

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Psychological Impacts of Narrative Condensation in Film: A Case Study of Red, White & Royal Blue.**

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the psychological consequences of condensing complex narratives in film, focusing on the romantic comedy "Red, White & Royal Blue." By analyzing the film's narrative structure, character development, and cinematic techniques, this study investigates how condensed storytelling influences audience emotions, cognitive processing, and interpretation. The findings provide insight into the psychological mechanisms underlying film-induced emotional experiences, shedding light on the dynamic relationship between narrative condensation, emotional resonance, and audience engagement. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of film narrative techniques and their implications for storytelling.

Keywords: Queer representation, Film adaptation, Novel, Case Study**I. Introduction**

The power of film lies in its ability to transport audiences to different worlds, evoke strong emotions, and convey complex narratives within a limited timeframe. One of the key techniques that filmmakers employ to achieve this is narrative condensation, the process of compressing extensive stories into a manageable cinematic format. Narrative condensation involves streamlining plots, merging characters, and omitting subplots to create a cohesive and engaging viewing experience. This paper examines the psychological impact of narrative condensation in film, using the romantic comedy "Red, White, and Royal Blue" as a case study. By analyzing how the film condenses the source material, this paper argues that narrative condensation significantly shapes viewers' emotional engagement, cognitive processing, and overall interpretation of the story. The following sections will explore the theoretical underpinnings of narrative condensation, analyze specific examples from the film, and discuss the broader implications for film audiences and adaptation studies.

"Red, White"– Symbol of American Identity. The colors red and white are part of the American flag, representing the United States. These colors stand for Alex Claremont-Diaz, the First Son of the U.S., and reflect the novel's setting in American politics and the White House. The art of filmmaking intricately weaves together various narrative techniques to evoke emotions, disseminate information, and cultivate character development, thereby establishing cinema as a multifaceted and enthralling narrative platform (Jing, 2023).

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The capacity of film to rapidly convey complex narratives is rooted in its refined structure, which facilitates the efficient processing of intricate storylines (Cutting, 2016; Jing, 2023). Film is a sequence of still or moving images created through photographic recording, animation, or visual effects, offering a powerful medium for storytelling (Chen, 2013). Narrative film serves as a conduit for conveying emotions through visual and auditory elements, deeply influencing audience perception (Hagan, 2008). The convergence of visual aesthetics, musical compositions, and thespian performances in film underscores its essence as a multidisciplinary art form, wherein each element contributes to the overarching narrative (Jing, 2023). Cinematic storytelling is a symphony of scripting, production design, lighting, directing, and editing, all harmonized to immerse viewers in a flow of information, emotion, and perspective (Figueiredo, 2015).

The experience of watching a great film or television show allows us to immerse ourselves in the world that it has created, with aspects such as cinematography, plot development and special effects vital to the narrative process (d'Artenay, 2019; Jing, 2023). The narrative architecture of film is deliberately planned to simulate environments, characters, and situations so convincingly that viewers can momentarily suspend their own realities and fully inhabit the cinematic world (Figueiredo, 2015).

"Royal Blue" – Symbol of British Monarchy: Royal blue represents the British monarchy specifically, Prince Henry, the second son of the British royal family. The color evokes nobility, tradition, and royal identity. Title Reflects the Central Romance: The title combines American and British national symbols, just like the novel's central romance between Alex (U.S.) and Henry (U.K.), highlighting their union across cultural and political lines. Politics, Power, and Public Image: The title reflects not only the national identities of the characters, but also the tension between personal love and public duty as both characters are high-profile figures expected to uphold their countries' images. A Playful, Romantic Tone: The title sounds charming and whimsical, setting the tone for a romantic comedy rather than a heavy political drama. It suggests both national pride and emotional vulnerability. The title Red, White & Royal Blue symbolically captures the American and British identities, the romantic bond between two powerful young men, and the fusion of politics, love, and royalty all central themes in the novel.

A. Media Psychology and Viewer Reception

Beyond structural and aesthetic considerations, the field of media psychology sheds light on how audiences engage emotionally and cognitively with adaptations. One key concept in this area is identification, defined as a psychological process by which viewers vicariously experience the emotions, motivations, and challenges of a character. Murray Smith (1995) introduced the idea of structure of sympathy, explaining how narrative construction—including camera work, character alignment, and emotional cues—guides viewers' identification.

Psychologists such as Melanie Green and Jennifer Garst have further developed the transportation theory, which describes how deeply audiences can become immersed in a narrative. In literary texts, transportation is often facilitated by internal monologue, descriptive depth, and narrative complexity. When these features are condensed or omitted in a film adaptation, the immersive experience can be weakened. As such, adaptations that simplify character motivations or remove introspective moments risk reducing the psychological engagement of the viewer. A related concept is emotional resonance, which refers to the intensity of affective responses a story can evoke. In a study by Igartua (2010), emotional engagement was shown to be higher when narratives retained complexity, moral ambiguity, and character development. This is particularly significant in queer narratives, where viewers often seek validation and emotional truth. Media psychologist Zillmann (1982) explored exemplification theory, which suggests that viewers are strongly influenced by

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memorable or emotionally salient examples in media texts. When adaptations remove or alter key scenes—such as a coming-out moment or a declaration of love—they may deprive viewers of crucial exemplars that support identity development or emotional catharsis. Thus, narrative condensation can lead not only to structural shifts but also to significant psychological gaps in meaning-making. In a 2021 study by McInroy and Craig, it was found that LGBTQ+ youth often turn to media to see representations of themselves that are absent in real life. The study emphasized that when media representations are incomplete, stereotypical, or overly sanitized, it can lead to feelings of misrecognition, invalidation, or internal conflict. These findings reinforce the psychological stakes involved in adapting queer literature for the screen.

B. Queer Representation in Literature and Film

Queer theory has become an essential framework for analyzing both literature and film, particularly with respect to how non-normative sexualities are depicted, silenced, or celebrated. Scholars like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (*Epistemology of the Closet*, 1990) and Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*, 1990) have interrogated how dominant narratives either marginalize or regulate queer identities. Adaptations that condense or erase queer complexities may unconsciously reinforce heteronormative values, even when they appear progressive on the surface.

In queer adaptation studies, works such as *Queer Cinema in the World* by Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover (2016) critique the tendency of mainstream cinema to sanitize or commodify queer narratives. This often occurs through the omission of sex scenes, the downplaying of political realities, or the romanticization of suffering. Such tendencies are evident in the film adaptation of *Red, White & Royal Blue*, which excludes explicit queer intimacy and significantly tones down the political commentary present in the novel.

Glyn Davis and Gary Needham's *Queer TV and Film: Critical Reader* (2009) highlights the importance of preserving narrative agency in queer adaptations. They argue that many adaptations reduce queer characters to narrative functions—love interest, comic relief, or symbolic rebellion—rather than fully developed individuals with psychological nuance. This results in what film theorist B. Ruby Rich has termed “the new queer visibility”—a visibility that may be aesthetically pleasing but politically or emotionally hollow. In addition to academic theory, fan discourse plays a critical role in contemporary queer media reception. Online platforms like Tumblr, Reddit, and Twitter have allowed LGBTQ+ audiences to voice their critiques and expectations, creating a participatory culture around adaptation. Henry Jenkins' concept of textual poaching (1992) explains how fans actively reinterpret and expand narratives to fill in gaps left by adaptations. In the case of *Red, White & Royal Blue*, fan responses often highlight disappointment over the removal of certain scenes, such as Alex's introspective journey or Henry's traumatic experiences with royal expectations—both of which are crucial to the novel's psychological richness.

C. Bridging the Gaps: A Psychological and Queer Reading of Condensed Narratives

While previous studies have analyzed adaptation, viewer psychology, and queer representation independently, very few have bridged these domains to focus specifically on the psychological consequences of narrative condensation in queer adaptations. This gap is critical because queer audiences often rely on literature and media for emotional validation and identity formation, particularly in the absence of real-world representation. Scholars such as Anita Wohlmann and David Roche have called for more interdisciplinary research that combines media theory, literary analysis, and psychological inquiry. In *Emotion in Adaptation* (2022), Wohlmann emphasizes the emotional labor involved in watching adaptations that erase or simplify complex identities. She argues that these narrative shifts can result in affective dissonance—a feeling of emotional detachment or unease when the adaptation does not meet the psychological expectations set by the

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source text. This study responds to that call by examining Red, White & Royal Blue through the lens of narrative condensation and its emotional and psychological effects. By analyzing what was cut or changed in the adaptation process—and how these changes affect emotional identification, psychological immersion, and queer representation—it aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how adaptations are not just textual transformations but psychological experiences

II. Literature Review

Narrative condensation is deeply rooted in narrative theory, which provides frameworks for understanding how stories are structured and interpreted. Theorists such as Bordwell have explored how classical film narratives rely on efficient storytelling techniques to maintain audience engagement. Propp's work on morphology and fairy tales offers insight into how narrative functions can be condensed and rearranged to create new stories. Genette's work on narrative discourse examines how stories are transformed through adaptation, highlighting the role of condensation in adapting novels to film. These theories provide a foundation for understanding how filmmakers manipulate narrative structure to fit the constraints of the cinematic medium. The psychological impact of film viewing has been extensively studied, revealing how viewers become emotionally engaged, identify with characters, and process information. Research has shown that emotional responses to film can be intense and lasting, influencing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Cognitive processing of film involves constructing mental models of the story world, making inferences, and integrating new information with existing knowledge. Understanding these psychological processes is crucial for analyzing how narrative condensation affects viewers' experiences.

Adaptation studies examine the challenges and strategies involved in transforming literary works into films. Narrative condensation is a common technique used in film adaptations to manage the length and complexity of the source material. This process often involves cutting subplots, merging characters, and streamlining dialogue to create a more focused and cinematic narrative. Previous research has explored the impact of these changes on audience reception, finding that some viewers appreciate the efficiency of condensed narratives, while others lament the loss of detail and nuance. According to the Cambridge dictionary, the term "queer" refers to a gender identity or sexual orientation that diverges from society's traditional notions of gender and sexuality ("Queer"). The Oxford English Dictionary provides a similar definition, emphasizing the idea of traditional ideas being particularly heteronormative ("Queer"). Heteronormativity, therefore, encompasses the belief that heterosexuality is the norm and that gender is solely determined by biological sex ("Heteronormativity"). Consequently, the term "queer" can be understood as encompassing both sexuality and sexual orientation that challenge heteronormativity, which is considered the societal standard. Additionally, "queer" serves as an umbrella term for any sexual orientation or gender identity that deviates from heteronormativity. When examining the definition of "queer," it is crucial to note that queer theory is not solely about queer individuals. Instead, it primarily focuses on how cultural texts, such as literature, influence our understanding of sexuality and queer expression. Furthermore, queer theory critiques the reduction of sexuality to fixed definitions ("Burston and Richardson 1"). Thus, queer theory should not be perceived as being solely about queer people but rather as a lens through which society portrays and affects the perception of queer individuals. Queer theory is often employed to discover queerness in contexts where it may not be readily apparent ("Burston and Richardson 1"). For instance, in older literature, such as Shakespeare's works, as exemplified in Madhavi Menon's "Shakesqueer: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare," this approach aims to increase visibility for queer individuals. However, in contemporary times, the primary focus has shifted from visibility to representation. Specifically, it delves

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into the types of representation present in media, literature, and society, as well as the reasons behind the portrayal of queerness.

Queer theory has been a subject of debate, with some scholars arguing that it has “run its course” (Penney). Others, such as Tyler Bradway, E.L McCallum, and James Penney, contend that the label “queer” limits the field and suggests a need to look forward rather than backward (Bradway and McCallum). Penney further emphasizes the need for new areas of analysis and a shift in how queer theory is discussed, as existing areas have been thoroughly explored. However, this thesis argues that queer theory remains relevant today as it was at its inception. The primary shift within queer theory lies in its purpose, transitioning from mere visibility to representation. Scholars have approached and questioned heteronormativity within queer studies in various ways. For instance, Adrienne Rich’s 1980 article “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” explores the concept of compulsory heterosexuality, asserting that heterosexuality is assumed and imposed upon individuals as a result of a heteronormative society. Rich illustrates this through examples of “erasure of lesbian existence,” highlighting the historical and literary erasure of lesbian lives. Sandra Lipsitz Bem’s concept of androcentrism further contributes to this discussion. Androcentrism refers to the societal expectation that male perspectives are the norm, often marginalizing or overlooking the experiences of non-male individuals, particularly women.

In contrast, José Esteban Muñoz’s book “Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity” delves into the concept of a queer utopia, envisioning a world beyond the existing norms and expectations. Muñoz argues that a queer utopia would prioritize the experiences and perspectives of queer individuals, challenging and redefining societal boundaries. Live beyond the heteronormative society According to Muñoz, queerness is not something we’ve achieved yet; it’s a future we yearn for. Muñoz elaborates on this by stating that queerness is “essentially about rejecting the present and insisting on the potentiality or concrete possibility of another world”. In other words, queerness itself exists outside the norm, and to achieve queerness and queer utopia, we must abandon heteronormativity. In contrast to Rich, who discussed how heteronormativity has negatively impacted queer people and shaped their stories, Muñoz envisions the future as an opportunity for a queer utopia beyond heteronormativity. Therefore, Muñoz sees heteronormativity as a tool to reach a queer utopia. This implies that we must confront heteronormativity and work with it to achieve queer utopia.

However, it’s important to note that while Muñoz published his book in 2009, Rich published her article in 1980. Consequently, Muñoz has the luxury to discuss queer utopia due to the time of writing. A significant shift occurred within the field of queer theory and society between the 1980s and 2009. One notable change was an increase in acceptance of queer people, leading to a shift in the field’s focus from visibility to representation. This shift means that when Muñoz wrote his book, he could envision a queer utopia and recognize the positive aspects of heteronormativity, which Rich couldn’t. Rich was influenced by the socio-political climate of her time, and being queer was not as accepted as it is today. Therefore, she couldn’t see the positive uses of heteronormativity and only its negative impact on queer people. Angela Jones, in her book “A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias,” further explores the positive aspects of queer utopias. She demonstrates how the creation of queer utopias is not only intellectually rewarding but also has practical benefits. Transform the lives of individuals and society at large. This implies that the impact of queer utopias extends beyond individuals, affecting society as a whole.

According to Jones, queer utopias serve as safe havens for queer individuals in their daily lives, enabling them to break free from heteronormativity. However, Jones cautions against viewing queer utopias as perfect or ideal. In essence, according to Jones, queer utopias are not utopian in nature but rather safe spaces within

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a heteronormative society. Queer theory provides a solid foundation for the theoretical framework that this thesis draws upon. The key theories and concepts presented in the section above include performativity, heteronormativity, and queer utopia. Performativity, as explained, refers to identity, particularly gender and sexuality, being a performance driven by societal pressure. This concept helps explain the fluid construction of identity. Heteronormativity describes heterosexuality as the norm, which is also somewhat compulsory. Queer utopia, on the other hand, can be conceptualized as a safe space or a potential future within a void of heteronormativity.

Psychological Impacts on Characters and Audience

Narrative condensation, a technique wherein the plot is streamlined by omitting or simplifying scenes, subplots, or character arcs, significantly affects both the psychological depth of characters and the emotional experience of audiences. In the adaptation of Casey McQuiston's 'Red, White & Royal Blue' (2019) into the 2023 Amazon Prime film directed by Matthew López, this condensation process influences how internal struggles, character development, and emotional connections are portrayed and perceived. This section critically examines the psychological repercussions of narrative condensation on the central characters—Alex Claremont-Diaz and Prince Henry—as well as its broader emotional and cognitive effects on the audience. One of the most profound consequences of narrative condensation in film adaptation is the reduction in the portrayal of internal conflict. In McQuiston's novel, both Alex and Henry undergo intricate psychological processes while coming to terms with their sexualities, socio-political identities, and familial expectations. Alex, for instance, experiences a prolonged period of confusion and denial regarding his bisexuality. He engages in self-questioning, introspection, and subtle emotional detachment before embracing his identity. Similarly, Henry's internalized homophobia and royal duty-induced repression are explored through deeply reflective inner monologues and emotionally layered correspondence (McQuiston 102–183).

In the film, however, due to time constraints and the need for a coherent visual narrative, much of this internal struggle is condensed or eliminated. The psychological realism that renders these characters profoundly relatable in the novel becomes stylized and somewhat superficial in the film. While cinematic tools such as facial expressions, music cues, and body language attempt to compensate, they often fall short of conveying the intricate layers of inner turmoil (Bordwell 56). This reduction leads to a diminished representation of psychological conflict, which in turn impacts how audiences perceive the authenticity of the characters' journeys. The complexity of queer identity formation, especially in contexts bound by political and monarchical norms, is thus simplified, potentially undermining the emotional weight of the narrative. The film's accelerated pacing necessitates an abridged depiction of emotional growth. Alex's evolution from a self-centered, career-driven political figure to an emotionally mature individual capable of vulnerability and love unfolds over several hundred pages in the novel (McQuiston 200–280). This transformation is deeply tied to his introspective moments and evolving relationship with Henry. However, in the film, these transformative sequences are compressed, often taking place over the span of a few montages or dramatic confrontations.

The psychological impact of this condensation is twofold. Firstly, it presents characters as more emotionally decisive and articulate than is realistic, especially when dealing with identity crises, familial rejection, and political pressures. Secondly, it may inadvertently promote an idealized and linear model of emotional development, wherein self-acceptance and romantic stability occur swiftly and without enduring psychological labor. This framing can distort viewers' expectations of real-life emotional journeys, especially for young queer audiences seeking affirmation and representation (Jones 88). The novel intricately explores

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the psychological effects of familial dynamics on both protagonists. Alex's relationship with his divorced parents, particularly his driven and politically ambitious mother, is crucial in shaping his personality, goals, and insecurities (McQuiston 50–75). Henry's strained bond with his emotionally repressed brother and the shadow of his deceased father adds significant emotional depth to his motivations and fears. In the film, while these familial ties are acknowledged, they are often relegated to brief scenes or background exposition. For example, Henry's grief over his father and his fraught relationship with the British royal family are only lightly touched upon, reducing the viewer's understanding of his fear, shame, and internalized obligations. The psychological implications of family—sources of both identity and trauma—are thus underrepresented, leading to a narrative where emotional reactions may appear ungrounded or abrupt (Smith 123). This condensation creates a subtle psychological dissonance for the audience. Viewers may sense that emotional stakes exist but may not fully grasp their origins, leading to a weaker empathetic engagement with the characters. For those familiar with the novel, this can be frustrating; for newcomers, it can result in an emotionally flattened viewing experience. Despite the loss of some psychological intricacies, the film leverages visual symbolism to convey emotional and psychological subtext. The use of spaces such as the palace, the White House, and the private hideaways the characters share plays a crucial role in building an emotional atmosphere. Symbolic items like the key to the Paris apartment and letters exchanged between the protagonists attempt to preserve the depth lost through omitted narrative exposition (López 2023).

While these symbols provide emotional anchors, their psychological richness depends heavily on the viewer's ability to decode them. Without sufficient narrative context, their meanings may remain superficial. The letters in particular are emblematic of emotional vulnerability and connection in the novel. In the film, they are used effectively but are condensed to fit the limited screen time, thereby reducing their cumulative psychological impact. This illustrates a core tension in narrative condensation: the shift from internal to external forms of storytelling. Where novels can explore psychological states through detailed introspection, films often rely on symbolic shorthand. While potent, this strategy places a higher interpretive burden on the audience, requiring them to infer psychological nuances that may not be explicitly articulated (Genette 210). The psychological impact of narrative condensation is not limited to characters—it also shapes the emotional responses of audiences. Research in media psychology suggests that character identification and emotional catharsis are contingent on perceived psychological realism (Cohen 256; Green, Brock, and Kaufman 319). When audiences can trace a believable psychological arc, they are more likely to experience empathy, emotional immersion, and post-viewing reflection. In *Red, White & Royal Blue*, viewers may still feel emotionally engaged due to the charisma of the actors, romantic tropes, and aesthetic cues. However, the condensation of psychological development may restrict the depth of identification. Viewers might appreciate the romance and cheer for the protagonists, but their emotional investment may be shallower due to the limited narrative scaffolding. Moreover, catharsis the emotional release that often follows witnessing a character's resolution or triumph is muted when the psychological journey appears overly facile. When Henry publicly proclaims his love or when Alex defies political convention to embrace authenticity, these moments are powerful. Yet, they may not evoke the same level of emotional resonance as in the novel, where these choices are earned through extensive psychological struggle.

From a queer theoretical perspective, the psychological impact of narrative condensation raises complex questions about representation. On one hand, *Red, White & Royal Blue* offers a rare and affirming depiction of queer romance in mainstream cinema. Its mere existence is psychologically significant, providing visibility and narrative centrality to queer characters who have historically been marginalized or tokenized (Rich

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649). On the other hand, the smoothing over of psychological struggle and systemic barriers may create an idealized version of queer life that feels emotionally unrepresentative. For queer viewers, especially those still grappling with identity formation, such portrayals may offer hope but also set unrealistic expectations. The lack of focus on internalized homophobia, social alienation, or mental health challenges risks sanitizing the queer experience for mass consumption, which can be psychologically disorienting or alienating (Muñoz 142). Furthermore, the film's emphasis on romance and happy endings, while uplifting, may eclipse the broader psychological realities of being queer in politically charged or culturally conservative environments. In this sense, narrative condensation operates as both an inclusive and excluding force it affirms certain emotional truths while erasing others.

Narrative condensation often necessitates a neat emotional resolution. The film, true to romantic comedy conventions, ends on a celebratory note. The protagonists come out publicly, receive support from loved ones, and embark on a future together. This conclusion offers viewers emotional closure, but it is achieved through compressed psychological resolution (López 2023). While emotionally satisfying on the surface, this condensed closure can be problematic. It may give the impression that deep-seated psychological challenges—like navigating cultural taboos, healing from familial trauma, or reconciling public duty with private identity—can be resolved through singular acts of bravery or love. This simplification potentially undermines the psychological authenticity of such transformations, leading to emotional gratification that is intense but transient. For some viewers, particularly those attuned to psychological realism or familiar with the source material, the lack of lingering uncertainty or emotional ambiguity may lessen the film's resonance. Closure, in this context, functions more as a narrative device than a psychologically earned state, highlighting the trade-offs inherent in condensed storytelling (Propp 79). Narrative condensation also affects how audiences cognitively process and retain the story. Cognitive psychology suggests that detailed, emotionally resonant stories enhance memory retention and narrative impact (Van Dijk and Kintsch 367). By streamlining complex psychological developments, the film version of 'Red, White & Royal Blue' may create a more accessible but less memorable narrative experience. Viewers are more likely to remember emotionally intense scenes like the cake incident, the hotel tryst, or the public kiss than the nuanced emotional shifts that led to those moments. This focus on dramatic peaks rather than psychological build-up reflects a common trend in film adaptations, where visual spectacle often replaces internal narrative continuity. As a result, audience memory may skew toward romantic idealism rather than psychological realism, shaping perceptions of queer love through a condensed, emotionally heightened lens.

III. Methodology

This paper employs a case study approach to examine the psychological impact of narrative condensation in "Red, White, and Royal Blue." A case study methodology is well-suited for in-depth analysis of a single instance, allowing for a detailed exploration of the film's narrative structure and its effects on viewers. Data will be collected through close textual analysis of the film, focusing on identifying specific examples of narrative condensation. Audience reviews and reactions will be examined to gauge the emotional and cognitive responses to these condensed narratives. Additionally, relevant psychological theories and concepts, such as emotional contagion, cognitive dissonance, and schema theory, will be used to analyze the psychological impact of narrative condensation.

This paper investigates the psychological effects of narrative condensation in film adaptations, with particular reference to the 2023 adaptation of "Red, White & Royal Blue". Narrative condensation—defined as the process of simplifying or omitting elements from a source text—often alters how audiences engage

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with a story psychologically, especially in terms of character connection and emotional resonance (Hutcheon 37; Leitch 95). By analyzing the transition from Casey McQuiston's 2019 novel to its screen version, this study explores how key aspects such as queer identity, emotional intimacy, and character complexity are transformed or reduced. Employing qualitative content analysis and concepts from audience reception theory, the research highlights that although narrative condensation enhances accessibility and time efficiency, it may weaken the psychological depth that fosters strong viewer-character bonds (Stam 68). Ultimately, this case study contributes to the broader discourse on adaptation studies, media psychology, and the portrayal of queer relationships in mainstream cinema.

IV. Results and Discussion

"Red, White, and Royal Blue" provides numerous examples of narrative condensation, reflecting the challenges of adapting a novel into a film. One notable instance is the streamlining of the characters' backstories. The film focuses primarily on the central relationship between Alex and Henry, reducing the screen time and development of secondary characters. This condensation allows the film to maintain a tight focus on the romantic plotline, enhancing the emotional intensity of the central relationship. The film's condensation of narratives significantly impacts viewers' emotional engagement. The intense focus on the romantic relationship allows viewers to become deeply invested in Alex and Henry's journey, intensifying emotional responses such as joy, sympathy, and anticipation. The streamlined plot also enhances cognitive processing, making it easier for viewers to follow the narrative and understand the characters' motivations. However, some viewers may find the condensation sacrifices depth and nuance, leading to a less satisfying emotional experience.

The findings suggest that narrative condensation in "Red, White, and Royal Blue" effectively shapes viewers' emotional engagement and cognitive processing. The intense focus on the central relationship enhances emotional intensity, while the streamlined plot facilitates comprehension. However, it is important to consider the potential limitations of this approach. The condensation of narratives may sacrifice depth and nuance, potentially alienating viewers who are familiar with the source material or prefer more complex character development. Compared to other film adaptations, "Red, White, and Royal Blue" employs a relatively conservative approach to narrative condensation. Some adaptations make more radical changes, altering plotlines and character arcs to fit the cinematic format. The success of narrative condensation depends on striking a balance between efficiency and fidelity, ensuring that the core themes and emotional essence of the story are preserved.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, narrative condensation is a powerful technique that shapes viewers' experiences in film. By streamlining plots, merging characters, and omitting subplots, filmmakers can create cohesive and engaging narratives within a limited timeframe. The case study of "Red, White, and Royal Blue" demonstrates that narrative condensation can enhance emotional intensity and facilitate cognitive processing. However, it is important to consider the potential limitations of this approach, such as the sacrifice of depth and nuance. Future research should explore the long-term psychological effects of narrative condensation and compare its use in different film adaptations. The adaptation of 'Red, White & Royal Blue' from novel to screen represents more than a shift in medium; it epitomizes the narrative transformations inherent in cinematic storytelling—particularly the psychological implications of narrative condensation. Throughout this study, it has become evident that condensing a richly layered queer romance like McQuiston's into a time-constrained film involves

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critical trade-offs. These alterations not only reshape character psychology and plot structure but also significantly affect how audiences emotionally engage with and interpret the story.

One of the most significant findings is how narrative condensation curtails the portrayal of internal conflicts, thereby diminishing the psychological depth of the central characters. In the novel, Alex and Henry's emotional arcs are meticulously crafted through introspection, correspondence, and nuanced dialogue that reflect real psychological processes—confusion, denial, self-discovery, and growth (McQuiston 110–220). The film, due to the limitations of screen time and the demands of cinematic pacing, compresses these transformative processes into visual shorthand and rapid character transitions. While efficient, this method often strips away the subtleties that allow viewers to fully appreciate the characters' inner lives and emotional labour (Bordwell 56). The condensation of internal conflict also impacts the audience's capacity for empathy and identification. Media psychology research suggests that audiences develop emotional investment through perceived psychological realism. When characters' behaviors, reactions, and transformations are grounded in believable psychological processes, audiences are more likely to connect deeply with them (Cohen 247; Green, Brock, and Kaufman 312). However, when those processes are abbreviated or overly idealized—as they often are in the film adaptation—this connection becomes more superficial. Emotional moments remain impactful but may lack the lasting resonance produced by a more grounded, psychologically intricate narrative.

Moreover, the simplification of familial and socio-political dynamics contributes to a narrower psychological portrayal. The novel's exploration of familial expectations, cultural legacies, and systemic pressures—especially in the lives of queer individuals operating within powerful institutions—is significantly more robust (McQuiston 60–85). These elements are essential to understanding the psychological motivations of both Alex and Henry. Their absence or reduction in the film risks misrepresenting the emotional burdens that shape queer identity formation, particularly within heteronormative and hierarchical systems like American politics and British royalty (Smith 89). On a broader level, narrative condensation impacts how viewers interpret and internalize themes of queer love, political resistance, and self-acceptance. The film's choice to prioritize romantic tropes, dramatic peaks, and visual spectacle over psychological introspection aligns with the conventions of romantic comedy but potentially flattens the complexity of queer experience (Muñoz 98). This has a dual psychological effect on audiences: it affirms queer romance through visibility and positivity, yet also risks promoting overly idealized narratives that may not reflect the emotional truths of many queer individuals (Rich 648).

At the same time, it is essential to acknowledge that the psychological benefits of such a film—particularly for marginalized viewers—are not entirely undermined by condensation. The visibility of a joyful queer romance on a mainstream platform like Amazon Prime carries profound symbolic and emotional weight. For many, the film provides an accessible, uplifting representation of queer love that can inspire hope and pride, even if its psychological depth is reduced (Jones 91). The cinematic medium excels in offering immediate, emotionally charged experiences, and in this sense, the film adaptation of 'Red, White & Royal Blue' achieves significant affective impact, especially through moments of public vulnerability, shared intimacy, and declarations of love (López). Ultimately, the psychological effects of narrative condensation are complex and multifaceted. While it inevitably results in the loss of certain narrative and emotional textures, it can still preserve, and in some cases enhance, others through audiovisual storytelling, performance, and symbolic imagery (Genette 203). The challenge lies in achieving a balance—retaining enough psychological authenticity to support character development and emotional engagement, while adapting the narrative to suit

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the constraints and aesthetics of cinema. This case study thus reinforces the importance of considering psychological realism and audience response in discussions of film adaptation. It also highlights the need for ongoing critical engagement with how queer narratives are translated across media. As more literary works featuring diverse identities are adapted for the screen, filmmakers must grapple with the question of what can be condensed without compromising psychological and emotional truth. ‘Red, White & Royal Blue’ demonstrates that while narrative condensation is a necessary element of adaptation, its psychological consequences should be thoughtfully navigated—not merely for artistic coherence but for the sake of authentic representation and meaningful audience connection.

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