

# The Rachel Divide Viewing Guide

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## Questions

1. State the title of the film and the year it was released. Then briefly describe what the film is about and the position that it advocates.

The Rachel Divide was filmed and published in 2018, taking on the challenge of analyzing Rachel Dolezal's conflicting identity — and more importantly, her expression of this identity. The documentary takes into consideration her family's perspectives and that of the NCAAP, questioning whether her consideration as a black woman was justified.

2. Describe the progression of the film: how it begins, what stages it passes through, and how it concludes.

The film begins with the context under which Rachel's life and identity was exposed, where her and her son were put in the face of danger. Rachel was exposed during the increasing amount of police brutality that existed in her community — she mentioned how her identity was shaped by her *oppressive childhood*.

In news scenes, there is a stronger understanding of the social in-acceptance of her choice. With high media attention, she is faced by social criticism by those in the Black community. During the Facebook Live interview, she is challenged by digital influencers that take offense to her *transracial* identity. She is also challenged by talk shows and news reports, notably The Today Show. On Instagram, her posts often get hate comments — some of which challenge her identity and others her desire for media attention.

To gain a stronger understanding of the context behind her choice, conversations with her son and family are introduced. Her son is deeply entangled in the issue and feels threatened by the beliefs of her mother. Her parents of birth were disapproving from her switch and found shame in her newfound identity.

The film ends with her going to the DMV and changing her name from Rachel to Nkechi Amare, and her publicly embracing a false identity.

3. List six facts described in the film that impressed you and explain how each fact relates to the film's premise or theme.
  - a. Rachel felt a strong connection to Black heritage and people of the African-American community.
  - b. As of 2018, Black men are 2.5 times more likely than white men to be killed by *police* during their lifetime
  - c. She grew up in an abusive household. Her parents, Larry and Ruthann, are described as religious extremists who faced severe consequences.
  - d. She is facing financial struggles and is, by extension, being discredited by African-Americans that are facing the same issues as a result of prejudice.
  - e. Very limited influence from Dolezal's parents, Franklin's dad and the father of her most recent child — these voices may provide insight into the familial acceptance of her choice
  - f. Her son was deeply affected by the high amount of media attention, now being turned into a documentary. Dolezal's inability to assess the consequences beyond her own life brought attention to the credibility of her opinions.
4. How did the filmmakers try to convince you of the position that the film supports? Look for appeals to logic, emotion, and prejudice.

Large emphasis on news articles and varying types of media that went against her point. For all the arguments she brought up, which were limited to the editor's perspective, she was perceived to be crazy and delusional. Directly juxtaposed credible sources and personal anecdotes to her opinion. During points against her, there is usually triumphant music and a quick pace, while her arguments face somber music and very slow imagery.

Mentions of her parents and influencers appeal to prejudice in an attempt to share an impartial take on the consequences of her switch. Mentions of news reports and direct features aim for an appeal to logic by providing credible sources of analysis. Mentions of her son provide an appeal to emotion, through an analysis of how this is affecting the next generation of her family.

5. Did any of the reasoning given in support of the position advocated by the film seem to be weak or misleading? If so, describe the concept put forward in the film and why you thought the reasoning was flawed.

In the way that the film was edited, her arguments were often discredited by conveying a constant stream of lies and deceitful thinking on her end. It reached the point where the audience — and the people around her — were unable to trust her anymore. There were a few strong points, however these were quickly contrasted by credible sources or verifiable members of her family. This also applies to a few claims that she made, notable that "race is a social construct".

6. Describe any cinematic techniques used in presenting particular scenes, images, or sounds that were designed to appeal to the viewer's emotions and to encourage the viewer to agree with the position advocated by the film, without reliance upon fact or logical argument.

Re-Enactment: Visual scenes from her childhood that were recreated for dramatic effects in flashbacks

Montage: during scenes of media attention, the most influential points made were compiled together

Eye-Level: documentary created the feeling of speaking directly to Dolezal

Lighting: during scenes of rebuttal, there is often high-key lighting to emphasize credibility and reliability. During the somber moments of her discussion, she faced low-key lighting

7. If the filmmakers asked how this film could be improved, what would you tell them? Describe the changes you would suggest in detail.

Emphasize more on the personal experiences of those that were affected by her switch. How exactly did this affect the African-American community; what was done in compromise by Dolezal, if anything?

In discussion of her son, take into consideration his future — does publishing this documentary with more media attention change the course of his future? How will this affect his life?

8. Did the film change your mind about any aspect of the subject that it presents? What information, argument or persuasive technique caused you to change your

mind?

Although this was a new topic for me, my first interpretation was ridiculing/questioning the viability of this idea. As the film progressed, my opinion did not change much. Instead of sympathizing with Rachel, I took into consideration the direct consequences of her actions, specifically with her son. The emphasis of external views persuaded me to side with the media, and continue my perspective of this being an improper choice.

9. Can you make any connections to a Global Issue? How so? Which literary work studied in the course can you connect this documentary to?

This strongly resonates with the social stratification involved with racial identity. Connections can be made to Persepolis, where she tries to fit in with Western society, as well as A Raisin in the Sun where racial barriers are precursors for discrimination

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## Post-film Analysis

### Sympathy

- Private Life (eye-level)
  - Family
  - Household
  - Friends
- Crying/Frustration
  - Frustration within family
  - Anecdotes from children; how it's ruining family
- Emotional/Somber Music
- Social Media → negativity
- Her side of the story/impact on the community

### Opposition

- Interviews with Black women
- Facebook/Social Media Interviews & Opinions
- News Channels (Clips → Ethos)

- Interviews with her Son and frustrations
- Interviews with biological family