***Appropriate Behavior* (2014)**

**Film Background:** *Appropriate Behavior* was the directorial debut of Desiree Akhavan, who wrote, directed, and starred in the film. She went on to direct the 2018 film *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*, based on the novel of the same name by Emily Danforth. Akhavan wrote *Appropriate Behavior* for her graduate thesis at New York University. While there are elements of Shirin's character that mirror some of her experiences, such as her Iranian-American background and her bisexuality, she has stated that the film is not autobiographical.

**Plot summary:** *Appropriate Behavior* takes place in Brooklyn, NY, and follows Shirin (Desiree Akhavan), as she processes a recent break-up with her ex-girlfriend, Maxine (Rebecca Henderson). The film has many flashbacks that examine the trajectory of Shirin and Maxine's relationship.

The film begins with Shirin moving out of Maxine's apartment and commiserrating with her friend Crystal (Halley Feiffer), who offers to help her get a job, which she ends up accepting. The job turns out to be not what Shirin expected; she was told it was a film production course for adolescents, but it turns out to be a program for five-year olds. Shirin hopes to get Maxine back by appearing in the places Maxine spends time, but her prospects appear limited. She moves into a new apartment and faces the criticism of her Iranian parents, who cannot understand her decision to move, since she told them that Maxine was her roommate. Shirin attempts to start dating again, and has several awkward dating experiences, but ultimately ends up missing Maxine more. As she recalls the connection she and Maxine shared in the early part of their relationship, she also remembers their challenges; particularly their conflict over Shirin's sense that she could not come out to her parents. Shirin recalls their break-up, in which Maxine tells her, among other things, that she need not come out to her parents because her bisexuality is likely "just a phase." In the present moment, Shirin meets up with Maxine at a party and is horrified to discover that Maxine is dating Tibet, her co-worker in the documentary film program. Shirin comes out to her mother, and while her mother does not accept her statement, Shirin tells Crystal she plans to bring it up again soon. In the final scene, Shirin spots Maxine on a subway platform, and the two wave to each other.

**Content warnings:** *Appropriate Behavior* contains brief nudity, two sex scenes, sexual humor, and marijuana use.

**Running time:** 1 hr 26 min

**Materials for this week:**

* Lesson plans
* Screening quiz
* Secondary texts:
  + Day 2: Benson, Chloe. "Film Review: *Appropriate Behavior.* " *Journal of Bisexuality* Vol. 17, no. 2, 2017, pp. 251-256.
  + Day 2: [Music Video: Katy Perry, "I Kissed a Girl")]((https:/www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAp9BKosZXs)(Watch in class)
  + Day 3: San Filippo, Maria. "The Politics of Fluidity: Representing Bisexuality in 21st Century Screen Media" in *The Routledge Companion to Media, Sex, and Sexuality,* edited by Clarissa Smith and Feona Attwood with Brian McNair, Routledge, 2018, pp. 70-79.

**Lesson 1 – Close Reading Key Scenes and Student-Led Scene Analysis:**

1. (7 min) Screening quiz.
2. (15 min) Student-led scene analysis.
3. (5 min) Teacher-led scene analysis begins. Screen today’s clip. (22:33-27:11)
4. (5 min) Discussion prep.
5. (20 min) Whole class discussion.

**Lesson 2: Examining *Appropriate Behavior* Alongside Benson’s Review**

1.(5 min) Personal reflection. Jot down notes.

1. Did you enjoy watching *Appropriate Behavior?* Why or why not?
2. Did you relate to any of the characters? Why or why not?

2.(5 min) Discuss personal reflections.

1. (4 min) Teacher can say, “this week we are examining representations of bisexuality. In 2008, Katy Perry’s first single on her first album was “I Kissed a Girl.” Let’s watch the video and consider how this video represents bisexuality (or bi-curiosity). Watch “I Kissed a Girl” music video.
2. (3 min) Students take notes on the following questions:

a. If this video was making an argument about what bisexuality is, what do you think that argument would be?

b. How do the formal elements of this video underscore that argument?

1. (10 min) Whole class discussion.
2. (4 min) Screen today’s clip from *Apporpriate Behavior.* (1:15:30-19:05)
3. (5 min) Discussion prep.

a. What is Benson’s argument in her film review? What evidence was most important?

b. Do you agree with her claims? Why or why not?

c. How does the scene we just re-watched support or challenge her claims?

d. How do other scenes in the film support or challenge her claims?

1. (15 min) Whole class discussion.

a. What is Benson’s argument in her film review? What evidence was most important?

b. Do you agree with her claims? Why or why not?

c. How does the scene we just re-watched support or challenge her claims?

d. How do other scenes in the film support or challenge her claims?

**Lesson 3: Examining *Appropriate Behavior* Alongside San Filippo’s “The Politics of Fluidity”**

1. (5 min) Compare and contrast. Jot down notes.

A. Compare and contrast *Appropriate Behavior* to *Saving Face, Boy Meets Girl* or *But I’m A Cheerleader.* What did you notice was similar or different about the two films’ narratives, themes, characters, settings, tone, style, etc.?

2. (5 min) Discuss reflections.

3. (3 min) Watch today’s clips: (14:40-15:15; 1:02:22-1:04:44)

4. (15 min) Study groups.

a. What is San Filippo’s argument? What terminology is most significant?

b. To what extent does “I Kissed A Girl” exemplify any of the tropes that San Filippo discusses? How do the formal elements of the video underscore the tropes you’ve identified?

c. What does San Filippo argue makes *Appropriate Behavior* unique? Do you agree or disagree with her argument? Why?

d. How does the scene we just re-watched, or other scenes from the film support your claim regarding *Appropriate Behavior’s* representation of bisexuality?

5. (25 min) Whole class discussion.

a. What is San Filippo’s argument? What terminology is most significant?

b. To what extent does “I Kissed A Girl” exemplify any of the tropes that San Filippo discusses? How do the formal elements of the video underscore the tropes you’ve identified?

c. What does San Filippo argue makes *Appropriate Behavior* unique? Do you agree or disagree with her argument? Why?

d. How does the scene we just re-watched, or other scenes from the film support your claim regarding *Appropriate Behavior’s* representation of bisexuality?