

Captain Fantastic (Ross, 2016)

<p>Film form and aesthetics</p>	<p>The use of handheld camera adds realism. Director Matt Ross thought that using a tripod would create a rigidity: "I felt a more classical or formal manifestation of photography would put you at arm's length... I wanted to be in the scene... not watch the scene".</p> <p>The aesthetics and oppositions of freedom vs conformity and nature vs modernity are linked to the political ideologies and values of Ben's family and Harper's family. At the church funeral, the Cash family wear colourful, unconventional clothing. They are in direct opposition to the rigidity and formality of a Western funeral.</p>
<p>Representations of gender, ethnicity and age</p>	<p>Rellian and Bo both have a 'coming of age' narrative. Rellian rejects some of his father's beliefs, as he enjoys aspects of Western consumerism, such as playing video games. When Bo meets Claire and is awkwardly unaware of the rituals of dating, he realises he has much to learn about the world.</p> <p>The film can be criticised from a feminist viewpoint as it is the male characters who are explored in the most depth.</p>
<p>Institutional and Cultural contexts</p>	<p><i>Captain Fantastic</i> was an independent production and was distributed in the USA by Bleeker Street, a smaller and relatively new distribution company based in New York City. It was given its worldwide premiere at Sundance Festival in 2016, a typical release strategy for an independent film. The film is an example of 'indiewood' cinema – films that combine some of the experimentation and artistry of more experimental films with some conventions of Hollywood cinema. These films tend to be described as 'off-beat' and 'quirky'. They tend to have ensemble casts and offer more complex characterisation than blockbuster films.</p>
<p>Social and political contexts</p>	<p>The film does not judge either Ben, Jack (Grandpa) or Harper. Instead, it portrays the complexities of parenting and differing ideologies, suggesting there are benefits and limitations to each. Both Ben and Jack are portrayed sympathetically, as they are doing what they perceive is best for their families.</p> <p>Ben's ideology and values are far-left, as he rejects capitalism and consumerism. Prominent communist leaders and thinkers referred to by the Cash's include Karl Marx, Chairman Mao and Noam Chomsky.</p>



Ideology and spectatorship in the Family Dinner and Bill of Rights sequences:



During the dinner sequence we are not aligned with one specific character. The camera cuts around the room to different characters to convey the oppositions between the two families. At first, we may judge Harper's children playing on electronic devices at the dinner table, then we see Ben's liberal parenting as he pours wine for his children and discusses topics normally deemed inappropriate for children. The spectator can judge each family according to their own values. We may also question aspects of our own western lifestyles and family rituals.



The Bill of Rights sequence comments on the schooling system in the USA. Ben's homeschooled daughter Zaja is able to explain the Bill of Rights whereas Harper's children with a formal traditional education are not. However, the notion that Ben's approach to education is the superior is later questioned by Bo who tells his father that he is ill-prepared for the real world.

"I hoped to write a film without clear protagonists or antagonists (on a daily basis, we're usually both), where all the characters were complex and imperfect, that allowed me to reflect on parenting and on our country; I wanted to write a film that didn't tell anyone what to think but allowed the audience to read the information given, to hear the questions asked and draw their own conclusions."

Director Matt Ross