Invalids Versus Valids In Gattaca

Invalids/valids: everyone knows their place, social structure, opportunities

Genetically engineered individuals, such as Eugene and Anton, are labeled “Valids”, and are society's elites while those born by natural means or “invalids” such as Vincent, are treated as inferior citizens. Valids are genetically modified to reach their greatest potential through selective breeding. From birth, Valids are favored and prioritized over Invalids; giving them the impression that they are superior and setting them apart within social class. Their modified genes allow them to do specific tasks that are considered impossible to be performed by an ordinary human; for an example, the twelve-fingered pianist was genetically engineered to have that specific physical trait, as it is almost impossible to find an individual with perfectly functioning six fingers in both hands.

Individuals are constantly reminded of their position in the hierarchy and are strongly discouraged from exceeding their restrictions as it disturbs the “perfection” of the society. For example, Vincent’s father stated that “The only way you’ll see inside a spaceship is if you’re cleaning it', reminding Vincent that as an “Invalid” his true position in society is always going to be as a second-class citizen.

This society is portrayed as the perfect utopia, where every individual is aware of their specific role. Therefore, they are forced to believe that they are nothing more than their genetic makeup. This prevents both Valids and Invalids from exceeding their genetic potential and constrains them in their respective social position. For example, even though Irene is considered “Valid”, and can work at Gattaca, she isn’t allowed to take part in any space mission due to her heart condition. “The best test score wasn’t gonna matter unless it has a blood test to go with it.” is another example of this within the society. As an Invalid, it is impossible for Vincent to get into Gattaca even if he meets every other required qualification.

Society is also rich in discrimination; Valids holds power over Invalids in terms of genetic superiority. Valids have access to better opportunities than Invalids, and this creates a gap between the two social classes, subverting Gattaca from the original theme of a utopia. During his first flashback Vincent stated that, “Of course, it was illegal to discriminate, ‘genoism’ it’s called. But no one takes the law seriously”; reflecting that underneath the surface, Gattaca is indeed a society that has many flaws. The protagonist was able to identify these faults in the society, but he couldn’t act against them as he is an Invalid himself; “I belonged to a new underclass, no longer determined by social status or the colour of your skin”. This provokes the question, “if meritocracy of an individual’s worth is completely determined by their genetic makeup, is Gattaca really a perfect society?”

As Vincent mentioned in his first flashback, “For the genetically superior, success is easier to attain, but is by no mean guaranteed”, it is clear that majority of the time Valids doesn’t have to work for their place as they can have what they want. This idea is demonstrated when Anton, his brother, stated that he could get into Gattaca if he wanted to. Theoretically, this society seems perfect as Valid individuals can achieve almost everything without any hard work.

However, this makes them a slave to the society as they completely depend on the coding of their genes. Eugene, an individual with a genetic code that is almost close to perfection, couldn't win first place in the swimming competition. This event made him realize that the society is not everything that he was promised, and he no longer had a specific purpose, leading him to the decision to give up his life; this scene illustrates that the image of a perfect society masks the fact that people in Gattaca lack individuality.

Clean, orderly, organised, functional world (Gattaca)

From the first panning shots of Gattaca, every scene that the audience is exposed to illustrates the structure of a "perfect" society. The crisp white walls, minimal decorations and artificial lights, leave no room for any imperfections; reflecting the strictly formatted nature of the society.

The next shot focuses on a crowd wearing identical suits ascending an elevator. In-between every individual, there is an even gap, and they move inside the building in rows; without any chaotic rush. Low angle shots are used to show that certain individuals are considered elite within the society. The only sound in the background is the beeping of the blood testing machine, and the repetitive, but rhythmic sounds of the footsteps. There is no chattering between individuals, and they all maintain a calm facial expression. This scene makes a positive impression on the audience as it shows that in the near future, society will be very advanced in terms of technology; creating a functional and structural world.

In the scene which shows Vincent working on his computer, the shot focuses on the movement of his fingers across the keyboard, and how neat and clean his working space is. Zooming out from this, a medium shot is used to focus on Vincent and the mission director. In this scene, the structure of the work cubicles in the office is shown. They are arranged in an orderly manner, in rows with perfect distance in between; not too narrow that someone can't walk past, but not too wide that the space looks empty. Artificial lights are used to illuminate the room, reflecting that every small detail has been manipulated and reconstructed to reach perfection.

For example, the scene where Irene takes Vincent to watch the sunset together, they only enjoyed a reflection of the sunset, as they stood facing their backs to the sun. This illustrates that even nature has been changed and reflected to achieve the goals of their "perfect" utopia. This represents that within this society, the idea of finding beauty in the world is challenging as they tend to focus more on the reflection, instead of truly looking at the beautiful things themselves. This demonstrates how society is all just an illusion.

Not much focus has been established on the living conditions of invalids, as the movie tends to focus more on the "perfect" lives of valids, leading the audience to believe that the invalids' standard of life wouldn't be too bad since they live in this so-called "utopia". However, in the scene where the invalids were being interrogated, it was clear that there were some significant differences between valids' and invalids' clothing, hairstyle and posture. Invalids' clothes were more causal, and not as neat and tidy as the valids, and so were their hairstyles. They didn't look as physically fit as the valids and their posture was more slouched. Does this raise the question within the audience of whether Gattaca is really a utopia, or just an illusion masked by perfection?