

I Didn't SMH at SM:H

An immediate reaction to hearing the news that there is now yet another Spider-Man reboot might have been “Oh God, they’re making more?” Perhaps this is because some feel that two versions of the Spider-Man story are enough. It’s true that one must be careful when rebooting a popular series, for fear of fatiguing a flagging franchise or befouling a favorite fantasy. Fortunately, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* does none of the aforementioned possibilities. In fact, it does better than that, adding a completely new story-line not revolving at all around the tragedy that is his Uncle Ben’s death. Due to its unique take on the popular narrative and incredible casting, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is the best out of all other non-animated Spider-Man movies.

The cast can make or break a film, and in the case of *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, the cast really makes the film. When looking at a cast and trying to decide whether it’s good or not, one must take into account how well the actors fit the character, how famous the actors are, and how diverse the cast is. Tom Holland, the actor who plays Peter Parker, is a perfect fit for the persona of the character. He has the squeaky teenager voice and awkward behavior down to a science, seeing as Peter Parker becomes Spider-Man in high-school (Ditko). This representation is important because many minors in media are played by adults who look perfect and sound incredibly eloquent, which can lower the self-esteem and body positivity of teenagers (Stern). I, as a teenage girl, have experienced this myself when watching anything with teenagers on the Disney Channel, and I’m sure that many of my peers have as well. When presented with characters who look like statues come to life, with perfect skin and perfect bodies, I take in my bumpy and flawed skin and feel like I should look more like the so-called teenager on the screen, so seeing actors closer to the ages they portray, such as those in this film, allow me to accept myself as I am. Additionally, Stan Lee, the creator of Spider-Man, himself has stated that Tom

Holland is exactly what he pictured when he created Spider-Man, saying “I think @TomHolland1996 is a great Spider-Man. He is the exact height and age I envisioned when I first wrote Spider-Man. Spidey was never supposed to be too large,” on his Twitter account (Lee). As the man who dreamt up what would become the influential figure that is Spider-Man, Stan Lee is the highest possible authority to consult on this matter. Also, the cast list boasts the names of Robert Downey Jr., Donald Glover, and Michael Keaton, all very big names in the acting industry. Not only does the cast list have big stars, but it also has diverse characters. When looking at the cast list, it is noticeable that a lot of the actors and actresses listed are of different ethnic and racial backgrounds, such as Zendaya Coleman, Tony Revolori, Laura Harrier, and Jacob Batalon (IMDb *Spider-Man: Homecoming*). Not only are they diverse, but they have no harmful stereotypes. This differs from the cast of *Spider-Man* and *The Amazing Spider-Man* because both versions have few or no actors of color (IMDb *Spider-Man*, IMDb *The Amazing Spider-Man*). It is important for diversity to be portrayed positively on screen because, as Dr. Dana Mastro said, “Consuming the images and messages associated with racial/ethnic groups in the media contributes to the formation, activation, and application of racial/ethnic cognitions,” meaning that if the only time someone sees a person of color is when they’re dangerous or stereotypical, that person then believes and perpetuates harmful prejudices (Mastro). Since all positive representation has a constructive effect on minorities and *Spider-Man: Homecoming*’s cast showcases minorities in a positive light where other adaptations don’t, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* reinforces positive perspectives towards people of color, paving the way to a brighter future with less unfounded discrimination and negativity. Because the cast is diverse, unlike the other Spider-Man movies, and they fit the character, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is better in this aspect, but there are still other aspects to consider.

While it has been established that the cast of *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is stellar, this means very little if not paired with an engrossing plot. Because there are so many versions of

Spider-Man, the director, Jon Watts, had to bring something special to the movie in order to make it memorable. To do this, he skipped the already widely-known and overused backstory of how Peter Parker got his powers and went right to the conflict, which hasn't been done in any other Spider-Man movies (*SM: H*). After trudging through the tragic backstory in other films, it's hard to fit in more details with the time left, so an original story was like a breath of fresh air, instead of recycled. The film balances light-hearted jokes with serious lessons, action with emotional development, and romance with an actual plot. One review states, "There's a spontaneous charge to the film, a euphoric innocence, that makes it a much-needed antidote to stale franchise formula," showing that the joyous air of the film captures the teenage essence surrounding the conflicts of a friendly neighborhood Spider-Man. That same review also states that the movie is like "a John Hughes comedy," meaning that the numerous witty one-liners that Spider-Man is famous for really add to the memorability of the movie (Travers). While the movie is amusing, it also touches on responsibility and the pressure of meeting expectations, utilizing the not-so-average high-school drama in Peter Parker's life to do so. Peter feels responsible for the well-being of everyone, simply because he has greater abilities than most, saying, "When you can do the things that I can, but you don't, and then the bad things happen, they happen because of you," which can also lead one to believe that he is worried about the crushing expectations that he and others hold him to (*CA: CW*). This theme continues through Peter's character arc in *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, and is shown when he wishes to become an Avenger so that he could have a greater impact and consequently help more people, as his idols do. This character arc resolves itself with Peter deciding to continue what he's been doing when offered a position with the Avengers by his mentor and hero, Tony Stark, because "Somebody's got to look out for the little guy." This shows that Peter has overcome his self-doubt and crippling fear of disappointing others and is now confident in himself and what he does. Since the movie is a superhero movie, there is a guarantee of stimulating action scenes, and

Spider-Man: Homecoming more than delivers with a car chase, a fight on an airplane, and an emotionally-charged struggle in the sand between Spidey and the main villain, the Vulture, also known as Adrian Toomes. However, there is also emotional development involving building trust between Peter and his best friend Ned Leeds, his Aunt May, and his hero Tony Stark. In doing this, the movie manages to sate the appetite for action of comic books fans while simultaneously satisfying the sappier sort.

Speaking of sappy, Peter's romantic relationship with Liz Allen is absolutely adorable but also contributes to the story-line with a jaw-dropping plot twist that hits you like a punch to the gut and leaves you reeling and recounting all the foreshadowing. Spoiler alert, the Vulture is Liz's dad (*SM: H*)! Thanks to this revelation, the romance now has a purpose besides mindless marketing to the masses, furthering the plot making it evident that Liz wasn't just created to be a pretty face and the object of teenage affection. As if this wasn't enough, the film touches on even heavier topics, such as how difficult it is to get ahead in a plutocracy, using Adrian Toomes's struggles as proof. Throughout the movie, he's constantly talking about the closed cycle of wealth that only benefits the already wealthy, but the most poignant example is before the final face-off when he says, "the rich and the powerful, they do whatever they want. Guys like us, like you and me, they don't care about us [...] We have to eat their table scraps," (*SM: H*). Because there is so much included in this film, viewers get a well-rounded experience without the flat feelings of a singular focus, so more people can enjoy the film, and the reviews certainly reflect this.

Arguably the most important factor, both the general public and film critics enjoyed *Spider-Man: Homecoming*. In fact, the film received higher ratings than the first installment of both prior adaptations from both critics and the public on Rotten Tomatoes. *Spider-Man: Homecoming* was given a rating of 92% fresh, which is based on the percent of critics who gave the movie a positive review, and 88% of the audience members who reviewed the film gave it

more than three and a half stars out of five (Rotten Tomatoes SM: H). *Spider-Man*, the original movie, received a lesser score of 90% fresh and 67% of the audience, proving that even classics can be improved with the right reboot (Rotten Tomatoes SM). *The Amazing Spider-Man* got a less amazing score of 72% fresh and 77% of the audience (Rotten Tomatoes TASM). Further proof that *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is more successful than the other movies is that it has a higher international grossing than them. *Spider-Man: Homecoming* made \$880,166,924 globally, compared to *Spider-Man*'s \$821,708,551 and *The Amazing Spider-Man*'s \$757,930,663 (Box Office Mojo SM: H, SM, TASM). While public sentiments aren't always the best way to form your own opinion, when it comes to reviews and cold hard cash it's hard to deny that *Spider-Man: Homecoming* is more popular and widely-liked, which leads one to determine that it must be better than the other adaptations in some way.

Spider-Man: Homecoming has proven itself to be better than the previous Spider-Man film adaptations. The cast was qualified, the plot was riveting, and the audience was pleased. Any one of these reasons on their own would have proven nothing, but combined, they create a fool-proof case for why *Spider-Man: Homecoming* should be known as the best Spider-Man movie and how it already holds this title for many people. What this title doesn't do is show the significance this has outside of the comic book movie sphere. Not only does it strive to improve racial relations through representation, but it also doesn't use romance to sell tickets and it has valuable life lessons that could benefit anyone, even the most relentless anti-comic people out there.

Works Cited

- @stanlee. "I think @TomHolland1996 is a great Spider-Man. He is the exact height and age I envisioned when I first wrote Spider-Man. Spidey was never supposed to be too large. How is my friend Tom doing?." *Twitter*, 19 May 2018, 12:28 p.m., twitter.com/therealstanlee/status/997921856119234561, Accessed 18 Dec 2018.
- The Amazing Spider-Man. *Box Office Mojo*, www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=spiderman4.htm. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.
- The Amazing Spider-Man. *Rotten Tomatoes*, www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_amazing_spider_man. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.
- The Amazing Spider-Man Full Cast and Crew. *IMDb*, www.imdb.com/title/tt0948470/fullcredits?ref_=tt_cl_sm#cast. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.
- Ditko, Steve. *Amazing Fantasy*, 15, Marvel Comics, 1962.
- Dr. Mastro, Dana. "Race and Ethnicity in U.S. Media Content and Effects." Sept. 2017, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.122. Accessed 18 Dec. 2018.
- Dr. Stern, Susannah. "Why It Matters That Adults Play Teens On TV." *YouTube*, uploaded by NBC News, 7 Feb. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IeGxg34W6o.
- Spider-Man. *Box Office Mojo*, www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=spiderman.htm. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.
- Spider-Man. *Rotten Tomatoes*, www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spiderman. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.
- Spider-Man Full Cast and Crew. *IMDb*, www.imdb.com/title/tt0145487/fullcredits. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.
- Spider-Man: Homecoming. *Box Office Mojo*, www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=spiderman2017.htm. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.
- Spider-Man: Homecoming*. Directed by Jon Watts, Marvel Studios, 2017.

Spider-Man: Homecoming. *Rotten Tomatoes*,

www.rottentomatoes.com/m/spider_man_homecoming. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.

Spider-Man: Homecoming Full Cast and Crew. *IMDb*,

www.imdb.com/title/tt2250912/fullcredits. Accessed 18 Dec 2018.

Travers, Peter. “‘Spider-Man: Homecoming’ Review: New Reboot of Marvel Webslinger Really Is Amazing.” *Rolling Stone*, 29 June 2017,

www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-reviews/spider-man-homecoming-review-new-reboot-of-marvel-webslinger-really-is-amazing-200149/. Accessed 18 Dec. 2018.