Voice Of Female Youth In Teen Cinema Clueless

Pop Cinema research essay

Analyse and critically discuss the representation of female youth in any two films screened in the course. Your essay should consider the impact relevant industrial, economic and cultural factors have had on both representation and popularity, in relation to specific examples from your chosen films.

Teen cinema in the late twentieth century revealed a curious and often consistent cultural fascination with stories about and ideologies of young people, in particular females, and their significance in popular culture. Both Randal Kleiser's, "Grease", and Amy Heckerling's 'feminists masterpiece' (Khona, 2015) "Clueless", speak to the representation of female youth and their significant role in the development of society at this time.

Cher, the teenage female hero of Amy Heckerling's buoyantly light-hearted 'Clueless', highlights the representation of female youth in the 90's, and the ideal cool morsel of teen sex appeal that females universally admired. The film is a loosely adapted and modernized variation of Jane Austin's 'Emma'. The core story remains the same, with a social butterfly and amateur matchmaker being unable to find love and happiness for herself before 'discovering it right under her nose' (Mendelson, 2015). Clueless took the outline of Emma and crafted something of its time. It resonated in a way that a straight period-accurate adaptation would not have.

Cher is the voice of female youth, she empowers young girls around the world to be vivacious, sexy and to stand up for what they believe in, regardless of the superficial surface persona she may give off. The classic female youth character in teen films at this time was someone who was attractive, privileged, who had an overbearingly protective father, received plenty of male attention yet waiting for the perfect man, and popular, AKA- Cher. What differentiates Clueless from other films focused on female youth, is that although Heckering plays with the stereotype of an American 'it girl', she uses her position as a filmmaker to shine this stereotype into a positive light. Although Cher's intentions, on surface level are superficial, her steely self determination and sense of self is what embodies her character and represents the manifestation of the stereotype of female youth at this time in a optimistic way.

Clueless was a film of its time, precisely depicting society for young females during this period, and the popular culture and trends that were seen. The mall was a central place universally in numerous teen films that represented female youth. The mall in Clueless is considered a place where Cher can concentrate, think and be focused; her 'therapy', which young females collectively can relate to. As Josh says, the 'only direction in life' is 'towards the mall'. Whilst watching Clueless, viewers are taken back to a time of leg warmers and leotards as exercise wear, headbands, big hair, short skirts and bowl haircuts; all of which representing female youth during this period.

The 90s were remembered as a time of strong economic growth and capitalisation, and advancement in technology and social classes. This is represented in Clueless by Cher's privileged life, plus the obsession with cosmetics procedures and treatments passed down and

reflected on to young girls. The film portrays the popular economy culture in Beverly hills in a sarcastic and hyperbolic way. Most of the people are materialistic and obsessed with fashion and plastic surgery, for example many of the high school girls had a bandage on their nose, mocking the fact plastic surgery or a nose job is part of the social norm for this economic bracket of individuals.

Contributing to this irony is the death of Cher's mum, having died undergoing a liposuction surgery, which speaks to the popular culture and economic factors that young females were exposed to in this social group.

Expanding on the economic culture in Clueless is the third world-first world relations seen throughout the film. In particular, the scene in question stages a paradigmatic 'encounter' of the gendered first world subject with the violence and disorder of the 'street', as Cher, abandoned by Elton on the way home from a party in order to protect and stand up for her feminist identity, is mugged in a deserted parking lot whilst making her way home from a distant neighbourhood. The location of the mugging scene is particularly significant as it offers a symbolically third world locale as the site in which Cher's class privilege does not protect her or guarantee her safety and agency as a woman, as it does in the 'first world' domestic sphere.

Although in her immediate response to the mugging Cher continues to insist on her classed invulnerability to gendered violence (screaming loudly at the loss of her phone and the state of her designer dress), at the same time Clueless undercuts her comic interpretation of the mugging scene by using it to lay the groundwork for the refashioning of her gender identity.. The scene begins to serve such a legitimising function with regard to gender and female youth when Cher calls Josh to ask him to drive to pick her up.

On the one hand, the phone call situates Cher within a gendered economy of power and mobility, in which women are victims and men rescuers, classic in female youth. Yet on the other hand, the scene serves a complimentary function in engendering masculine desire, providing the first occasion in which Josh sees char as not a spoiled revelry hills brat, but as a woman, contributing to not only represent female youth, but also female growth.