Pretty In Pink Vs Shes All Tha Essay, Research Paper

The Eighties Teen Movie Vs. The Nineties Teen Movie

In John Lewis s book, The Road to Romance and Ruin, he defines the teen movie as the principle mass mediated discourse of youth; a discourse that rather glibly and globally re-presents youth as a culture (p. 2). In using the term teen movie this does not refer to a movie geared towards teens, but instead to movies about teens. The 1980 s gave us many teen movies, such as Pretty in Pink, Better Off Dead, Say Anything, The Breakfast Club, and Can t Buy Me Love, which have become classics to the twenty-somethings of today. These were movies usually involving two teens from different classes most likely, and the impossible love that they find not-so-impossible. Joseph Reed, in American Scenarios, believes that the ongoing popularity of these movies is that they call up something primal in all of us High school pictures tend to be about public high school, but they know this: even if I went to private school I can be every teen in this picture. I can be (because I have been) victim or failure or nerd (p133).

The late 1990 s gave birth to a new breed of high school movies. Freddie Prinze Jr. replaced John Cusack; Jodie Lynn O Keefe replaced Molly Ringwald. Though on the outside these new movies have all the makings of the old eighties high school movie, a close look will show you that not only are they very different, but they in fact enforce the opposite ideals and problems that high school teens face in real life. Though the plot lines are very similar and many of the characters have many of the same traits, when we examine them we see how different they really are.

Pretty in Pink, written by John Hughes, tells the story of Andie Walsh (Molly Ringwald), an unpopular, lower middle class girl who dresses in thrift shop/homemade clothes. In the opening scene we learn that not only is the mother missing (we find out later that she left three years earlier), but Andie and her father have a slim budget and he is not a model father (she wakes him in the morning and his first words are “where am I? ) Her only true friend in the school is an eccentric boy named Duckie (John Cryer) who is completely in love with her. We like them both right away, and almost as quickly as we are introduced to them, we meet the richies. Lead by Steff (James Spader) a rich, bored, obnoxious yuppie-in-training – the richies represent all that Andie does not have. When a richie named Blaine (Andrew McCarthy) asks her out, though harboring a previous crush, she has her doubts. After their date, though there were many downs, they agree that nothing should stop them from being together. They enjoy a short time together until Blaine backs out of their prom plans without even a phone call. Andie, being the strong girl, goes to the prom alone, where she meets up with Duckie. Blaine, obviously a wreck about what he has done, professes his love and the movie ends with a beautiful kiss in a parking lot.

Though more obvious than real life may allow, this story tells the same story as so many of these eighties teen movies. The popular kids are cruel, heartless, and not as fun as the unpopular. Excluding Blaine, all of the richies are out spoken in their hatred of Andie The only visible reason being that her clothes are different and she has less money. We are shown that it is not better to be popular, having money is not necessarily the answer to life s problems. Andie comes from a loving home, her father though he makes mistakes obviously loves her very much. We never see Steff s parents because they have left him home alone, which we are to assume is not uncommon. Though Andie does end up with the rich popular boy, we are not inclined to believe that they have anything to do with his former life and friends. Before Blaine confronts Andie at the end of the movie, he even tells off Steff: You couldn t buy her. She thinks you re shit and deep down you know she s right. After that line, the issue of class becomes meaningless and it is now only about the two people in love (Lewis, 139). Blaine has traded in his place in the class system to be with Andie.

She s All That is a nineties high school movie with a similar premise. Laney Boggs (Rachel Leigh Cook) is an outcast from a middle class family who would rather bother with problems of third world countries than wear make up and socialize with just about anyone except her best friend who like in Pretty in Pink is an equally outcasted boy. Zack Siler (Freddie Prinze Jr.) is the most popular, most handsome guy in school with acceptance letters from Yale, Dartmouth, and Harvard, and until just the beginning of the movie, a future prom queen girlfriend. All goes haywire for poor Zack when his girlfriend dumps him for Brock Hudson (Matthew Lillard), a self-obsessed jerk from the Real World. Zack claims that any girl could be prom queen with the right make up, walk, and boyfriend, and thus begins a bet between friends. Zack finds himself with only six weeks to transform geeky Laney Boggs into the prom queen. She falls for him, he starts to fall for her, and then it all hits the fan when she finds out about his bet. Of course he wins prom king and then realizes that he loves her and again, they kiss under the stars and we are left under the impression of happily ever after.

There are many similarities between these two movies. Both girls have only a father, who of course dishes out the best advice. Both girls are outcasts, have very few friends and are not interested in what most of the kids their age are. Both guys are super popular. Both have lots of money, are very attractive, and seem to not possess the same jerk quality that all their friends do. But this is about where similarities end.

The main character in Pretty in Pink is Andie Walsh. The majority of girls in high school are not super popular, and it is safe to say that almost every teen has felt like an out cast at some point. This is why we relate to Andie. The main character in She s All That is not Laney Boggs, but Zack Siler. Throughout the whole movie we are told to understand him, and to relate to him which most teens cannot do very easily. Instead of feeling bad for him when he explains to Laney how hard it is to live with a father who constantly pushes for him to go to his own alma mater (Dartmouth), we are thinking what Laney says to him ( are you listening to yourself? ) Except she doesn t seem to actually think that, because she follows that line up with an inspirational speech about how he can do whatever he wants to do.

While Pretty in Pink teaches us a lesson about being an individual and that social class and popularity are not what is important, She s All That does quite the opposite. When we meet Laney, she is a girl who is very socially conscious. We see her in art class speaking about a painting about the terrible injustices going on in Mogadishu. By the end of the movie, she has dropped all of her prior beliefs. Not only does the girl who can spell Mogadishu go to the prom now she even learns to care about being elected prom queen (Klawans, 34). We see a completely different girl than who she was at the start of the movie. She has lost every bit of what made her an individual, only reinforcing the idea that the popular group has stolen Laney s true self and made her into something they felt they could easily accept something more like them.

When Zack forces her to go to a party with him, he brings her a dress and gets his sister to give her a full makeover (which is another rediculous aspect this girl is beautiful to begin with, no one would believe that she was considered ugly). The first time we see him actually take interest in her is when she comes walking down the stairs – cleavage, makeup and all. Once transformed, she never goes back. She begins wearing make-up every day, even dresses like the other kids in her school. This only reinforces the idea that what she became is something better than what she was. The only bit of relief we get is when the sister presents her at the stairs and she says introducing the new not improved but different Laney Boggs. Though she makes that statement, we soon realize that in this movie, she is considered improved. We never see her reject the culture that she has been forced into, instead she embraces it.

In Pretty in Pink, Andie ends up in the principal s office after fighting with some rich girls who were harassing her. As she rises to leave the room, he says If you put out signals that you don t want to belong, people are going to make sure that you don t, to which she responds, That s a beautiful theory. We immediately think that the principal is wrong and does not understand Andie or anyone like her. We don t question the fact that the line was meant to only further the point that being different is not bad, and that the richies are the ones to blame and not Andie or Duckie. Ironically, this quote fits in the plot of She s All That, except as a real lesson, something that we know Laney has learned. Laney does not belong because she does not want to, and because she insists on being different. As soon as she allows herself to be like the other teens, she almost at once is happier and more positive. The closing line of the movie says it all: I feel just like Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman well, except for that whole hooker thing. Zack is looked at as the rich, handsome man that saved Laney from a depressed middle class life full of concerns and strong beliefs. With the popular man, she no longer needs to care about dolphin friendly tuna and third world countries.

Many people, including critics, are quick to put movies like Pretty in Pink and She s All That in the same category, and assume that they are quite similar. Though it is true that the plot lines to these movies, as well as other teen movies, are very similar and follow the same track, the underlying messages are distinctly different. One reason that the movies of the eighties are so memorable is the fact that they represent something or someone that most people can relate to. Like Reed said, everyone was the nerd or the failure at some point in their life (p 133). This is not the case in the nineties movies. Very few people have been or will be a Zack Siler. Only a small minority can understand and care about the problems he faces. Even worse, those who have been the nerd don t want to hear of his problems with college and the prom. The only character in She s All That who has the same characteristics of the typical eighties teen, decides that they are not good enough and throws them away for a life of mediocrity and blatant conformity.