Stereotypes in film

Stereotypes in FIlm After examining the film " Mean Girls", it can be observed that clear stereotypical gender roles and social class distinctions still exist in contemporary western society. As described by Judith Andre in her article in the Pearson Anthology, a stereotype is a " conventional, formulaic, and usually oversimplified conception, opinion or belief" (60). In other words, a stereotype is an opinion or belief about anything that is so rigid, it can be generalized to the entire population it is describing and it is so simplistic that it can be hard to be proven wrong.

One must not confuse a stereotype with a generalization though. The key thing that differentiates the two would be that a stereotype reflects an unwillingness to change one's mind despite evidence to the contrary while a generalization can and will be swayed when presented with new facts and data. The film " Mean Girls" describes the life of a homeschooled girl from Africa, Cady, transcending from her confront and tranquil life in Africa to the " Real World".

This film is a perfect example of how stereotypes fit into the western contemporary life style because of its crude humor and portrayal of the typical teenage life. In terms of social class, this film takes the hierarchy of western society (job positions, financial status, etc.) and places it in a high school creating this outlandish, but somewhat true portrayal of how life is for a typical teenager. These different " social classes" or cliques are all based off of different stereotypes created over the years.

On Cady's second day in a normal high school, her friend Janice created a seating chart for the cafeteria categorizing where to sit and where not to sit

by the different cliques, going anywhere from the " Smart Asians" to the " Overly sexually active band geeks" to the " worst people you'll ever meet (the Plastics)" and depending on where you are categorized into is where you sit for the rest of your high school life.

Andre states that stereotypes are used to hide and protect the world from harmful or difficult thoughts and that we accept them because it gives us a form of self-deception which " results from a sense of danger to oneself: a fear that the unfaced fact itself will turn out to be unpleasant, or at least that the facing of it will be" (60). The students of North Shore High school acknowledge their stereotypes because that's where they fit in but don't accept them because of how hurtful some of those truths can be.

When Cady couldn't fit in anywhere she coward into the clique that did accept her no matter how fake she needed to be in order to get into it and throughout this transformation she kept trying to convince herself of how innocent and playful she " really was". By the end of the film she was a full on " Plastic" but didn't realize it until Janice slammed it in her face. At the point of that realization, when she faced the stereotype was when she was struggling the most.

All the games Cady played and how she changed physically and personality wise was just to be accepted into the stereotype that seemed most acceptable, that seemed most " liked". Andre mentioned that " psychologically, [stereotypes]…are privileged because they keep us happy" and that is the only reason they are pursued (60). The stereotypes of different genders are also potent in this film. From the start, it is know that in

order to be liked or " popular", girls must be hot, perky, and perfect like the plastics and all the other girls aspire to be like them.

This stereotype of " popularity", that all popular girls are sexy, is very rigid and hard to falsify because of the history of the most liked girls. It is obvious in the film " Mean Girls" that it doesn't matter how mean one person is, if their pretty they will get far and everyone would want to be like you. This is portrayed in the film by how every other North Shore high school sophomore would cut holes at the chest of their shirts to expose the color of their bra just because the most popular girl did it first.

Another example of the rigidity of this and many other stereotypes is how Cady, in order to impress her crush Aaron Samuels, changed from dressing in her simple jeans and sneakers to dressing in the shortest and tightest dress because it is know that the " hotter" one person looks the easier it is to " get the guy". All in all, gender is one of the stereotypes that have had the most trouble changing, and even after all the strides women have made in history, it is still stereotypical for the women of the house to stay at home and watch the kids.

The rigidity of a stereotype bleeds even into its definition. Any belief can become a stereotype just by being broad enough. The place where they are most seen is in the teen years where the one thing anyone wants is to belong. " Mean Girls" takes the teenage life and exaggerates it to show the danger of stereotypes. Regardless of how positive or negative they could be, they will always be hurtful because they don't give credit where credit is due.

All the " Smart Asians" are not smart because they are Asians, but because they work hard to get what they need yet nothing will change the stereotype because of how general it has become. In all honesty, one must fight against the stereotypes just as the girls of North Shore High school ended up doing because all they do is cause more harm than good. Andre, Judith. " Stereotypes: Conceptual and Normative Considerations. " Multi-Cultural Film: An Anthology (Spring 2012). Eds. Cashin & Tanner. Boston: Pearson Learning Solutions, 2012. 59-63. Print.