

## **Kristan Woolford: Social Justice in Science Fiction Storyworlds**

Joss Whedon crafts storyworlds in which his characters are free to grow, develop, and ultimately embody philosophical ideas. This skill has proven itself useful for two of his works that I hope to analyze as vehicles for expressing philosophies of social justice as they pertain to issues of normativity and its relation to power. As a science fiction filmmaker, I am currently in the process of creating a storyworld for my thesis film, in which achieving social justice is the primary motivation of my story's heroes. Whedon's works provide an excellent reference as I consider story structure and characterization.

In *Astonishing X-Men*, Beast contemplates taking a newly created 'cure' that would turn mutants into 'normal' humans. Being a mutant is positioned as being a flaw in human development, and the audience is allowed to witness Beast negotiating the treatment's implications on him as a mutant. Whedon is able to seamlessly use the already existing story structure and portrayal of X-Men's heroes to arguably critique society's approach to medication via chemical treatment. Mental health treatment methods frequently use chemicals to restore patients to what the practitioners of the field consider 'normal'. With patients being made to feel pressured to subject themselves to medication to function in society, a point of intervention for social justice to be attained is presented. Whedon's storytelling strategies give us a platform to spark debates about norms and status quo.

Elements of social justice also ring true in Whedon's *Serenity*. The question of which *Serenity*'s characters hold power, how the genre of space westerns influences character development, and society's response to being governed for what is considered the 'greater good' have become important aspects in developing my own creative work. Combining Elizabeth Anderson's social justice theory of Democratic Equality and abstractions from Whedon's *Serenity*, I will outline a number of aesthetic and political possibilities.