Mean Girls
Media Analysis Paper

Observation

Cady Heron lived in Africa for 12 years with her parents who were research zoologists. She was homeschooled until she enrolled in North Shore High School at the age of sixteen. She is quickly swept up by two groups with completely different viewpoints, pursuing very different relationships with Cady. Janice and Damien took Cady under their wing at first. However, another group of students, “The Plastics”, made up of Regina George, Gretchen Wieners, and Karen Smith, also take interests in Cady. When Janice and Damien, whom The Plastics referred to as the “art freaks”, saw the interest that The Plastics have in her as well, they wanted Cady to spy on The Plastics, reporting “all of the horrible things that Regina says”.

One day at lunch Gretchen Wieners asked Cady if she thought any boys were cute, and Cady answered. However, Aaron Samuels, the boy that Cady said she thought was cute, happened to be Regina’s ex-boyfriend. Even though Gretchen told Cady that she wouldn’t tell Regina about her crush, she did. When Regina found out that Cady liked Aaron, and that Aaron had an interest in Cady, she did everything she could to stop the relationship from progressing into anything more. This included lying about Cady and kissing Aaron at a Halloween Party. This is what spun Damien and Janice’s new plan to “overthrow Regina George’s evil dictatorship.” Cady was asked to continue hanging out with The Plastics as if nothing was wrong. However, this plan went sour when Cady herself became wrapped up in the world of the plastics: a world full of lies, gossip, revenge, manipulation, drinking, sabotage, and sexual promiscuity, among other things. In this down spiral of events, there are several people who get hurt, not only Cady’s friends and parents, but also one of her teachers, Ms. Norbury.

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*Mean Girls* expresses many different themes throughout. It is a good movie to look at in relevance to culture because, although many trends have changed, many issues are still relevant to teenagers today. These themes include, but are not limited to the following: sexual promiscuity, gossip, importance of reputation, and harsh language. The movie is rated PG-13 for sexual content, language, and some teen partying, (IMDb). The language can be seen in different ways. Much of it is in profanities, but the rest can be seen and heard in the form of derogatory terms mostly in reference to women. The sexual content is apparent in multiple scenes, but also in promiscuous clothing worn throughout the movie, and the terms and language used. In one particular scene, Regina and her boyfriend were in an intense make-out session and her mom came in and said, “You guys need anything? Some snacks? A condom? Let me know.” (Waters)

The question from Mrs. George (Regina’s mom) encourages us to dig deeper and take a look at the environmental factors surrounding the characters of this story. The viewer is offered an in-depth look at Regina, Cady’s, and Ms. Norbury’s lives outside of school. The other characters drop subtle hints about theirs. We already know several factors about Cady; her parents were research zoologists in Africa for 12 years, and she was homeschooled while she was there. Also mentioned in the movie is the fact that her family moved to Evanston because her mom was offered tenure at Northwestern University. Her parents decided to put her into school instead of continuing to home school her in order that she would become more socialized. As we meet and learn more about Cady, we can see that she is very polite, intelligent, and has stereotypically good morals.

Regina, on the other hand, comes from a completely different environment. We see that the structural system in her house is pretty lax. When Mrs. George first meets Cady she says, “There are no rules in this house, I’m not like a regular mom, I’m a cool mom.” After she hands
Cady a drink, Cady asked if there was alcohol in it. Mrs. George replied, “Why do you want a little bit because if you drink I’d rather you do it in the house.” There are also other subtle hints throughout the movie. Regina’s younger sister is allowed to watch music videos to songs like “Milkshake”, and the television show *Girls Gone Wild*. As she watches these mediums she learns dance moves and even flashes the television to copy what she sees. Her parents gave Regina their bedroom, and are quick to submit to her when given instructions or commands. Also, it is said that her parents don’t sleep in the same bed. This gives the viewer a look into Regina George’s home life. (Waters)

Ms. Norbury expresses a strong influential role in the lives of the students at North Shore High. She pushed students to do their best, even though she was going through many personal struggles. She had recently gotten a divorce and was having to work three jobs in order to make ends meet. She communicated well with her students. She even offered Cady a way to earn extra credit after Cady put that Ms. Norbury was a drug pusher in the Burn Book.

The Plastics’ main concerns are what they wear to school, how they appear to others, and what their reputation is. In a specific scene in the movie they stand in front of a mirror complaining about different aspects of their image that they don’t like or wish they could change. They enjoy hanging out and throwing parties, shopping, and gossiping with each other. These girls not only look forward to the Spring Fling, a yearly school dance in which the Seniors elect an underclassman, Spring Fling Queen, but also to Halloween each year because, “Halloween is the one night a year when a girl can dress like a total slut and no other girls can say anything about it. The hard-core girls just wear lingerie with some form of animal ears.” The Plastics stay loyal to their small group of friends, and do not branch out much. Cady was an exception.
Damian and Janice enjoy hanging out with each other as well, but they go to fewer parties, if any at all. They enjoy watching movies and doing artsy things together. They seem to have a greater sense of who they are. Janice expresses herself through her art, and Damian is proud and expressive in his homosexuality.

One interesting aspect of *Mean Girls* is the lack of emphasis put on media usage. Although we previously noted Regina’s younger sister watching shows, there are other forms of media that are used throughout the movie. Music is played at all social gatherings like parties, school dances, and the mall. Cady doesn’t know many of the musical artists because she lived in another country for so long. Lastly, cell phones are not heavily relied on in this movie. Regular home phones were used to three-way call. This is largely due to the fact that in 2005, the year after *Mean Girls* released, only about 56% of older teens owned a cell phone. According to Generation M2, “Texting was a new phenomenon, and those [teens] who did own cell phones still used them primarily as a way of talking to people, rather than as a multimedia platform” (Kaiser Family, 18).

**Interpretation**

Regina George and Cady Heron are the two main characters of the movie. Regina portrays the rich, beautiful, powerful girl, getting whatever she wants and using whatever means she can in order to get it. Janice says at the beginning of the movie, “Evil takes a human form in Regina George.” She is our villain. Cady however is the complete opposite when we first meet her. She comes across as very sweet and innocent. She has good morals, makes good grades, and is respectful to her parents. She doesn’t like to skip class, lie, or steal. The more she gets involved with Regina and the Plastics, the more her morals, and she herself starts to change. She
would be the heroine of this story: Cady, in the sense of the “true Cady” and not the one “created” by Regina. (Waters)

There are several different meanings that can be taken by dissecting the themes of this movie. First let’s take a look at Cady’s transformation from “home-schooled jungle freak to shiny Plastic to most hated person in the world to actual human being”. One could say that the transformation occurred because of peer pressure from The Plastics to Cady. A message could be seen as, “Avoid peer pressure” or “Just say no.” The importance of popularity and reputation in Mean Girls is heavily emphasized. Possibly, teens could hear the message, “Stay true to yourself”, thinking, if Cady had only stayed true to who she was, she would have never gotten wrapped up in this mess. Janice also represents this view, along with her promotion of self expression in the way she dresses, speaks, and presents her artwork, and Damian as well with his outward expression of, humor, personal beliefs, and homosexuality. The idea of “Stick it to the man” or “let the underdog conquer” could be deducted. Regina George is “the man”. Janice, Damian, and Cady, the underdogs, want to undermine her and ruin her life, or make her die a “social suicide”. This is their ultimate goal.

Regina George is the image of popularity in the movie, Mean Girls. As Damian says at the beginning of the movie, “If North Shore was Us Weekly, they would always be on the cover.” Regina’s “dictatorship”, according to Janice, comes from her “resources”. She says, “Regina would be nothing without her high status man candy,(Aaron Samuels) technically good physique, (“hot body”) and ignorant band of loyal followers (Gretchen and Karen)”. Viewers may think that these are qualities that are portrayed as important throughout the movie. This might lead viewers to think that in order to be popular they must be skinny, have a “hot” boyfriend, and have lots of friends. Popularity is a very tricky subject. Young people could watch Wilson 5
this movie and deduct one of several things. 1. Popularity is the most important thing. 2. These are ways I can become more popular. 3. Popularity is superficial and unimportant.

Not only do The Plastics spread rumors verbally, and use 3-way calling to sabotage each other, they also have something called a “Burn Book” in which they write mean things about all the girls in the junior class at North Shore High. Several things can be seen about gossiping in this movie. Some girls might take the more destructive path thinking, three-way calling is a good way to learn about what someone really thinks of me, or, a burn book is a great way to write what we really think about people or, specific ways to remember. However, others could see the negative effects that gossip has. “Gossiping ruins peoples’ lives.” “It is destructive.”

The role of parents is crucial to the different lifestyles portrayed in the movie. Cady seems close with her parents at the beginning of the movie, but the more she becomes involved with The Plastics, the more her deception and lies increase, and the worse relationship she has with her parents. Regina on the other hand comes from a house with no rules or expectations. This could make the viewer desire either a close relationship with their parents based on Cady’s lifestyle, or it could make them want the “pushover parent” that has no rules and let’s their children rein free. A change in a teenager’s relationship with their parent is a result in the way that the teenager treats their parent. The way that Regina treats her mom is so absurd that it is funny. This could possibly be translated as, “It’s funny when I treat my parents like crap.” Or, the opposite effect could be taken. “Cady and her parents have a mutual respect for each other, and this will happen if I…”

By watching Regina’s younger sister watch shows like Girls Gone Wild and promiscuous music videos, we can deduct several things. Viewers might have conflicting reactions, either
thinking that it is humorous when parents let such young children watch these types of show, or possibly a viewer is appalled that children are watching such things. Quite possibly one could deduct that since the girl is watching Girls Gone Wild and dancing the way that the “Milkshake” song promotes, the viewer could say that media is influencing our children to behave in this way. In this case, they would be blaming the medium, and not taking into consideration that Regina’s house “has no rules”. However, we must hold into consideration the message that is possibly being promoted through the use of media.

Lastly, we will look at sexual promiscuity, which widely influences the movie, Mean Girls as well. As we watch the transformation of Cady Heron, we can see that the more a part of the plastics Cady becomes the shorter and lower her clothing becomes. The more make-up she wears, the more promiscuous she acts towards Aaron. From this one might conclude that peer pressure from Regina and The Plastics causes her clothing to change. Teens might think that the more promiscuous they dress, the more popular they will be, or guys will like them more if they show more skin. However, to contradict this, Aaron liked Cady less when she was with The Plastics versus when she was herself in the beginning and herself at the end. This was not only evident in her choice of make-up and attire, but also in her actions. A teenage girl might think, “If I stay true to myself and my morals, then guys I actually want to like me will like me.”

Evaluate

Mean Girls is presented in such a way that it makes the “obvious fallacies” look humorous. If a mom walked into a room where her 16 year old daughter was passionately kissing her boyfriend and rolling around on the bed, the mom wouldn’t offer her daughter a condom. Would she? Is it truly funny when a group of girls conspires to the downfall of other peoples’
reputations? When high schoolers use media as a medium for sabotage in relationships, is this to be used as an idea, or be frowned upon? Are we to be shocked when young girls are allowed to watch *Girls Gone Wild* and flash the television in accordance? These are good questions to take into consideration when watch the movie, *Mean Girls*.

After all of the drama that goes down within our movie, there are several key points that are brought about at the end of the movie. So far we’ve been on an emotional rollercoaster with jealousy, anger, malice, hurt, sadness, happiness, and lust. After the burn book is published and everyone sees what people have been writing, “all hell breaks loose”. The junior class begins viciously fighting with each other. The principle has to call an impromptu convocation to talk to all of them. Ms. Norbury had the girls write out apologies to people they had hurt. During this time, Janice came clean about her plan with Cady and Damian to sabotage Regina. This is when things started coming out between Cady and Regina. Cady wound up claiming she wrote the entire book, and started to “suck all the poison out of [her] life.” She started with Regina and then moved to Ms. Norbury, apologizing to the people that she hurt. The movie ends with Cady winning Spring Fling Queen and breaking up the plastic crown she received, sharing it with everybody. As we look into the following year at North Shore High, we can see that Regina has channeled all her anger into sports, and Cady gives a small speech talking about her personal transformation in her first year at high school. She even touches on the fact that peace was found after “she sucked out all the poison”.

“I had gone from home-schooled jungle freak to shiny Plastic to most hated person in the world to actual human being...All the drama from last year just wasn’t important anymore. School used to be like a shark tank, but now I could just float. Finally girl world was at peace.” (Waters)
Although *Mean Girls* is presented in an incredibly humorous, biased manner, there are several beneficial things that teenagers can take from it that they might not even notice at the time. In the paragraph above, we can see a representation of the verse in Matthew, “If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away.” (5.29) One of Cady’s major temptations is the temptation to be popular and do whatever it takes to be more like Regina. This can be encouraged by peer pressure. Biblically, Christians are to be set apart, and we can see this throughout scriptures. “Do not love the world or anything in the world.” (1 John 2.15) “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.” (2 Corinthians 10.3) As Christians, watching this movie we can see an example of needing to stay set apart and not being overcome by the world. We can see Janice, Damian, and Ms. Norbury staying true to themselves. However, a Christian is not encouraged to stay true to his or herself, but rather, “deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow [Jesus].” (Luke 9.23)

Although Cady “got the guy” in the end when she was herself, her transition in attire throughout the movie draws attention to the matter of sexual promiscuity, or immorality. The ways the girls dress, especially around Halloween, and act with their boyfriends are sending all the wrong signals. The Bible clearly states that sexual immorality is wrong. “There must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” (Ephesians 5.3) As Christian viewers see the portrayal of this material, we should recognize that it is wrong, and not condone it.

Previously in the movie we saw the stereotypical “good morals” that Cady had. Not in just what she wore, but also in how she acted. When Cady tells Janice about the Burn Book and Cady refuses to steal it, she is unknowingly following one of the Ten Commandments. “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20.15). We can see the Ten Commandments being referenced again
when looking at the reoccurring theme of gossip. At the root of much gossip are rumors, which usually consist of lies. One of the Ten Commandments is, “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” (Exodus 20.16) Proverbs 16.28 states, “A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends.” Teenage Christian viewers should be able to see the destruction that is caused in *Mean Girls* by gossip and see even more so, how hurtful it really is. Cady states towards the end of the movie how she “is trying this new thing where [she] doesn’t talk about people behind their backs.”

However, Ms. Norbury calls the girls out on their foul talk later in the movie. She speaks a lot on the subject of gossip; however she makes a valid point about how we speak to each other as women. She makes the comment, “You all have got to stop calling each other sluts and whores, it just makes it okay for guys to call you sluts and whores.” Ephesians 4.29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

Ms. Norbury is a strong woman in Cady’s life. In a way, she represents redemption in this secular world we are looking in on. When Cady is apologizing to Ms. Norbury she says, “No good deed goes unpunished.” Ecclesiastes 12.14 says, “God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” After Cady actually admitted her “sin against” Ms. Norbury, Ms. Norbury replies, “I forgive you.” Matthew 6.14 states, “If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” This does not mean, forgive others so that you can be forgiven, but rather, “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3.13) As Christians, watching a secular movie that gives such a powerful example of forgiveness should be uplifting, convicting, and challenging for us to forgive as well.
All in all, *Mean Girls* could be a very useful tool to better relate with teenage culture, especially young women. Although it is rated PG-13, I certainly would not sit down with a group of 7th or 8th grade girls to watch this movie. However, with the permission of parents, I would certainly use this movie as a topic for a Bible study with Junior and Senior girls, because that is who the movie is directed at. It could be in a small group setting. Outside of a small group or retreat setting, I think that it is okay for Christian teenagers to watch this movie, if they are of an appropriate age. The movie is presented in such a way that the audience knows it is calling out stereotypes and segregation of social classes within a school system. It also presents many good themes that I think are appropriate for Christian teens to see. However, I do think that teenagers should use discretion when watching this movie, because it does promote and use foul language and sexual immorality among other things. If any of this is a struggle for a viewer, then they should most definitely not watch it. “Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way…if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean.” (Romans 14.13-14)

Act

*Mean Girls* is a movie directed at high school girls. It is written about the Junior Class, so these girls are probably 16 or 17 years old. Due to the fact that much of the “high school ‘girl world’ culture” is highly unavoidable, I would encourage youth leaders to embrace it in reference to learning about it and staying in tune, in order to better relate to the generation in which they are speaking. I think that *Mean Girls* is a good movie to use in reference to Media, because it is still fairly clean in retrospect to what is now coming out in theatres.
I had mentioned earlier about watching the movie in a small group setting, but I honestly do not think that that is enough time to cover all the information that should be brought to the attention of teenage audience members. An even better idea would be to show this movie at a “Girls Movie Get Away Weekend”, or something similar. We could draw out from the movie themes that are relevant to everyday life, and to scripture. Not only learning about what the world says, but also about what God says.

One of the things I enjoy most about Mean Girls, is that it is real. Despite the fact that the movie is presented in such an over the top, humorous way, high school girls can usually relate to this portrayal of the “caste” system. Not only can ideas about how to act as a Christian in such a society be inferred, but also taking into consideration this is just one form of Media, and that there are many others that are even more popular, and more widely used.

Above much else that can be taken from this movie, Mean Girls should be used as a way to encourage teenage viewers to use discernment when watching movies and partaking in other mediums. “Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8) Watching movies, such as Mean Girls, is a way to practice building up and learning how to better discern, so that we may be better representatives for Christ.
Works Cited


