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Assignment 2

Booker and Wolf’s Analysis of *Legally Blonde*

Dear Booker,

It comes to my attention that it has been a while since I last conversed with you, but I recently watched a movie that I was interested in hearing your opinion of because I know you also think popular culture should challenge traditional values, and this movie did just that. The movie is called *Legally Blonde*, and I came into the movie thinking it would be one of those mindless, entertaining works of pop culture. You know what they say. Ninety percent of works of popular culture aren’t worth a second thought, but ten percent of it contains some worthwhile, thought-provoking material. It turns out *Legally Blonde* can be put into this ten percent category due to the fact that itis surprisingly packed with implications that break sexist stereotypes particularly in the realm of higher education making the stand that women are just as capable of being successful in this academic atmosphere as men. *Legally Blonde* brings about these important issues in a way that is subtle, so that the traditional values brought up are not attacked, but are challenged, which allows for a much more productive and effective discussion of the issues.

The main character, Elle Woods, serves an embodiment of the stereotypical blonde, ditzy woman. However, Elle’s transition in the movie to a serious law student at Harvard serves to break this stereotype. She shows that women are just as capable at becoming serious and competent students. Furthermore, she serves to represent the broadening of higher education to a wider group. Traditionally, privileged, white males have predominantly occupied higher education and college. *Legally Blonde* uses Elle’s character to challenge this traditional idea that women belong in the household realm and don’t need a higher education or job. As a woman doing very successfully at an Ivy League college, she demonstrates that college is not just a male domain and that women also belong there.

This may not seem as pertinent as a problem as say fifty years ago because colleges have been enrolled with more and more women in the past half-century, but there is still a major imbalance in some of the majors in terms of gender. Some fields of study that continue to be male dominated include engineering and law. At the beginning of the movie, Elle was a fashion student, which is kind of a stereotypical “womanly” major, and her commencement in this major serves to represent what is normally considered a major for a woman. Even with more women going to college, there still exist this stereotype of kinds of studies that are more suited for men versus women and vice versa, and that women might not be able to handle such a challenging major as something like law. However, Elle’s transition to studying law serves as a challenge to the male- dominated studies that women are just as capable as men in being successful in these fields, and her emergence in this field becomes a “subtle peer pressure” in normalizing the idea of women working and studying in these domains. I’m so glad I came across this movie because it’s such a great example of how pop culture can serve to effectively CHALLENGE traditional values versus ATTACKING them with its implications about gender values and stereotypes. I look forward to hearing back from you soon and getting to know what you thought of the movie and its important implications on sexism.

Sincerely,

Wolf

Dear Wolf,

I appreciate that you thought of me in discussing a popular culture medium that you thought would be of importance, however, I did not see the wide implications of *Legally Blonde* that you did. I agree that popular culture can be an important way in which traditional values can be challenged and that Enlightenment, progressive thinking can be incited, but I don’t think this particular work does either of these things.

If anything I think *Legally Blonde* further entrenched the negative stereotypes of women because although Elle transitions to becoming a more serious student and to eventually winning a big court case, the fact that she won the court case through her expertise of hair rather than law overshadowed her actual achievement. Although this movie shows her having this huge success, it’s not represented through superior intellectual prowess or something barrier-breaking for woman. Instead, her success is attributed to her knowledge of something that is stereotypically represented as an expertise of women; hair. The other time in the movie that Elle made a significant discovery in the courtroom was when she deduced that the man allegedly having an affair with the murder-suspect Brooke was gay. The way in which Elle figured this out, though, was in the kinds of shoes the man was wearing. Therefore, every time Elle did something of importance, it was through her knowledge of shoes and hair; topics that are supposedly the woman’s domain and expertise. This very clearly strengthens the stereotype that the only things women are knowledgeable in involve cosmetics and clothes thus entrenching the ditzy woman stereotype.

Elle’s two sorority friends also serve to further entrench the stereotype of ditzy women because every appearance they made in the movie portrayed these women as extremely shallow and materialistic. For example, when they call Elle at Harvard, the big news one of them has to share with Elle is the fact that she got bangs. This instance portrays these women as having very simple and shallow thoughts that are of very little importance. Then, when these friends show up in the courtroom to support Elle, they are dressed very exuberantly and act inappropriately for the occasion making the point that these mindless girls do not belong in such a serious and academic setting.

There were two kinds of stereotypical women portrayed in this movie, one being very beautiful, materialistic, shallow, and ditzy and the other being smart yet mean and prudish. Elle and her two hometown friends were represented by this first stereotype and the character Vivian embodied the second stereotype. Although Vivian may first appear to be a positive representation of a woman because she is portrayed as smart and successful, she is also shown as being mean and cattish. Therefore, *Legally Blonde* entrenches several different stereotypes of women, and all of these stereotypes are negative and thus regressive to Enlightenment thinking and challenging of traditional values. While this movie may be entertaining to watch, it is meant for just that; entertainment. It was not meant for progressive thought and the challenge of traditional values.

Best Regards,

Booker