

Your seventh blog entry, which you will post on www.NetflixStudies.com, is due before **5:00 p.m. Wednesday, June 20**. Before posting your comments (which should be at approximately **700 words**), you should [1] watch the first four episodes of either *Evil Genius*, *Flint Town*, *The Keepers*, *Last Chance U*, or *Making a Murderer*; [2] watch either *13th*, *Joshua*, or *Icarus*; and [3] read the following chapter from your course textbook:

- Sudeep Sharma, “Netflix and the Documentary Boom” (pp. 143-154)

As explained in your assigned reading this week, Netflix’s recent acquisition and funding of feature-length documentaries can be seen as a means for the company to bolster its already-estimable standing as a supporter of independent filmmaking while ensuring its commercial viability as an alternative exhibition site. By providing a “new, widely accessible platform” for creators of “edifying” and “educational” content (i.e., films that would otherwise rely on the festival circuit or be given a small theatrical run to reach an audience), the online streaming service has thus contributed to the flourishing of a cultural form that, for decades, was seen by only a small percentage of the viewing public. But it has done so in ways that might, as Sharma suggests, restrict the range of expressive possibilities for film artists drawn to the documentary form. That is, “edgy,” experimental examples of non-fictional cinema (for example, Joshua Oppenheimer’s *The Act of Killing* [2012] and *The Look of Silence* [2015]) are of less interest to Netflix executives and programmers than are the more stylistically “traditional” types of documentary that can appeal to mass audiences (for example, those that foreground social issues relevant to the lives of many people and which do not necessarily push the boundaries of the form in any overt way). Do you agree with the author? Is Sharma’s analogy of the “newsstand” (rather than the “library”) accurate in terms of evoking the kind of service that Netflix provides to both consumers and producers of documentary features?

After having watched ONE of the above feature-length documentaries (either director Ava DuVernay’s *13th*, director Joshua Wong’s *Joshua: Teenager vs. Superpower*, or director Bryan Fogel’s *Icarus*), explain how your chosen film conforms to or subverts genre expectations. Stated differently: How does your selected documentary either support or undermine Sharma’s claim that the kinds of non-fictional cinema privileged by Netflix tend to be “very traditional in terms of film style and format”? On a more subjective level, did you find your selected documentary to be edifying and enriching? Did it bring greater awareness about a social issue that you knew little about prior to watching the film?

Finally, but most importantly: Taking your last weekend viewing (of either *Evil Genius*, *Flint Town*, *The Keepers*, *Last Chance U*, or *Making a Murderer*) into consideration, explain how the long-form (multi-episode) documentary series differs from the feature-length documentary film. Beyond the obvious difference of running times (with the former being longer than the latter), pinpoint some of the textual elements in one of those Netflix original series that mark it as a distinctive yet representative example of reality-based programming. In watching its first four episodes, were you emotionally and intellectually invested in the “story” that it tells? Is it accurate to say that there are “narrative” elements at play in that documentary series’ organization of factual materials? Do you agree with the widespread consensus (hinted at by Sharma) that watching a documentary — either a feature-length film or a multi-episode series — is a more “meaningful” use of one’s time than watching several hours of fictional/scripted programming back-to-back? Why or why not?