

*BoJack Horseman*: A Narrative Analysis of Mental Illness and Substance Abuse

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## ABSTRACT

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Since the rise of various media forms, depictions of mental illness and substance abuse have mostly been one-dimensional. Historically, these portrayals have usually demonized or sensationalized these issues in ways that leave no room for nuance and discussion. However, the Netflix series, *BoJack Horseman*, seeks to dismantle these narratives in favor of a more fair, comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of various mental illnesses and substance abuse, particularly alcoholism. This thesis project seeks to explore the narrative tools and techniques employed by the creators of *BoJack Horseman* to depict arguably one of the most vivid and compelling portrayals of experiencing mental illness and addiction on television. By performing both a close reading of the dialogue itself alongside an analysis of the show's narrative tools, such as animation and serialization, the show is able to illuminate the chronic, self-destructive cycle that mental illness and addiction vortexes oneself and one's loved ones into. When commenting on *BoJack Horseman*, it is imperative to understand the way in which the show undermines key elements of traditional storytelling, such as the protagonist's redemption arc, in favor of deeper exploration about the subtleties surrounding the lived experience of mental illness and substance abuse. Finally, this show's particular way of storytelling positions itself to provide companionship for those who similarly suffer from these illnesses by investigating the ways that this show offers some form of solace and guidance in light with one's own lived experiences with mental illness and/or substance abuse.

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## Introduction:

*BoJack Horseman* is a Netflix animated series about an anthropomorphic horse named BoJack, a washed-up, famous 'Hollywood' actor from the hit '90s family comedy show *Horsin' Around*. This television series explores the life of BoJack and his relationships with his family and friends; most importantly, the show focuses on how BoJack's relationships with others as well as himself are affected by his self-destructive and toxic behavior, which is fueled by a myriad of mental health issues, such as childhood post-traumatic stress disorder, clinical depression, and alcoholism. This television show seeks to utilize both humor and animation - narrative tools traditionally used in episodic sitcom shows - to discuss very serious issues, such as generational trauma and addiction. This show seeks to highlight the cyclical nature of addiction by following the lived experience of the main character BoJack, and it does so by both undermining ideas about the unrealistic nature of episodic television shows and, later, relating that framework to the flawed linear understanding and nature of 'recovery' when it comes to addiction and other chronic mental health conditions.

In a society where mental health has risen to the forefront of public discourse, both in the media and in people's daily lives at large, having an accurate depiction of mental illness and substance abuse creates a space for a more comprehensive understanding, and therefore discussions, about the lived experiences with these illnesses. Therefore, the series' role in contributing to this understanding was pivotal for the discourse surrounding mental health. Broadly, what makes this show important is the way it took risks, not only in its portrayal of mental illness and substance abuse, but also for pushing the boundaries about the way that the medium of animation itself could be used. In regards to the series' broader social impact surrounding the conversation of mental health, the creator of *BoJack Horseman*, Raphael Bob-Waksberg, himself has explicitly discussed that he is most proud of the fact that the series has helped many of its fans be able to discuss and

articulate their feelings. The creator reveals in an interview that “the show has encouraged them to get help for their problems to feel less alone, to give them a language to articulate the feelings that they’ve had, maybe they thought only they had (Bright).” Bob-Waksberg specifies that his biggest accomplishment as a result of creating *BoJack Horseman* is that the show has provided fans “a way to talk about something that [people were] through that [they] didn’t know how to talk about (Bright).” Not only does this show a cultural breakthrough on the discussion about mental health, but its position as a visual medium provides its fans the language and tools to articulate their own lived experiences with mental illnesses as well; thus, this series relates to its current broader culture at-large because it complicates society’s current understanding of the realistic experience of grappling with mental illnesses. Furthermore, in regards to this show’s place in the history of television, *BoJack Horseman* proves to be a decisive work, particularly in the strides it has made for animation. It consistently challenged itself by exploring new and creative ways to approach storytelling through this medium in many cases by heavily relying on visuals to tell the story. By treating the visual aspect of the medium as equally important as dialogue to the show’s narrative, *BoJack Horseman* revolutionized its medium by capitalizing on new ways to tell real, human stories by taking complete advantage of the multifaceted nature of animation. Therefore, this series ultimately showed audiences that animation could be taken seriously as a medium that was able to tackle nuanced, complex philosophical and psychological topics about the human condition.

Additionally, this show is also personally significant to me for two reasons. First, this show was actually suggested to me by my cousin who had already watched and fallen in with the show. It was only after I had finished watching the show that I realized that this show was a way for my cousin to explain to others how he struggled with his own mental health. Not only was he able to use scenes from *BoJack Horseman* to explain to others how he was feeling, it also allowed him to find both a verbal and visual language to communicate his feelings with other people. Thus, this series

became a powerful tool for my cousin; his experience impacted me by inspiring me to think about the reason why this particular series might have been best positioned to accurately reflect my cousin's struggles with mental health. Second, one of my closest friends from college has also found *BoJack Horseman* involved with her mental health except this time, this series was introduced to her by someone else. During a therapy session, my friend was having a difficult time understanding why her maladaptive thinking and coping skills were self-destructive to her self-image overall. In order to make this friend understand why her thought processes were inherently unhealthy, her therapist actually showed her a two minute scene from *BoJack Horseman*. It was only upon viewing this specific scene that my friend was able to have a breakthrough in her understanding of her thought patterns. By both hearing the way BoJack talks about himself and visually seeing the way that his internal dialogue is animated, my friend was able to relate and recognize how this negative thinking manifested itself in her own mind as well. In discussion with her, I found this point to be very important because she essentially found a way to connect the dots about her own experience by intimately viewing someone else's. By understanding this anecdotal experience of one of my friends, I began to realize that there might be practical clinical uses and implications in the field of mental health work for television shows, such as *BoJack Horseman*. By dissecting the show itself, the possibilities of this show's ability to help others understand their own lived experience with mental illness and substance abuse becomes closer to becoming a reality, which is long-term but another important reason for exploring this series. Overall, *BoJack Horseman* has both large-scale cultural impact for society and personal importance, which constitutes the reasoning and justification for deep-diving into the series.

In this paper, I analyze the ways in which the creators of *BoJack Horseman* employ a diverse set of narrative techniques to portray a more realistic, comprehensive, and nuanced understanding of the lived experience for those grappling with mental illnesses and/or substance abuse. These three

elements include: 1) the medium of animation alongside dark humor to simultaneously distance and engage the audience with the series' darker content material, 2) the serialization of *BoJack Horseman* to emphasize the unrealistic nature of both episodic television and specifically sitcoms, and 3) an analysis of the undermined narrative structure of Freytag's pyramid in order to complicate traditional redemption arcs and comment on the nonlinearity of 'progress' when grappling with a chronic illness. These narrative elements are used as lenses for my close readings of the series itself and are utilized to create an argument about why *BoJack Horseman* in particular creates one of the most authentic representations of the lived experiences of mental illnesses and substance abuse in media. In general, this overall argument matters because realistic depictions of the lived experiences of mental illnesses and substance abuse are necessary in order for society to begin to understand them more clearly. In turn, understanding the complicated nature of this will allow society to more holistically address the nature of mental illnesses and substance abuse. Not only will this understanding provide a more just perspective on mental illness and substance abuse culturally in our society, but it will also serve to inform us about the ways in which we can learn to adequately support those suffering with mental illness and substance abuse in our own lives as well.

In regards to the exploration of this argument overall, this thesis is chronologically organized by sequentially progressing from Season One to Season Six. I chose to organize this thesis chronologically for two reasons. First, the portrayal of BoJack's poor behavior at the end of each season culminates into a defining moment for the next season to lead from. By setting groundwork for the next season, these moments become markers for the audience to witness the ways BoJack's behavior repeats itself in an unhealthy self-destructive cycle. Second, the creators of the show strategically incorporate different elements and information into the series as it progresses (i.e. choosing to wait until Season Four to discuss BoJack as a victim of generational trauma). The audience only becomes privy to this information as particular points of the series; therefore, it is



impossible to understand the significance of this strategic inclusion of information without considering the positionality and placement of this information within the timeline of the series itself. Ultimately, I chose to organize the discussion of *BoJack Horseman* within this thesis chronologically because the order in which the events occur is necessary to address in order to paint a complete picture of both the development of characters and thematic messages in the series.

In order to give an overview about what I will be discussing in this paper, I wanted to first give a roadmap about the progression of this explanation chronologically through each season. Season One begins with setting up the traditional narrative archetypal elements of the show, such as the character foil between BoJack Horseman and Mr. Peanutbutter, which will be dismantled in later seasons. Additionally, Season One focuses on the strengths of serialization in contrast with episodic television introduced with this season as the audience learns about the ways *BoJack Horseman* differs with the show that the main character was on *Horsin' Around*. By introducing and solidifying both of these archetypal elements within the show, Season One begins by creating a foundation and setting a precedent for the types of narrative elements that the show employs in order to affirm the authenticity of telling the story concerning BoJack's lived experiences with mental illness and substance abuse.

*BoJack Horseman* continues to explore and highlight the utilization of other narrative elements as well in Season Two with a focus on the animation alongside the use of dark humor and irony. This season's purpose lies in its willingness and dedication to more deeply investigate the balance between animation with humor and dark, more depressing content. By concentrating on the ways in which humor and irony can highlight the more tragic aspects of BoJack's life, the show starts to create this relationship between animation alongside humor and intense topics of conversation alongside more serious content, such as abuse, childhood PTSD, and sexual assault/predatory behavior. It is in this season where the creators bring the use of animation and humor to the forefront of the show;

Season Two emphasizes the use of both of these narrative tools to both simultaneously distance the audience from constantly engaging in triggering content while also ensuring that the humor provides a more subtle way for the the audience to interact with the darker content material in a more intimate, subconscious manner. This intersection demonstrates the ways that *BoJack Horseman* seeks to subvert the traditional use of animation in order to display the ways in which it can be used to grapple with more serious and important philosophical and societal issues, such as mental illness and substance abuse, and therefore, portray a more accurate representation of what these lived experiences as well.

The series continues to Season Three where BoJack's cyclical nature and patterns grow increasingly in contrast with the serialized format of the show that tries to explore long-term change and character development of the characters. However, BoJack seems to be repeating the same self-destructive behavior as the audience heads into this season. Season Three reiterates the chosen serialized format of this series by emphasizing the irreparable harm BoJack causes on others around him. By forcing BoJack to reckon with the consequences of his own actions, the series exposes the audience to ask about the limited role of forgiveness when no change in BoJack's behavior can be seen. When BoJack has to bear the ultimate consequence of being a major contributor to the death of his former co-star Sarah Lynn, the audience is forced to question whether this 'rock-bottom' moment will ignite any substantial change within BoJack. Thus, Season Three ultimately focuses on the role of serialization in the understanding of linear notions and narratives of progress as well in relations to chronic illnesses such as these. Not only does the deconstruction of this linearity leave room to explore how one measures progress and betterment in regards to these chronic illnesses, but it also allows the creators to highlight and examine the difficulty of breaking out of these harmful cyclical behavior patterns. Overall, Season Three considers the ways in which BoJack's intentions to change himself are more difficult to manifest into action than he expected because of

the extraordinarily laborious work that is necessary to complete in order to integrate these changes into his life to break out of these negative patterns of behavior. Therefore, this season lends itself to the dissection of the realistic difficulty of transitioning away from using maladaptive behaviors and coping mechanisms to deal with one's problems, a common struggle for those experiencing mental illnesses and substance abuse issues.

Furthermore, after Season Three's ending with the death of Sarah Lynn, Season Four begins with BoJack once again running away from LA in a futile attempt to escape his own issues, his guilt, and the consequences of the pain that he has caused others. The creators characterize this season with one main topic: the pervasive and longitudinal impact of generational trauma. Through the manipulation of time throughout the entirety of this season, the creators spent a majority of Season Four detailing the backstory of BoJack's mother, Beatrice Horseman, and the ways in which her upbringing and life have impacted BoJack.

Here, the role of both serialization and time in Season Four lies underlining the importance of recognizing the ways in which generational trauma must be addressed in order for the individuals within such a family can begin to stop and heal from it. By expanding on Beatrice's childhood and life story, this season's examination of the Horseman family's generational trauma not only allows the audience to empathize with both Beatrice and BoJack, but it serves as a reminder that people can both have suffered at the hands of others and also continue to perpetuate that suffering onto other people as well. Recounting this generates a space for these two seemingly mutually exclusive ideas to exist simultaneously; therefore, the inclusion of contrasting ideas presented together expands to include a more complex understanding of lived experiences of mental illness and substance abuse. It serves to provide context and explain some of the reasons for their behavior without justifying or making excuses for their horrible actions towards others. Season Four simply remains to be a reminder for the audience about the way someone's environment can cultivate and encourage

maladaptive coping mechanisms, poor decision making, and selfish behavior. Ultimately, the creators develop the narrative use of serialization alongside time in order to complicate the audience's understanding of trauma and its respective nuances in Season Four, providing a more comprehensive definition of the ways in which mental illness and substance abuse can originate, manifest, and perpetuate across generations.

Once again with Season Five of *BoJack Horseman*, the creators employ the narrative elements of animation and dark humor to explore the inner character development and working of BoJack. This episode primarily focuses on BoJack's new television series, Philbert. The television series is used as a vehicle for BoJack to explore his inner psyche through his character Philbert in the show since they both continue to struggle with alcohol and drug addiction; the character of Philbert similarly represents the deep-rooted nature of BoJack's issues. The distinguishing characteristics between television and reality become blurred as BoJack's drug problem increasingly worsens. In turn, this allows the creators to highlight the ways in which BoJack is only able to come to terms with the reality of his deteriorated state through this fictional character. Again, Philbert becomes a mechanism for BoJack to be able to evaluate and reflect upon himself and his haunted past through its titular character, demonstrating the ways in which television becomes a way for BoJack to unpack and grapple with his own trauma. In addition, the end of this season is also characterized by BoJack arguably hitting 'rock bottom' as he ends the season by checking himself into rehab. Here, the creators open a space to question whether or not BoJack will be able to make substantial progress in his life by finally seeking professional help. Overall, through both Philbert and the checking himself into rehab, BoJack spends Season Five exploring what it means to heal and reckon with one's past by undermining the traditional structure of Freytag's pyramid and instead focusing on the incomplete understanding of traditional redemption arcs as he seeks to find peace from his trauma.

Lastly, the last season of *BoJack Horseman* focuses on creating space to ask open-ended questions about the nature of healing for BoJack and those around him. By displaying each one of BoJack's relationships changing drastically throughout this season, the show seeks to demonstrate the ways in which there are different ways to deal with someone such as BoJack, and none of those ways are necessarily wrong, but they are simply the best option for that particular person. Therefore, the audience witnesses the variety of ways that the people in BoJack's life change their relationship with him as well, undermining sitcom tropes and an element of episodic television of never changing, stagnant relationships. Instead of providing a resolution or answers, Season Six emphasizes that the uncertainty of BoJack's future provides a more genuine and realistic understanding of what it means to struggle with mental illness substance abuse issues and what it means to be 'in recovery.' While the series concludes with BoJack intending to be better, the show does not leave the audience with a guarantee of anything. Instead, the show centralizes on the use of serialization to create a more nuanced understanding of the nonlinearity nature of progress as well as the necessity to establish a more nontraditional, complicated understanding of redemption arcs utilized in storytelling. Overall, the emphasis of both of these thematic ideas as the conclusion of *BoJack Horseman* leaves the audience with a more complex, yet more realistic, depiction of the lived experiences of mental illnesses and substance abuse.

## Season One: The Setup of the Anti-Hero

In Season One, the show is initially set up quite traditionally and similarly to other shows that also focus on an anti-hero main character. The audience is introduced to the character of BoJack by seeing the former sitcom star's struggle with writing a memoir. BoJack has hired a ghostwriter named Diane, another important main character of the show, to work on his memoir with him. Ironically, both the audience and BoJack find out that Diane is actually the girlfriend of BoJack's 'Hollywood' nemesis - Mr. Peanutbutter whom BoJack dislikes very much. Mr. Peanutbutter is a happy, go-lucky anthropomorphic Labrador Retriever who is placed as the perfect character foil to BoJack almost immediately as the show begins. Therefore, the entire initial setup of the series follows the traditional formula for shows - animated or not - about the main character as the epitome of the anti-hero, commonly seen in similarly innovative and popular shows such as *Breaking Bad* or *Mad Men*. This initial character foil setup between BoJack and Mr. Peanutbutter proves to be one of the most important narrative aspects of the show, which is later purposely and completely undermined by the creators themselves.

Particularly, with the first five episodes of Season One, *BoJack Horseman* sets up a very traditional setup of a satire where it spends much of each episode heavily relying on its joke commenting about the emptiness and shallowness of celebrity life. However, once Season One reaches its sixth episode, *BoJack Horseman* steps up its game by beginning to emphasize two important features of the show itself. First, the show displays its commitment to continuity between episodes, also known as serialization. For example, this is first seen in Season One: Episode Six where Todd Chavez, a friend of BoJack's who is staying at BoJack's home at the moment, is seen to still be in jail at the beginning of this episode where Episode Five left off. While it's not necessarily a huge plot moment for the series, it serves to set the norm and precedent for this series; it signals

that *BoJack Horseman* will not be an episodic television show like it has played out to be thus far in the beginning half of Season One. Rather, it demonstrates that the show will be adhering to a serialized format, thus emphasizing continuity within the show. This proves to be an important point because it serves two purposes throughout the series itself.

First, serialization allows the show to emphasize that all of the characters, or at the very least the main character of the series BoJack, will embark on a personal developmental character arc of some sort that will span the entirety of the series; this emphasis of a journey is an important aspect here. The serialization of *BoJack Horseman* resides in direct contrast with *Horsin' Around*, the former episodic '90s sitcom show that BoJack used to be on and that he models his own conception of life on. This juxtaposition allows *BoJack Horseman* to comment on itself; it emphasizes that between *Horsin' Around* and *BoJack Horseman's* reality the difference between illusion and reality - a common theme that the show frequently draws back on. By utilizing *Horsin' Around* to comment on the nature of real life, *BoJack Horseman* uses this sitcom to comment and derive conclusions about the nature of real life vs. the illusion of life sold by sitcoms and episodic television, such as *Horsin' Around*. Therefore, this juxtaposition provides an insight into this division between reality and illusion that permeates throughout the series.

By having *BoJack Horseman* employ serialization as a technique for telling its story, the series' creators are determined to undermine the reality perpetuated by unrealistic episodic television, most commonly emphasizing family-friendly sitcom shows. *BoJack Horseman* utilizes serialization to argue that these television shows' depictions of 'reality' showcase false notions about life - that one can live without consequences for one's actions, that grand, showy gestures are the solutions to the conflicts with others, that at the end of every day one can hit 'restart' and life will simply revert back to the way that it was at the beginning of the day. The narrative setup of *BoJack Horseman* argues that the reality in which the audience exists does not equate the reality of *Horsin' Around*, but in fact, more

similar to the reality of *BoJack Horseman*. This series is determined to undermine this sense of false reality presented by the unrealistic storytelling found in episodic television, such as sitcoms. The show chips away at the facade presented by *Horsin' Around* in order to underline the harm and danger of believing that television represents life when what is presented on-screen is a fantasy as one sees and as Bojack believes from *Horsin' Around*. This notion of a fraudulent version of reality being propagated by episodic television becomes a central idea of the meta-analysis and critique that *BoJack Horseman* makes about the illusion about linear progressions of life, and in turn, the lived experience of chronic illnesses, particularly mental illness. By commenting on this notion, *BoJack Horseman* seeks to undercut the idea that the versions of realities presented on much of episodic television are not synonymous with the experiences of real life, even though people might believe otherwise. The creators ultimately argue that if the audience and BoJack, believe that this version of television represents reality, then they are living in a fantasy about what the experience of life is truly like and consists of. In turn, the creators utilize serialization to convey that one cannot live life as if everyday is independent, therefore emphasizing that people must understand the long-term consequences to their actions that result in changes to the relationships that they have with others. By showing these effects and changes that come with time, *BoJack Horseman* demonstrates that one cannot repeatedly engage with the same destructive behavior that hurts people and expect there to be no long-term ramifications to those relationships; essentially, people have to deal with the consequences of their actions. By emphasizing consequences through the use of serialization, the creators highlight that in real life, there is no reset button unlike a twenty-two minute television series episode. Ultimately, by facilitating the juxtaposed setup between *BoJack Horseman* and *Horsin' Around*, serialization is used as a television tool in order to emphasize a more accurate, and therefore realistic understanding of life and also produce the reality effect for audience viewers.



Second, the importance of serialization emphasizing continuity creates the foundation for serialization's second purpose: to showcase how serialization sets the stage for exploring long-term, or chronic, health issues, such as mental illness and addiction, and how this complicates certain understandings of the never-ending journey of 'recovery.' The serialization of a television series highlights the continuity in real life; everything that one does and everything that happens to them is simply part of their entire story. As serialization emphasizes that there are tangible and important consequences to one's actions, it also serves to demonstrate that life in any shape or form is not defined by a beginning or an end.

Furthermore, the second element of the show beginning to be emphasized in Season One: Episode Six lies in undercutting sitcom tropes by excessively satirizing them. In turn, this mocks the idea that these tropes are even remotely realistic in any way, shape, or form. Again, this extravagant display of sitcom tropes provides an important setup for *BoJack Horseman* as the audience follows the continuous deconstruction of these sitcom tropes in the following seasons. One of the best examples of this is found in the character of Mr. Peanutbutter himself. From a visual and animation perspective, not only is Mr. Peanutbutter a dog, but he is specifically a Labrador Retriever who are traditionally known to be happy and fun-loving. Everything about his physical appearance and public celebrity personality radiates friendliness and approachability; in this initial portrayal, he both epitomizes and embodies what it means to be both an amazing person and lovable celebrity, which is in direct contrast to BoJack's character and nature. The clever use of the dog animal to portray Mr. Peanutbutter is also very intentional for the reason that in Western cultures, dogs are traditionally seen as a man's best friend and are typically only associated with positive connotations. Hence, from the purposeful choice to represent the character of Mr. Peanutbutter as a dog, the creators have already asked the audience to associate his character with goodness, positivity, and morality. Not only is Mr. Peanutbutter initially portrayed as very well-liked and kind to the general public, in the first

season, the plot is set up to portray Mr. Peanutbutter in the most positive light as possible as he is seen as a doting, caring boyfriend, and eventual fiance, of the character of Diane. Additionally, he is in stark contrast with BoJack as Mr. Peanutbutter is always kind to others and treats others' feelings with delicacy and care. Overall, throughout Season One, Mr. Peanutbutter is seen as the epitome of kindness and friendliness and the kind of character that everyone wants to be friends with. He is sweet, considerate of others, playful, and overly optimistic and positive about life, which only increase and heighten his likability. By creating a character whose outward image and existence represents likability and positivity, the creators of *BoJack Horseman* begin the series by successfully creating what is later found out to be the illusion that Mr. Peanutbutter is the better, more desirable version of a celebrity. Again, through this juxtaposition, he comes to represent the antithesis of BoJack and arguably the version of BoJack that the audience wished he was, a representation of someone good. Furthermore, this facade of Mr. Peanutbutter's likeability later highlights the faulty assumption of Mr. Peanutbutter as the better version of BoJack; it is only through the second half of the series that Mr. Peanutbutter's more problematic personality traits become more noticeable and nefarious and therefore affect the audience's understanding and evaluation of his character. By characterizing Mr. Peanutbutter as an anthropomorphic dog, the creators uphold this notion of him as 'the good guy.' More specifically, Mr. Peanutbutter's initial characterization aligns with the sitcom trope of the 'Nice Guy,' or someone who is overall friendly, psychologically well-balanced, morally good and socially balanced in most cases, and in short, someone anyone would like to be around and have as a friend. Since Mr. Peanutbutter embodies this sitcom trope, his extreme portrayal and embodiment of this trope simply later undercuts his entire character as his very existence on the show eventually becomes a joke. Overall, his extremely positive portrayal of a celebrity lives in direct contrast with BoJack, allowing Mr. Peanutbutter to embody "the Nice Guy" sitcom trope for the first half of the series, only to have this illusion fall apart in the second half of the series.

In turn, Mr. Peanutbutter is perfectly positioned as the character foil to BoJack Horseman. In any narrative, the foil is a character who typically contrasts the protagonist in order to highlight or, at the very least, differentiate certain qualities of the protagonist. It is in this way that Mr. Peanutbutter is deliberately portrayed to lead the audience to believe that he is, in fact, the foil to the character of BoJack, which reinforced by Mr. Peanutbutter's own history of success and ascension to fame and status. When BoJack was starring on his hit '90s family sitcom *Horsin' Around*, Mr. Peanutbutter was also starring on a hit '90s family sitcom called *Mr. Peanutbutter's House*, which was essentially the same show as *Horsin' Around* with the exact same premise but instead with a dog in place of a horse as the main character. By planting Mr. Peanutbutter as BoJack's long standing sitcom rival, he is perfectly positioned for the audience to believe that he is the embodiment of everything BoJack could be if BoJack were 'good.' This celebrity history offers legitimacy for the audience to place BoJack and Mr. Peanutbutter against one another as foils. This traditional setup of character foils proves to be important throughout the first half of the series where the show plays into this stereotypical narrative character dynamic and common sitcom trope. However, as the audience finds out in the second half of the series, Mr. Peanutbutter is shown to be at least as problematic, codependent, and self-absorbed as BoJack, completely undercutting this duality of character foils built throughout the first half of the series. Therefore, the setup of the character foil between Mr. Peanutbutter and BoJack underlines the show's focus on the importance of dismantling this supposed dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' people; instead, the show pursues a more comprehensive, yet nuanced, understanding of how people exist and behave in the world through good and bad decisions instead of allowing those to define whole characters. It is only through undermining this original traditional setup of a character foil between BoJack and Mr. Peanutbutter that the audience can understand the gravity and danger that lies when characters are only labelled, and therefore seen, as 'good' or 'bad.' By highlighting this gray area of moral judgement about the characters on the

show, *BoJack Horseman* seeks to show a more fair, realistic portrayal of how people truly live their lives, and none of this would have been possible without this impactful original character setup.

Ultimately, Season One's focus on building sitcom tropes that will then be later dismantled in the series provides a metaphor for one of the many thematic messages of the show. By highlighting the futility of holding onto such oversimplifications, and therefore, fantasies about people's behavior and believing them to be true, the audience is shown what happens when one truly believes that sitcoms become the foundation for someone's understanding of life similarly to BoJack. He has grounded his entire understanding of life and how to deal with it by watching sitcoms, where there were no consequences for one's actions and skewed perceptions of reality. The character of BoJack has been shown to be rooted in a lack of accountability that manifests itself as a symptom of his childhood trauma and is exacerbated by his mental illnesses and substance abuse issues. Therefore, through Season One's setup of the series through serialization and the character foil between BoJack and Mr. Peanutbutter, these elements provide the necessary structural metaphor in order to create messages about how storytelling that is reflective of reality is more often than not grounded in nonlinearity, convoluted and unresolved relationships, and bearing the consequences of one's actions. Ultimately, this Season One setup provides *BoJack Horseman* with the ability to completely undermine the foundation that they build in the first half of the series during the second half of the series in order to prove that dismantling character tropes and empathizing nonlinearity are essential when depicting the reality of life and, later specifically of recovery in a mental health and substance abuse context.

As the second half of Season One comes to fruition, BoJack's plainly self-destructive behavior begins to seriously hurt himself and the relationships that he holds with those around him. In particular, for example, this is most clearly evident with BoJack's unknowingly codependent need to pull and keep Todd in the same pit that he inhabits, figuratively speaking. As one of his closest

friends and also someone who has been indefinitely crashing in BoJack's home, Todd is initially constantly seen as dumb character without any ambitions or dreams. However, as Season One progresses, it becomes evident that this is not the case. As early as Season One: Episode Four, Todd begins to plan a concept for a rock opera and manages to garner professional support and financial investment for it as well. However, instead of being supportive of his friend's newfound success, BoJack makes disparaging comments of the whole premise itself calling it "worse than a hundred September 11ths ("Zoës and Zeldas" 06:31-06:34)." BoJack's verbal cruelty, and arguably abuse, towards Todd does not stop there. Due to his narcissistic tendencies and self-inflated ego, BoJack takes Todd under his wing under the guise of mentoring him, yet this just becomes a way for BoJack to ensure that Todd continues to be fully dependent on him by keeping him close. This way BoJack never has to be alone, and therefore, he never has to be lonely. Since BoJack's mental illnesses prevent him from even thinking about the possibility of being so lonely by himself, this manifests in dragging down others with him, and Todd becomes the first, but not the only, one of many examples. Not only does the audience see BoJack self-sabotage and then self-medicate himself with prescription drugs and alcohol, but the audience also witnesses how BoJack always ends up bringing people into his messes in a desperate attempt to not be or feel alone. In the case of Todd, BoJack ensures Todd's initial codependency on him by taking every opportunity to be kind to instead be abrasive and cruel. It is important to note that this damaging behavior is clearly shown to not always be BoJack's intention; he does not always mean to do it. Here, the animation of these scenes consisting of BoJack's harsh criticism of Todd allows the audience to closely observe this interaction. The simplicity of the animation emphasizes the moments where BoJack dissociates and loses control of himself. This television narrative element of animation highlights BoJack's bulging eyes alongside a moment of shock streaked across his face. Similarly to an intuitive reflexiveness, BoJack is immediately disgusted by himself for this awful behavior. Moments afterwards, he retreats back into

himself, and his eyes relax once again in a moment where he excuses his damaging behavior as simply “telling the truth” and a warped understanding of honesty. Here, the creators demonstrate that BoJack rationalizes his awful behavior because the alternative is too damaging and difficult for him to feel and reconcile with. BoJack’s subconscious dedication to ruining Todd’s life results as a manifestation of a multitude of his own personal mentalhealth issues. Importantly, the audience notices that the animation depicts BoJack as not realizing what he is saying until he is actually saying it. This delay between saying something and realizing that one is saying it is a perfect textbook example of self-estrangement and dissociation, which are both common, and likely, symptoms of clinical depression. Therefore, as the audience watches BoJack self-sabotage, they also see the negative consequences that this behavior has on his relationships with the people around him. BoJack’s self-hatred places him in a cyclical pattern where he destroys and sabotages the relationships with those around him in order to fulfill the narrative about himself that he has built: that he is in fact an inherently terrible person. By alienating himself, and therefore those around him, the audience is introduced to this manifestation of clinical depression that will set the dark tone for much of the series.

Particularly, it is important to point out the explicit mention of addiction here in Season One. As early as Episode Four where Todd begins to gain traction on his idea about creating a rock opera, he receives attention from potential investors and creatives who want to debut his rock opera to the public. Here, it is evident that this is the first time in a very long while in which Todd has been driven and passionate to create and do something with his life, especially something that brings him so much joy. It is only in this moment where Todd reveals that much of his life was consumed by a video game addiction, particularly with a game named ‘Decapathon’, and explains to BoJack how that addiction ruined his life and rendered him unable to do anything for himself or others. Later, while at the store, BoJack finds Decapathon VII, the newest game in the video game series that

Todd mentioned being addicted to. Due to BoJack's inability to be alone, codependent nature, and necessity to bring others down with him, he schemed a plan to get Todd addicted to video games once again in order to ensure that Todd's rock opera would fail, and therefore, he would continue to live and stay with BoJack for comfort. BoJack bought Decapathon VII, placed it in the convenience store bargain bin, and paid off store clerks and a minor character named 'Character Actress Margo Martindale' to manipulate putting the game into Todd's hands in order to jeopardize his chances of ever having a successful career. This scheme verifies that BoJack prioritizes his own comfort and needs over the happiness and success of his dear friend, an important trend that manifests itself throughout many of BoJack's relationships over the series. The creators portray BoJack's dismay at Todd's potential for success and underline that this very selfishness continues to feed into his need to be codependent on those around him; BoJack only wishes to bring and sink others to where he is. Hypocritically, when Todd discovers the game at the store, BoJack disingenuously pleads Todd to not buy the game in a dishonest attempt to prevent him from relapsing, but as BoJack knew, this becomes of no use. By highlighting BoJack's extremely manipulative behavior, BoJack's posturing becomes evident as he attempts to portray himself as someone who does care about others, such as Todd, when in fact, he is the reason for their demise and eventual self-destruction. As a result, Todd buys and plays, or more accurately binges, the game all-night long anyways despite BoJack's 'pleads', leading to Todd's unprepared rehearsal performance the following morning for the possible financiers of the rock opera. In turn, this becomes a perfect example and foreshadows the way in which BoJack's own self-destructive behavior erodes his relationships with those around him as he brings others down with him, a clear manifestation of his own mental illnesses. The creators utilize this moment to emphasize BoJack's facade that he created about himself in a desperate attempt to cling onto some nonexistent version of who he thinks he should be. The most important idea to gather from Season One's portrayal of Todd and BoJack's relationship is that it never fully recovers;

things are never quite the same after BoJack insults and then sabotages Todd's creative process of writing the rock opera.

Furthermore, the long standing damage of BoJack's toxic behavior is demonstrated in BoJack's relationship with his old best friend, Herb. As seen in Season 1 Episode 8: "The Telescope", the series recounts this relationship when BoJack goes to visit Herb for the first time in twenty years because Herb is dying of rectal cancer. This episode in particular utilizes flashbacks to the '80s and '90s to scenes of BoJack with Herb or about Herb when they were working together on their old sitcom show *Horsin' Around*. During many of these flashbacks to the 80s, as one sees not only in this episode but throughout all of the '80s flashbacks in the series, there is a running gag where BoJack refuses to drink alcohol, which is a sharp contrast of personality and decision making from present-day BoJack as he is currently a heavy drinker and alcoholic. In another instant, there is a flashback to a conversation that BoJack had with Herb's girlfriend at the time, Charlotte, who tells him that, "Hollywood's a real pretty town that's smack on top of all that black tar. By the time you realize you're sinking, it's too late" ("The Telescope" 06:32 - 06:38). This piece of dialogue sets a precedent for the motif of black tar throughout the series. The series explores this recurring symbol by investigating what or who the black tar truly represents. In turn, this motif alludes to BoJack's struggle with his poor decision-making and toxic behavior, which causes him to take down and sink others with him, arguably just like black tar. Importantly, this only becomes a symptom of what happens to BoJack and what BoJack does to others later in the series. When one is sinking in black tar, one does not know until it's too late. Similarly, Charlotte's dialogue foreshadows the fact that BoJack eventually becomes so selfish, toxic, and narcissistic that he does not even realize that he has become this way until it is arguably too late for him and many of his friendships. Additionally, it points to the fact that BoJack does eventually realize that he is sinking in his own pit of sadness and despair, and he cannot help but to bring anyone down with him. This symbol of black tar remains to



be important throughout the rest of the series as the audience finds BoJack being consumed himself or the audience's screen being consumed by black tar on multiple occasions in a possible reference to being swallowed up by the pit of darkness and sadness that represents clinical depression and alcoholism. This particular flashback later highlights the fact that BoJack allowed himself to get sucked into this pit of darkness, fame, etc. in this very episode since that is when BoJack began to smoke and drink heavily, resulting in his relationship with Herb becoming increasingly strained. His horrible treatment of people fueled by his narcissism made him more and more difficult to work with, spiraling him deeper and deeper into this black tar pit. Furthermore, one instance of dark humor within this episode also happens to lie in a flashback of when BoJack and Herb first met. This moment was characterized by Herb heckling BoJack when BoJack was first performing stand-up. Since he was so angry and upset, BoJack tells Herb to "get cancer, jerkwad," almost comically foreshadowing Herb's onset of rectal cancer over two decades later ("Zoës and Zeldas" 00:46 - 00:47). This moment of dark humor demonstrated the way in which the series' creators decide to depict the show by combining dark plot points and humor to utilize comedy as a coping mechanism for dealing with the depressing nature of any situation. While this moment may seem to be an instance of dark humor, it could also be interpreted as BoJack's complete disregard for his words or actions and the way that they affect the lives of other people. In this case, BoJack would be portrayed as always having been cold, narcissistic, and self-absorbed - regardless of his clinical depression and alcoholism; this would emphasize that while his mental illnesses contribute to his horrible behavior and poor decision making skills, they cannot be used as scapegoats to excuse his actions. Not only does this interpretation put strain and tension on BoJack's personality and character as a whole, but it also forces the audience to reconsider the ways in which BoJack chooses and continues to choose to be extraordinarily unkind and cruel to people no matter the physical, emotional, and mental consequences.

Particularly, this episode contained the first significant moment of reckoning that BoJack had with someone from his past as he dealt with their broken relationship. BoJack's strained relationship with Herb stems from the fact that BoJack did not stand by Herb's side when Herb was arrested and then subsequently fired for what the press called "lewd acts," a euphemism for Herb being gay ("The Telescope" 11:43 - 11:44). In this instance, BoJack picked his career over his friendship with Herb, and additionally, BoJack did not reach out or visit Herb once in the past two decades afterwards. Hence, now BoJack has come to visit Herb in an attempt to appease himself of the guilt that he feels for leaving and betraying Herb all of these years ago. Due to this intense betrayal, Herb has grown deeply bitter towards BoJack, and this episode focuses on displaying the deteriorated nature of their friendship due to BoJack's selfishness and sabotage. Although Herb is still furious with BoJack, they do manage to reconnect momentarily during BoJack's brief visit. Everything seemed to come to some form of ending until BoJack decided to go back into Herb's home after he left in order to apologize to him, again, in an attempt to appease his own guilt and seek closure. Although Herb accepts BoJack's apology, he does not himself forgive BoJack, an oddly similar parallel to BoJack's current relationship with Todd for the rest of the series, and later replicated in many other relationships as well. Herb not granting BoJack any sympathy or any semblance of closure allows the creators to emphasize that the damage and the scars that BoJack left on Herb were irreparable, and that there was absolutely nothing that would be able to absolve him of that guilt or action. Simply, a single apology would not suffice to undo the inconsiderate emotional damage and havoc that BoJack wrecked on Herb's life. He had simply hurt Herb too deeply to ever be forgiven, a notion that BoJack could not simply not live with and refused to believe. Upon hearing this, instead of accepting Herb's decision, BoJack continues to selfishly serve himself as he attempts to guilt trip Herb into accepting BoJack's apology when BoJack recognizes that this moment is probably the last time that Herb and BoJack will see one another. This understandably

deeply angers Herb as he has finally made peace with the past and is furious that BoJack has the audacity to ruin that for him in addition to everything else he has done to Herb. Here, BoJack's narcissistic tendencies become very clear as he becomes increasingly angry and dissatisfied that Herb is not providing the closure that BoJack believes that he deserves. Since Herb has decided to not forgive BoJack, he forces BoJack to live with the guilt surrounding his horrible treatment of Herb for the rest of his life. It is for this reason of abandonment that Herb exclaims that he will never forgive BoJack as he explains and says "No, I'm not gonna give you closure. You don't get that. You have to live with the shitty thing you did for the rest of your life. You have to know that it's never, ever going to be okay!—I'm dying! I'm not gonna feel better! And I'm not gonna be your prop so you can feel better!—Then, why didn't you call me? 20 years--You didn't call me.—You know what it was like for me? I had nobody. —Everybody left! I knew all those showbiz phonies would turn on me. Sure. But you?—I don't care about the job! I did fine. I had a good life. But what I needed then was a friend, and you abandoned me. And I will never forgive you for that ("The Telescope" 21:11 - 22:02). Hence, Herb's refusal to forgive BoJack ensures that he can never escape the immeasurable amount of guilt for his actions. Although BoJack attempts to address this lack of forgiveness by trying to reconcile with Herb with a half-hearted attempt at an apology, Herb's determination to not provide BoJack closure prevails. The importance of this ending to Herb and BoJack's relationship lies with it undermining narrative structure, in this case being Freytag's pyramid. Not only were there loose ends at the end of the confrontation about their friendship, but the lack of a resolution between Herb and BoJack subverts traditional episodic as well as sitcom structure where forgiveness is always extended by the wronged. By undercutting traditional narrative endings found in both sitcom and episodic television, *BoJack Horseman* created a space to ask questions about how television deals with unresolved relationships and continued tensions between characters, thus exploring continuity of these relationships between episodes and throughout the series

By forcing BoJack to live with his guilt of these horrible actions and without Herb's forgiveness, BoJack is forced to confront his self-obsession and lack of consideration for others besides himself. The simple fact that he imposed himself onto Herb when Herb had already made his own peace is a testament to that selfishness. Herb emphasizes and recounts how his career fell apart and how difficult his life became. He discusses that he expected everyone but BoJack to leave him and how he really needed a friend, but BoJack simply thought of himself and his own career and abandoned him instead. This conversation escalated dramatically when Herb points out that while BoJack might think of himself as the 'good guy,' BoJack is truly nothing more than a selfish, narcissistic coward. Herb explains this by saying "You know what your problem is? You want to think of yourself as the good guy. Well, I know you better than anyone, and I can tell you that you're not. In fact, you'd probably sleep a lot better at night if you just admitted to yourself that you're a selfish goddamn coward who takes whatever he wants and doesn't give a shit about who he hurts. That's you. That's BoJack Horseman" ("The Telescope" 22:46 - 23:09). Here, Herb highlights that BoJack continues to be selfish and self-serving because he simply wants to do whatever he wants and does not care about the way his decisions affect others; he has no regard for who he hurts or what the consequences of his actions are. Herb emphasizes that BoJack must live with what he has done; he will never forgive BoJack not because BoJack decided to continue his career of *Horsin' Around*, but because of the fact that BoJack severed contact with Herb and did not speak to him for twenty years. Herb was angry because BoJack completely abandoned him, and that was inherently unforgivable. Lastly, Herb yelled at BoJack to "now, get the fuck out of [his] house," a significant moment in the show ("The Telescope" 22:02 - 22:07). This piece of dialogue is important because it is the first time in the series where someone utilizes this particular obscenity. It is important to note that the writers of the show themselves abide by a self-imposed rule that they can only use the explicit word 'f\*\*\*' one time every season. In fact, this word is only spoken when one of BoJack's

relationships has been irreversibly destroyed. Therefore, upon reflection of this series, this moment was important because of the fact that it signaled that BoJack's relationship with Herb was permanently destroyed. Again, not only does this foreshadow the downfall of many of BoJack's other relationships, but this also demonstrates that BoJack inflicts irreparable damage onto himself *and* those around him. This reinforces yet again that BoJack's repetitive toxic and cyclical decisions do not actually produce any changes in behaviour; therefore, his many half-hearted apologies simply fail to have any effect of remorse and does not convince those around him that he will ever change. This first, earth-shattering moment of truth for both the viewers and BoJack set the stage for the characters in *BoJack Horseman* to have to deal with the long-term consequences of their actions towards others. This goes on to play an important thematic role throughout the series, and yet again, reiterates the idea that life is not episodic like in sitcom shows, such as *Horsin' Around*, that BoJack has modelled his life after. Again, this is a moment where it becomes evident that serialization of the show allows it to portray a more accurate representation of how reality works in it of itself. By having to deal with the slow buildup of his actions and their respective, and usually negative, consequences, BoJack faces the realistic changes that occur in long-term friendships. Overall, this moment of reckoning with Herb, supported by this particular diction in the dialogue, successfully emphasizes the important role that serialization plays and will continue to play throughout the series in order to portray a realistic depiction of life and the relationships in it.

After this heated discussion, BoJack walks out, but not without picking up a telescope from Herb's home, which was a token of *Horsin' Around* that Herb kept as a nostalgic reminder of the past happier days of their friendship; the telescope became a symbol of Herb and BoJack's friendship. In anger, Herb subsequently attacks BoJack in an attempt to gain his telescope back from him. After wrestling with one another, the telescope ends up actually breaking, a symbolic representation for the irreparable damage on their friendship. This altercation displays the way in which BoJack deals,

or more accurately does not deal, with the damage that he has caused overall. This provides one of the first, and arguably one of the most important, examples of BoJack not taking responsibility for his actions. His lack of accountability when it comes to this relationship with Herb sets a tone and a precedent for a large portion of the series. The fallout between Herb and BoJack foreshadows the ways in which BoJack will go on to destroy many of his friendships beyond repair and the multitude of ways in which the people around him will deal with that. This decenters BoJack, the main character and somewhat the protagonist of this story, and also manages to view the ways in which the main character's actions affect the lives and relationships of the people around him as well. By doing this, the creators of the show embody this idea that BoJack is not necessarily the most important character in the story as the ways in which he treats other people become as important as the way he feels about himself as well. In turn, this puts a spin on traditional stories of redemption and resolution as the show complicates this idea of their ever being an end to one's progress.

Furthermore, it is only in Season 1 Episode 9: "Horse Majeure" that Todd realizes that BoJack attempted to sabotage his rock opera. It is this episode where the audience witnesses Todd voice his anger, telling BoJack to stop messing with other people's lives as BoJack is now attempting to sabotage Diane and Mr. Peanutbutter's wedding, as his destructive habits are now more clearly being seen as a pattern of behavior. Here, the audience begins to understand the irreparable damage that BoJack has committed against Todd by inducing him to relapse back into playing video games. It is only by witnessing Todd's intense anger that the audience realizes that BoJack's relationship with Todd is heading in the same direction as his relationship with Herb went. This foreshadowing demonstrates to the audience that BoJack has not learned from his past mistakes as he continues to participate in his cycle of toxic behavior. It even becomes clear in the following episode, Episode 10: "One Trick Pony," that BoJack assumes that Todd is conspiring against him with a revenge scheme by sabotaging his new film to prevent BoJack from relaunching his career, which is eerily exactly

what BoJack did to Todd when he planned the failure of his rock opera. During BoJack's confrontation with Todd, this accusation falls flat as Todd explicitly mentions that he has moved on and is now wholeheartedly focused on working honestly on this film. However, it is important to note that while Todd may have moved on, at the end of the day, BoJack's relationship with Todd has been irrevocably changed forever. While it has not necessarily been ended, Todd makes it very clear that he refuses to fully reconcile with BoJack, and the audience sees this change in Todd's relationship with BoJack for the rest of the series. The nature of this particular betrayal of BoJack's, whether it was a culmination of his long-term poor treatment of Todd or simply the severity of this one instance, forever altered his friendship with Todd, which is a different, yet similar, effect that BoJack's behavioral consequences continue to have on his friendships. Additionally, in Episode 10, BoJack's self-destructive behavior also begins to manifest itself as he lashes out on another one of his friends, Diane, the ghostwriter of his memoir. The title of this episode 'One Trick Pony' is a reference to Diane's first draft of the memoir. Naming the title of both the episode and BoJack's memoir this circus idiom insinuates that BoJack was a fluke; BoJack either must have only had success once or was only ever able to perform one thing in his life and even that was not very entertaining. Despite the fact that BoJack himself asked her to depict him with his "warts and all," the intentionality of the book title bothers BoJack as he becomes angry with Diane that this memoir paints him in a bad light ("One Trick Pony" 17:41 - 17:42). It's ironic that BoJack acts as if he wants to be vulnerable in order to connect with others, but when he is presented the opportunity to do so and envisions what that would look like, he quickly and furiously rejects presenting the unfiltered version of himself as his true self. Ironically, BoJack simply wants to appear transparent and authentic without exerting any emotional and mental work necessary to improve. Thus, this dishonest intention prevents and impedes BoJack's progress to becoming a better person to himself and others. BoJack only desires to participate in appearing to be authentic and real with others

without actually doing so in reality, and this continues to be an issue that he is riddled with throughout the rest of the series. Therefore, this confrontation with Diane demonstrates how BoJack's inability to deal with himself and his respective issues results in the destruction of the majority of his own relationships here, it becomes evident that the creators highlighted that BoJack has no one to blame but himself. Even though Diane honors the agreement to portray BoJack authentically, BoJack's anger gets the best of him as he proceeds to fire Diane and insist that he could write the book by himself, which from past experience, the audience and BoJack knows he cannot do. His inability to truly self-reflect about the damage that he has caused himself and others due to his unhealthy coping mechanisms prevents him from making any strides towards self-improvement. This theme continues to pervade as the audience identifies the ways in which BoJack's relationship with himself and others change or obliterate with time as BoJack continues to make poor life choices and avoid accountability for the consequences for his actions. Again, Season One's foundational understanding about the functioning and manifestation of BoJack's toxic and selfish behavior builds the framework for the audience to understand the cyclical nature of BoJack's destructive behavior.

As Season One draws to a close, in the penultimate episode of the season, Episode 11: 'Downer's Ending', BoJack begins to attempt writing his own memoir. However, after many distractions, he ultimately engages in another self-destructive habit by contacting one of his former *Horsin' Around* co-stars, Sarah Lynn, and later, Todd, to join him for a session of recreational drugs. By justifying that this will help jump-start the writing process, BoJack binges on these drugs and convinces Sarah Lynn and Todd that the three of them should work on the memoir together. Unsurprisingly, the three of them are unable to work for long, and once again, the guilt-ridden BoJack confronts Todd about his successful sabotage of Todd's rock opera. Here, Todd's reaction is important as it both reiterates and expands the audience's, and arguably BoJack's, understanding of



who BoJack is as a person. While Todd emphasizes that he has moved on, he explains that he has only been able to do so by realizing that he should have had low expectations for BoJack in the first place. In this moment, Todd highlights that if he simply learns not to expect anything substantial from BoJack as a friend, then Todd can protect himself from being vortexed by BoJack's self-destructive habits. By emphasizing Todd's fear of being dragged down with BoJack, the creators supplied another version of how BoJack's behavior affects his relationships with others - one version being total unforgiveness as seen with Herb and another version being setting low expectations for BoJack's ability to be a friend as seen with Todd. This response from Todd surprises BoJack as he starts thinking about the ways in which other people think about him because of the destruction he has wrecked onto their lives. Consequently, BoJack realizes that many of the people closest to him, such as Herb and Todd, believe that he is too far gone to ever meaningfully improve himself and therefore, become a better version of himself. This scares BoJack because if those who are closest to him feel this way about him, as if he is too horrible and broken and too far gone from being able to be saved, then that must mean that it is true. This interpretation of reality shakes BoJack to his core, and he quickly attempts to find solace and comfort away this dissonance by finding and approaching Diane. As the writer of his memoir, she is arguably his closest friend and the person that knows him the best. Thus, BoJack feels as if her opinion is the most important one even though he has hurt her as much as he has hurt others in his life. He explicitly seeks her validation when he says, "...I don't actually even really care what the world thinks about me anymore. I just hated reading that book because I hated feeling like that's how you saw me. Because I guess you know me better than anybody, and if you think that— Um, I guess my question is, do you... Do you think it's too late for me? I mean, am I just doomed to be the person that I am? The... The person in that book? It's not too late for me, is it? It's— It's not too late Diane, I need you to tell me that it's not too late"

("Downer Ending" 23:08 - 23:38) This desperate plea for confirmation becomes a significant aspect

of BoJack's character development as it now becomes clear to the audience that BoJack does not want to be this way. He wishes to be a good friend and person, but he continues to engage in harmful and destructive behavior because he does not want to confront the hard work necessary to become a better version of himself. As the audience finds out later in the series, BoJack's self-concept is substantially based in his abusive childhood and problematic upbringing. While the show does not utilize this traumatic childhood as an excuse for his behavior, they do present it as partially contributing to BoJack's very poor self-regulation skills when it comes to his emotional and mental state. This dialogue presents the idea that BoJack has experienced a history of distressing events that have seriously damaged him, but instead of finding ways to heal from his damage and engage with healthy coping mechanisms, he continues to inflict and perpetuate this destructive behavior onto others and himself in this unhealthy, cyclical manner. Here, BoJack acknowledges and exclaims that "I— I need you to tell me that I'm a good person. I know that I can be selfish and narcissistic and self-destructive, but underneath all that, deep down, I'm a good person, and I need you to tell me that I'm good, Diane. Tell me, please, Diane. Tell me that I'm good" ("Downer Ending" 23:40 - 23:54). Here, BoJack acknowledges the fact that he behaves in a harmful and destructive manner, but he still so deeply wants to believe and know that his friends and the important people in his life do not think that he is too far gone to be saved and become a good person. BoJack strictly adheres to this idea that there are good people and bad people, mimicking an all-or-nothing mindset which is another symptom of clinical depression specifically. He functions in this binary, believing that people, ideas, and events are fundamentally and simply just good or bad. However, the creators of the show utilize this ending moment of Season One as an opportunity to dismantle this oversimplification between good and bad people in favor of a more morally ambiguous mindset. *BoJack Horseman* thrives by positioning itself in the area in between good and bad, the grey area, and this is seen when BoJack's questions were met with Diane's response -

complete silence. This silent response represents that Diane does not have the answers to these questions, and it's very possible that perhaps no one has the answers at all if they even exist. Instead, Diane's response serves to create a space for both *BoJack Horseman* and its audience to grapple with this existential problem, providing a more accurate insight on the ways in which life's questions are dealt with in reality. Ultimately, at the end of Season One, the creators employ Diane's deafening silence to BoJack's questions to signal that both life and people do not operate and cannot be categorized into a binary of good and bad; rather, the creators favor following a philosophy that revolves around the nuanced, complicated realities that we live in and occupy, which more often than not, do not have easy or direct answers to these types of questions. By not providing an answer to BoJack's questions, the creators highlight that more often than not, people do not receive answers to these big questions and instead must spend their time confronting and reconciling this uncertainty between whether or not who they are or what they do can even be categorized within this oversimplified notion of good or bad. Overall, the goals of Season One lie with providing a foundation for the series by first establishing fundamental concepts of the show, such as serialization, and then secondly, setting up traditional tropes, such as character foils, that are later undermined by the show itself to comment upon traditional, linear storytelling techniques and narratives.

## Season Two: The Role of Animation & Dark Humor

Season Two: Episode 1 “Brand New Couch” opens with a flashback to 1973 where a nine-year old BoJack was listening to one of Secretariat’s interviews. Secretariat, the famous race horse who BoJack later plays in his biopic since he is BoJack’s hero, answers questions from fans and stumbles upon BoJack’s question: “What do you do when you get sad? How do you not be sad?” (“Brand New Couch” 00:29 - 00:33) However, since BoJack’s parents begin to fight loudly in the background of this scene, neither the audience nor BoJack can hear the answer. Beginning Season Two with this opening is a very powerful move by the creators as this reiterates their goals to open up a space to discuss the possible answers to these heavy philosophical questions, debating them instead of necessarily providing the answers. The goal of the creators lies in them giving themselves the freedom to explore reality, particularly the negative aspects and experiences that make up the human condition. They accomplish this by repeatedly exploring the grey areas of life where there is not necessarily a right answer to every question as shown in this opening clip between BoJack and Secretariat. After BoJack’s parents finish fighting, BoJack’s mother, Beatrice Horseman, returns back to the living room where BoJack is watching television only to chastise him by exclaiming that “[he] ruined her, ... [so he] better become something great to make up for all the damage [he’s] done” to which young, frightened BoJack timidly replies “I know” and “I will” (“Brand New Couch” 01:14 - 01:24). This crucial scene narrates a flashback where Beatrice directly equates his existence to an inconvenience and problem for everyone at-large, particularly her. The importance of this moment lies in the fact that it reveals one of BoJack’s many distressing and traumatic childhood memories. This memory most likely serves as one of the sources of BoJack’s belief in his inherently flawed nature as the audience continues to see him assume that he is only capable of inflicting damage onto himself and others; therefore, this flashback constitutes one of many throughout the series seen as

responsible for BoJack's fundamental self-esteem issues, a notion later more thoroughly evaluated when exploring the root cause of the manifestation of BoJack's mental illnesses as well. Here, it can be pinpointed that Beatrice begins to manifest, and therefore pass on, what is later found out to be generational trauma onto an impressionable, young BoJack. By telling BoJack this, it becomes easily imprinted on his mind and psyche as true since it is also coming from a trustworthy point of authority in his eyes: his mother. Therefore, once BoJack begins to insist that he is only capable of causing damage, he begins to do so, satisfying a self-fulfilling prophecy over time. This leads to the pattern of self-destructive behavior that plagues both BoJack himself and all of his personal relationships as well. Furthermore, another point of impact from Beatrice's damage on BoJack lies with the fact that once BoJack begins to think that he himself is and has always been innately damaged since birth, this idea prevents him from believing, let alone even trying, to change and better himself; simply put, he just gives up. Not only does this opening moment set the stage for the rest of Season Two, but it also speculates a concrete, foundational reason to what may constitute as the initial root cause for BoJack's unhappiness.

Subsequently after this flashback, the audience finds BoJack in the present day, listening to an inspirational audiobook at sunrise. The audiobook speaker remarks that "I can change and I will change" followed by asking the listener to repeat that phrase out loud, which BoJack does ("Brand New Couch" 02:38 - 02:41) This self-motivating audiobook repeatedly appears throughout the episode, and it serves to be an important motif representing the ineffectiveness of the self-help industry. In the beginning of this episode, BoJack seems to be following the advice of this audiobook. He actually gets rid of his couch, explaining to Todd that it's a metaphor for his old attitude. Ironically, however, BoJack only does this because he misheard the audiobook telling him to rid himself of his burdens in life "so far," which he misheard as "sofa" ("Brand New Couch" 03:28 - 03:32). This misunderstanding places BoJack in a tragic position in the eyes of the audience once

again as this becomes another moment in which he tries to become a better version of himself, and instead, fails miserably. In turn, throughout out the series, this humorous, yet tragic, situational irony often serves to invoke a feeling of hopelessness as the audience witnesses BoJack's cyclical, and seemingly futile, behavioral pattern towards self-improvement - failure, an attempt to become better, misinterpretation of how to do so, failure once again. Additionally, the running motif of BoJack attempting to run up a hill in front of his house reiterates this cyclical notion as well. At the beginning of Season Two, specifically in Episode One, BoJack attempts to jog up the hill, but he stops early due to exhaustion; this hill becomes increasingly important as the season progresses as it slowly becomes a symbol of BoJack's progress.

Season Two continues with the audience watching BoJack's involvement with the new biopic that he stars in of his idol, Secretariat. Once BoJack arrives on the *Secretariat* film set, the director, Kelsey, initiates to start filming the movie. When administering notes to BoJack, Kelsey asks him to say his line "What are you doing here?" with seriousness as this is a dark, melancholy moment of the film ("Brand New Couch" 09:44 - 09:52). However, after several unsuccessful takes, BoJack remains unable to execute this line seriously and instead jokes about the entire scene by reading the line comically. The series creators demonstrate that this present-day scene parallels a past scene by showing another flashback. This time it's 1988, and BoJack invited his mother to a taping of his then-sitcom show *Horsin' Around*. Instead of being proud of BoJack for making something of himself, especially something so incredible as a famous, beloved actor on one of the nation's favorite family sitcoms at that time, Beatrice spends the entire taping glaring at BoJack, unimpressed by the show and him. When BoJack and Beatrice eat dinner after the taping, Beatrice spends the entirety of the meal disapproving of *Horsin' Around* and BoJack's involvement with the show itself. Although BoJack is successful at the time, Beatrice continues to berate him and his career, intensely criticizing him. She calls him a clown and then condescendingly comments that the show "wasn't Ibsen"

("Brand New Couch" 12:50 - 12:52) Importantly, Beatrice's comment specifically references Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright and also historically known as the father of realism. By completely rewriting the rules of drama, Ibsen pushed forward the notion that what makes a play an art form rather than simply entertainment was the fact that it would challenge assumptions and directly speak about important issues. Therefore, in a sad, cruel way, there is some element of truth behind the meaning of Beatrice's comment. The creators repeatedly plant pieces of evidence, such as this reference to Ibsen, in order to highlight the fact that BoJack's expectations about life, acting, reality, etc. have been unnaturally warped by his experience on *Horsin' Around*, and therefore do not accurately align with reality. Instead, BoJack indulges in these illusions about life and relationships based on his internalization of what he has seen on television. These delusions about the reality of life reiterate that one cannot model their life off of a fantasy, and in this case, the creators argue that the fantasies are television sitcoms. Although there might be truth to what Beatrice is saying, her cruelty cannot be excused, and BoJack becomes deeply wounded again by these criticisms as his response to them consists simply of sarcasm and requests for alcohol from the restaurant. As Beatrice continues to gaslight BoJack, she tells him "you don't know how lucky you are to have me. I hope you die before I do so you never have to know what it's like to lose a mother" to which BoJack responds by exclaiming, "well, as long as one of us dies, that's good enough for me. Can we please get some alcohol into my mouth?!" ("Brand New Couch" 13:47 - 13:59). This exchange really showcases the way in which both BoJack and his mother are suffering in their own ways as a result of their respective traumas, and it also demonstrates how BoJack's mother has particularly reinforced and passed down her family trauma onto BoJack. As is later found out in Season Four, when Beatrice was quite young, her mother was forced by her father into receiving a lobotomy operation. This tragedy rendered her mother useless and unable to provide any form of support to Beatrice anymore, a traumatic experience that Beatrice carries and alludes to for the rest of her life. Therefore,

upon this knowledge from hindsight, it makes this scene all the more painful to watch. It is evident that Beatrice is in pain about what she had to watch her own mother endure at the hands of her father; however, instead of dealing with her own rage, sadness, and trauma in a healthy and healing manner, she simply replicates this toxic behavior that she saw as a child and impresses it onto her own son, BoJack. Seeing Beatrice repeatedly chastise BoJack, and thus allowing her own trauma to be re-lived with BoJack, the audience more fully understands BoJack's desperate need for motherly love and affection, which manifests itself and develops into a maladaptive coping mechanism - consuming inordinate amounts of alcohol and as a result becomes an alcoholic. After this flashback scene, the audience sees BoJack driving home from work with a plan to resume shooting in two days.

As BoJack drives home, he continues to listen to his audiobook. The audiobook describes that "the past is past. That's why it's called 'the past.' Tomorrow is an opportunity. You can be big and proud and bang on your tom-tom drum or you can get in your boat and row. Tom or row. Tomorrow" ("Brand New Couch" 13:59 - 14:17). Again, here is another example of the audiobook becoming a caricature of the self-help industry. The creators satirized this audiobook in order to bring attention to the fact that while BoJack might not be able to even follow the directions of this self-help book, the self-help industry inherently does not help much, if at all, to those who are suffering from long-term, deep-rooted mental illnesses and trauma. This paradox is highlighted in this moment as BoJack attempts to change his life by following guidelines that are not designed to necessarily change his life. It's this irony between the fact that BoJack wants to change his life and the ways in which the self-help audiobook is not designed to do so that brings a tragic sense to BoJack's inherently flawed attempt at self-improvement. Another flashback was shown in order to emphasize this misalignment between who BoJack wants to be and who he truly is. This flashback was also from 1988 - the day when his mother came to a taping of *Horsin' Around*. When BoJack



asks the creator of *Horsin' Around* and his friend, Herb, if he is a clown, Herb simply responds with “didn't I tell you not to invite your mom to the taping?” (“Brand New Couch” 16:25 - 16:28). Here, it seems evident that while those close to BoJack at the time could recognize that Beatrice behaved extraordinarily cruelly and awfully towards BoJack, he still cared deeply about what she thought of him, and it is evident that it seems to have made an impact on him. BoJack follows up by asking Herb if he’s a good actor, and Herb exclaims “I don't know. Look— You know what you're good at? Hitting your mark, saying your lines, loudly with good diction” (“Brand New Couch” 16:36 - 16:43). BoJack questions this by asking “but should I be doing more? To capture the character and make the audience connect to its feelings?” (“Brand New Couch” 16:43 - 16:47). Herb ends the conversation by explaining that “this is a situation comedy. No one watches this show to feel feelings. Life is depressing enough already. You bring joy to millions of people. Maybe someday later, you'll need to learn how to act for real. But for now, don't worry about it” (“Brand New Couch” 16:47 - 17:02). This flashback exchange is important because of the fact that BoJack’s preoccupation, and arguably obsession, with being a good actor permeates his life and the way that he views himself. Ironically enough, Herb’s comment resonates deeply for two reasons. First, by recalling this memory, BoJack is again being confronted with the fact that since there was something disingenuous about his own acting and its lack of depth on *Horsin' Around*, there must have been something untrue or unreal about the life portrayed on the show as well. Herb insinuates that BoJack’s acting is nothing more than imitation and wordplay; it’s not real just like the life portrayed on the sitcom itself. This proves to be a huge unconscious realization for BoJack because he has been trying to imitate his life based off of the actors and family sitcoms that he grew up watching. This moment points out that his attempted imitation of these people and their lives when he was off-screen is as fraudulent as the imitation of good acting he was trying to embody on-screen. The idea that BoJack’s acting for *Horsin' Around* was not ‘for real’ translates to BoJack that he cannot really act, that he is not really an

actor; thus, Herb's comment reinforces BoJack's inner thoughts about inadequacy and reminds BoJack that nothing about *Horsin' Around* was real. Second, on a more metaphysical level, Herb's comment is as much a comment about *BoJack Horseman* as it is about *Horsin' Around*. As Herb explains 'situation comedy' to BoJack, it becomes evident that *BoJack Horseman* similarly explores this very concept about how one can reconcile more dark, depressing subject matter while also bringing joy to viewers through the use of humor. Herb's comment insinuates that *BoJack Horseman* is simultaneously both a comedy filled with jokes and a show meant to evoke and have the audience 'feel feelings.' By undermining Herb's comment about how no one wants to watch television to feel feelings, the creators are highlighting the ways that they can prove Herb wrong by the very existence of this show *BoJack Horseman*. This meta-analysis provided by Herb's dialogue represents the creators of the show utilizing the show *BoJack Horseman* to comment on itself. These two conclusions from Herb's conversation with BoJack continue to reaffirm the divide between reality and television as well as the ways in which humor can be used to deeply explore dark themes about the depressing aspects of the human condition.

This recollection of this conversation between BoJack and Herb stirs up feelings of inadequacy for BoJack, believing that this a moment of realization for him about his acting skills. Hence, BoJack comes to the conclusion that he is not an actor, or at the very least, not a good one. This reinforces BoJack's belief that he is, in fact, a fraud and that there is simply nothing more to him than this fact, which is he thinks what people already think about him. When discussing this with Diane, he ends up extremely panicking, and Diane calms him down by suggesting tangible ways in which he can improve his acting in the next two days before going back to set to begin shooting once again. While the thought of these ideas, such as hiring an acting coach or doing more research on Secretariat's background, momentarily boost BoJack's self-esteem, he simply does not take any action to actually help himself be a better actor for this role. This inaction on BoJack's behalf

represents everything about the way that BoJack deals with the issues in his life; he recognizes them, he wants to do and be better, but in the end, he is never willing to start or engage in the hard work necessary to actually become better himself. This is the soundtrack of BoJack's life - to want to change but to never have the discipline nor the willpower to do so. While explaining that he is under a lot of pressure, he describes to Kelsey how he is supposedly attempting to have a "brand new attitude," but then further articulates to her that he believes that this movie may be his last shot of happiness ("Brand New Couch" 19:27 - 19:28) Again, this reinforces the idea that BoJack continues to live in this fairytale that acting and replicating life as he knows it on screen will allow him to achieve happiness, which the creators spend time here emphasizing that is inaccurate and wrong. Again, here BoJack does not follow his own advice; by not practicing what he preaches, BoJack demonstrates that he is unable to change and simply wants growth without the work that is required for that growth to occur.

As the episode ends, BoJack finally picks up a phone call from a number that has been calling him all day, and behold, it's his mother Beatrice. While talking to him, Beatrice reveals that she has read BoJack's book, saying that "it takes a real narcissist to think anyone wants to buy a book about him. You know I feel about Anne Frank" ("Brand New Couch" 23:45 - 23:51). While this dialogue is dark in nature, it's a moment of humor where the audience realizes that Beatrice's comment does not make any sense because of the fact that Anne Frank's book was, in fact, her diary, a literary medium in which the central point is to talk about oneself. By creating this inaccurate connection between Anne Frank's diary and narcissism, Beatrice builds this dark moment of irony. She utilizes this comment to blur the line between self-reflection alongside investigating one's feelings and trauma with an extreme selfishness associated with an excessive interest in oneself. Therefore, in this moment, Beatrice ironically reinforces the idea that BoJack should not care about himself this much, feeding into his self-destructive nature. Unfortunately, while BoJack acts on his

narcissistic tendencies and is continuously selfish, Beatrice's comment focuses more on the fact that she believes that BoJack is too self-absorbed when in fact, she is the one who is too focused on herself, diverting the blame that is the tragedy of her life onto her son. While continually berating BoJack about the way he described her in his memoir, she tells BoJack that he "must really think that she was a real monster" as she begins to guilt BoJack for the things that he said both about her and about the way that she treated him ("Brand New Couch" 23:57 - 23:59). She then explains "I don't wanna fight you, BoJack. I just wanted to tell you I know. I know you wanna be happy, but you won't be, and—*I'm sorry*—It's not just you, you know. Your father and I, we—Well, you come by it honestly, the ugliness inside you. You were born broken, that's your birthright. And now you can fill your life with projects, your books, and your movies and your little girlfriends, but it won't make you whole. You're BoJack Horseman. There's no cure for that" ("Brand New Couch" 24:00 - 24:41).

After she finishes speaking to him, she hangs up, leaving a distraught and speechless BoJack. Here, one might quickly jump to the conclusion that Beatrice was solely acting horribly selfish for what she has said to BoJack, but it is important to not only see that aspect of this interactions' dialogue. The audience should also recognize this as a moment where Beatrice possibly recognizes the generational trauma and suffering being passed down to BoJack as it was to her from her parents. Therefore, her comment emphasizes the fact that destruction is in his and his family's inherent nature, a philosophy that she herself seems to believe and attempts to pass down to BoJack as well throughout his life. By insisting that BoJack was inherently 'born broken,' Beatrice highlights that he cannot and, in fact, will not necessarily ever be able to be happy. During this 'apology,' she emphasizes that nothing can fill this hole; not only does this interaction reiterate Beatrice's callousness, but it reveals the truth of BoJack's emptiness. Furthermore, when Beatrice names being 'BoJack Horseman,' she then follows up with an emphasis on the fact that there is no cure for BoJack from being himself; he can never escape the disease, which is himself. By naming BoJack

himself as the disease that plagues him, Beatrice violently utilizes the language of disease to exert emotional trauma onto BoJack's psyche. While articulating that there is no 'cure' for BoJack being BoJack is incredibly destructive, it does highlight a version of what people suffering from mental illness feel about themselves. In many ways, BoJack's inner voice is a direct result and personification of Beatrice Horseman as she spends most of BoJack's life berating and scolding him for not doing and being better. Thus, BoJack has internalized these comments, which have resulted in his self-esteem to plummet. Again, while Beatrice's comments are heinous and arguably unforgivable, her comments to BoJack about him being the problem, a disease, and the idea that he can never be cured or run away from this highlight and provide language to the feelings and thoughts of those who suffer from mental illness and substance abuse issues. Additionally, by creating a dichotomy between BoJack as the disease that must be cured, Beatrice buys into this linear idea of what it means to have a disease and experience an illness; therefore, this also seeks to undermine BoJack's experience as he desires to be 'cured' while this intention of including this piece of dialogue by the creators instead highlights, and possibly undermines, this linear notion of what it means to experience illness. Considering the fact that BoJack himself is dealing with multiple chronic mental illnesses, linear representations of illness recovery do not effectively communicate his illness journey. Therefore, when this is the only version of the path towards a better quality of life that is presented to him, he feels ashamed, overwhelmed, and unworthy, perpetuating a cyclical pattern of destructive behavior and self-esteem issues. Ultimately, Beatrice's comments about BoJack's inherent, incurable nature highlight two important factors: 1) the language inside people's minds that captures the ways in which those who are suffering with mental illness think about themselves, and 2) the ways in which linear models of recovery and experiencing illness do not fully capture of the lived experience of mental illnesses and substance abuse. Although *BoJack Horseman* does not provide a comprehensive overhaul of how mental illness and substance abuse should be treated or considered,

the show does provide a momentary glimpse about the insufficient ways in which they are being treated right now and provides a possible alternative to the illness narratives that society adheres to about mental illnesses and substance.

As Season Two progresses, BoJack continues to divert attention to himself as the audience finds increasingly more moments alluding to BoJack's destructive nature and the ways in which that inflicts harm on others. In Season Two: Episode 7: "Hank After Dark," Diane attempts to pursue a story about a famous, well-liked celebrity because of his sexual assault allegations. Throughout this episode, there are larger, societal themes that the series' creators point out that are important in understanding the way that the show and its characters treat BoJack as the series progresses. For example, when talking about this accused actor, Diane explains that "because he is so nice, people don't want to think he's capable of awful things, so they let him off the hook," similarly suggesting how nobody thought that BoJack was capable of doing anything bad since he was the star of the 90s hit sitcom show, *Horsin' Around* ("Hank After Dark" 12:14 - 12:18). Furthermore, Diane meets with a magazine editor-in-chief who expresses interest in Diane's reporting on this story. The editor-in-chief emphasizes that she would love to be a part of the coalition that brings this actor, Hank, down because he epitomizes everything that is wrong with Hollywood and perpetuates the idea that a man's reputation is more important than the lives of the women that he has ruined. This idea remains important throughout the rest of the series because it does, in fact, foreshadow the way that the public and many of BoJack's friends will come to evaluate him during his second tell-all interview in Season Six as the show *BoJack Horseman* itself evaluates BoJack's arguably abusive history with women. Understanding that this episode's exploration of powerful men abusing their power by treating the people around them improperly is not only in reference to the subject of this episode, Hank, but also becomes a critique of characters later on in the show, such as BoJack and eventually, Mr. Peanut Butter as well. Afterwards, BoJack actually manages to discuss the practicality of pursuing

this story and cause against Hank with Diane, expressing that she needs to “give it a rest. It’s over. [She] lost” (“Hank After Dark” 20:11 - 20:14) As Diane attempts to counter that comment with a response about whether or not BoJack is on her side on this issue, BoJack somehow manages to turn the conversation around onto Diane as he questions her about whether or not she was ever on his side on any issue - another example of BoJack’s narcissistic, selfish behavior. He explains about how he is still angry and frustrated about the way that Diane portrayed BoJack in his memoir, but Diane remains annoyed that BoJack continues to be upset about his own memoir and on a more subconscious level, about the fact that BoJack made the entire conversation about himself once again. From BoJack’s perspective, he feels as if Diane manipulated him, which is ironic considering he just spent this entirety of their conversation guilt-tripping and gaslighting her - both forms of emotional manipulation. On the other hand, Diane believes that the way that she wrote about BoJack in his memoir encouraged people to both take him seriously again and allowed him to have everything that he had always wanted - a positive, long-lasting legacy in Hollywood. Here, Diane argues that she wrote the memoir by painting BoJack’s story as one of overcoming adversity and final triumph and framing her version of BoJack. This way BoJack would be remembered favorably because of the way that Diane decided to highlight and portray BoJack’s struggles to the public, shining a kind and redemptive light onto BoJack’s life and legacy. Considering that BoJack incessantly expresses that he is still upset about this and that Diane hurt his feelings, especially because he never received an apology, Diane eventually ends up apologizing and explains that it was never her intention to upset BoJack. This interaction between BoJack and Diane fully encapsulates their unhealthy relationship in many ways. First, it now becomes obvious that BoJack manages to twist things around onto Diane, manipulating her sense of reality about any situation. He spends the entirety of this episode focused on the way that Diane made him feel instead of focusing on supporting and helping Diane unveil the horrible truth behind one of Hollywood’s biggest stars.

BoJack's hyperfixation to constantly divert attention to himself really accentuates the ways in which he really only cares about himself and the things that are important to him instead of thinking about the ways or things that other people, such as Diane, are focusing and caring about at the moment. This demonstrates to the audience that BoJack takes advantage of his friendship with Diane because she provides him emotional support when he discusses his own problems; however, the audience quickly begins to notice BoJack has not shown to reciprocate this aspect of their friendship for Diane as well up to this point. Hence, he takes emotional advantage of this so-called friend of his in order to process his feelings in a non-judgemental space where he knows he will be validated and supported without question. Again, BoJack has taken a shortcut to finding a solution to his problems instead of doing the honest, critical, and more difficult work, such as therapy, to receive more robust mental health help in order to change his decisions, thought processes, and eventually behaviors around coping with the stress and sadness of his life, especially when related to his childhood trauma. Particularly, since Diane relies on BoJack as one of, or possibly the only, close friend of hers, Diane and BoJack become progressively more co-dependent on one another for support and solidarity in different ways because they both share the diagnosis of clinical depression. Diane expresses that she does not have anyone else, convincing BoJack to be in her corner should she need support and friendship throughout this journey. Next, Diane indulges BoJack's behavior by more often than not allowing and accepting the excuses that he makes for his behavior; she does not want to stop being his friend, but she also knows that their friendship needs to improve in some way. While BoJack and Diane are very distinct characters, and therefore process their clinical depression and manifest many of their symptoms very differently, one common trait that they have is that they both desire to change things in their life, but they also both lack the willingness, motivation, and determination to do so. Arguably, this manages to bring Diane and BoJack closer to one another because they can relate on this intimate level about this feeling and unspoken



understanding about aspects of the lived experiences with clinical depression. However, rather than supporting one another through their own journeys toward bettering themselves and their mental states, they instead pull each other in, deeper and deeper into the holes that they both dig for themselves. Therefore, instead of being able to help one another in a healthy manner, they alternatively become codependent on one another in a way that only propagates and encourages their destructive behavior towards each other, others, and themselves. This conversation highlights the ways in which Diane and BoJack bring each other down by sucking each other into their own sadness, desperation, and frustration about life. Simply, not only do they both not really know exactly what they truly want, but neither of them really understand how to deal with their mental illness outside of engaging with these unhealthy, destructive coping strategies.

The creators continue to allude to this negative pattern of behavior as the season progresses to Episode 8: "Let's Find Out" where BoJack is asked to be a contestant on Mr. Peanutbutter's new game show. During the game show, Mr. Peanutbutter continuously gives BoJack the harder questions instead of his opposing contestant, Daniel Radcliffe. This is due to the fact that according to social media, everyone wants Radcliffe to win, so he is receiving the easier questions in order for the network's ratings to increase. As the game show comes to a close, Mr. Peanutbutter's last question is about Secretariat, BoJack's idol and the person who BoJack plays in his biopic. While BoJack knew the answer to this question, he answered incorrectly in order to allow Radcliffe to win, and therefore, be able to donate the money to charity. However, the situation takes a turn for the worst when Mr. Peanutbutter mocks and pokes fun at BoJack for not answering a question correctly about his own idol, the very person who he is supposed to be emulating in this biopic that he is starring in. Since the audience's roaring laughter at Mr. Peanutbutter's mockery angers BoJack, he harshly retaliates by publicly claiming to Mr. Peanutbutter that Diane went to Cordovia, a foreign, war-torn country, simply just to get away from their awful, horrendous marriage. Taken aback by this

comment, in response, Mr. Peanutbutter then rampages on a rant about how BoJack attempted to ruin his wedding by kissing Diane a week before the wedding.

Meanwhile, as BoJack and Mr. Peanutbutter bicker, the game show's producer capitalizes on this drama and loves the fact BoJack and Mr. Peanut Butter are both at each other's throats, and he then proceeds to heighten the tension by turning on the rain stage effect, allowing that to flow as the backdrop to this scene. By adding this dramatic visual effect, Mr. Peanutbutter and BoJack are situated in what looks like a tell-all interview with dark lights surrounding them as a complement to the dramatic rain falling onto the set. Mr. Peanutbutter explains to BoJack that "all [he] wanted was to be [his] friend. And you treat me like a big joke" ("Let's Find Out" 18:21 - 18:26). Since Mr. Peanutbutter was not oblivious to the cruel way that BoJack has treated him, he asks BoJack why he does not like him. Here, the audience for once witnesses BoJack truly expressing his emotions and explaining how he feels instead of lashing out on others and indulging in his self-destructive habits. BoJack tells Mr. Peanutbutter that he's jealous of him since everything seems to come so easily to Mr. Peanutbutter. Confused, Mr. Peanutbutter angrily exclaims about how BoJack is a movie star, has a girlfriend, and is releasing his dream movie cast as the main role of his hero. When Mr. Peanutbutter exclaims "what more could he possibly want," BoJack finally puts his feelings into words and explains that all he wants and desires is "to feel good about himself the way [Mr. Peanut Butter does.] And [he doesn't] know how [He doesn't] know if [he] can" ("Let's Find Out" 19:48 - 20:02). While BoJack utilizes this time to apologize, Mr. Peanutbutter remains furious and saddened as he walks off of the stage. This moment characterizes an important question that the creators have raised for the series as a whole: to what extent does one excuse the behavior of another when that person is struggling with something else in their life and specifically mental illness? The creators of *BoJack Horseman* keep this question open throughout the entirety of the series, displaying different manifestations of answers to this question. By not providing an answer, the creators essentially ask

the audience to answer this question for themselves, especially as viewers with a more omniscient understanding of BoJack's trauma and shortcomings. This question continues to haunt the show as it progresses, but it does not stay a topic of conversation for this episode for long. When Mr. Peanutbutter runs off stage, one of the game show network producers approaches him and demands that he end things on a good note with BoJack even though Mr. Peanutbutter is unsure about whether or not he wants to forgive BoJack. However, Wanda explains to him the necessity of "having a happy ending." To this, Mr. Peanutbutter reluctantly responds that "[he doesn't] think [they] can resolve everything cleanly in a half-hour," and it's this hesitation that prompts Wanda to explain that "this is network television. So resolving everything clearly in a half-hour is kind of what we do," insinuating that episodic network television shows must have all of their problems solved and wrapped up in under a half hour because the audience always wants to be left with a satisfying resolution ("Let's Find Out" 20:47 - 20:57). Finally, in a threatening tone, the producer exclaims that this "these people want resolution" and that it's Mr. Peanutbutter's job to "resolve" implying that this is the type of actor and life that Mr. Peanutbutter has always embodied and sold to the world through his on-screen appearances, and he is simply not allowed to stop doing that now ("Let's Find Out" 20:04 - 20:11). This interaction between the network executive and Mr. Peanutbutter underlines the commentary that *BoJack Horseman* explores about network sitcoms, particularly those that follow the traditional episodic format. Through this emphasis of a happy, resolved ending, it becomes clear that *BoJack Horseman* mocks how episodic shows seem to quickly and easily resolve their own problems in the span of half an hour. This also manages to emphasize the fact that happy endings do not exist in the seamless way that they may be portrayed on these types of television shows. This interaction allows the audience to realize the dishonest nature of episodic television narratives when it comes to portraying reality. If network episodic television focuses more on happy endings and clear resolutions, then the problem-solving of issues within the show becomes less

centered on nuance, and thus, less representative and accurate of reality. Additionally, considering that the network executive explained that this is the type of storytelling that actors such as Mr. Peanutbutter engage in, this also implies that this is the type of storytelling that BoJack participates in as the public views BoJack and Mr. Peanutbutter as similar types of actors due to their work on similar '90s hit sitcom shows. In turn, this similarity further clarifies the reason why BoJack wanted to separate himself from the kind of television focused on entertainment rather than showcasing reality. Therefore, this brief, yet important, conversation between Mr. Peanutbutter and the network executive brings attention to the ways in which the priorities and purpose of episodic network television shows differ greatly from the other shows as episodic television is usually focused on accurately portraying a version of reality or a lived experience with nuance and delicacy. Ultimately, Mr. Peanutbutter ends up forgiving BoJack and declares him the winner of the show. For the final round, he asks BoJack if he would like to opt into the 'double or nothing' round; BoJack risks it all and opts into participating in this final round for the last question. Mr. Peanutbutter ironically asks him who starred in Harry Potter, and simply just to spite Daniel Radcliffe for not remembering who BoJack was at the beginning of this episode, BoJack pretends to not remember the answer to this question even though Radcliffe reminds him that this money is for charity. Since BoJack pretends to not remember the answer, he loses all of the money, and for an unknown dark, sadistic reason, the money is burned in front of everyone as the episode ends. This ending is unnecessarily extreme, but this absurd and illogical conclusion underlines how selfish BoJack's behavior is at the end of this episode. In an attempt to reconcile with him, Mr. Peanutbutter gives him another opportunity to prove himself worthy of the forgiveness that he has granted him by allowing him to be the winner. However, BoJack rather chooses to waste this opportunity on a revenge scheme to spite Radcliffe instead of winning money for charity. Not only does that incident demonstrate BoJack's continued ungratefulness for the forgiveness that his friends show him, but this also highlights how

self-absorbed BoJack is with himself, his own wants and needs, and how he feels. Regardless of the fact that BoJack was engaging in petty behavior with Daniel Radcliffe, he also completely disregarded the fact that the money that he was playing to win could have gone to charity. In fact, BoJack would rather have the money uselessly burned if it meant that he was able to make his point and get revenge back at Radcliffe. Essentially, this entire interaction not only was able to provide language to the feelings and emotions that encompass BoJack's clinical depression, but it also demonstrates the self-destructive behavior that BoJack chooses to partake in at the expense of the well-being of others - a pattern of behavior that is increasingly becoming a habit of BoJack's.

As BoJack continues to film *Secretariat* in the Season Two: Episode 10 - "Yes And", he becomes frustrated with filming one of the scenes because it actually never really happened in *Secretariat's* real life. However, the film's director explains to BoJack about how he is not concerned with making a film that is reflective of the reality of *Secretariat's* life; instead, he is just simply focused on getting paid, which will happen regardless of if this film is accurate or not since "they are not making *Casablanca*" ("Yes And" 4:28 - 4:29). This comment summarizes the way that BoJack has been beginning to feel about his entire seemingly fraudulent Hollywood career since he spent the majority of it making family-fun, feel-good entertainment instead of what he considers to be real, authentic, and most importantly, memorable, art. Furthermore, when the director senses BoJack's discomfort, he invites BoJack and Wanda, his girlfriend, over for dinner in order to change the subject. At dinner, BoJack explains how he "can't wait to work on something good" since *Secretariat* is a "piece of shit" ("Yes And" 4:49 - 10:21). BoJack's insults offend the film director since he thought the director also believed that this movie was not going to be a masterpiece after his previous comment deeming that "it was not going to be *Casablanca*" ("Yes And" 4:28 - 4:29). When BoJack and Wanda arrive home from the dinner, Wanda questions BoJack about why he chose to antagonize his director, and BoJack uses this moment to deflect from the point and starts an

argument about how Wanda is probably glad that “[he gets] to stay [there] and work on this movie that’s gonna ruin [his] career” (“Yes And” 11:27 - 11:29). She then emphasizes that he should not sulk about it, but Diane, who is currently staying with BoJack and Wanda, retorts to Wanda’s annoyance about how she thinks he should. The creators’ setup of Wanda and Diane in opposition to one another highlights the two alternative ways to deal with unideal aspects of one’s life; it also represents the ways in which others’ dark, depressive nature has the ability to vortex others into their sadness as well. This is clearly exemplified as Diane continues to explain the way in which she has figured out that “[she] was not the person that [she] thought [she] was,” and instead of dealing and confronting this issue, she asks BoJack if he would like to wallow in self-pity with her by drinking and watching old episodes of *Horsin’ Around* (“Yes And” 15:06 - 15:09). BoJack’s submission to wallowing with Diane is met with stark disapproval and annoyance from Wanda who believes that Diane’s loafing is a negative influence on BoJack, an exact example of how misery loves company. While Wanda might be considered the voice of reason and reality, since she does not understand how or why Diane and BoJack are so easily able to spiral out of control, her efforts are in vain until BoJack resigns and decides to go back to work on the Secretariat film. It’s important to note that Wanda’s frustration with both BoJack and Diane stems from the premise that both of them recognize that they have deep-rooted issues to deal with, however, neither of them are willing to make any strides to better themselves at this point in the series. This recurring theme of recognition without action reminds the audience that there is a difference between knowing that one has an issue and actively towards solving one’s issues, becoming a foundational concept explored for the entirety of the series.

As BoJack returns back to set, he films a scene where he ends up repeating the lines “I’m running in circles” over and over again (“Yes And” 18:52 - 19:28). Even though this is simply one of BoJack’s lines in the film, it is a moment of self-realization for BoJack where he recognizes that he,

himself, is in fact tired of running in circles. Here, the audience begins to view the ironic importance of running as a motif in this entire series. While the nature of horses is to run freely, there is a redundancy and futility in running in circles that seems to defeat the purpose of running at all. This phrase allows BoJack to realize that he is tired of making the same mistakes, disappointing the same people, and ruining the same relationships time and time again. This brief moment of realization requires BoJack to introspect about if and how he would be able to stop running in circles and instead work towards actual change that will allow him to move, or run, forward in his own life. This awareness permeates BoJack's emotional and mental state as he returns from set again, understanding that he is so incredibly unhappy with his movie and his life at-large. While Wanda tries to comfort him, she makes it explicitly clear that she does not believe that "moping around the house with Diane all day is particularly healthy" or will help at all; in response to this, BoJack becomes upset and reads this as Wanda wanting him to pretend that he is happy ("Yes And" 20:08 - 20:11). This becomes the breaking point for Wanda as she calls out BoJack's self-centeredness, explaining how many people hate their jobs and don't bring it home with them all of the time. BoJack then digs at Wanda's job, emphasizing that it's network executives like her whose "job is to pump out garbage every year hoping some of the garbage stinks less than the rest of the garbage so [she] can quietly renew that garbage and keep falling sideways until [she] retire[s]..." commenting about the nature of the way that most of television simply revolves around providing solely escapist entertainment for its viewers ("Yes And" 20:33 - 20:44). As BoJack bitterly tells Wanda about the ways that network executives ruined his own life, Wanda again provides to be a voice of reason and reality; she explains that she empathizes with the fact that BoJack feels so negatively about himself and his own life, but that still does not give reason for him to act so rudely, bitterly, and negatively towards her. Here, Wanda becomes one of the first minor characters to set boundaries with BoJack and call him out on his bad behavior. She continues to question BoJack about "what happened" to

them to which BoJack responds that the “same thing that always happens. [She] didn’t know [him]. Then [she] fell in love with [him]. And now [she] knows [him]” (“Yes And” 21:22 - 21:32). In one of the most important pieces of dialogue in the series, Wanda responded with, “... it’s funny. When you look at someone through rose-colored glasses, all the red flags just look like flags” (“Yes And” 21:35 - 21:41). It is this line that simultaneously defines and foreshadows the pattern of several of BoJack’s relationships, and in this case, Wanda decided to not allow herself to be sunk alongside BoJack in his misery. This recognition of an unhealthy relationship pattern with BoJack could have only been demonstrated with the chosen serialized format of this series; otherwise, it would have been more difficult for the audience to notice the repetitiveness and destructive nature of this kind of behavior alongside its long-term impact over the series. In the case of episodic television, repetitive storyline structures and behaviors are inherent to the style while it is not with serialized television. Therefore, by juxtaposing BoJack’s cyclical, destructive behavior with a television style that prides itself on being longitudinal instead of cyclical, the creators were able to specifically bring attention and underline how intensely problematic BoJack’s behavior was and how it has now become a tenet, and therefore a pattern, of his personality.

After BoJack and Wanda split up, BoJack explains the situation to Diane and importantly does explicitly talk about the way that this entire situation is his fault. This again highlights this recurring idea about how BoJack recognizes his destructive behavior, but continues to refuse to take any meaningful, actionable steps to improve it. In an effort to comfort him, Diane again suggests that they watch *Horsin’ Around*, which becomes another reminder that *Horsin’ Around*, and arguably episodic sitcoms at-large, provide to be escapes from real life. It is important to highlight that the creators are not berating this style of episodic television, but simply commenting on how this form of television is not reflective of reality and is instead an idealized version of it that entertains people away from their own lives. In an attempt to change the subject, BoJack asks Diane why she has been



lying about being back in Hollywood to her husband, Mr. Peanutbutter. She explains that she simply “[wishes she] could just go home right now and crawl into bed and not have to talk about anything or explain anything.—Any [she] wouldn’t have to say, [she’s] sorry [she] left. [She’s] sorry [she] made things so difficult. [She’s] sorry [she’s] not the person [she] thought [she] was” (“Yes And” 22:10 - 22:40). She simply wishes for a night where she could go home to her husband for a simple night where she doesn't have to apologize for leaving, for being difficult, or for not being the person she thought she was. Here, it becomes evident that not wanting to face consequences for their hurtful actions is not only a problem that BoJack deals with, but also seems to be an issue that Diane deals with as well. What is interesting is at this point, it has become clear that both BoJack and Diane both suffer from clinical depression, and it is during moments such as these where the similarities in their experiences provide solidarity between the two of them. On the other hand, both of their inability to get themselves out of their deepest, saddest bouts of depression only reinforce each other's negative self-talk, bringing each other deeper and deeper into holes that become increasingly more difficult to bring themselves out of. In response to listening to Diane’s frustrations, BoJack emphasizes that “the longer that [she] keep[s] lying to him, the harder it’s gonna get,” foreshadowing the way it becomes increasingly more difficult for BoJack to get help as the series progresses (“Yes And” 22:41 - 22:45). Furthermore, Diane begins to ask BoJack about whether he thinks he would have been happier had he gone to New York or been making his preferable version of the Secretariat film. BoJack explains that he thinks he would have been happy for a little while to which Diane prompts him to think about the last time he was genuinely happy, causing BoJack to seriously contemplate how he has been choosing to live his life. This discussion around happiness points to one argument that the show opens discussion about: how realistic it is to pursue happiness. Creating space for these conversations surrounding the futility of attempting to achieve happiness in the first place may support a less optimistic outlook, but it also provides a more relatable outlook in large.

Instead of focusing on what one ought to pursue in order to truly achieve happiness, the creators question the premise and value of pursuing happiness at all; this is revealed and reiterated as the audience notices that regardless if BoJack had everything that he wanted, he would have never been happy anyways despite having all of those things.

As the episode continues, the audience simultaneously sees BoJack driving what seems to be away from LA as Secretariat's film director angrily wonders where BoJack is on set. Not only is BoJack's departure from LA representative of how he runs away from his problems, but it also negatively affects his friendship with Todd once again. This episode's storyline follows Todd as he joins an 'improv' group that Diane and BoJack are convinced that it's actually a cult, which is later found out to be true. Todd then relays this information to his troupe, explaining that his best friend, BoJack, told him that this was a cult, and thus, now he was having hesitations about it. The troupe members tell Todd to invite BoJack to their final show in order to truly see if BoJack is truly Todd's friend as well as someone that is worth Todd having in his life. Unsurprisingly, even after detailing to BoJack about how, as his best friend, it would mean a lot to Todd for BoJack to be at the improv graduation performance, BoJack still does not show up. Regardless of whether it was out of forgetfulness or a lack of care, Todd is rightfully upset. This dark, yet ironic, moment where Todd's cult proves to be right simply underlines the extremity of BoJack's behavior as he continues to destroy his relationships time and time again. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to feel empathetic, or even sympathetic, towards BoJack because he continues to blatantly and selfishly disregard the feelings of those around him, inevitably damaging the relationships he has forever. Hence, instead of showing up for Todd at his performance, BoJack prioritizes himself once again and leaves LA. The end of this episode shows that the setting is now New Mexico, and one of BoJack's old friends and one of Herb's ex-girlfriends, Charlotte, is about to open her store when she sees BoJack outside of his car, and she looks happy to see him.

Thus, Season Two - Episode 11: "Escape from LA" begins with BoJack asking Charlotte if she wants to get a drink despite it being early in the morning. While Charlotte suggests that they go to her home instead, the beginning of this episode already sets the precedent by juxtaposing BoJack's unhealthy lifestyle and decision-making with Charlotte's healthy one. This is further supported by the change of the intro to this episode for the first time in the entire series where instead of playing the regular opening theme, a montage of Charlotte's family is shown alongside a parodied song called 'Kyle and the Kids' in reference to Charlotte's husband, Kyle. This montage reveals to the audience that Charlotte has a husband and two children - a daughter named Penny and a son named Trip. Even after they both express how happy they are to see one another, Charlotte tells BoJack about how excited she is for him to meet 'Kyle and the Kids,' which becomes a phrase that is parodied for an imaginative family-friendly episodic sitcom show throughout this episode. By parodying a sitcom opening, the creators of the show utilize this modified intro to exemplify BoJack's wishful thinking about how Charlotte is now seemingly living a version of life that he wishes he had. While Charlotte's life is far from perfect, here, the creators are trying to emphasize that BoJack is not focused on the reality of Charlotte's life but rather on the illusion that it represents the 'perfect, traditional sitcom family.' Even at the end of the montage, BoJack appears shocked at Charlotte's life and as a result of his self-centered nature, also at the fact that Charlotte has never mentioned or discussed her life in LA or friendship with BoJack to her family. Nevertheless, this parodied sitcom-like opening establishes the theme of this episode that is focused on subverting the traditional elements of sitcom, and in turn, redemption arcs.

As the episode progresses, it becomes immediately apparent to the audience that BoJack is only here for one reason: to see if Charlotte was still single and live out his alternative fantasy with her from the past. This is evident from BoJack who only partially jokes about the fact that he hoped 'Kyle and the Kids' was the name of the band that she was in; this moment is significant because it

reinforces this idea that even though BoJack might have cared about Charlotte in the past, it is clear that he is focused on prioritizing his selfish wants and desires over her own happiness by intruding on her life like this without any notice. In order to cover up his true intentions, BoJack lies and says that he is here in New Mexico to buy a boat instead of revealing that he thought Charlotte, a woman he was casually friends with almost thirty years ago, was possibly still single. After Charlotte's family and BoJack all eat breakfast together, BoJack receives a call from Princess Carolyn, his agent, who angrily protests about his excursion to New Mexico. Although Princess Carolyn emphasizes how BoJack will get sued if he does not come back to LA soon, BoJack selfishly hangs up on her again without any consideration to how his actions will affect her own reputation and career as a Hollywood agent. Importantly, these frequent calls from Princess Carolyn throughout the episode will serve as physical as well as mental reminders to BoJack that this trip is not representative of his real life, that it is simply as the episode calls it - an escape, and therefore, a fantasy. While BoJack attempts to get this taste of existence outside the Hollywood bubble, Princess Carolyn's phone calls continue to remind BoJack that one cannot simply run away from their problems.

After BoJack hangs up on Princess Carolyn, Charlotte tells BoJack about how he is more than welcome to stay as long as he could like, which later eventually results in BoJack's two month stay. Later that day, he ends up being the only adult in the household available to help Penny practice her driving skills. When they are in his car, Penny asks BoJack why he is really in New Mexico since this entire time she has been rightfully suspicious of BoJack's intentions of being there. BoJack then divulges into how "[he] didn't... like the person [he] was in L.A.," so he decided to get away from that place for a while ("Escape from L.A." 6:55 - 7:00). BoJack's confession to Penny about this aspect of his life emphasizes two important ideas for this particular episode. First, this reveals this inconsistent notion in BoJack's head that his external environment is the issue at hand and that simply changing his physical location will solve his internal issues, which is repeatedly shown not to

be true as represented by Princess Carolyn's phone calls. Essentially, the creators portray BoJack participating in a form of escapism by parodying Charlotte's life as one of a familiar sitcom that BoJack has imagined his 'perfect' life to be similar to. Second, and possibly more disturbingly, BoJack is inappropriately emotionally vulnerable with a teenage girl, establishing odd power dynamics while also reinforcing BoJack's emotional immaturity and incapacity to behave as an adult. This second point provides, and eventually becomes, an increasingly more pervasive and problematic issue as the episode progresses as well. However, this is slowly built up over the course of BoJack's stay. Since BoJack's public intentions for travelling to New Mexico are to buy a boat, he actually ends up buying one the same evening that he came into town, possibly to prove a point. When everyone sees the boat, they all discuss what they believe the name of the boat should be while Penny almost ironically suggests the name "Escape from LA" as a reference to the episode title. Upon having bought the boat, BoJack suggests to Charlotte that it might be time for him to go back to LA to which she responds and insists that he continue to stay with them, especially considering that her family loves him. This arguably 'perfect' family moment of BoJack's is interrupted by another call from Princess Carolyn; however, this time BoJack explicitly tells her that "[he] thinks [he] might be here a while" since he is not sure when he is coming back and proceeds to not provide any further explanation and then destroys the phone itself ("Escape from L.A." 9:25 - 9:27). This symbolic destruction of his phone represents BoJack's attempt to cut himself off from the previous version of himself. However, the audience knows that this effort is futile because of the fact that BoJack's behavior thus far has already proved and foreshadowed that his issues do not simply stem from his environment but from his personality and his decisions themselves.

Considering Charlotte's assurance about BoJack being able to stay with her and her family, the episode now shows BoJack after having stayed approximately two months with the Carson family, living on his boat in the driveway. This physical placement outside of Charlotte's home is also

symbolic about how BoJack is not truly a part of this 'perfect sitcom' family, but only adjacent to it. He is simply an onlooker on a life that he chose to not fully participate in due to the decisions he made about the kind of life he was going to have some thirty years ago. If Charlotte's life represents the illusion of a 'perfect' suburban family found in many episodic sitcom network television shows, then BoJack's placement adjacent to that life in his boat must represent a life attempting to gain proximity to that one; while BoJack may feel a part of this 'perfect' life, the audience recognizes that in actuality, BoJack is truly not a part of it. As BoJack's life continues here in New Mexico, Penny's prom is coming up, and she is without a date. However, BoJack agrees to take her in order to make her current high school crush, Diego, jealous; BoJack also convinces her that she will have a better time with him anyways, an extremely unseemly sentiment for a grown man to voice to a young teenage girl. Here, the audience can already recognize BoJack blurring the boundary lines here between himself and Penny. This uncomfortable moment is important because it reiterates BoJack's immature nature as represented by his willingness to participate in high school drama. Additionally, it is worthwhile to think about the ways in which this act of BoJack's paints him as the hero in a traditional narrative redemption arc; however, as is learned quite quickly, this episode has always been set up to emphasize that this attempt of BoJack's to live an illusion of a picture-perfect family of his will simply not work. Therefore, BoJack's idea to take Penny to her prom in an effort to make her feel better sets up BoJack within a stereotypical sitcom and narrative trope of 'saving the day,' created and presented in this episode only to be undermined and subverted throughout the rest of it.

As prom night arrives, BoJack and Charlotte attend with Charlotte's friends, Maddy and her date, Pete Repeat. As Penny drives everyone to prom, Maddy is drinking from a flask in the backseat of her car; instead of discouraging heavy underage drinking, he orders Penny to stop by a liquor store to buy Maddy some 'real' alcohol for her to enjoy. BoJack's irresponsible decision reinforces Maddy's behavior, which is becoming dangerously close to self-destructive as she is already

extremely drunk even though it's only the beginning of the night. Upon arrival at the venue, Penny becomes increasingly sad over seeing her crush Diego with his date. In an attempt to liven things up, BoJack tries to perform his 'Do the BoJack' song from the '90s; however, the other teenagers at the prom reject his attempt at doing so, symbolizing the way that this family-friendly life is beginning to reject him as well ("Escape from L.A." 13:58 - 14:36). By rejecting the song, the creators are able to demonstrate that BoJack's version of a perfect life simply does not exist in reality, not only for BoJack, but for anyone. This moment also serves to remind the audience that while BoJack might want to live in his illusionary, idealistic version of life from the 90s (again characterized by a picture perfect family), his time and life here in New Mexico is simply not representative of that since he has made no commitment to actually starting a better and new life for himself; all he has simply done in an attempt to change is moved his residential location for the time being. The reason this is important lies in the fact that it reinforces the idea that BoJack's problems are not with where he has been living, but with who he is as a person right now. After this failure, BoJack suggests that they leave prom because "[They're] young. [They] can do whatever [they] want. That's what they never tell you until it's too late. [They] don't have to be [there]" ("Escape from L.A." 14:52 - 14:58). This piece of dialogue represents a clear instance of what BoJack has been doing this entire time in New Mexico; he has been projecting his own loss of youth, specifically his time with Charlotte, onto Penny and her friends in an extremely inappropriate, and arguably creepy, manner, by spending time specifically with Penny. BoJack is able to remind himself about the life he could have lived out and had with Charlotte, which the audience sees more explicitly later in one of BoJack's hallucinations that he has while high at the end of Season Three while on a drug-induced bender.

After BoJack, Penny, and Penny's friends leave prom together, they all end up releasing balloons with glow sticks attached to them in the middle of the desert, creating a memorable, picturesque moment for Penny and her friends to remember forever. Following this, Penny and

BoJack climb to the top of the water tower, and as Penny explains that she wished she could have danced at prom, BoJack suggests that they did just that at that very moment. Hence, BoJack and Penny end up slow-dancing at the top of the water tower; Penny notes how “the night has been... so perfect” while BoJack responds with how “[she] looks just like her mother,” corroborating the earlier notion about how BoJack is simply vicariously living his fantasy of the life he could have had with Charlotte by spending time with her daughter, Penny, throughout this episode (“Escape from L.A.” 16:08 - 16:15). In another setting where the audience knew that BoJack had purer intentions of simply wanting to help out a friend’s daughter than in this one, this moment would have characterized as sweet and as a classic intergenerational friendship trope found in many sitcoms; however, this trope was set up in this episode in order to be subverted as the entire goal of this episode is to undermine sitcom tropes in order to paint a more realistic picture of BoJack’s life. Hence, this unequal pairing between BoJack and Penny alongside this more-than-intimate moment only seems to foreshadow the likelihood of inappropriate behavior ahead due to the large power dynamic. However, this almost-sweet moment was interrupted by Pete Repeat who calls them down because Maddy has passed out from what seems to be an excess of alcohol consumption. Upon taking Maddy to the hospital, BoJack refuses to behave like an adult and takes any responsibility for his contribution to this issue as he is the one who enabled Maddy to drink by buying her more amounts of stronger alcohol. Instead, he drops Pete off with Maddy at the hospital and explains to Pete that he should tell the hospital that “he does not know where Maddy got the whiskey from,” eventually convincing reluctant Pete that this is the right course of action (“Escape from L.A.” 17:05 - 17:07). This moment reiterates the idea that BoJack does not take issue with using his power and authority to obtain and manipulate the outcome that he so desires, providing evidence that would suggest that he would act similarly with Penny. As Penny and BoJack arrive home, BoJack reassures her that they did the right thing, and Penny proceeds to thank him for a great night and ironically,



for treating her like an adult. This unfortunate moment only further highlights the ways in which BoJack has simply not treated nor acted like an adult to these teenagers. To end the night, Penny kisses BoJack on the cheek, but then attempts to kiss him on the mouth as she specifies that this as an advance that is signaling that she would like to have sex with BoJack. While BoJack moves away from her kiss and clearly rejects this initial offer to have sex, citing it as inappropriate because of her age and the fact that she does not know what she wants, it cannot be helped to notice that Penny spends some time trying to convince him by explaining that she is sober, has protection, and is legally of age since the legal age of consent in New Mexico is 17, which seems to be a little too convenient for the scenario as it blurs the lines of boundaries. Again, in hindsight, this moment serves to foreshadow the last, almost-sexual encounter between Penny and BoJack at the end of the episode.

As BoJack walks away from a crying Penny, he makes his way to Charlotte who is sitting near the fire pit in her backyard. Without specifying any information, BoJack simply tells Charlotte that Penny went to bed, which already sets up an uncomfortable environment for BoJack as it leaves the audience wondering why he did not tell Charlotte about Penny's request and instead decided to lie and omit the full truth. BoJack asks Charlotte if she remembers when they and Herb released balloons with glow sticks, shockingly the exact same thing that BoJack recreated with Penny that very night. Charlotte responds by noting how "that was really bad for the environment. — A seagull could have choked on one of those balloons," but still remembering times, such as those, fondly ("Escape from L.A." 19:38 - 19:43). Charlotte's response proves to be important because, again, it shows that she is both cognizant of the consequences of her actions and understands about what Wanda had been saying earlier about looking at moments and people through rose-colored glasses; here, it is abundantly clear that BoJack is both not considering the consequences of his actions and looking at his past through a untruthful, overly nostalgic perspective where he only remembers the

good, positive and possibly selfish aspects where he personally felt good about himself and where he was at in life. After revisiting this memory, BoJack asks Charlotte about the comment she made a long time ago about equating “LA to a tar pit” (“Escape from L.A.” 19:51 - 19:52). While she remembers, Charlotte clarifies her comment and explains how she now believes that “[the individual person is] the tar pit” because “it doesn’t matter where [one is], it’s who [one is]. You know, [one] can’t escape [themselves]” (“Escape from L.A.” 20:03 - 20:19). Essentially, It simply does not matter where one is; if they are the problem, then their problems will stay with them and permeate their life wherever they choose to go. This comment of Charlotte’s brings together many narrative elements of this entire episode to emphasize the fact that one can possibly escape places, just as BoJack has ‘escaped from LA,’ but no one is able to escape themselves; that is the irony, but also the true tragedy, for those who deeply struggle within themselves, such as BoJack. With nothing else to say, BoJack jokingly tells her that she sounds like his mother who often reiterated to BoJack that he was inherently broken from the day he was born, effectively rendering his confidence and self-esteem from the time he was a young boy. This equivalency that begins to form between the idea about BoJack’s inherent brokenness and BoJack being a tar pit perpetuates throughout the series, importantly in Season Six.

Eventually during this conversation, things begin to take a turn for the worst. As BoJack and Charlotte laugh together, they actually end up kissing, but then Charlotte pulls away, telling BoJack that he has the wrong idea. While BoJack could have spared her feelings by simply walking away from the situation with his respect and dignity intact, he selfishly rants about how he loves her instead. While he confesses that he has loved her this whole time and that they should leave together, once again, someone else, and in this case Charlotte, has to think about the reality of their situations. While Charlotte tells BoJack to leave in the morning, she is also the one who explains how “[she has] worked very hard to build this life for [herself]. [She] is happy [there]. And [he] just

rolls into [her] life like a hurricane. Why? Because [they] knew each other for five minutes thirty years ago? [She doesn't] know [him]" ("Escape from L.A." 21:42 - 21:53). Charlotte's response keys into BoJack's issue during this entire time he has been away from LA: his desperation for an escape, no matter how outlandish the idea may seem. Since BoJack is solely focused on giving himself a seemingly fresh, new start, this moment simply characterizes his self-obsessed nature with his own life without thinking about the way those ideas might affect others. To think that he could come in and impose himself on Charlotte's life only to ask her to abandon her husband and children for him was an outrageous and incredibly selfish thing to think, especially as Charlotte puts it, "... [he doesn't] know [her]" ("Escape from L.A." 21:55 - 21:57). Again, it becomes evident that BoJack does not care for Charlotte, but simply for the version of life that Charlotte represents, a life that is simply different from what BoJack has right now and represents the false, but pervasive, picture-perfect family sitcom lifestyle that he has romanticized. Therefore, in his mind, it's an idealized version of life that he believes would have been better than what he is living right now. Although BoJack explains that he has been "sitting on [his] hands and imagining of what could have been," he then begs Charlotte to let him continue to stay there with her even if they cannot be together; however, at this point, the audience knows he has blown his chance at any form of friendship with Charlotte ("Escape from L.A." 21:29 - 21:33). He pleads for her forgiveness and wants to pretend that this never happened, but for the audience, this is an all too familiar scene of BoJack retroactively asking for forgiveness after serious damage has already been done. His desperation is palatable as he explains how "[he] loves [her], [her family], and [that] town" and how he "does not [want her to] make [him] go back to L.A.," confirming the idea mentioned beforehand about how BoJack is simply looking for an escape from LA in any way in which he can find possible ("Escape from L.A." 21:59 - 22:11). Charlotte explains that she simply wants him to leave, and that "[she] can't have him around [there]. [He makes her] too sad" ("Escape from L.A." 22:14 - 22:18). As with many of his

other relationships thus far, such as Wanda and Todd, Charlotte draws boundaries with BoJack because of the realization that his pattern of self-destructive behavior damages her and her loved ones. This attempt to safeguard herself and her family from any more destruction caused by BoJack leads BoJack to agree to leave by the next morning.

As BoJack retreats to his bed, Penny surprises him on the boat as she declares to him that now “[she knows] what [she wants]” (“Escape from L.A.” 22:27 - 22:30). While BoJack does initially tell her to “go to bed,” he does retire in the captain’s room and leaves the door wide open (“Escape from L.A.” 22:33 - 22:35). First, it has been interpreted that BoJack telling Penny to go back to bed remains to be too vague and unspecified a statement to absolve him of blame since he did not explicitly mention to her to go back to her own bed. Second, by leaving his room door wide open, this would seem to indicate a nonverbal cue that would signal to Penny that BoJack would not be opposed to the idea of having sex her, and therefore, that this was an unspoken extended invitation; at the very least, keeping his door open made his supposed refusal now more vague and unclear.

After this moment, the scene cuts to Charlotte who is still in the backyard and who now notices and follows one of the glow stick balloons floating towards the driveway where BoJack’s boat is located. Immediately, this symbolism is uncanny. This recollection to the glow-stick balloons represents how something can initially seem like a good idea; however, in hindsight or even upon further reflection, that same notion proves itself to be quite harmful and detrimental to others even if it’s not necessarily for the person initiating and committing said action. Upon hearing what sounds like a lamp breaking, Charlotte goes onto the boat and opens the door to the captain’s room only to find BoJack and Penny on his bed, seemingly about to undress each other. Rightfully so, Charlotte explodes with anger and horror at the sight of her essentially almost underage daughter about to be taken advantage of by a manipulative, older man - BoJack. While BoJack attempts to apologize, Charlotte furiously cuts him and states, “Don’t. Don't you dare. If you are not out of my driveway in

thirty minutes, I will call the police. And if you ever try to contact me or my family again, I will fucking kill you” (“Escape from L.A.” 23:18 - 23:32). Here, the creators have chosen to use the “f” explicit word in order to signal once again that BoJack has irreparably damaged a relationship forever just like he had done with Herb in Season One. The power of reserving this particular word for onedingular use per season allows the audience to fully internalize the gravity of BoJack’s damage upon hearing the word. Now, understanding that BoJack has lost all ties with Charlotte and her family, BoJack is seen being driven back to LA while he sits expressionless on his boat only to be met with a depressed Diane still loafing in his house. This episode ending subverts the sitcom tropes that were presented and previously undermined this entire episode by emphasizing that there is no ‘happily ever after,’ such as the ones seen on television sitcoms, particularly those in episodic format. To emphasize Wanda’s point once again, during BoJack’s entire time in New Mexico, he chose to wear these figurative rose-colored glasses that blinded him from the reality of his situations; instead, he romanticizes what he is experiencing in order to gain proximity towards his ideal: a sitcom-esque life. However, the ending of this episode emphasizes that rose-colored glasses cannot insulate anyone from the consequences of their actions. This ends up holding true for BoJack in his real life as people must be held accountable no matter what. Ultimately, this episode ends up becoming a warning for BoJack to display how dangerous it is to prioritize unrealistic ideals in favor of ‘happily ever afters’ over the long-term consequences of one’s actions that affect real people’s lives. This tension between sitcoms and real life serve to be a cautionary tale about how not to ignore the difficulties, and therefore the realities, of life in favor of quick fixes that support an illusionary, unattainable ideal about life as this not only harms oneself but also their surrounding people become unnecessary casualties as well.

The last episode of Season Two focuses on BoJack’s attempt at readjustment in LA. Princess Carolyn yells at him for not being in contact for over two months and then breaks the news that

Secretariat was finished without him using a computer-generated version of BoJack. When BoJack goes to the director to apologize for his absence, the director waves it off because they actually ended up replacing the entire movie with the computer-generated BoJack since that version performed so well. This meant that BoJack was not really in this movie at all; it was just his body and his voice that were, but that was not really him. After seeing BoJack's dismay, the director assures him that the "computer [BoJack] is giving the performance of [his] career" and then invites him to a screening, so he can see for himself ("Out to Sea" 6:21 - 6:24). At the screening BoJack realizes that the computer-generated version of him put on a phenomenal performance, and the director tells him to clear his schedule since they will now be doing an awards push for the movie for the rest of the year. However, BoJack's main area of concern lies with the fact that it was not really him who was the one acting, but the director reassures him once more and tells him that it doesn't matter since BoJack's job is to "smile and collect [his] trophies" ("Out to Sea" 14:48 - 14:50). It is moments such as these that remind BoJack about why he feels like he is such a fraud himself. Additionally, this is when the director introduces BoJack to Ana Spanakopita, his Oscar publicist for the Secretariat movie. While she tells BoJack that everyone loves him, BoJack vehemently disagrees because "they don't know him" ("Out to Sea" 15:30 - 15:31). In response, Ana says that there is the whole premise behind the public liking BoJack and famous people generally; people assume and like to think that they do really and truly know celebrities and continue to enjoy learning more about them. However, at some point, the general public, especially fans, "pass a threshold where they actually know [him] and then they find [him] weird and off-putting" ("Out to Sea" 15:39 - 15:46). Ironically, this is exactly what Wanda said to BoJack earlier this season about not truly understanding the kind of person that BoJack was until she got to really know him; essentially, this comment focuses on the illusion of the way that people perceive and view other people. In turn, this comment scares BoJack as he then asks both the director and Ana if that means that "nobody who really knows [him] could

ever love [him],” BoJack’s greatest fear, to which they both quickly disagree in an attempt to maintain BoJack’s fragile ego (“Out to Sea” 15:46 - 15:48). This saga of BoJack not being the real one acting in the Secretariat movie proves to be a key plot point for the rest of the series since BoJack continues to view and equate this moment with him being a fraud. Lastly, BoJack wonders whether anyone could truly love him if they really knew how it preys on BoJack’s insecurity of not being known because of who he truly is inherently internally.

Season Two ends with a scene of BoJack running up the hill located right outside his house; however, he is clearly struggling, and the audience hears him complaining about how “[he] hates this. Running is terrible. Everything is the worst” (“Out to Sea” 24:10 - 24:13). After reaching the top of the hill, BoJack collapses out of exhaustion, and Season Two’s recurring baboon jogger who has been seen running many times in many episodes before this then gives BoJack advice. He stands over BoJack and explains that “it gets easier. Every day, it gets a little easier. — But you gotta do it every day. That’s the hard part. But it does get easier” (“Out to Sea” 24:24 - 24:35). As he jogs away, BoJack responds with a simple okay, concluding both the episode and the season. As said beforehand, running is a key motif in this entire series, and it really begins to permeate the show in Season Two. It is important to note that this final scene of Season Two alludes to Albert Camus’ Myth of Sisyphus as BoJack running up the hill is analogous to Sisyphus pushing his rock up the hill. This myth is traditionally characterized by the eternity of a hopeless struggle, but there is also often a glimmer of hope in this existentialist idea. Camus emphasizes that “one must imagine Sisyphus happy” in order for everyone to be able to cope and face the absurdity of life (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica). When parallelizing the struggles of both BoJack and Sisyphus, the audience can conclude that an acknowledgment of the absurd is the first step to overcoming it in order to achieve some form of happiness in life. In turn, by having BoJack continue to confront his demons and work towards healing from them everyday, over time, it will get easier to do because he

will have built up the strength and stamina to do so just like one would need to practice running daily in order to successfully run up a hill day after day. This ingenious parallelism serves to leave Season Two on an open, and possibly hopeful, note for BoJack's healing journey, especially after his horrific actions back in Arizona. Here, not only does the series continue to question the notion about the linearity of progress, but they also complicate Freytag's classic narrative structure in favor of a more complicated portrayal of what redemption would, arguably, more realistically look like. Overall, by exploring non-traditional narrative structures, *BoJack Horseman* is able to simultaneously comment about the unrealistic nature of redemption arcs and the importance of exploring other ways of manipulating plot structures to tell a more nuanced life journey story.



## Season Three: Serialization & Continuity

Season Three of *BoJack Horseman* continues to deconstruct traditional notions of linear narrative arcs as the serialization of the show becomes more pronounced. The audience finds BoJack having to more clearly deal with the consequences of his action - many of which destroy the relationships that he has with his loved ones. This season raises many more open-ended questions not only about whether or not BoJack will ever be able to be redeemed, but also, and possibly more importantly, whether or not redemption is what BoJack, and by extension the audience, should be seeking. This season is characterized by an expansion of uncertainty and how one should deal with what life throws at them. As BoJack confronts his past mistakes, the audience finds themselves intrigued to see if BoJack will finally act retroactively, apologize, and change his behavior in order to try and be better as he moves forward. This central theme of changing and BoJack's ability and willingness to break out of cyclical patterns is the focus of Season Three. Furthermore, three of the most important episodes of this Season Three include Episode 4: 'Fish Out of Water,' Episode 10: 'It's You,' and Episode 11: 'That's Too Much, Man!,' and it is through these two episodes that BoJack's supposed journey of self-improvement is explored.

As the season begins, BoJack is found participating in publicity after the release of the movie *Secretariat*. The positive acclaim that the movie is receiving boosts BoJack's ego as he becomes more and more desperate to win an Oscar in order to feel as if he will be remembered positively after he passes away. Beginning with Episode Four, BoJack goes to Pacific City Ocean to attend a movie premiere, but the episode quickly becomes a metaphor for BoJack's past failed attempts at reconciling friendships with those who needed him most. Here, BoJack is forced to reconcile his mistakes and pattern of abandonment, especially when a lost baby seahorse is in need of BoJack to help it return to its family. The audience learns that BoJack has not been underwater since his

mother tried to drown him in his childhood, which fairly gives reason to BoJack's deep anxiety about being underwater. This is a clear reference to the first theme of this episode, and arguably this season, and that is about BoJack's deep-rooted discomfort with being and adjusting to a new, different way of life - one of accountability and apology, two things BoJack is not familiar with. Since BoJack cannot speak underwater at this point, this underwater environment represents a space where actions inherently speak louder than words, which is an idea that BoJack, in turn, has a hard time wrapping his mind around.

'Fish Out of Water' is a remarkable piece of animation and serves as the 'the silent episode,' a common trope in television where an entire episode of the series lacks dialogue in order to focus on the narrative journey of a character. While BoJack is in Pacific Ocean City for an underwater film festival, he is unable to speak or normally communicate with those around him. This phenomenal piece of visual storytelling focuses on two themes by first, using the underwater environment as analogous to the difficulty one has when adjusting to a foreign way of life and second, exploring the way that the unspoken bond BoJack creates helps him better understand his own weaknesses and shortcomings. Particularly, this episode explores the depths of BoJack's own guilt surrounding his recent incident of getting Kacey fired. While this particular event from Season Two is what BoJack spends the majority of the episode focused on, this episode at-large specifically explores the ways in which BoJack has left many things in his life left unsaid, detrimentally ruining many of his relationships past the point of return. BoJack spends the majority of the episode desperately attempting to try and figure out what to say to Kelsey in order to apologize for his actions and for abandoning her as her friend after she got fired; this is ironically very difficult to do when you are not able to speak, and this speaks to the way that this episode emphasizes that words can only do so much, before actions speak louder than words. Most importantly, BoJack's guilt not only stems from convincing her to do something that inevitably got her fired, but also from never reaching out to her

after her firing even though he was partially responsible for it. While this episode focuses on this particular incident with Kelsey, BoJack's guilt stems from his consistent pattern and history of leaving things left unsaid to those that he cares about, such as with Herb. This signals a pattern of behavior in BoJack's life of his inability to try and make things right until it is too late.

Upon brief reflection, until this point, this pattern of behavior has been seen with three people: Herb, Charlotte, and Kelsey. With Herb, BoJack was too ashamed and embarrassed to reach out, believing that his actions were too far gone to be forgiven or reconciled with by Herb. When BoJack finally visits Herb after he got cancer, it becomes evident when Herb explains that his issue with BoJack does not stem from BoJack not fighting for Herb to stay on the show, but from the fact that BoJack had not contacted Herb for 25 years. BoJack's betrayal was rooted in the fact that BoJack was so selfish and self-centered with his own guilt about the citation that he did not care and forgot to think about another person's, in this case Herb's, feelings about the situation altogether. This severance of his friendship with Herb reaffirms his narcissistic, self-destructive behavior that not only affects him, but those around him as well. The audience even recognizes that the initial reason that BoJack goes to visit Herb when he has cancer in the first place is to assuage his own guilt about the situation at-large about not having reached out for so many years. By the time that BoJack reached out to Herb, it was far too late for an apology or any form of reconciliation. While BoJack desperately sought out closure with Herb and apologized for his actions (or lack of action), Herb was unwilling to forgive BoJack for abandoning him as a friend. Herb stated "but what I needed then was a friend. And you abandoned me. And I will never forgive you for that" ("The Telescope" 4:45 - 3:54). Abandoning Herb was arguably one of the worst things that BoJack had done thus far, and it shows that he had made too deep of a mistake to be forgiven by Herb. In Herb's eyes, BoJack was too far gone to be forgiven as this abandonment completely destroyed their friendship and any wish BoJack had to reconcile their differences as it was too late for forgiveness.

This second instance of self-destructive behavior and abandonment can be seen with Charlotte where again, BoJack managed to leave things unspoken and unsaid. In the 80s, before his big break, BoJack's closest friends were Herb and Charlotte who were dating at the time. Since Herb was his friend and was dating Charlotte at the time, BoJack thought it would be best if he did not express his romantic feelings for Charlotte to her to avoid any conflict and to respect both of his friends. While BoJack let his attraction for Charlotte go unspoken, she noticed and asked him a very important question: "Would you [BoJack] have made a move on me? — I don't think you would have. You know why? I think you're a coward" ("The Telescope" 6:59 - 7:05). Charlotte's words haunt BoJack until the present-day as this entire episode basically represents BoJack's inner conflict and struggle with recognizing whether or not he truly is the coward that Charlotte called him to be. Even when Charlotte was leaving LA for good to move to Maine, BoJack still did not take that opportunity to tell her how he felt about her, even though it haunted him for years afterwards as the audience sees through BoJack's construction of an imaginary constructed life with Charlotte had he revealed his feelings for her during his drug bender in Season 1: Episode 11: 'Downer Ending.' Since he clearly thought about this decision to not reveal his feelings for Charlotte for years, it made BoJack again wonder whether he really was the coward that Charlotte thought he was. By concocting an entire life living happily together with Charlotte and their imaginary daughter in Maine in his head, the audience does get to see the life that BoJack wishes he might have had had he not chosen to go into show business play out - all of this was left unspoken from Charlotte. During his drug trip, he imagines 'Charlotte' saying, "Just how nice things could've been if you had chosen this life," a possible indication that even BoJack's subconscious realizes that he truly might actually be a coward and the issue simply might be that he cannot admit this to himself ("Downer Ending" 21:30 - 21:33). Again, by the time BoJack decides to say something to Charlotte in Season Two: Episode 11 'Escape From LA' when he goes to stay with her and her family, it is too late for him to admit his

feelings even though he does so anyways. He explains to Charlotte that “I’ve wasted so much time sitting on my hands and imagining what *could* have been. Tell me you don’t feel the same. Tell me you haven’t thought about it,” to which Charlotte then responds by saying “I think you should go.—Tomorrow” (“Downer Ending” 21:30 - 21:42). Something about this exchange that is important is that the creators have purposely set it up like many traditional, romantic scenes with the trope that one of the characters goes to confess their love to another character after a very long time in an attempt to finally be with them again, resulting in the two people destined to be together to finally be together. However, this setup between Charlotte and BoJack remains grounded in reality; BoJack is being selfish by intruding and ruining the life that Charlotte has with her husband and children simply for his own personal gain and attempt at a relationship he wished he had pursued. By purposely undermining this common romantic trope, the creators are again able to highlight how self-absorbed BoJack is by only thinking that this profession of love will affect him instead of others, such as Charlotte. After finally making a move, in his own eyes, BoJack was attempting to finally stop being the coward everyone, including himself, always thought he was. However, it was too late, and it was actively selfish to confess his love for Charlotte as he would be wrecking emotional chaos and havoc on her own settled, peaceful life. BoJack’s narcissistic preoccupation with his own feelings preclude him from thinking about the consequences of his actions on others, therefore constantly destroying the lives of people around him. It is important to note that this incident with Charlotte becomes BoJack’s second attempt to right the wrongs of his past in a desperate attempt in order to fulfill his own guilt, not to mend the relationship or genuinely take accountability for his actions.

Lastly, it is here that the audience begins to notice this pattern of self-destructive behavior of BoJack’s, finally culminating with his third friendship with Kelsey and his likewise abandonment of her that led to him disappointing and failing another friendship. In Season Two, Kelsey and BoJack sneak into the Nixon library in order to shoot a movie scene that has been cut by the director from

the final movie; however, when the studio finds out, Kelsey is fired. As usual, even though BoJack was at least partially responsible for this incident and for Kelsey getting fired, he faces none of the consequences. In fact, even after walking off of the film, BoJack still receives glory, credit, and accolades for his Secretariat performance despite the fact that the film used a digital creation of his likeness after he left the movie, again reinforcing that BoJack simply wants to be remembered in general - no matter if it's through honest means or not. When BoJack abandons Kelsey, it seems like another instance of him making and repeating the same mistakes that he has always made. This leaves the audience to wonder and then decide that BoJack is indeed making the same mistake with Kelsey as he did with Herb, and similar in nature with Charlotte. Despite making this exact same mistake by abandoning Herb in the 90s, BoJack did not reach out to Kelsey after she was fired as a colleague or friend. Instead, BoJack abandoned her just as he did to Herb, which is ultimately a pretty horrible and awful way to treat yet another person who believes in you and your tremendous acting ability. BoJack's struggle to understand how he plans to apologize to Kelsey after abandoning her becomes the backdrop to a long history and patterns of leaving things left unsaid for BoJack. As BoJack struggles to figure out what to say to Kelsey when he sees her in Pacific Ocean City, it becomes clear that BoJack's long history of leaving things left unsaid and unspoken or not speaking up until it's too late will be tested and followed throughout this entire episode. Ultimately, the creators utilize an environment and physical location where BoJack cannot literally physically speak to brilliantly showcase and symbolize BoJack's inability to use his words to apologize and take accountability for his actions as soon as mistakes have been made, let alone change his behavior accordingly. BoJack's inability to speak in this episode ends up highlighting both how empty BoJack's words have become and also how the only thing stopping BoJack from taking any action at reconciling with those who he has wronged is himself.

By the end of Season Two, BoJack has had to come to terms with two major failed friendships in his life that he has ruined by leaving things left unsaid, or ultimately, saying these necessary things too late. While his friendship with Kelsey was not necessarily exactly the same as his friendship with either Herb or Charlotte, BoJack is dealing with the similar fact that his friendship with Kelsey might be another friendship that is going to fall apart, resulting in another person that he respects hating him forever. This episode particularly employs irony and dark humor in its foundational setup; BoJack is searching for the right thing to say to Kelsey while being incapable of actually speaking, which actually ends up carrying him further and further away from his goal. However, it's BoJack's imaginary, constructed life with Charlotte from Season Two that connects the audience back with the next aspect of this episode, which is the baby seahorse.

After BoJack is whisked away to the outskirts of Pacific Ocean City, he witnesses a seahorse give birth on a bus, accidentally leaving one of the babies behind. From the Vox interview with the creative lead of *BoJack Horseman*, Lisa Hanawalt discusses that the design of the baby seahorse is supposed to look like Harper, BoJack's imaginary daughter from his drug trip in Season One: Episode 11 'Downer's Ending' where BoJack imagines a version of his life where he is married to Charlotte and lives with this imaginary daughter, Charlotte. This was a great example of the subtle callback to design, especially since BoJack has such a strong connection to this baby very quickly as can be seen throughout this episode; the parallels in design between Harper and this baby seahorse mimic their similarities in what they symbolize and mean to BoJack. This element of design, animation, and production seems to indicate or insinuate that there might be something in BoJack's subconscious calling out to this baby. While BoJack is coping with a situation that reminds him of his unspoken failures throughout life, he is also presented with this adorable baby seahorse who had subconsciously tapped into something that deeply reminds him of Charlotte, or more exactly, the version of life that he could have had with her had he pursued it. It's this own manifestation of these

reminders of all of the things that were left unspoken for so many years. Not only that, but he is also dealing with the fact that he has abandoned Herb and Kelsey, and upon seeing this abandoned baby seahorse, a creature that he feels a connection with, he knows that he cannot leave another person/thing as well; he cannot abandon them too. BoJack spends the remainder of the episode traversing the scary underwater world, doing his best to protect this baby seahorse from danger as though it's his own imaginary daughter. Throughout the episode, when they confront danger, suspense, and fear, BoJack bonds intensely with this baby seahorse to the point where it's very difficult to leave when he finally gets them back home where they belong.

After BoJack has returned the baby seahorse to its family, he travels back to Pacific Ocean City (having missed his film premiere), he reflects on the events of that day. He looks down at the bottle of the seahorse milk that he bought for the baby, and he realizes what he should say to Kelsey. What he writes down on a note is "Kelsey, in this terrifying world, all we have are the connections that we make. I'm sorry I got you fired. I'm sorry I never called you after" ("Fish Out of Water" 22:09 - 22:20). BoJack connected with that lost baby seahorse, and he also had connections with Herb and Charlotte. While he squandered those connections with Herb and Charlotte, BoJack realizes he does not want the same outcome for his friendship with Kelsey. However, when BoJack ends up back in the city, he quickly readjusts to his comfortable, cushy life of stardom. Here, he settles back into his typical, normal lifestyle and participates in his usual vices. The audience would hope that after all he has gone through and all of the reflection he has done throughout this particular day/episode and after all he had learned about himself, that he would immediately seek out Kelsey and apologize, but this was not the case immediately, showing that the cyclical nature of self-destructive behavior is comfortable for those who engage in it. BoJack was out of his comfort zone until fame, success, nicotine, and alcohol lulled him back into it, tucking himself into that security blanket where he did not have to worry about consequences of his actions on anyone else or



the comfort of anyone but himself. Shortly after, he sees Kelsey leaving the hotel, and he decides to use this as an opportunity as one last chance to apologize. As he chases her down and hands her the note he had written, he is only to find when he hands her the note that the ink has been smeared, and she angrily and furiously hands it back to him and drives away. It is in that moment that BoJack is approached by someone who uses a setting on his helmet to speak to him, thus realizing that he could have spoken through his helmet this entire time. Sadly, this is a fitting metaphor and important piece of dark irony for BoJack's history of leaving things unspoken. The truth is that while for years BoJack felt like it was too late to reach out to Herb or tell Charlotte how he really felt about her, the hard truth is the fact that this entire time BoJack was fully capable of doing those things, therefore, he can only blame himself for not doing so. In fact, he could have reached out at any time, but he simply made the decision to choose not to do so.

While 'Fish Out of Water' remains to be a fantastic piece of animation for numerous reasons, it also represents a wide variety of BoJack's shortcomings. Metaphorically, as it takes place underwater, it represents the ocean of guilt that rests on BoJack's shoulders for all of the mistakes that he has made by abandoning those close to him, particularly in times of great need, for being a coward, and his struggle to cope with the fact that he might actually still be a coward. Additionally, while his intentions in this episode show the audience that he is making efforts to try to change for the better, in the end, sadly, he doesn't. These futile efforts are compounded by the fact that this entire episode is in silence without dialogue; hence, BoJack cannot simply talk his way out of situations like he is used to. Here, it is particularly evident that actions speak louder than words, and this sentiment is heightened and highlighted to emphasize the very fact that words can only mean so much if changes in behavior do not follow. This episode proves to be a moment where BoJack could have been able to break out of his cyclical behavior, but he is unable to. All of this makes the audience wonder that even if BoJack had known that he could have spoken underwater, would he

have said the things that needed to be said and apologized to her? Again, the creators of the show present an uncertain, open-ended ending to BoJack at the end of this episode, leaving the audience wondering to what extent and for how long BoJack is going to continue to make excuses for his behavior. Most importantly, for the Season 3 and the series as a whole, this marks an important moment in the series. Arguably, this episode is one of the strongest pieces of evidence that proves that the creators of *BoJack Horseman* are not interested in traditional redemption arcs for their characters. While there are many other narrative elements that are undermined late in the series as well, it is vital to note the fact that this episode proves to be an important landmark of the show. By opting out of the traditional redemption arc where the main character does eventually repent and redeem themselves, the creators provide the main character BoJack with that opportunity, and he falls short. This complication of the original notion of redemption proves to be a salient theme throughout the rest of the series. By establishing and solidifying this theme, the question of whether or not one should be seeking redemption or not also comes into play throughout the series. This nuanced understanding of how people tend to behave emphasizes the realistic difficulty of breaking bad behavior and removing oneself from self-destructive, cyclical bad habits. Therefore, by undermining the traditional trajectory of a redemption arc, the creators are allowed to complicate their own and the audience's understanding of what it means and how one can be a better person.

Furthermore, unfortunately, BoJack's past mistakes put another one of his friendships on the line once again as seen in Episode 10: 'It's You.' This episode begins with BoJack being nominated for the Oscars, but he is only surrounded by fans while all of his important real friendships are all falling apart. It's only after this news that BoJack finds himself not feeling any happier or more gratified than before, but his publicist, Ana, at the time tells him to not "fetishize [his] own sadness," a recurring phrase in this series ("It's You" 2:27 - 2:30). Right afterward, BoJack throws a party in celebration of his nomination only to be visited by Diane who wants to check up on him. BoJack

feels offended that she does not believe that he could be happy and responds by insulting her by saying that "I'm not like you; I don't fetishize my own sadness" ("It's You" 6:25 - 6:26). This phrase right here epitomizes the exact point of the show, highlighting what makes *BoJack Horseman's* portrayal of mental illness and substance abuse different from other shows. The show's creators are wholeheartedly focused on ensuring that this show does not, in any way, romanticize these serious issues of mental health nor does the show downplay the seriousness and severity of their consequences. By simply including this phrase in the show, the creators are able to emphasize that *BoJack Horseman* is not here to fetishize or romanticize these issues themselves as well - even if some of the characters in their show might be doing so. Here, Diane takes this as an opportunity to emphasize to BoJack how horrible he is to other people by responding with how after he wins the Oscar, he will be so miserable that he'll kill himself with no one around available to stop him. While Diane says this to BoJack in an attempt to highlight how he is imploding all of his close relationships with people, BoJack does not seem to understand or ignore the purpose of why Diane is saying this to him. In response, he yells that all of the people at his party right now will be around when he does kill himself. This conversation highlights the fact that BoJack continuously ignores the fact that he hurts other people because of his destructive behavior. This is metaphorically reinforced when immediately after this interaction, BoJack accidentally backs his new Tesla into his pool where he then starts to sink. This reel of BoJack backing up and sinking in the pool exactly mimics what the end of the introductory sequence looks like. As BoJack sees his air bubbles, instead of following them and moving himself upwards, he simply closes his eyes and allows himself to sink, only to be pulled out and rescued by Mr. PeanutButter. It is the inclusion of this drowning sequence, which is exactly what part of the intro reel looks like, that proves to be really important in metaphorically emphasizing the impact of BoJack's behavior on those around him as Todd later emphasizes in this episode. Since BoJack did not even try to help himself out of the pool and allowed himself to drown,

that action in it of itself represents the fact that BoJack cannot seem to be pulled out of the hole that he creates for himself; instead, not only does he pull others down with him, but those who he does pull down must be strong enough to carry themselves and BoJack out of the hole. Therefore, this short sequence presents itself to be an accurate metaphorical representation about the way BoJack's self-destructive behavior manifests itself in the relationships with those around him, clearly communicating BoJack's toxic and selfish nature.

In fact, the toxicity of BoJack's behavior is first explicitly called out by Todd shortly thereafter, who continues to be angry at BoJack for his thoughtless behavior. When Todd explains and confides to Mr. Peanut Butter about whether or not he would consider BoJack a friend earlier in the episode, Mr. Peanut Butter brushes Todd's concerns off with the excuse that BoJack is a damaged person battling many demons. While Mr. Peanut Butter is partially correct, he manages to ignore Todd's real concerns about being tired of the way that BoJack walks over everybody but in the end, BoJack still ends up getting what he wants instead of what he deserves. Todd is one of the first main characters of the show to vocalize his concerns about the negative effects that BoJack's self-destructive behavior is having on him personally and on those around him. It is only after BoJack is pulled out from the pool that Mr. Peanut Butter mentions these concerns to BoJack.

When BoJack wakes up in what is practically a completely destroyed house all by himself, he panics and seeks validation from one of his closest friends, from someone he trusts. It is in this moment that he desperately seeks out Ana only to find that she is not returning his calls, and he cannot get access to her; therefore, BoJack seeks to antagonize, bully, and infantilize his so-called best friend Todd instead as he always does to make himself feel better about himself. BoJack gaslights Todd by telling him to not leave like everyone else has in BoJack's life and then begins to claim that Todd owes him for everything that Todd has accomplished in the last couple of years. In anger, Todd responds by saying that he has only been nice to BoJack recently because of Emily.

Thinking that Todd knows that he and Emily spelt together, BoJack unknowingly reveals this information to Todd, shocking him in the process. Not only is Todd shocked and hurt, but he is arguably the most angry in this scene in the entire series. While BoJack tries to apologize in his half-hearted, empty way as usual, Todd views any apology from BoJack as just empty words. BoJack attempts to use excuses as he normally does by saying that he was drunk and that he was under a lot of pressure because of the Oscar camping; this is the moment that broke the camel's back, and finally, Todd simply snaps. He yells angrily at BoJack and exclaims that "You can't keep doing this! You can't keep doing shitty things, and then feel bad about yourself like that makes it okay! You need to *be better!* — No! No, BoJack, just stop. You are all the things that are wrong with you. It's not the alcohol, or the drugs, or any of the shitty things that happened to you in your career, or when you were a kid. It's you. All right? It's you. Fuck, man. What else is there to say?" ("It's You" 24:54 - 25:37). This outburst by Todd signifies one of the most gut wrenching scenes of one of BoJack's friendships ending and going up in flames, especially since BoJack has no one to blame but himself. Here, the audience deconstructs Todd's outbursts to gather some really important information about what the creators are attempting to tell them about behavior similar to BoJack's.

It is in this outburst that Todd articulates BoJack's problems directly and clearly to him without sidestepping. First, he emphasizes that just because one may feel bad about their actions does not mean that that in itself rectified the situation. Feeling bad about something does not equate to an apology or forgiveness if it is not followed up by changes in behaviors and actions. This comment perfectly describes the reason for all of BoJack's broken and failed friendships thus far with Herb, Charlotte, Kelsey, and now, Todd. By emphasizing that feeling bad about one's mistakes and even apologizing for them is not enough to make a situation better, Todd is able to emphasize that the real apology for one's mistakes is by taking action to 'be better.' In turn, this emphasis to change actions and behaviors instead of repeating the same mistakes over and over proves to be an

important lesson for BoJack to hear as he attempts to try to become a better person much later in the series. It is these words of Todd's that exemplify what it means to improve oneself and actually pull oneself out of a cyclical pattern of self-destructive behavior. It is this brutal frankness that BoJack must hear in order to get in touch with reality once again. Furthermore, Todd also highlights that BoJack needs to stop making excuses for himself and his behavior as well. While he acknowledges the many unfair things that have happened to BoJack in his career and childhood alongside BoJack's substance abuse issues, Todd really hones in that those only play a factor in the decisions that one makes in life. He underscores the importance of BoJack, and frankly everyone, taking responsibility for his actions and behaviors because while horrible things have happened to BoJack, Todd as well as the audience knows that BoJack has always made all of his poor decisions himself. By emphasizing that 'you are all of the things that are wrong with you,' Todd utilizes this moment to showcase that BoJack is responsible for the decisions and mistakes that he has made because he has always had the choice to make good or bad decisions and has simply chosen to make bad decisions. Here, Todd's reference to 'it's you' is simultaneously a reference to the title, again only signifying the importance of Todd's outburst to explaining the destruction that BoJack has inflicted on those around him. Todd's outburst serves as the first instance in the series where someone has outrightly called BoJack out for being irresponsible and not taking responsibility and ownership of his own actions, behaviors, and decisions. This speech ultimately identifies that no matter what one's upbringing is, at some point, repeating the same mistakes over and over, continuing to hurt the same people over and over, and destroying relationships in the process simply becomes inexcusable. As the audience might notice, this is the only instance in Season Three where the explicative f\*\*\* is used, again signaling when a character's relationship with BoJack is permanently ruined; thus, this instance demonstrated BoJack's relationship with Todd being irreversibly altered forever, never being able to be the same or fully recover again. By ending this version of his friendship with BoJack, Todd

is one of the first main characters to draw boundaries with BoJack, setting a precedent for the other main characters in the series and arguably the most impactful use of this explicative in the entire series. By forever altering and momentarily ending his friendship with BoJack, Todd is able to free himself of being sucked in by Bojack. Nevertheless, Todd's severing his relationship with BoJack is characterized by sadness and disappointment as it was finally time for him to give up on his friend; this hurts him as much as it hurts BoJack. Again, the audience finds themselves witnessing another one of BoJack's failed friendships, demolished by BoJack's destructive personality. Now, both Kelsey and Todd are friendships that BoJack has destroyed in this season, and the audience progresses throughout the rest of the season, desperately hoping to find BoJack learning from these confrontational experiences and his own mistakes.

In Season Three: Episode 11: 'That's Too Much Man,' the audience is confronted with arguably the darkest and saddest episode of the entire series as, again, another one of BoJack's relationships is explored: his relationship with Sarah Lynn. This episode is largely characterized by Sarah Lynn's death for which BoJack is very responsible for by preserving his own wishes over the livelihood of a young girl in order to maintain his fame and comfort; it is this episode that could be argued as the culmination of the most selfish act that BoJack has ever committed: causing the death of the young, impressionable Sarah Lynn by failing to be a role model and father figure to her. Before the episode, the audience is aware of a pattern by the creators of the show to emphasize the eleventh episode of every season to both be significant and usually characterized by something incredibly horrible that BoJack does to someone else. Additionally, the beginning of this episode is the first time in the entire series where BoJack is truly all alone in his house since Todd (alongside his employees) have left; this reiterates the idea that BoJack has continued to push those who cared for him away because of his self-destructive nature to the relationship that he has with others.

With this tone going into the episode, it is no surprise that this episode begins with BoJack and Sarah Lynn going on a drug-fueled bender as BoJack attempts to make amends to the people that he hurt. In the beginning of the episode, Sarah Lynn is about to mark her ninth month of sobriety, characterizing her as more calm and positive in her life than she has ever been simply because she has gone sober. However, this is short-lived when BoJack calls her as he is in need of a drinking buddy to go on a bender with, and Sarah Lynn accepts, immediately breaking her sobriety. Without any regard to what is best for Sarah Lynn and her well-being, BoJack again disregards the safety and well-being of someone else in order to obtain what he wants, a prime example of his selfish regard for only himself. As they drink alcohol and drugs together, they both simultaneously reminisce about the past as they watch old episodes of *Horsin' Around*. This becomes a moment of irony because as they both consume more drugs and alcohol, they both become more disillusioned and lose touch with reality, which is also the parallel characterization of the portrayal of life on *Horsin' Around*. The creators utilize this moment to symbolize that as much as alcohol and drugs can disrupt one's understanding of reality, similarly, strict adherence or comparison of one's own life to sitcom television will also result in a warped understanding and expectation of how life and relationships operate. This brief moment allows the creators to comment on the unrealistic nature of sitcom television by undermining its key characteristics through this science; ultimately, this emphasizes that sitcom television sells a curated, version of life that presents unhealthy expectations for what life should be like. This twisted understanding permeates Sarah Lynn's, but more so BoJack's, impression of what and how life should be like, causing them to be thoroughly unprepared for the real world, especially in having to deal with the consequences of their actions and dealing with conflict at-large.

As their bender progresses, at some point, BoJack begins to blackout, and the audience experiences these blackouts with him as they are only shown experiences during this bender that



BoJack himself also experiences; we only are allowed to experience what BoJack experiences, so we only see what he sees as the audience follows his consciousness. Therefore, after one of BoJack's beginning blackouts, he is found recklessly driving a car with Sarah Lynn as they are on his way to make amends to those that BoJack has wronged. It's important to recognize that BoJack's intentions for making amends are not to right the wrongs of his past, but his goal in making amends is to make himself feel better and attempt to obtain a clean slate with those relationships around him. During this drive, there is a brief moment in which Sarah Lynn tries to convince BoJack to commit, or at least to try, a twelve-step program, but BoJack ignores Sarah Lynn's attempt to help BoJack help himself. This becomes, yet again, another example of BoJack refusing to take actionable steps towards becoming better or making progress on himself even though he recognizes that something must change about the way he lives in order to change his current self-destructive nature.

Furthermore, their first stop was Diane Nguyen and Mr. Peanut Butter's house where they waited for them to come home; however, out of impatience, Sarah Lynn dresses up like Diane. While pretending to be Diane, Sarah Lynn convinces BoJack to apologize to 'Diane' as if Sarah Lynn were her, so that they can leave and continue their journey. As this is happening, Diane and Mr. Peanut Butter enter their home, shocked at Sarah Lynn and BoJack's actions. In distress, Sarah Lynn and BoJack hurriedly leave their friends' house, shoving Diane in the process and she breaks her wrist. This incident reminds the audience of two things. First, while BoJack may want to genuinely make amends with those he has wronged, he continuously pursues shortcuts in order to do so. Again, at this point in the series and in his own life, BoJack remains unwilling to pursue the difficult work of apologizing for his past transgressions in an attempt to genuinely become a better person in action and not just in word. Secondly, since his pattern of behavior remains unchanged, these half-hearted attempts at apologizing do not resonate with those he tries to apologize to. In this first attempted apology, it is even symbolized by Diane physically breaking her wrist that BoJack's insincere and

incomplete apologies actually continue to actively cause harm to those that he is trying to make amends with. Not only are these half-hearted attempts not representative of any behavioral change, but they are actively continuing to cause BoJack to inflict direct harm onto those he is trying to apologize to.

As the night progresses, Sarah Lynn and BoJack continue to go on their journey to help BoJack make amends to those who he has wronged, and their second stop is with Todd. However, instead of making amends with the real Todd, since BoJack is both high and drunk, he ends up mistaking a young boy who dresses similarly to Todd and instead apologizes to this young boy instead of the real Todd. Again, this dark, ironic instance represents the way in which BoJack is trying to make amends but because he is unwilling to fully commit to changing, his attempts consistently fall short, such as in this attempt to apologize to Todd. From here, BoJack goes to try and apologize to Princess Carolyn by standing on his car's roof in front of her apartment balcony while screaming that he is sorry to her. Unsurprisingly, this borderline insane attempt was not favorably seen by Princess Carolyn who resigned to her room after seeing BoJack. Here, BoJack attempts to apologize to Princess Carolyn by expressing this traditional grandiose act for her outside of her apartment just as one might have seen on television. This action provides to be a direct example of BoJack mimicking what he has seen on television; therefore, when he attempts to replicate this in life just as he has with this attempted apology to Princess Carolyn, the show makes it evident that simply replicating life the way it is seen on television does not translate to the same results in real life, supporting the claim that much of television, and particularly sitcom television, cannot be translated to real life. Next, BoJack visits Ana Spanakopita, his former publicist and ex-girlfriend. When asking her why she left him, he probes her about the reasoning behind why she will not allow them to have a chance at "being broken together" and expands on this by asking her "what about that doesn't appeal to [her]?" ("That's Too Much, Man!" 14:13 - 14:18). Immediately,

when BoJack says this, it is clear that BoJack is not as interested in becoming better as he is in sharing his misery with someone. As Ana begins to explain why BoJack and her cannot work as a couple, BoJack blacks out; the next time the audience sees BoJack he is selfishly asking Sarah Lynn to drive him back to Ana in order to hear, and more importantly remember, her story once again. However, he continues to black out two more times, and as he apologizes to Ana for bothering her so much in one night, Ana reveals to the audience and informs BoJack that she has not seen him in over two weeks. This only ends up emphasizing the fact that BoJack has blacked so much and so frequently that the audience has missed approximately two week of his life, further emphasizing his self-destructive behavior. Additionally, this continuous attempt to ask Ana about her personal, traumatizing, life-threatening story that has shaped her to become the person that she is today is completely selfish and inconsiderate of the ways that repeatedly telling that story could, and most likely is, retraumatizing and triggering for her. Finally, the audience is able to hear about Ana's life altering, near-death drowning experience as a teen as she explains that "after I almost drowned, I decided I would never again be weaker than water. So, I became a lifeguard. On my first day of training, my instructor told me that there are going to be times when you'll see someone in trouble. You're going to want to rush in there and do whatever you can to save them, but you have to stop yourself, because there are some people you can't save. 'Cause those people will thrash and struggle, and try to take you down with them" ("That's Too Much, Man!" 15:44 - 16:10). One would assume that BoJack would understand the metaphorical meaning and reasoning behind why Ana would tell this particular story to him; it's evident that Ana's story refers to the fact that BoJack is one of those people that vortexes other people into his sadness. Again, this is another moment where the series makes abundantly clear that instead of attempting to work on himself, BoJack surrounds himself with people that he brings down into his sadness and depression with him. In a traditional narrative format, Ana's story would be a moment of reflection for the protagonist, possibly even a moment of

redemption. However, BoJack's reaction to this consists of confusion about the relevance of Ana's story to himself. This disappointing moment for the audience lies with the fact that BoJack has missed a clear opportunity to seriously reflect about the ways in which he negatively affects others through his self-destructive behavior. Instead of utilizing Ana's story as a sign to think about his own actions, BoJack again fails to see the ways in which he is culpable for hurting anyone, which is ironic since he is going on this journey of apologies with Sarah Lynn at that very moment. It's simply another case of his self-centeredness trumping his willingness to evaluate himself and the kind of relationships that he has with those around him.

After his meeting with Ana, BoJack blacks out once again, waking up in the car with Sarah Lynn en route to Ohio in an attempt to make amends with Penny, Charlotte's daughter. While BoJack does make an attempt to tell Sarah Lynn to turn around the car, he ends up at Penny's college campus with an interest to see if he has irreparably damaged and messed up her life. Similarly to Ana, this is another instance of BoJack prioritizing his own curiosity over the mental and emotional wellbeing of another person; he obviously has no consideration for the fact that seeing him again could be incredibly painful and retraumatizing for Penny. Instead, BoJack is more interested in seeing how much he has negatively affected her in a hopeful attempt to appease him of his own guilt and remorse. Even though they spot Penny and BoJack attempting to stop following her, he blacks out again; the audience sees him again outside of a college party that Penny is attending, and here, it becomes evident that Penny seems to be completely fine in regards to her emotional and mental state. Since BoJack has now made certain of what her mental state is, in an attempt to relinquish his guilt, he tells Sarah Lynn that Penny seems to be doing and there might even be a possibility that he did not ruin her, which is a big source of stress for BoJack since he realizes that what he has done was wrong. At this moment, the audience hopes that BoJack can simply walk away from this situation without incurring more damage. However, when trying to leave,

BoJack ends up drawing attention to himself, and Penny notices him, freaks out, and yells at him that he cannot be here. Logically, she believes that he is here to stalk and find her and exclaims, "'I was seventeen, I didn't know any better!'" ("That's Too Much, Man!" 19:10 - 19:13). While the people surrounding Sarah Lynn and BoJack begin to take photos, they escape while a retraumatized Penny seemingly disappears from the crowd shown in the episode frame. Not only was the fact that BoJack came here simply in his own interest without any consideration to Penny, but the fact that he, in fact, reintroduced those traumatic memories for her made this situation even worse, again frightening her by reminding her of these memories. When they manage to reach the car, Sarah Lynn points out to BoJack that "you know, on the plus side, she really seemed okay. — Unite she saw you and freaked out. But she probably would have been totally fine if you'd never shown up. — I think the wound was completely healed before you reopened it by showing up unannounced at her college and all the pain came rushing back to her. — In a way, it's like you destroyed her life twice" ("That's Too Much, Man!" 19:31 - 19:52). Here, the difference between Sarah Lynn and BoJack's reaction to this situation is the fact that Sarah Lynn realizes that they were wrong for coming and distributing Penny's peace while BoJack continues to simply ignore the fact that there was anything wrong with what they did. This difference highlights the ways in which Sarah Lynn takes accountability for her actions while BoJack does not; by continuing to make excuses for himself, he absolves himself of any guilt that he might have to feel knowing that he has forever scarred Penny by what he has done to her, and especially by following, finding, and scaring her moments before.

Moreover, Sarah Lynn and BoJack begin to think about driving back home to LA. While looking for a bottle opener to open an alcoholic beverage in the glove compartment, Sarah Lynn also manages to find a pack of heroin named BoJack. This element of dark humor serves to foreshadow the way that BoJack's inaction and self-destructive behavior finally irreparably destroys the life of someone he cares about deeply and someone who he was a direct mentor for - Sarah

Lynn. Specifically, this is the same pack of heroin that BoJack and Diane find in Season Three: Episode Three - 'BoJack Kills.' Not only considering the implications of the fact that this heroin is particularly named BoJack, but also the fact that it was introduced into the series during an episode named 'BoJack Kills' seems to be enough foreshadowing for the audience to correctly assume that this heroin does, in fact, kill someone upon ingestion. While Sarah Lynn is interested in shooting heroin, BoJack is initially not interested; however, once returning to Sarah Lynn's house in L.A., BoJack suggests that they "snort heroin like sophisticated adults," which is another ironic moment since BoJack is masking his poor decision making by pretending that he is acting like an adult would ("That's Too Much, Man!" 20:42 - 20:45). Additionally, BoJack's reference to acting like an adult is ironic considering the fact that any responsible adult would know how harmful it would be to take drugs, let alone give someone else drugs, in this case that being Sarah Lynn. After BoJack blacks out from the heroin, he has a flashback to 2007 where his producer was explaining the low ratings of his show at the time, 'The BoJack Horseman Show'. His producer then suggests that they bring a guest star on the show in order to boost ratings, and Sarah Lynn is brought up as a possible option considering that she is "the world's biggest pop star" at the time ("That's Too Much, Man!" 21:43 - 21:46). Although BoJack is uneasy about this since he has not spoken to Sarah Lynn since after the ending of *Horsin' Around*, he ends up getting convinced to ask her anyways since "[he] was like a father to her" only worsening the fact that BoJack has had such a negative impact on Sarah Lynn's life by encouraging her similar drug and alcohol habits ("That's Too Much, Man!" 21:49 - 21:52). The reason why this particular flashback is so damning for BoJack has to do with the fact that when BoJack betrays Sarah Lynn by not visiting and keeping in contact with her after all of these years. The audience finds out that when BoJack does go to visit her and ask her about being a guest on the show, Sarah Lynn expresses her gratitude for the fact that BoJack has not come to visit her to ask for anything, but simply just to see and spend time with her. It is in this moment that the audience

realizes that BoJack has betrayed Sarah Lynn by only coming to see her after all of these years to ask for a favor instead of to simply check in about her own well-being; this is one of many and major times he fails her as a father figure. What becomes worse is the fact that BoJack still asks her to be a guest star on his show even after all of this, highlighting the fact that BoJack does not have any regard for the fact that he had the option to salvage this relationship and simply chose not to - a cruel, selfish act on his part.

After consuming the heroin, BoJack continues to have a series of heroin-induced blackouts, and it is in and between these blackouts that BoJack reminisces about his time on *Horsin' Around* with Sarah Lynn. There are moments of dialogue between the two of them that can be elucidated. For example, BoJack explains to her that “[she’s] the only one who really understands [him] because how could anyone else?” and that “But [they] knew each other before [they] were anybody, and that’s how [they] can be friends, because [they] are not like those other people. The people who glom onto you because of who they think you are;” here, this dialogue emphasizes that Sarah Lynn and BoJack can be friends because they are the only two people who knew each other before they became famous as well as liking each other for who they really are (“That’s Too Much, Man!” 22:15 - 22:33). Unfortunately, in the present, the audience realizes there is another, possibly more harmful, instance where BoJack has made empty promises to another person only to fail in execution. It is evident in the fact that BoJack does not visit Sarah Lynn after *Horsin' Around* that emphasizes the fact BoJack may not truly like Sarah Lynn for who she really is; as the episode progresses, it seems that BoJack uses Sarah Lynn to only make himself feel a little less alone. While BoJack may have once promised Sarah Lynn something in the past, this only becomes another situation in which he cannot follow through on his promises to accurately make them reality. While BoJack continues to exist between blackouts, it’s nighttime, and BoJack ends up lying on a hotel bed alongside Sarah Lynn. Here, BoJack explains that “[they] don’t want anything from each other” and expresses that “[he] loves

her” (“That's Too Much, Man!” 22:39 - 22:51). Again, this statement proves to be untrue as the audience knows that BoJack, in one way or another, has betrayed Sarah Lynn by not contacting her after the end of *Horsin' Around*, using her for publicity, and for generally not being a good role model or father figure for her. Knowing this, BoJack's seemingly sincere declaration of love is diluted by the fact that he does not know what it truly means to love as love requires some form of selflessness. In this sense, BoJack loves the way that Sarah Lynn makes him feel less alone; he does not care nor does he necessarily pay attention to the things that make Sarah Lynn happy, which would be a truer indication of any semblance of love towards her. After this moment, BoJack momentarily panics when Sarah Lynn does not respond as he is afraid something quite bad has happened, another great moment of foreshadowing for the end of the episode characterized by Sarah Lynn's death.

Furthermore, mostly out of boredom, Sarah Lynn turns onto the television, which reveals that Sarah Lynn has won an Oscar for Best Original Song. While Sarah Lynn is overjoyed, she becomes overcome with regret as she realizes that she wishes that she could have been there herself to accept the award, another moment that was robbed from her because of BoJack's negative influence on her. This moment reveals a time in this series where television actually does ironically become a way in which BoJack gets reeled back into reality as the airing of the Oscars makes him realize how long he and Sarah Lynn have actually been on this drug and alcohol induced bender. As Sarah Lynn witnesses her abusive step-father accept the award on her behalf, the audience witnesses the ripple effects of childhood abuse manifest themselves as Sarah Lynn begins to explain to BoJack how “[she] doesn't like anything about [herself]. None of this is [her]” as she explains how everything about her is fake and not true to herself and who she is and wants to be (“That's Too Much, Man!” 23:57 - 24:03). The audience finally receives an authentic revelation about Sarah Lynn's self-esteem and the way that she feels about herself as she explains that “even [her] shirt came from some company who paid [her] \$8000 to wear it. And [she] didn't need the money. [She] just liked



that someone still wanted me to wear their shirt” (“That's Too Much, Man!” 24:09 - 24:17). Not only is this a commentary about the dangers of child stardom, but in contrast to BoJack, Sarah Lynn honestly reveals the way in which she feels about herself and her deep-rooted desire to stay relevant and wanted by other people since she cannot provide that to herself. Since she does not care that much about herself, it feels good to her when someone else does. From this, Sarah Lynn begins to enter mania and panic about the fact that everyone, including herself, is somehow inevitably doomed. In order to comfort and calm her down, BoJack hastily agrees to finally go to the Griffith Park Observatory, Sarah Lynn’s favorite place and where she has been begging to go this entire Bender. At the planetarium, this next scene is shot where both Sarah Lynn and BoJack are seen as silhouettes watching one of the planetarium’s prerecorded night sky shows. While Sarah Lynn notices the dome shape of the building, she puts and rests her head on BoJack's shoulder, commenting that “[she] wants to be an architect” (“That's Too Much, Man!” 24:55 - 24:59). Importantly, this is a repetition of the exact same statement that Sarah Lynn made to her mother when she was a child as seen previously in the series. At this moment, the night show’s narrator says that “[their] lives are but the briefest flashes in a universe that is billions of years old” (“That's Too Much, Man!” 25:02 - 25:09). BoJack supplements these thoughts by reassuring Sarah Lynn that there is nothing to worry simply because of the fact that it does not matter what you have done in the past or how one will be remembered. He utilizes this nihilistic perspective to emphasize that all that matters is the fact that they are sharing this precious moment with each other. When asking Sarah Lynn if she agrees, this time she does not respond and ends up never responding. This episode ends with this scene where BoJack is nudging Sarah Lynn and saying her name multiple times as he goes “Sarah Lynn? ... Sarah Lynn?” (“That's Too Much, Man!” 25:31 - 25:36). It is at this moment where it is made clear that Sarah Lynn will never be responsive again as she has obviously overdosed on the heroin that she and BoJack took. This instance of Sarah Lynn’s death

provides a poignant and one of the most heartbreaking moments in the entire show since BoJack's have now had irreparable damage on someone else's life - death. No apology nor gesture could ever compensate for the ultimate price that someone, Sarah Lynn, had to pay for BoJack's reckless and self-destructive behavior. Although BoJack and Sarah Lynn have been together this entire journey throughout their Hollywood careers, instead of being the role model and father figure that Sarah Lynn needs, BoJack plays on her most self-destructive habits. As seen in this tragic episode, Sarah Lynn's overdose on a drug literally named 'BoJack' signifies the ways in which BoJack legitimately becomes the death of Sarah Lynn. BoJack curated his entire life as a performance of the version of someone that he thought he was. Although it is later explored about the way in which BoJack's mother instilled a need to perform in BoJack from a very young age, it does not excuse the fact that not only has BoJack internalized this mentality himself, but he also managed to pass this mentality down onto Sarah Lynn. While this may have been unconscious, on some level, BoJack was looking for a partner in his misery, and with Sarah Lynn, he managed to create one. However, in this moment of Sarah Lynn's death, BoJack must face the emotional consequences of his actions that led to Sarah Lynn's death. In turn, not only does Season Three end on this grim note, but it also begs the question of how will BoJack handle paying the ultimate cost for his selfish, reckless behavior? Does this incident provide a moment of reckoning for BoJack? Many addicts in recovery often speak about the ways in which they hit 'rock bottom,' and this moment asks whether or not hitting 'rock bottom' so to speak actually brings about any change for people in their life, or does one simply continue to escape the consequences, especially someone of privileged status as BoJack?

## Season Four: Time & Generational Trauma

Approaching Season 4, it becomes immediately evident that there is a shift in the character of BoJack and the television series as a whole; it is a moment of reckoning - both for BoJack and for the audience. After witnessing Sarah Lynn's jarring and horrific death, we find ourselves at a crucible moment for the show. The question coming into Season 4 remains: will BoJack be able to cope with his involvement in Sarah Lynn's death? We find ourselves having to wrestle with the last drop of empathy that we may have for BoJack in the series, and this season in particular probes us to look at whether we can find ourselves within BoJack. Particular episodes of Season 4 that I will be highlighting in this section include: 'The Old Sugarman Place' (episode 2), 'Stupid Piece of S\*\*\*' (episode 6), and 'Time's Arrow' (episode 11). Not only do these episodes remind us of the brutal, but realistic, consequences of a 'serialized' life, Season Four's narrative elements complicate our understanding and empathy of BoJack and his mother, Beatrice.

At the beginning of Season Four, the focus of *BoJack Horseman* shifts to the life story of Mr. PeanutButter and how he became the successful person that we see in the present day. With his accidental claim to fame and almost no-hassle road-to-success, we find ourselves presented with the very traditional, sappy formula of 'things working out and resolving themselves' that is often found in entertainment, particularly in sitcoms. Arguably, this irony is elevated when it is realized that in spite of physically being a dog himself, Mr. PeanutButter ironically embodies the 'underdog' success story that the show works to undermine as unrealistic. The introduction of this episode as the beginning of Season Four allows us to see why *BoJack Horseman* works so tirelessly to undo and complicate. The reason for this lies in realism; while many of us envy Mr. PeanutButter's optimistic and positive outlook without having to sacrifice anything, *BoJack Horseman* utilizes this episode as a reminder that this understanding of hard work and success does not manifest itself in this manner in

the real world. Realistically, life is about consistently investing your time and energy to ultimately triumph to prove that hard work actually does pay off but without compromise or personal growth and change. The episode frustrates us because we are aware that Mr. PeanutButter's life is not representative of reality while simultaneously sometimes wanting it to be, and this is where we find ourselves relating to the story of this episode.

Since Episode One is specifically focused on the supposed foil of the series Mr. PeanutButter, Episode 2 'The Old Sugarman Place' is a stark juxtaposition to Episode One. As we see BoJack for the first time this season, we are thrown back into the 'real' world, or perhaps more appropriately deemed 'reality,' since the end of Sarah Lynn's death as the serial nature of the show once again reminds us that reality exists in a world where there are consequences for our actions. In fact, we find BoJack running away from these consequences and heading out to his old family lake house in Michigan where he takes it upon himself to fix the place up. This moment in Episode Two immediately sets up the scene for the rest of the episode, and arguably, the rest of the season. Instead of facing his guilt, BoJack refuses to address the reality of Sarah Lynn's death, neglects phone calls from his close friend Diane, and drives to Michigan. Ironically, his physical distance from LA to Michigan parallels his attempt to emotionally distance himself from the guilt of his involvement with Sarah Lynn's death, further exacerbating his emotional pain and trauma. Episode Two serves to highlight that the sugarcoated version of life exhibited in Episode One does not exist; from the very beginning of Episode Two, the show works to debunk any notion that personal growth can be attained without serious self-reflection and hard work - an idea that pervades the portrayal of Mr. PeanutButter in Episode One.

Upon arrival at the 'Old Sugarman Place,' we are introduced to a unique episode structure where the location reminds central, but the plot flips back and forth between BoJack in the present-day and Beatrice experiencing the momentarily bliss alongside the deep-rooted trauma

during the summers of the 1940s. Beatrice's subplot serves as a quintessential flashback B-plot as this episode is the first attempt made to evoke empathy for the character of Beatrice. It is important to note that she is the one recalling and remembering these memories; for the first time, the show provides us with space to more deeply explore the character of Beatrice apart from the one-dimensional villainous character that BoJack, and up until now the viewer, sees her as. Two storylines that are 70 years apart in one episode sets the stage to give vital context of some of the traumas that plague BoJack's family and how this trauma has permeated and affected their family for generations.

The intertwining of this story begins with Crackerjack, Beatrice's brother, and Honey, Beatrice's father, singing, laughing, and playing the piano. It is important to recognize that this is one of the only happy, and seemingly 'normal,' memories that we see of Beatrice's childhood. During Crackerjack and Honey's duet, Beatrice's father, Joseph, cuts them off by saying "time's arrow neither stands still nor reverses. It merely marches forward" ("The Old Sugarman Place" 5:20 - 5:25). Time's arrow is the concept epitomised by an arrow to symbolize the concept proposing the 'one-way direction' or 'asymmetry' of time. The statement about this 'time's arrow' alludes to this concept of time that is explored throughout the season that eventually culminated in Episode Eleven itself, which is called 'Time's Arrow.' Furthermore, this quote complements the song lyrics of the duet as those lyrics were about remembering about the times that have passed and remembering those you have loved. This moment eerily haunts the rest of the episode as Crackerjack is killed in World War II, and Honey slowly slips into hysteria as she is never given any real opportunity to deal with her pain and trauma of losing her son. In this scene, Honey actually responds with an equally haunting response that also foreshadows her future when she says, "...but I've got half a mind to kiss you with that smart mouth" to which Joseph responds, "Well, that half you can keep," foreshadowing Joseph's 'solution' to Honey's hysteria - a lobotomy ("The Old Sugarman Place" 6:06

- 6:11). Therefore, this moment of Joseph's interruption of the duet foreshadows how later in the episode, he physically removes Honey's ability to cherish the memory of those that have loved and lost through her lobotomy.

While these stories do eventually simultaneously occur on screen near the end of the episode, the inclusion of Beatrice's story seems to point to a more abstract notion about the way that each of the characters, and ourselves, experience life. It highlights the fact that we all see ourselves as the heroes and main characters of our stories; inherently, that can blind us to the experiences of others until we actively listen and to those stories in an attempt to emphasize the trials and struggles of others. This episode emphasizes the importance of a viewer becoming a companion of a story, creating space for that story to breathe and share its details. *BoJack Horseman* has now added another person's story for the viewer to engage with, and this inclusion of Beatrice's humanity and personhood relates to the viewer as we are finally granted a glimpse into traumatic moments of Beatrice's childhood. While the show makes no comment about whether this *justifies* Beatrice's abhorrent treatment of BoJack, the existence of Episode Two and later Episode Eleven, emphasize the importance of viewing characters as well as people as neither 'good' nor 'bad.' Instead of painting characters as heroes and villains, *BoJack Horseman* offers a more complex, multidimensional, and possibly more realistic portrayal of what it means to grapple with one's trauma, familial issues, and grief as well as how that affects the people around us.

The location of the 'Old Sugarman Place' also serves as a reminder of the themes of Episode Two and sets the tone for the rest of Season Four. Upon arrival, BoJack sees the extreme deterioration of this lake house, also known as 'The Old Sugarman Place,' and attempts to fix the place up. At first glance, it seems as BoJack is seriously pursuing himself towards a project; however, throughout the episode, BoJack only tackles small aspects of the house's state and never attempts to fix its larger, pervasive structural issues. The little tasks BoJack gives himself are small distractions

from the larger issues, which can be seen in both trying to fix the house and dealing with his own grief; however, none of these solve either of the larger underlying, chronic issues at hand - the crumbling house foundation and BoJack's approach and coping mechanisms to his mental illness and addiction. In fact, every attempt he makes to fix one small problem of the house, another part of the house ironically breaks and manages to cause more damage than there originally was beforehand. As the episode progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that the show utilizes 'The Old Sugarman Place' as a metaphor for BoJack himself. This symbolism represents two main ideas: 1) how BoJack must reconcile with the consequences of his actions and seriously address reckon with his deep-rooted personal flaws in order to experience any form of meaningful self-growth and 2) how the neglect and suppression of generational trauma (as well as mental illness and addiction) pervade throughout families, becoming particularly dangerous when left unaddressed. Unfortunately, BoJack has neither the tools nor the knowledge to fix the house at its root causes and finds himself similarly lost in how to approach healing the trauma in himself.

Just as 'The Old Sugarman Place' represents how foundationally broken BoJack is at this moment, it also symbolizes how deep-rooted and generational BoJack's issues are, providing the viewer space to connect and empathize with BoJack. Just as Beatrice's mother was never allowed the space to deal and process her own grief, we unfortunately witness a moment where BoJack forces himself to deal with his own grief by watching the mini-series about Sarah Lynn's death and legacy. Interestingly, while BoJack is intensely grieving in this moment on the right side of the living room of 'The Old Sugarman Place,' simultaneously, we witness Honey attempting to process the death of Crackerjack upon finding his childhood blanket. The dialogue in the mini-series perfectly parallels the dialogue between Joseph and Honey, evoking an eerie sense of trauma that both BoJack and Beatrice, respectively, had to undergo in their lives. This jarring decision to simultaneous present scenes from both the past and the present emphasizes that Beatrice experienced childhood trauma

just as BoJack has experienced it as well, and these formative experiences end up highlighting the importance of serialization in this show; its purpose allows *BoJack Horseman* to subvert sitcom comedies with their episodic plotlines in order to more realistically and effectively portray the nature of chronic mental illness and substance abuse issues not alongside generational trauma.

This episode points to a necessary personal reckoning that must occur in order for BoJack to be able to move forward with himself and as we later see, prevent passing down the wreckage and burden of his familial trauma to his half-sister Hollyhock. Episode Two provides a monumental message for the audience as Season Four begins: similarly, to the 'Old Sugarman Place,' BoJack will not be able to meaningfully grow as a person if he does not confront the deep-rooted, 'structural' issues within himself. In the end, BoJack deals with the structural issues of 'The Old Sugarman Place' by simply demolishing the house in its entirety along with all of the huge modifications and structural changes that he did eventually make to the home. Through his eventual physical representation of tearing down 'The Old Sugarman Place', this possibly hints that BoJack has either not truly dealt with the trauma and grief surrounding Sarah Lynn's death or that he has self-sabotaged himself yet again and regressed in his progress. This ambiguity probes the question of what this means for BoJack as he travels back to LA where he will be forced to confront himself, the people around him, and the consequences of his actions, alluding to the future of BoJack's nonlinear path towards self-development and progress.

As BoJack continues throughout Season Four, he returns to Hollywood where he must somehow resume his normal life even after everything that has happened. Again, these episodes continue to strictly follow this serialized format that we find more accurately mimics the reality of the consequences that we face in our own lives. This idea of consequences is explored as BoJack convinces himself that he is able to return back to normalcy, but in multiple instances throughout Season Four, we find BoJack in a state of despair because he has not truly done the hard work of



self-reflection nor has he addressed his guilt in regards to her involvement with Sarah Lynn's death. Therefore, he has arguably not made any real progress towards betterment; instead, he wants to believe that he is a better person without pursuing any of the work it takes for that to become reality. Again, BoJack's refusal to work on himself is the show's commentary on why sitcoms and episodic shows at-large are not accurate or real measurements of reality. For example, BoJack finds himself thinking that he has accepted his role in Sara Lynn's death; however, throughout many episodes of this season, BoJack experiences panic attacks, flashbacks, etc. - examples of ways people are affected by traumatic experiences. In particular, there is a two minute clip in Episode Six titled 'Stupid Piece of S\*\*\*' where the viewer gets an inside look at BoJack's self-hatred as he berates himself nonstop for his choices and actions. This two minute and twelve second inner monologue at the beginning of the episode provides the viewer with a true look at what BoJack's clinical depression looks like for the first time in the show. This inner monologue has dialogue that truly depicts how deep-rooted and ingrained this sense of self-hatred is in the way BoJack views himself. Particularly, at the beginning of the clip, his internal monologue says "Oh, I don't deserve breakfast. Shut up! Don't feel sorry for yourself. What does that do?" ("Stupid Piece of Sh\*t" 1:15 - 1:20). This moment of inner dialogue displays parts of BoJack that we have simply not had access to until now. This 'little voice' that resides in BoJack's head clearly becomes the representation of BoJack's clinical depression. It is only through this inner voice that we are able to understand the way BoJack sees himself in a way never explored on the show until this point. The 'little voice' in your head bearing and insulting you can be an experience that many people relate to even if it is not to the extent that BoJack experiences it. If anything, this inner monologue emphasizes that BoJack's depression can be represented by an extreme version of the 'little voice' in your head where nothing you ever do is good enough as you will remain to be 'garbage' as BoJack tells himself. However, it does provide a moment of relatability

for BoJack as the viewer finds themselves pitying BoJack's sense of self, possibly even a moment of empathy, compassion, and/or companionship that they can find with his story.

One final note about the importance of 'Stupid Piece of S\*\*\*,' this episode reminds the viewer about why the animation provides the best medium for expressing many facts about mental illness. During this two minute inner monologue, we are given access to the visual images in BoJack's head that are constructed around his version of how he sees himself. The visuals embody it all: the sharp jagged lines for all of the characters, the exaggerated, almost manic portrayals of all of the characters, and the background fuzz that both represents the unreliability of our own minds and its thoughts, and later, the disorientation of an intoxicated BoJack. One particularly important example is a moment where BoJack positions himself as being the subject by more than ten pairs of abnormally large, judgemental eyes. This represents how much BoJack criticizes himself in everything he does and provides the viewer with a relatable portrayal of how BoJack depression, mania, and anxiety distort your perspective. The use of this visual exaggeration of BoJack's thoughts to represent his mania could have not been executed in live-action form; while this may not explain or corroborate why the entire show is animated, it does highlight the unique utility of animation as a narrative element for storytelling. We all distort our realities and ultimately, animation contains the tools to allow us to explore how one would display that distorted reality to another person. Therefore, Episode 6 demonstrates that animation is uniquely positioned to fairly represent BoJack's version of reality and how his mental illnesses manifest with that reality as well.

Lastly, Season Four's most important episode is Episode 11: 'Time's Arrow.' Not only does this episode shed light on Beatrice's background and cultivates some semblance of empathy for her as a character, but it also breaks down the element of time in order to emphasize the ways in which trauma has everlasting, generational effects for years to come. For example, the important moments of her life are often shown out of order with the scenes being cut halfway through time after time;

sometimes even the reality of where she is right now with her BoJack sneak in and make an appearance in these memories. By focusing on all of the important moments in Beatrice's life, this episode manages to garner empathy for arguably one of the cruelest and most antagonistic characters on the show. One of the most important narrative elements of this episode lies in the unreliable narrator since this episode is told from the point of view of Beatrice's dementia, serving as an incredibly powerful and compelling framing device for this episode. Interestingly enough, the most important details of these moments are very clear while the secondary, unimportant details are not; for example, more often than not, the faces of the background characters are indistinguishable, representing the fact that they were not important to Beatrice whatsoever as they remain faceless. On the other hand, depending on Beatrice's perception of events at the time, some of the event details are exaggerated; for example, the diving board ladder is extraordinarily high up because of the fact that at the time, young Beatrice saw the diving board as being extremely high off of the ground in relation to her own height as this is how the ladder *felt* to Beatrice at the time. In this way, "her reeling mind is adjusting to her own memories to the reality of those emotions and fears," providing an interesting, yet unreliable, way to tell a story (2 Cellos 01:14-01:19) . Hence, the audience is unable to be certain about the reality of these events and the way that they truly played out since they only have Beatrice's skewed point of view; her recollection cannot be fully trusted, so the presentation of these events may not be fully accurate. Despite this fact, regardless of the fact that these portrayed memories might be altered or changed based off of Beatrice's understanding of these experiences, the important thing is that this is how she does, in fact, remember these events occurring, leading to the audience understanding the ways in which Beatrice herself has interpreted these events to feel the way that she does about them. Ultimately, this influences the way that these events affected Beatrice and provides a foundation for how she constructed her own worldview, which the audience knows she imposed and projected on BoJack.

'Time's Arrow' provides a great continuation of the backstory that the audience receives a glimpse from in Season Two: Episode Two - 'The Old Sugarman Place,' arguably acting as the sequel to that episode. It's important to consider the events of that episode to understand the ways in which Beatrice's life was set up - another reason necessitating the use of serialization in order to understand the overarching development of various character arcs, including Beatrice. At the beginning of Beatrice's character trajectory, the audience remembers the events of Beatrice's mother from when Beatrice was simply a child shown in 'The Old Sugarman Place.' Her mother's lobotomy forever shaped Beatrice's development and the relationships that she had with those around her, particularly her own incredibly abusive father. Although Beatrice began her childhood with two healthy, loving relationships from her brother and mother, she lost both of them - Crackerjack to the war and her mother to her grief that resulted in a lobotomy. Therefore, Beatrice was only left with one familial relationship, and that was with her toxic, problematic father whose relationship with Beatrice grew antagonistic over time as seen throughout this episode. These events shaped Beatrice as her own mother asked her to promise that she would "...promise me you'll never love anyone as much as [she] loved Crackerjack," inevitably shaping Beatrice's ability to love others, particularly her own son, BoJack ("The Old Sugarman Place" 24:00 - 24:05). In order to follow her mother's advice that had been imprinted onto her due to the traumatic nature of events, this piece of advice led to Beatrice's general disdain of BoJack his entire life, "leading BoJack to seek out that validation elsewhere like in comedy" (2 Cellos 9:44-9:49). By watching her mother grieve alongside her father's thoughts poisoning her mind, this major life event helped Beatrice associate love of any kind, especially towards a child, with grief and suffering, which easily translated into her later relationships with both her husband and BoJack. Later, throughout this episode, Beatrice pushes this general disdain for her own motherhood onto Henrietta, and later on Hollyhock, representing a way that generational trauma manifested itself through the theme of motherhood during this season.

As the audience witnesses Beatrice grow older throughout the episode, one particular moment of irony stands out. When Beatrice's father forces her to give her most probable suitor another chance, Beatrice does so out of obligation even though she has already been attracted to and spent the night with Butterscotch, BoJack's father. Initially, she believed that anyone her father wanted her to be with would be someone who would simply be an extension of him - rude, misogynistic, and abusive. However, after getting to know this suitor, she quickly realizes that they have a lot more in common than she realized as they both feel like they have been forced to live up to their father's demands and expectations. This moment would have been a perfect ending for Beatrice, but she ends up throwing up all over this suitor, alluding to the fact that she is now pregnant with her and Butterscotch's child, BoJack. By not allowing Beatrice to have had a perfect ending, the creators undermine a traditional 'happily ever after' ending in favor of a more tragic and ironic telling of Beatrice's life story. This element of Beatrice's life reinforces the notion that real life does not always work out the way in which people intend or want it to. This focuses on a big theme of the series that centers on being able to deal with the horrible things that happen to everyone in life simply because of the fact that they are inevitable. Overall, this particular life moment for Beatrice re-emphasizes the ways in which life gets complicated and how storybook endings simply don't exist and reflect real life stories.

## Season Five: Deconstruction of Traditional Narrative Structures

As the show progresses to Season 5, this season finds BoJack attempting to convince himself and those around him that he is working to improve himself as he said he would. The entirety of this season focuses on accountability, and how BoJack's attempt at self-improvement is blocked by impassable, and arguably unforgivable, roadblocks. Here is where we find a simultaneous emphasis on improvement and the difficulties that come with it. Season 5 of *BoJack Horseman* seeks to focus on the notion that self-improvement and progress are not linear journeys that we take even though they might have been portrayed to us in that way in many traditional sitcom shows, particularly those following an episodic format. This notion of breaking cyclical and generational behavior comes to the true test within this season as the audience witnesses whether or not BoJack will change for the better. The particular episodes that I will be focusing on for this season are: Episode 1: 'The Light Bulb Scene,' Episode 6: 'Free Churro,' Episode 11: 'The Showstopper,' and Episode 12: 'The Stopped Show.' These episodes fundamentally highlight BoJack's struggle with self-improvement, ultimately leading to his lowest point in the entire series.

As Season 5 begins with Episode 1: 'The Light Bulb Scene,' BoJack is found signing a contract to be a star on a new original series called *Philbert*, honoring a promise he made to Princess Carolyn. This surprising dedication and fulfillment of his promise to his dear friend and publicist is a shock to audiences who are so accustomed to BoJack's horrible behavior to his friends. It's a moment of questioning for the audience: Has BoJack really changed? Is this the redemption arc that people are looking for? Quickly, into this season, it becomes clear that again, BoJack will not receive the classic redemption arc that is so commonly found in stories. This first episode of Season 5 begins with this new show *Philbert*, bringing a physical, and later emotional, proximity of television's impact into BoJack's life. *Philbert* is a new detective drama that BoJack stars in that begins to

physically blur the line between television and reality for BoJack. Not only is the physical environment of the *Philbert* set an exact copy of one of the rooms in BoJack's own home, but the character Philbert himself is also a drunk, narcissistic antihero similar to BoJack. As early as the first episode, BoJack starts to notice and immediately becomes uncomfortable with the amount of similarities between himself and the character of Philbert. Initially, clear lines are drawn by BoJack about who BoJack is and who Philbert is; however, as seen throughout Season 5, BoJack's inability to separate himself from a television character, and their respective life, becomes the reason for his downfall at the end of Season 5. BoJack's dissonance between who he himself is and how much Philbert reminds him of himself is important to the show's realistic portrayal in ensuring that "it doesn't become the very thing it satirizes" as both *Philbert* and *BoJack Horseman* are fraught with the issue of representing and normalizing behavior of problematic men (Travers). The creators of *BoJack Horseman* aggressively reinforce this notion: something separates BoJack from a series about men doing bad things for reasons appealing to audiences for the wrong reasons. *BoJack Horseman* continuously pushes the limit of the audience's perception of BoJack. Episode 1 provides a strong foundation for the rest of Season 5 simply because it sets the stage of what seems to be BoJack's moment of growth and/or redemption. After Season 4, a collection of episodes fraught with portrayals of the severe consequences of mental illness and explicit generational and childhood trauma, the audience is situated in a position to forgive BoJack, or at the very least, give him grace and kindness throughout his journey towards a life that is better. However, Episode 1: 'The Light Bulb' reminds the audience that the audience themselves may have incongruities between what they believe BoJack's story will be vs. the way BoJack will actually decide to live the rest of his life. To place the audience in the way directly allows for the audience to experience one of the most important thematic elements of the show: the idea of illusion about life, illness, trauma, etc. that is sold on television screens through many sitcoms airing right now. Not only does this episode warn

the audience about their preemptive forgiveness of BoJack's actions and past mistakes, but the audience manages to also utilize this episode to criticize shows that do normalize this destructive behavior, especially from men. Through this commentary, the show keeps the audience accountable about how they view BoJack while *BoJack Horseman* is also held accountable to outline the dangers of normalizing bad behavior instead of condoning it to prevent them from participating in the very thing that they satirize.

Furthermore, the next important episode in Season 5, and arguably one of the most important episodes in the entire series, is Episode 6: 'Free Churro,' where BoJack gives his mother's eulogy at what he believes to be her funeral only to realize at the end of the episode that it is not, in fact, her funeral. While the dark humor around this episode does make it stand out from the traditional redemption arc path of character development, this episode provides some greater insight on how BoJack has processed his childhood trauma and how it has manifested itself in his own life. BoJack discusses in detail how his unresolved anger and lack of closure is simply a manifestation of an unfulfilling childhood - emotionally, physically, and mentally. BoJack tells a story about how he received a free churro, a direct reference to the title of this episode, at a Jack-in-the-Box because he told the cashier that his mother had passed. He states that "My mom died, and all I got was this free churro. You know the shittiest thing about all of this? It's when that stranger behind the counter gave me that free churro, that small act of kindness showed more compassion than my mother gave me her entire goddamn life. Like, how hard is it to do something nice for a person? This woman at the Jack in the Box didn't even know me. I'm your son. All I had was you!" ("Free Churro" 22:07-22:36). This moment of intimate clarity and unrestricted emotion from BoJack deeply resonates with the audience as it strengthens the idea that so much of the reason that BoJack is the way he is lies with the fact that he was a survivor of deep-rooted, generational childhood abuse, providing a foundation for which his alcoholism and mental illness built on. The reason that the



inclusion of these small, personal details proves to be so important is that it is very dialogue that allows the audience to begin to humanize and empathize with BoJack himself. Despite all of the horrible mistakes he has made, this monologue eulogy allows for BoJack to emotionally connect with the audience. The importance of this cannot be overstated as this is arguably the most personal and straightforward BoJack is about his feelings, and the worst part is that he is not even able to say it to the close friends and peers in his life, those who benefit to hear this from him the most, because he is simply at the wrong funeral - another testament to his ironic self-absorption.

Next, as mentioned beforehand, one of the cruelest jokes played in the entire series will be that this 20 minute monologue of BoJack's is probably the most real and intimate that the audience ever sees him with his own feelings about himself, his childhood, and his parents, particularly his mother. Nevertheless, all of the people in his life who would have needed to hear that raw truth and intimacy from him were not even there simply because he was at the wrong funeral. This dark comedic moment only reinforces what the audience knows about BoJack; he is self-absorbed and narcissistic, so much so that it took him a full 20 minutes to realize that he was at the wrong funeral. What becomes important, and arguably revolutionary, about this episode is that it seeks to humanize BoJack without excusing his behavior. It provides a nuanced perspective on his own life while still holding him to suffer the consequences of his actions. It prevents putting BoJack on a pedestal for a quick glimmer of redemption, and instead, seeks to complicate the way that the audience, and *not* his friends and peers, sees him.

By providing BoJack with this nonlinear structure and character development, the show seeks to break the stereotypes and illusions found in sitcom shows. Since BoJack grew up on sitcoms, he is constantly utilizing the unrealistic depictions of life found in many of these shows as the foundation and way that he lives his life, once again reinforcing BoJack's inability to distinguish between television and reality. Over and over, BoJack finds himself making grand gestures to

compensate for the destruction and damage that he wreaks upon others instead of being the dependable person that he should be. In his speech, BoJack explicitly explains that “When you’re a kid, you convince yourself that maybe the grand gesture could be enough. That even though your parents aren’t what you need them to be, over and over and over again, at any moment they might surprise you, with something... wonderful. I kept waiting for that, the proof, that even though my mother was a hard woman, deep down, she loved me and cared about me and wanted me to know that I made her life a little bit brighter. Even now, I find myself waiting” (“Free Churro” 09:02 - 09:30). This quote demonstrates that not only was this an ideal that BoJack used to guide his own life, but it was an ideal that he held his own mother to as well - an ideal that shattered once his mother had passed away since the opportunity for his mother to be more than she was had disappeared. BoJack’s wishful expectations of his mother parallel the audience’s unrealistic expectations for BoJack to suddenly become a better person (as is seen far too often on television). This complicated structure pushes the audience to see BoJack for who he is - incredibly damaged and flawed as well as a survivor of his own suffering. This more refined, nuanced portrayal of BoJack resonates with the audience more because of its ability to provide a realistic, more comprehensive/holistic view of who BoJack is as a person. *BoJack Horseman* comfortably exists in the place between good and bad, allowing ambiguity about the judgments that exist about others to be less judgmental and more complicated.

Furthermore, this humanization of BoJack allows him to express his feelings while also being held accountable for his actions; the show continuously portrays BoJack as someone worthy of empathy but does not allow that to be used as a scapegoat for his past mistakes and actions. While BoJack explains his childlike desire for approval, love, and attention from his mother, the authors also place a cruel moment of irony in this episode that highlights BoJack’s similarly flawed character as he discusses his mother’s cruelty. BoJack explains that, “my mother is dead, and everything is

worse now” (“Free Churro” 23:37-23:51). Because now I know I will never have a mother who looks at me from across a room and says, “BoJack Horseman, I see you.” The words that are particularly important here are ‘I see you’ as these are the last words that both BoJack and the audience see BoJack’s mother, Beatrice, say when she is in the hospital. While BoJack ruminates over the meaning of these words and why Beatrice chose to use them when she did, it comes to his attention that he may be overanalyzing these words for nothing. In a moment of existential irony, BoJack says, “I-C-U. I...see...you... Jesus Christ, we were in the Intensive Care Unit. She was just reading a sign” (“Free Churro” 21:52-22:06). This sorrowful moment makes both BoJack and the audience realize that Beatrice may have simply been uttering the location of where they were both at the time. Again, this reinforces the notion that in many ways, BoJack is just as self-obsessed and unaware of the people and things around him as his mother Beatrice. Likewise, due to this jarring use of irony within the dialogue, the audience is put into a position where they also simultaneously realize that they too could be as self-absorbed and unaware of the people and things around them in their own lives as BoJack - a terrifying thought that ironically brings the audience closer to BoJack. Upon this dreadful realization, the audience realizes that in that moment during this episode, the audience is put into the shoes of BoJack; even if just for a split second, he becomes the character that they are able to relate to the most. Here, it becomes evident that both the audience and BoJack were placed into the same vantage point in order to humanize BoJack. This placement allows the audience to realize that they are very similar to BoJack in more ways than they might like to admit, and they might be too self-focused to think that anything otherwise could have happened just like BoJack; the audience too attempts to extrapolate something/meaning from nothing in so many aspects of their lives, and the audience might be too self-conscious to think otherwise that something else could be the reason why. Feeling the disappointment that BoJack felt during the moment of realization allowed the audience to empathize with BoJack’s situation. Prescribing the

same perspective to both the audience and BoJack strengthens the show's ability to have people relate to BoJack because they can now see themselves in him; we become BoJack. Therefore, not only does this tragic moment cause BoJack to reevaluate how he has been thinking about himself in relation to others, but it also causes the audience to see themselves in BoJack, a key aspect of building empathy and relatability for BoJack.

BoJack's attempt towards betterment quickly turns into disarray, particularly in Episode 11: 'The Showstopper.' BoJack's vices begin to catch up with him all too quickly, and he begins to spiral as his drug problem gets worse and worse. BoJack continues to work on *Philbert* with his co-star, and also now girlfriend, Gina. For a large majority of this episode, BoJack is high on pills; in fact, as Season 5 progresses, BoJack's drug addiction has gotten progressively worse. His inability to recognize when he's high and when he's sober is mirrored by his growing inability to distinguish between himself and Philbert as well; role and reality become one for BoJack. This episode is characterized by constant, back-and-forth scenes between reality and *Philbert* that it almost becomes hard to keep up with what is reality and what is television, exemplifying how BoJack feels in an existential manner and also a physical manner when he is high on his pills. As BoJack blurs the line between reality and television, he snaps. When he blacks out on overdosing his meds, he manages to choke Gina, assaulting her. When he is pulled off of Gina, there is a sequence where BoJack sees stairs leading up to a bright light - a metaphor for a moment of realization and clarity. As he reaches the top of the stairs, he finds himself looking up at a balloon of himself. This moment becomes a visual representation of BoJack's realization that what he thought were the stairs of heaven as an escape is actually simply just a big balloon of himself, highlighting that there really is no escape from who you really are. Here, the audience realizes that while BoJack's story of self-improvement is again hindered by roadblocks, BoJack participates in his own self-destruction time and time again because he refuses to take personal responsibility for his actions. While *BoJack Horseman* does provide visual

cues and dialogue to show that BoJack is suffering under his addiction, the show does not shy away from seriously challenging attempts that pose whether or not BoJack *is* actually any different from the character of Philbert, a symbolic portrayal of a famous toxic man of Hollywood who gets whatever he wants and is never held responsible for his actions. After BoJack's assault on Gina, BoJack and Philbert have blended into one maniacal criminal. Diane realizes and says "[she] made him more vulnerable, and that made him more likable, which makes for a better TV show. *Philbert* just makes it easier for dumb assholes to rationalize their behavior [they] can't put it out there" ("Head in the Clouds" 14:51 - 15:01). This one line of dialogue itself allows for the show to keep itself accountable by highlighting the dangers of normalizing bad behavior such as this. *BoJack Horseman* continuously and openly engages with these issues in order to state very clearly that the show does not normalize these behaviors; in fact, the entire premise of the show, and specifically Season 5, is to engage with this all too familiar stereotype of men getting off of the hook and go out of the way to show the drastic consequences of BoJack's behavior.

Finally, in the last episode of Season 5, Episode 12: "The Stopped Show," BoJack is required to face the consequences of his actions in a real, tangible way. At the end of this episode as well as at the end of Season 5, Diane helps BoJack check into a rehab facility. While it still remains difficult to separate BoJack from everything that he has done, one important distinction here about BoJack and the character he has been playing this entire time, Philbert, is that BoJack is making an honest effort toward self-improvement. Here, it is where the importance of serialization comes into play. Having a show such as *BoJack Horseman* be serialized allows for the show to keep BoJack accountable for his actions. Unlike the sitcom he performed on in the 90s, *Hosrin's Around*, BoJack's own life does not reset after a half hour. There are no grand gestures to be made to compensate for the pain that one causes others. Not only does serialization allow for accountability, but it truly does allow the show to portray BoJack's cyclical self-destructive nature, reinforced by his childhood trauma, mental illness,

and addiction. The chaos and consequences of BoJack's actions have been particularly highlighted by his assault on Gina. At the end of Season 5, the show attempts to differentiate BoJack from other destructive men in Hollywood by showing BoJack attempting to be better. More often than not, as BoJack has done many times himself, the same mistakes get repeated and there is a refusal to acknowledge mistakes when seeking forgiveness. While BoJack has been on the path to self-improvement before, "seeing the effort makes all the difference in being able to identify with his journey and empathize with his struggle" (Travers). Ultimately, this last episode and the entirety of Season 5 display the effects of the harmful, cyclical nature of addiction while simultaneously not allowing neither the audience nor BoJack forget that they are responsible for the harm that they cause others. By forcing BoJack to always remain accountable for his actions, the show reminds the audience mental illness and addiction do not exclude you from dealing with the consequences of actions that harm others, providing a comprehensive portrayal of how mental illness and addiction manifest in reality.

## Season Six: Redemption Arcs & Moving Forward

Season 6 begins with BoJack checking into a rehab facility where the audience finds him in one last attempt to make amends with himself and those around him. From a structural perspective, this is the only season of *BoJack Horseman* that does not consist of twelve episodes; instead, this season is split into two halves with eight episodes each, bringing the total to sixteen episodes. Additionally, Season Six is the only season where the intro does not depict BoJack drinking at all. In fact, in this season's title sequence, BoJack actually reacts to his surroundings around him. This distinction provides the possibility that BoJack is beginning to be more cognizant, and therefore notice, the events that are going on around him. Particularly, in this title sequence, this can be seen through his varied facial expressions in response to the environment that he is in. At the very least, this is different from previous seasons in which he was found with a more catatonic expression. This change from an expressionless to an emotional face denotes the possibility of some kind of change within BoJack from the kind of person that he was before Season Six began.

All that aside, again, Season Six's Part One begins with BoJack checking into rehab with the help of Diane as he searches to find healing from his past and desires to move forward with his life. Season Six - Episode One: 'Horse Walks Into Rehab' begins with a modified version of the intro. The intro's frame rate is significantly slower than usual, and the audio is distorted; after only about one second into the intro, the music slows down fully, and a film burn effect cuts the intro short, causing the episode to start immediately and what seems to be prematurely. This distorted intro indicates that this season provides a different reality and headspace for BoJack. Whereas in the previous seasons he has been following a traditional pattern of behavior, this deviation from the normal intro signals that Season Six represents a life-changing shift for BoJack in some way or another. BoJack begins this season and episode by checking in the Malibu rehab facility, Pastiches,

where he will explore and grapple with his memories of Sarah Lynn; additionally, this ends up bringing about his emotionally-linked memories between his first introductions to alcohol use, eventually finding a way to use alcohol as a coping mechanism throughout his own troubled childhood.

However, importantly, before this episode shows BoJack checking himself into rehab, the episode begins with a 2016 flashback where he recounts the circumstances surrounding Sarah Lynn's death. This is the audience's first glimpse of the activities that follow Sarah Lynn's death. In these following moments, BoJack lies to both Sarah Lynn's parents and to the police officer about how he found Sarah Lynn passed out and called 9-1-1, but it was simply too late. Here, BoJack allows Sarah Lynn's mother to wallow in her own guilt about how this occurred because she was a terrible mother, again shirking the responsibilities of his own actions. Furthermore, when being questioned by the police officer about where Sarah Lynn obtained the heroin from, BoJack emphasizes that he knows that she was doing drugs just as he was simply because that's just who they were as people ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 00:50-00:55). It becomes increasingly evident that BoJack feels an immense amount of guilt for the situation as he explains to the police officer about how both him and Sarah Lynn "thought [they] could party forever, and it wouldn't catch up with [them]" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 00:56-00:58). It is only within this scene that the audience really gets a moment of self-reflection from BoJack as he verbalizes that he was "in a bad way of life" that Sarah Lynn followed him down on simply because "she thought that he was a safe place" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 01:04 - 01:07). Although the audience witnesses BoJack questioning what he has done, the police officer has no further questions and allows BoJack to leave in peace. While BoJack vows to begin making changes to his life right now "starting right then," he then proceeds to consume all of the drugs and alcohol that fall out of his car when he opens it ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 01:15 - 01:17). This scene is particularly important because it highlights two important, recurring



concepts within the show about people such as BoJack. First, this instance highlights the ways in which insight does not correlate to change. It becomes obvious here that BoJack is, at the very least, self-aware enough to realize the longstanding damage that he is inflicting on others. However, here the creators are trying to emphasize how insight about one's problem does not equate to making changes to one's behavior; it could even be argued that knowing that one has an issue and refusing or avoiding taking actionable steps towards fixing that issue is even worse. By highlighting the limited scope of realization and self-reflection, the creators don't allow BoJack use insight as a scapegoat for Sarah Lynn's death. Secondly, the creators also comment on how easily BoJack is able to leave questioning simply because of his status as a wealthy, famous person. This commentary focuses on how BoJack's status makes him privy to particular privileges in the legal system that are not available to the majority of others. Not only is this a comment about how certain groups of society are able to get away with such drastic actions such as murder, but it also highlights the ways in which wealthy people, particularly men, have been able to avoid the consequences of their actions simply because of who they are and the automatic assumption of goodness that follows them and their reputation. Both of these ideas are important in understanding the ways in which BoJack, at least up until this point, has been able to avoid the public repercussions of dealing with Sarah Lynn's death as the first half of Season Six explores the ways in which he has to deal with the personal guilt of his actions, or his action moreover.

It is after this flashback of the aftermath of Sarah Lynn's death that the audience finds BoJack checking into Pastiche Malibu Rehabilitation Center in the present-day. It is important to note the name of this particular rehab center; a 'pastiche' is a work of visual art, literature, theatre, or music that imitates the style or character of the work of one or more other artists, and unlike a parody, pastiche celebrates, rather than mocks, the work it imitates. Giving the name 'Pastiche' to the rehab center that BoJack checks into signifies the way in which BoJack has focused his entire life

on imitating the television lives of those on episodic television shows, particularly sitcoms, as he believed that this is the way that he could achieve happiness in his own real life. However, in reality, this has culminated in BoJack simply trying to imitate television out of celebration without realizing that his representations of life from television are misconstrued versions of what life really looks like. Therefore, by imitating something that does not translate to the reality that BoJack and all of us exist in, this imitation misaligned itself in BoJack's life by convincing him, thus far, that he does not have to deal with the long-term consequences of his own actions. This escape from accountability that this imitation provides BoJack ruins his relationships with everyone, especially in the event of being responsible for Sarah Lynn's death. Hence, the fact that BoJack checks into a rehab facility named Pastiche becomes a dark and ironic moment for the show as BoJack has to finally face the realities of trying to live a life that is modelled off of a lie. After checking in, the audience witnesses BoJack severely struggling with withdrawal symptoms; it is only after he spots Sarah Lynn's selfie on the wall behind the check-in counter does he actually begin to put in the work to try to become and get better by participating in hikes, yoga, and group therapy.

The episode fast forwards to BoJack's private therapy session with the in-house therapist, Doctor Champ, where Champ questions BoJack about how he is feeling about leaving since his last day in rehab is the following day. While BoJack says that he is ready, Champ presses him on the subject, asking once again BoJack about whether or not he thinks that he is ready enough to go out into the real world where one must be accountable for one's actions. Although BoJack continues to reaffirm the fact that he is confident about going out into the real world and having responsibilities of his own, Champ points out the fact that BoJack has still refused to discuss the origin of his addictive behavior, more particularly the source of his alcoholism. He manages to explain the different ways that BoJack has made a habit of deflecting when it comes to discussing this topic, more specifically by using humor to do so. BoJack resorts to staging that "[he] came here [rehab] to

take responsibility for [himself], and all [he] keeps hearing is, ‘it’s not [his] fault, [he is] powerless over [his] his addiction.’—[He’s] here because [he] made choices. Nobody made [him] drink” (“A Horse Walks into a Rehab” 04:48 - 05:19). This moment of self-reflection allows the show to look back on the ways in which people, including the audience, have made excuses for BoJack because of his traumatic childhood or because of the biological ways alcoholism has changed and manipulated his brain chemistry. However, in this moment, it does seem evident that BoJack takes the other extreme position on the spectrum where he refuses to acknowledge the influence and impact of his traumatic childhood on his maladaptive coping skills. Here then Champ emphasizes that this aspect of acknowledging the past is one of the first steps in ‘overcoming’ addiction. It is important to highlight that even the language of ‘overcoming’ surrounding the nature of addiction downplays the chronic nature of mental illness at-large. Champ then attempts to further illustrate his point by repeating a so-called saying of the sober community that is: "we want what our addictions want us to want, in the same way that our future is just a house built from the materials of our present on the blueprint that is our past" (“A Horse Walks into a Rehab” 05:29 - 05:38). This moment is funny for the audience, and BoJack proceeds to point this out as well as he talks about how sayings “are supposed to illustrate complicated concepts through straightforward allegory...” and sarcastically comments on how Champ’s sayings “don’t do that” and how he likes that they don’t (“A Horse Walks into a Rehab” 05:39 - 05:45). BoJack continues to ramble and reiterate the fact that he wanted to check himself into rehab in order to make himself responsible for his own choices; again, the audience witnesses BoJack’s desire to be accountable for his actions and the consequences of those actions, but fail to see him actually take the public heat and criticism for those actions. While BoJack explains that nobody made him drink and that it was simply him alone who began drinking, he continues to invalidate his own experiences in order to avoid or deflect dealing with his traumatic

childhood, stunting his emotional growth and progress, and more importantly, it fails to show BoJack how he can grow from healing from that trauma.

Moreover, the next scene of importance within this episode lies during BoJack's painting class when Champ asks him "did you grow up in a home with a lot of art?" to which BoJack sarcastically retorts that "[his] parents practiced the art of being terrible parents" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 06:15 - 06:20). While the rest of the group laughs about another one of BoJack's jokes about his traumatic childhood, Champ stands his ground and expresses to BoJack once again that he simply cannot joke his way through this self-reflective process surrounding understanding the root of his addictions. When Champ proposes that BoJack be honest just like everyone else, BoJack challenges this claim by exclaiming that all of the other patients are lying just as well as him ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 06:26 - 07:25). For example, he points out how it's one of the residents' fifth time being in rehab because she has no grip on her life once she leaves rehab and how about how she has been perpetually lying about her mental state when she has been in rehab these past several times, and that there could be a possibility that maybe rehab just simply is not working in improving her life. He then further begs the questions saying "if [one] is checking into rehab more than once, either [one] is a lost cause or this is just an industry that profits off of repeat customers, so maybe they don't have [one's] best interest at heart" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 07:26 - 07:38). This is in reference to BoJack's earlier sarcastic retort when he was in conversation with the check-in staff about this place (in reference to the rehab facility) manages to "put a price on clean living" - the very thing that they claim not to do ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 01:52 - 01:53). This scene becomes a moment of reckoning where BoJack and these series as a whole where the series understands that BoJack's addiction is something that requires attention and treatment, but the systems of treatment available to people suffering from addiction are inaccessible to those without financial capabilities, bringing into questions about whether these treatment centers and systems are

not only trying to drain those suffering of money but create a cycle where they never really equip them with the tools to cope with their addictions and instead simply expend more money trying to, only benefiting these so-called treatment centers. By bringing this into question, the entire premise and logic of seeking and getting treated for addiction gets turned on its head and brought into question.

While the audience grapples with the utility and value of addiction treatment and the commentary specifically made by that comment of BoJack's, the show progresses to center BoJack's relationship with one of the other residents, Jameson. In group therapy, Jameson has expressed that she believes that it's her father who has led her to be drinking and now has and is dealing with an addiction, alcoholism. While BoJack tries to tell Jameson that it's not her father's fault that she has been drinking in rehab, Jameson protests by explaining that "her father just waiter for [her] to slip so he could ship [her] here sp [she] wouldn't embarrass him and ruin his new perfect family—" even though she claims that she was sober for most of the last year ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 08:12 - 08:17). In order to make a point about accountability, BoJack proceeds to explain to Jameson about how can easily escape rehab, detailing the method and the gate code; however, while BoJack does essentially provide Jameson with an escape plan out of rehab, his intention is simply only to explain this process to her in order to highlight his question to her about if leaving is truly what she really wants for herself just like Champ asks BoJack is leaving is truly what he really wants for himself as well earlier in the episode. By posing leaving rehab as a choice, not only is BoJack able to portray accountability as a choice that Jameson can make for herself, but also reiterates the way in which BoJack has autonomy about making this decision about whether to stay or leave rehab for himself as well.

While BoJack has now set the scene around the question of accountability surrounding his addiction and its source, the audience is brought into another flashback to 1994 on the set of *Horsin'*

*Around*. Here, Herb is giving BoJack advice about how to loosen up for his first on-screen kiss to get the desired reaction from the audience. In order to calm his nerves for the scene, Sharona, one of the hairstylists on *Horsin' Around*, offers BoJack a mixture of vodka and orange juice. While BoJack initially refuses this attempt to loosen his nerves, after Sharona's insisting, BoJack does drink this mixture and manages to successfully go back onstage to gain the reception from the kiss that Herb and the other producers were hoping to garner. In a moment of confidence, BoJack kisses the other character and actively flirts with her as he calls Sharona to bring him more of that 'orange juice.' This is one of the first moments to the audience's knowledge where they witness BoJack consuming alcohol. The important aspect of this flashback lies with the fact that BoJack associates his confident onstage performance with alcohol; it is this association that propels him to think the ways that alcohol gives him confidence and likability factor that he otherwise believes that he would not have. If the general public and audience like the on-screen intoxicated version of BoJack, or at least a version of BoJack who has drunk alcohol, then in BoJack's mind, why would he not continue to put on a performance for the general public about who and how he really is by staying intoxicated? Again, this reinforcing association between BoJack's confidence and alcohol alongside on-stage performing in general and alcohol provides the foundational knowledge thus far about why BoJack might be so emotionally and mentally attached to alcohol.

After this flashback, BoJack realizes that Jameson has escaped rehab and decides to follow her tracks because it is obvious that she used his advice and plan in order to escape. He finds her at a party at her boyfriend's house where he interacts with alcohol outside of rehab for the first time. Upon seeing alcohol, BoJack experiences an anxiety attack and ends up in the bathroom, flashing back to one of his old high school parties. In this old high school flashback, BoJack nervously knocks over some tapes as someone in the distance calls him a nerd. As he picks up these tapes, one of his classmates, Katie, manages to help him clean it up - just like every quintessential teen movie.

Afterwards, one of BoJack's other classmates offers him a friend, and in an attempt to look 'cool,' BoJack reluctantly accepts. It is after consuming this beer, and many more, that BoJack begins to loosen up; however, BoJack 'loosening up' seems to only translate into him making fun of and taking jabs at various classmates of his, including making Katie cry even though she just extended a hand of kindness to young BoJack when he was in need. Instead of apologizing, BoJack is inflated by this popularity and continues to drink more alcohol. This experience seems to clearly reiterate the idea that BoJack's intoxication of power and popularity seems to be directly related to his consumption of alcohol. Additionally, considering the fact that BoJack has always sought out fame and attention, it makes sense that he would continue to engage in activities that have shown and have a proven track record of providing and enhancing BoJack's fame, likability, and attention from others. This becomes the second experience that the audience witnesses that supports this connection that BoJack has made associating alcohol with his rise in popularity, fame, and liability.

After BoJack stabilizes from this anxiety attack and is brought back to the present from this flashback, he locates Jameson who has recently found out at the party that her boyfriend has been cheating on her with her best friend. While Jameson emphasizes that she needs to drink alcohol, BoJack reasons with her to say that she does not and what she needs to do is go back to rehab to sleep. However, Jameson refuses and instead, explains that she wants to go to her 'real home.' Again, in an attempt to convince Jameson to go back to rehab, BoJack explains that if she really wants to go back to her dad's home that she could just steal her now ex-boyfriend's car and go, but again, emphasizes and asks her if that is really what she wants. Although BoJack thought that Jameson would do the right thing and go back to rehab, she continues to follow her one-track mindset by stealing the car and heading home just as BoJack has detailed. At her father's house, Jameson elaborates on her previous sentiment of disdain towards her father to BoJack by explaining how he threw out all of her stuff from the room in order to turn it into a baby room. In a moment of anger,

Jameson takes her father's favorite baseball bat and almost nearly smashes his car with it. However, BoJack restrains her and explains that while "parents are terrible, destroying things isn't going to change things. All you can change is you" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 18:20 - 18:26). It is this sentiment that clicks in Jameson's mind as she realizes that BoJack is right and decides to go back to rehab with him. This 'adventure' with Jameson provides a different insight into BoJack because for the first time, BoJack is positioned as the caretaker of someone who is making bad decisions instead of the person making bad decisions themselves. This different vantage point and perspective on BoJack shows the audience a different side of him, but it also manages to depict the ways in which helping Jameson explore her familial issues is helping BoJack unpack, interact, and partially heal from his own childhood trauma as well. The way that BoJack helps Jameson deal with her family issues parallels the ways in which BoJack needs to deal with his own family issues, leading to his next flashback about an important past moment where he consumed alcohol.

This flashback is from when BoJack is ten years old, standing outside of his father's office to drop his dinner off since he is supposedly working late. As BoJack comes in, he walks in on his father and his father's secretary having sex. Once the secretary leaves, BoJack begins to ask his father questions about what he was doing. In an uncharacteristically nice manner, BoJack's father, Butterscotch, deflects the question and explains "how fun [it is] to have [BoJack] at the office" and how "[he] is really turning into a man" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 19:03 - 19:09). Hence, Butterscotch exclaims that he "thinks [BoJack] is old enough now to have a Jack and Coke" and toasts to "their first drink as father and son" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 19:09 - 19:20). Here, not only does BoJack proceed to drink from the glass, but the frame's transition consists of black holes burning to the other edges, usually significant of either a traumatic moment or BoJack blacking out in his childhood, and in this case, it's both. The next time the audience sees BoJack is waking up from what seems to be from BoJack blacking out in his father's car as they drive the way home from



his father's office. While BoJack is confused about whether he went to sleep and why he feels sick, Butterscotch explains that "he went a little wild.— [He] thinks [his] mother would be very disappointed in [him]" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 19:37 - 19:43). He then specifically says that "maybe it's best if [they] both just forgot about everything that happened tonight, okay buddy?" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 19:43 - 19:51). While the flashback ends, it becomes clear the importance of this flashback sequence for many reasons. First, it reiterates the narcissistic and manipulative nature of Butterscotch who got BoJack drunk to either get him to forget about the fact that he was cheating on his mother or to guilt BoJack so much about the drinking that BoJack would not dare to bring this instance up to his mother out of shame and fear. Either way, this proves to be an instance that clearly outlines how BoJack was only shown kindness from his father when his father wanted something out of him, a clear sign of childhood abuse and trauma. By having BoJack question his own sanity, Butterscotch gaslights BoJack into remaining quiet about his extramarital affair. By manipulating BoJack into doing what he wants, Butterscotch effectively trains BoJack into using alcohol as an escape from painful events and memories, in this case being seeing his father cheat on his mother. Butterscotch was only ever nice to BoJack after BoJack drank with him as a child and that created another association between alcohol and the feeling of love for BoJack. Essentially, this flashback provides another life-changing moment for BoJack's relationship with alcohol and what he associates it with.

From this flashback, BoJack seems to have an epiphany in the present day where he tells Jameson to "screw her father" while proceeding to smash her father's car ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 19:58 - 20:01). While damaging the car, he exclaims about how "[she was] just a kid. Why [does she] have to be responsible for all the ways he screwed [her] up?" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 20:04 - 20:09). While Jameson joins in and participates in destroying her father's car with BoJack, all of the noise surrounding this wakes her father up who comes out with the baby.

Immediately, Jameson lies to her father about how she didn't want to leave rehab, but BoJack made her. Before BoJack can explain himself, she exclaims that she will go wait in the car to be dropped off back at rehab. As BoJack begins to apologize, Jameson's father actually apologizes first for how Jameson has roped him into this mess, explaining how BoJack is not the first person to break his daughter out of rehab. Her father then begins to explain about how he "thought she [Jameson] would change after she had her baby," surprising both the BoJack and the audience since this whole time, they had been under the assumption that the baby had been her father's and not hers ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 21:17 - 21:21). BoJack attempts to make Jameson's father feel better by saying that "change is hard. Takes a long time" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 21:23 - 21:26). After a moment, Jameson's father asks BoJack about if Jameson wanted to see her boyfriend, and BoJack lies and says that she just wanted to see her baby. However, Jameson's father sees right through this lie expressing how "wouldn't that be nice" as the scene ends with the sound of a baby's voice ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 21:37 - 21:40). In this scene, BoJack's so-called epiphany led him to ask rashly and destructively to the things and people around him. His uncontrolled anger causes him to lash out on his inner child in response to thinking about the ways that his own parents traumatized him and projects this onto Jameson's seemingly similar situation. While his anger may be justified, especially after witnessing the flashback with his father, it does not excuse BoJack's errant and destructive behavior, especially considering how impressionable he is on Jameson at this moment in time. Furthermore, this scene also highlights how Jameson refused to take any accountability for her actions and instead lied her way through a situation, especially since she got away with it. Similarly, this is how BoJack had managed to get himself out of any bad situation in the past as well; the parallels between their behavior here is uncanny. Just as BoJack has been unreliable and destructive to his own personal relationships, Jameson's father also explains the ways in which Jameson has destroyed many of her personal relationships as well. Especially when the audience and BoJack

realize that Jameson had been lying and keeping secrets about the nature of whose baby was, it is this jarring moment that allows the audience to come to terms with the fact that this is exactly the behavior that BoJack participates in as well. Here, explaining the way that people like BoJack and Jameson should change and simply don't even after serious life-changing impetus to do so. Even when BoJack explains the difficult nature of change and how long it does to change as well, it becomes evident that even if changes happens for the individual person, it becomes emotionally and mentally taxing for the loved ones of that person; it highlights, and eventually foreshadows, BoJack's relationship with Hollyhock, his half-daughter by the end of the season by commenting on how not everyone in your life can wait for you to change because it simply weighs down on them like a burden. When BoJack attempts to make Jameson's father feel better about why Jameson escaped rehab in the first place, it allows the audience to realize the fact that people make excuses and hold onto hopes that they have for the destructive people in their life in the hopes that they will, one day, change for the better, which is another reason that holding on and out for someone to change becomes such a grueling and taxing process. While BoJack and Jameson make their way back to rehab, BoJack explains to her that "[she] has no idea how lucky [she] is. [He wishes he] had someone when [he was her] age who cared enough about [him] to put [him] in rehab" ("A Horse Walks into a Rehab" 22:00 - 22:05). BoJack's external self-reflection reveals his inner desire to have had someone in his life who cared enough about him to get him help much earlier in life than right now. As BoJack makes his way back up to his room, he looks at the vodka-filled water bottle, seeing the same galaxy of the planetarium from the night of SarahLynn's death within the water bottle. This recurring motif of the planetarium galaxy from thenight of Sarah Lynn's death not only symbolizes BoJack's guilt, but also signifies his residual flashbacks of that night due to that particular traumatic witnessing of her death. Throughout the entirety of this season, this planetarium galaxy motif

repeatedly comes up in moments where BoJack is confronted with dealing with his role in Lynn's death.

Lastly, this episode concludes with yet another childhood flashback of BoJack's, but in this one, he is only about six years old. In the background, it can be seen that BoJack's parents are passed out in the living room, presumably intoxicated, and the remnants of what seems to be BoJack's sixth birthday party seem to surround them. The audience sees six-year old BoJack grab a leftover bottle of vodka and take a drink of it himself, and then he follows to crawl into his mother's lap and proceeds to fall asleep. Not only does this flashback prove to be a poignant moment in the show as the audience realizes how young BoJack was when he started drinking, but it also provides clarity on what BoJack's association is with alcohol; his presumably first encounter with alcohol would have associated the warm, fuzzy feeling that alcohol causes with the feeling of safety and comfort that he would have felt from his mother, especially since his mother was only loving and comforting towards him when she was passed out from drinking too much. This depressing realization is supported by the transition out from this scene - another instance where the audience sees holes in the screen that then catch on fire and burn the entire screen away into a blackout. Again, this particular technical transition only seems to occur when something related to the origins of BoJack's alcoholism comes into play. This recurring motif reminds the audience of the ways that generational trauma and childhood experiences compound to create the circumstances that surround issues related to addiction and mental health; they are the reasons for the environmental conditions that reinforced BoJack's self-destructive behavior and habits. This entire episode focuses on the way that BoJack has chosen to ignore both his familial history alongside his childhood circumstances that cultivated an environment that encouraged him to drink alcohol as that was what was equated with love, safety, and comfort. As Doctor Champ continues to repeatedly ask BoJack about when his first drink, BoJack spends the entirety of this episode trying to distance himself from this question by

using humor to deflect from the topic. However, in parallel to this, there are a series of flashbacks throughout this episode that all feature a younger version of BoJack interacting with alcohol in a moment that largely defines his relationship with the substance. Each flashback seems to answer Doctor Champ's question about when BoJack started drinking to only end with an extraordinarily young BoJack drinking for the first time at six years old seen at the end of the episode. With the first flashback, alcohol becomes associated with likability, fame, and popularity for BoJack as it gives him the confidence to put on a performance and create this version of himself that he believes is more palatable to the public and for his on-screen character. This moment is important because it solidifies the connection between BoJack's desire to drink and his desire to continue putting on a performance for the public about the kind of person he truly is. Next, when BoJack tries alcohol at a party, the audience sees a darker association being made between BoJack and his alcohol use; here, alcohol consumption serves as a medium for BoJack to gain confidence, but it also serves to show the ways in which alcohol made BoJack cruel and self-destructive, highlighting the ways in which alcohol negatively affected BoJack's life. Following this, BoJack's next flashback drinking for the first time with his father showcased the ways in which BoJack's association with alcohol becomes a twisted, dark tool that is used over BoJack to manipulate him into silence as it preys on his guilt and shame for drinking in the first place. The audience sees this translate over into BoJack's adult life where he uses alcohol as an escape from the guilt and shame that he feels for causing havoc in his own personal life. Last but not least, when BoJack drinks from the vodka bottle at what seems to be his sixth birthday party, this clearly creates an association between alcohol and his mother's love, which provides the foundation of BoJack's incredibly twisted relationship with his mother and how that translates over to his relationship with alcohol as well. Additionally, since BoJack does not have a visceral reaction to drinking pure vodka, it is implied that this is not necessarily the first time that he has been drinking alcohol either. Therefore, the key purpose of showing all of these flashbacks

lies in the fact that it provides a historical record of how his relationship with alcohol is also twistedly intertwined with his problematic relationships with both of his parents, particularly his mother. This episode manages to highlight BoJack's history with alcohol, particularly the way in which the serialization of *BoJack Horseman* allows for the audience to have a chronological understanding of the chronic nature of this mental illness. By understanding the ways that this has been a persistent issue for BoJack in his own life and in his personal relationships through Jameson's experiences, the audience is able to understand the ways in which BoJack has similarly destroyed many relationships in his own life. By commenting on the ways in which people can change, the series also manages to demonstrate how those who one hurts are not required or obligated to stay in someone's company as they make that change in their own life. As mentioned beheaded, this foreshadows BoJack's half-sister, Hollyhock's, eventually 100% cutting off BoJack from her own life for her mental health. This prompts a conversation about the way in which people may be able to change but also asks about what are the ways that those surrounding that person are supposed to adapt or wait for this change to happen, especially when still dealing with the negative long-term consequences of their previous behavior? It is here in this episode of Season 6, Part 1 where the creators begin to ask these questions about forgiveness and how the other characters in the show deal with BoJack's attempt to change personally, and then following in Part 2, publicly as well, especially as more information about his wrongdoings come to light.

The next episode of Season Six actually explores the ways in which BoJack must reckon and reconcile with the consequences of his past actions, particularly in regards to the death of Sarah Lynn in Part Two of Season Six. This reckoning begins with Episode 12: 'Xerox of a Xerox,' an episode riddled with heavy content and revelatory information about BoJack. Unsurprisingly, this episode becomes one of the most polarizing and significant episodes in the series as it informs, reveals, and reminds both the audience and the general public about the seriousness of BoJack's

damage on others throughout his career. While BoJack grapples with the fallout concerning some of his worst actions coming into the light of the public eye throughout the interviews taking place within this episode, he and his team attempt to exercise as much damage control as possible to mitigate any harm to his reputation. Furthermore, this damage control begins to succeed in rectifying the public's view about BoJack; however, it is due to this improvement that BoJack ends up falling back into some of his old toxic tendencies, ultimately causing his own downfall. The importance of this episode lies with the fact that it becomes one of the audience's final major crossroads in their journey with BoJack. Here, alongside the revelations seen throughout this episode, much of the audience's opinions diverge after this episode about their ability to forgive BoJack for his actions or about the ethical nature of his interviews themselves. These different paths taken by the audience about their opinion on BoJack represent this final moment of reckoning that the audience experiences alongside BoJack. This episode becomes a final peak in BoJack's journey unfortunately, right before he begins to plummet back down into a valley of addiction and abuse.

This episode begins with BoJack and his team preparing for a supposed 'tell-all' interview with a famous journalist, Biscuits Braxy. In order to prevent BoJack from ruining his finely curated self-image, his team coaches him about this situation by carefully and meticulously choreographing his interview answers in an attempt to help his career, image, and legacy. Regardless of the fact that Biscuits intends to have a proper interview, she also buys into this charade about the interview primarily by allowing the setting to be the former *Philbert* set. By taking this old set out of storage and utilizing it as the backdrop to BoJack's initial interview with Biscuit, his team is able to make it look and seem like the interview is taking place within BoJack's own home, creating a sense of intimacy and closeness that is intended to translate and create a sense of authenticity with the audience. The fact that BoJack's team chose to fake that they are in BoJack's house beautifully represented the hypocrisy embodied by this entire interview. Despite the fact that this interview was

simply a fluff piece and media stunt for BoJack's image, the purpose of this interview is to create some form of intimacy and vulnerability that is in favor of BoJack, which is ironically done by creating a close atmosphere of his home. While this first interview with Biscuit is marketed as the tell-all about the real life story of 'the Last Days of Sarah Lynn,' BoJack's publicity team manages all of the details of this interview. Although BoJack has been coached on his mannerisms and about how to answer the pre-planned questions of this interview, to the public, this interview is presented as though it will be raw, truthful, and revelatory. Even though the interview questions that will be asked have been coordinated to be softballed in favor of sparing BoJack's image, the interview is continuing to be marketed as if it will show the real BoJack Horseman, warts and all; however, this is not reality. Instead, the reality lies in the fact that this interview was never meant to portray an authentic version of BoJack as this entire interview was entirely meticulously coordinated to help BoJack's image.

As mentioned beforehand, there are two 'tell-all' interviews that BoJack participates in within this episode. Since this first one is closely planned, it becomes a raging success for BoJack as it does him many favors for his public image. Nonetheless, this first interview simply does not tell the whole story about BoJack's life and more importantly, about the mistakes that he has made. Instead, BoJack spends the entirety of the interview walking a tightline; he juggles between revealing information that was not previously known to the public and the entire truth of the situations at hand. By not disclosing the entire truth, BoJack can easily and obviously manipulate the way that the truth is both portrayed to the public and reflected onto him. His mannerisms during this interview also demonstrate his hesitancy concerning these issues, particularly as he struggles to talk around the entirety of the truth surrounding Sarah Lynn's death. While BoJack does admit that "[he] has made a lot of mistakes," he continues to dodge the opportunity to come clean about his past mistakes and take responsibility for his actions ("Xerox of a Xerox" 6:15 - 6:18). In the entire first interview, there



is really only one sequence where BoJack becomes fully and completely honest and truthful; here, he speaks from the heart and for one moment does not try to navigate around all of his own mistakes with his answers here. This titular sequence named 'Xerox of a Xerox' serves to explain how BoJack came from a broken home and family life. As he discusses how he felt as if his entire life was an acting job, he explains that he felt as if he was "just doing an impression of the people [he] saw on television, which was just the projection of a bunch of equally screwed up writers and actors. I felt like a Xerox of a Xerox of a person, you know what I mean?" ("Xerox of a Xerox" 6:42 - 6:54). Within this first interview, this seems to be the only truthful statement that BoJack's made. From previous information particularly found in Season Four, the audience is aware that BoJack grew up in a broken home as they witnessed how horribly mistreated he was. This moment shines a light on how these past experiences, such as his father forcing him to drink at a young age and his mother specifically instilling in him the need to perform, manifest in BoJack's life at this very moment as his unhealthy coping mechanisms. Additionally, it is through these previously seen flashbacks that the audience realizes that BoJack consistently puts on performances for the people around him by engaging in toxic behavior in order to do so. By constantly manipulating how he presented himself, BoJack struggles with an anxiety about how others will perceive him, and therefore, attempts to be in full control of his own narrative like he would on-screen, which is essentially another one of BoJack's futile attempts at trying to create reality in the image of the illusion that he believes life should like from television. Hence, while this titular sequence and reference to 'Xerox of Xerox' speech is the sole moment of honesty within this first interview, BoJack sadly continues to still perpetuate this cheap imitation of others throughout this interview because for most of this interview, BoJack is being dishonest about himself and the nature of his past mistakes. This interview was never intended to be real or honest about anything that BoJack did; instead, "he [walks] a metaphorical tightrope to maintain his public image" alongside the fact that "he has been

fully coached his behaviors and environment have been manipulated” to only propagate these lies and omissions of the truth (2 Cellos 3:19 - 3:24). BoJack’s performance is essentially a ‘xerox’ of other popular celebrities ‘tell-all interviews’ who have also experienced similar situations that have necessitated a curation and rehabilitation of their own public image. In turn, this information has been ‘xeroxed’ once again by BoJack’s agents and publicist team to ensure that BoJack came out of this first interview as favorably as possible. Overall, both the setup of this interview in itself alongside BoJack’s titular sequence demonstrate how pervasive these sitcom tropes and worldviews about performing were ingrained into BoJack and their failure to adequately translate over into the reality of life.

Furthermore, by highlighting BoJack’s attitude after the first interview, the audience is able to witness exactly the extent of BoJack’s disingenuity throughout this first interview. Instead of acting as if he just did a raw, emotional interview and therefore re-lived and resurfaced some of his darkest memories, BoJack simply actually celebrates his performance - the fact that he nailed the interview. He exclaims that “when [Braxy] brought up Sarah Lynn’s mother? [Braxy] was setting me up to throw her under the bus, but then I said, ‘I’m sorry?’ I mean that was a sweet move, yeah?” (“Xerox of a Xerox” 7:48 - 7:55). and this declaration does not embody the attitude of someone who feels relieved for finally telling the truth and removing that burden off of their shoulders. In fact, BoJack’s attitude is one of someone who has potentially escaped near cancellation by the public. Since this first interview was a huge success, BoJack is beloved by the public once again. As press coverage of the interview reports to be overwhelmingly positive and the network’s rating reach sky high numbers, the public begin to trust, love, and most importantly, empathize with BoJack once again; again, BoJack has taken a shortcut to actual self-improvement by rehabilitating his image in a mere evening. Since BoJack is offered his teaching job back at Wellesley, he is presented with an opportunity to return back to a secluded life away from his intoxicating, busy celebrity lifestyle.

However, BoJack suffers a relapse; he does not relapse from his physical addiction to alcohol or drugs, but instead he suffers a relapse from his psychological addiction to fame and success by revelling in this positive attention.

Despite the fact that BoJack is ready to leave LA, he is asked to do a second interview instead since his last interview apparently saved the network with the high ratings. Although Princess Carolyn advises BoJack against taking this second interview, BoJack's ego gets the better of him, and he is too boosted to consider otherwise. BoJack accepting this interview in spite of his agent's rightful, logical objections perfectly demonstrates BoJack's attitude problem as it represents and highlights "the mental gymnastics he uses to justify putting himself back on that stage" (2 Cellos 5:07-5:10). BoJack rationalizes this by explaining that "if [his] openness and candor about addiction is helping people, then [he is] kind of a dick if [he doesn't] do another interview, right?" ("Xerox of a Xerox" 10:38 - 10:45). Unsurprisingly, this decision would soon haunt BoJack as this unexpected second interview would become the real, raw emotional interview that the world was promised. Instead of painting BoJack the victim similarly to the first interview, this time around Braxby was armed with a fuller, more comprehensive picture and understanding of BoJack's toxic, destructive history. In turn, this second interview with BoJack was actually hard-hitting as Biscuits delivered intense questions and forced him to confront aspects of his past history that BoJack was simply unprepared to talk about, especially publicly. What ends up being the best aspect of this entire episode is that this second interview ends up revealing aspects about BoJack's past that even the audience themselves do not know about. Here, Biscuits reveals the ultimate, damning revelation: "not only did BoJack carefully call himself from Sarah Lynn's phone to lie to the police after her overdose death, but he also wanted seventeen minutes to call 9-1-1 to come and retrieve Sarah Lynn" (2 Cellos 06:00 - 06:09). Since the audience knows that Sarah Lynn ends up dying in the hospital, the audience and the public are both forever left with the haunting question about whether

BoJack could have saved Sarah Lynn's life by calling 9-1-1 earlier instead of trying to save himself. By ensuring that this fact is not revealed to the viewers until this moment, the creators ensure that the audience's lack of awareness contributes to how jarring this revelation truly is and in turn, highlights the intensity of BoJack's selfishness as he prioritized his own reputation over the life of another person, especially one so close to him. Again, this moment of truth forces the audience to seriously reconsider if they are being too forgiving of BoJack and allowing him to not adequately accept responsibility and face the consequences of his actions. Even by the beginning of this second interview, the creators have already dismantled the traditional resolution found in classic redemption arcs where the protagonist resolves the conflict, usually through a grand gesture. By including this second interview, the creators dismember this notion of denouement found in Freytag's narrative structure in favor of a more realistic portrayal of BoJack finally grappling with the negative, long-term effects of his destructive, harmful behavior towards others.

As the second interview progresses, Biscuits lays out BoJack's other past mistakes. It is important to recognize here that the creators are now attempting to portray BoJack's past mistakes through a more objective lens than what the audience has witnessed beforehand. While the audience has originally seen these events from BoJack's perspective, having Biscuit outline all of these past mistakes paints an important picture of the cyclical and destructive nature of BoJack's troubling behavior patterns. It is important to recognize that the audience of *BoJack Horseman* will, of course, have a fuller picture and understanding of many of BoJack's past mistakes simply because this series is told from his viewpoint. In turn, similarly to how no one can ever truly understand the full viewpoint of another in real life, it cannot and should not be expected that the other characters within the series have the same perspective as the audience, and therefore, BoJack. Likewise, in reaction to Biscuit bringing up all of his past mistakes and history, BoJack does not do himself any favors. Importantly, what seems to have made the biggest difference in turning the public eye against

BoJack lied in his behavior during this second interview. This second interview gave what the first one allegedly promised; neither BoJack's mannerisms nor his answers were carefully and meticulously planned by his publicity team to prevent BoJack from looking bad and showing his true colors. As a result, the 'real' BoJack Horseman was shown during this second interview. Instead of holding himself accountable and recognizing the way that he held power over people, BoJack got defensive. He began aggressively arguing with Biscuits and eventually exclaimed that "we're all a bunch of stupid, hungry, horny, little goons just grabbing at shit, hoping it'll press that little button in our brain that says, 'okay you're happy now!' that's not an abuse of power" ("Xerox of a Xerox" 14:27 - 14:38). While BoJack is finally being completely honest about how he feels here, his inappropriate reaction paints a picture of someone who is not remorseful for their mistakes. Unfortunately, BoJack has fallen back into his old destructive patterns here as he no longer becomes relatable to the general public, and therefore, also loses the empathy of the public from the first interview. This disappointing instance does not follow the traditional resolution of Freytag's narrative nor does it corroborate the classic redemptive arc of the hero. Therefore, while it's incredibly depressing to watch BoJack spiral once again in his self-imposed destruction, this situation becomes more reflective of the more realistic, nonlinear understanding of both 'recovery' and self-improvement narratives.

Moreover, Biscuits confronts BoJack about his relationship with the hair stylist on *Horsin' Around*, Sharona, about the rumors surrounding Sarah Lynn having gotten drunk on BoJack's vodka. While the audience and BoJack both know that he blamed this vodka incident with Sarah Lynn on Sharona, instead of taking responsibility himself, BoJack capitalizes on this moment to shirk blame onto Sharona once again. Here, he proclaims that "Sharona was a drunk too, so you can't trust the thing she says. Obviously, she has a vendetta against me. Besides, I already apologized to her" ("Xerox of a Xerox" 15:46 - 15:53). After Biscuits pushes him about what exactly he had already

apologized for, BoJack continues to attempt to defend himself by throwing as many as possible under the bus instead, arguably entirely collapsing into his old ways. While scattering to make excuses for himself, BoJack then accidentally reveals private information about how “[he] didn’t even have sex with her until she was 30,” and it was this complete public admission that became the final straw for BoJack’s public image and reputation (“Xerox of a Xerox” 16:18 - 16:21). This was not even just an allegation; BoJack fully admitted himself to have slept with his television daughter, Sarah Lynn, who was cherished and beloved to the public. Considering BoJack’s questionable past surrounding his power differentials in his relationships with women, this fact about him and Sarah Lynn proves to be even more unsettling. This is irredeemably compounded by the indefensible fact that BoJack might have been able to save her life and simply chose not to selfishly in service to himself and his reputation.

It is in this final straw that causes some of those who are close to BoJack to irreversibly break away from him for good. For instance, Todd decides to move in with his significant other, and Princess Caroline enjoys her last moments before the interview is aired to relax and spend time with her family. By participating in activities that they would not have at the beginning of the series, these characters represent how much one can change and grow over a period of time if they show it, something BoJack has arguably yet done. However, after watching this interview, Diane empathizes and then feels sad for BoJack; this permits her relationship with BoJack to remain different from the others as she has left this door open with BoJack with no definitive idea about the direction of their friendship moving forward. BoJack’s fluctuating relationships with those around him mimic the hills and valleys that he has personally had to encounter throughout the entirety of this series. While witnessing BoJack’s highest highs as well as his lowest lows, this interview creates a gaping hole within BoJack’s story about what is next in store for him. This lack of a resolution, a facet of both Freytag’s narrative structure and traditional hero redemption arcs, creates space for the audience to

further explore what the future holds for BoJack heading into the final last two episodes of the series. Ultimately, while the end of series at Season Six does leave room for BoJack to become a better person, the creators do emphasize that this does not mean that there is any form of redemption for BoJack - not in the eyes of the public nor in the eyes of his friends.

## Conclusion:

Overall, the purpose of this exploration into the Netflix series *BoJack Horseman* lies in unpacking the complicated, yet realistic, depiction of the lived experiences of mental illnesses and substance abuse primarily through the main character of BoJack. This analysis focuses on the myriad ways in which animation, dark humor, serialization, sitcom tropes, deconstruction of Freytag's pyramid, and nontraditional redemption arcs all contribute to creating and reinforcing the more nuanced version of a reality concerning the experience of mental illness and substance abuse. Here, the notion of the temporality of chronic illnesses comes to light as illness does not become this smaller part of one's life story, but instead as a lifelong journey that one learns to grapple with instead of heal from. In turn, the goal of illness narratives shifts from one 'returning' to a state of health to one understanding how to integrate and live with this illness as a function of one's life story overall. Thus, the exploration of these narrative elements within this television series gave rise to the understanding that portraying mental illness and substance abuse as illnesses those suffering simply must 'get over' oversimplifies the deep-rooted and lifelong work that must be done in order to learn how to cope with these illnesses as fragments of one's life. Through this investigation of these narrative elements as lenses for understanding *BoJack Horseman*, I found a more comprehensive and open-ended understanding of the illness, and particularly chronic illness, experience at-large by viewing *BoJack Horseman* through the application of Arthur Frank's theory on the companion narrative through the exercise of vulnerable reading.

Vulnerable reading "seeks help in literature" and "shifts the usual emphasis of literature and medicine by taking the perspective of ill and suffering persons" (Frank). Vulnerable reading asks the audience "how a literary work might be a companion and a resource either for ill people or for those who care for the ill" as it "uses literature to investigate suffering by making literature useful to those



who suffer” (Frank). Through my exploration of *BoJack Horseman*, I believe that the idea that a work of literature, or in my case, any work of art, can offer solace, companionship, and possibly some form of guidance to those who suffer. By expanding Arthur Frank’s understanding of both vulnerable reading alongside the companion narrative to include other mediums of storytelling, such as television, *BoJack Horseman* can easily find itself as a companion narrative for those grappling with mental illnesses and substance abuse. Here, not only does this television series provide a nuanced, comprehensive, and genuine depiction of the lived experience of mental illness and substance abuse, but it is this realistic portrayal that allows *BoJack Horseman* to be readily accessible and relatable to the general public. This relatability of the series facilitates both community and solidarity amongst those who suffer or who may have someone close to them who suffers with mental illness and/or substance abuse. It is in this power of storytelling that people find a way to articulate their own experiences by listening and sharing in others’. Not only was this true for previously mentioned cousin and close friend, but all around me I have been able to anecdotally begin to bear witness to the widespread impact that *BoJack Horseman* has to authentically represent a community of people living and grappling with their own mental illnesses and substance abuse issues. Hopefully, *BoJack Horseman* will only mark the beginning of bringing complicated narratives about mental health into the mainstream for those who are suffering to find themselves in a story with a voice of their own.

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Nima Rahman graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a Bachelor of Arts in Plan II Honors and a Bachelor of Science and Arts in Neuroscience in May 2021. Born in 1999, she spent the majority of her childhood in Irving, Texas. Since high school, Nima has been passionate about literature and mental health. In college, she was a natural leader who dedicated her time to the Natural Sciences Council (NSC), Texas Tour Guides, the C.D. Doyle nonprofit clinic, and the Asian Desi Pacific Islander American Collective (ADPAC). When she is not writing her thesis, she enjoys exploring local coffee shops, cooking her favorite dishes for her friends and family, and listening to good music in Austin, TX.