

The Way of Director Presenting Teenage Girls in a Movie and How It Influences Viewers of the Same Age and Gender, Taking the Film Lady Bird as an Example

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Abstract: In the contemporary era of rapid development, the progress of feminism and the evolving status of women have come into focus through the collective efforts of diverse individuals. Various forms of media have played a pivotal role in portraying women's representation. Within the film industry, there has been a notable transformation in the depiction of female characters. Unlike the past, where women were often objectified through the traditional male gaze, modern cinema has given rise to multifaceted female characters brought to life by a myriad of directors and screenwriters. These characters have ceased to be mere accessories and have emerged as independent figures, relatable to countless female viewers. This analysis focuses on the movie *Lady Bird* as a compelling illustration of contemporary female diversity in cinema. Through an examination of five key scenes, this essay explores the cinematic language, emotions, and messages conveyed to the audience. It delves into how these elements resonate with women of a similar age to the film's heroines. In essence, *Lady Bird* effectively encapsulates the struggles and passions of young women during their high school years.

Keywords: Teenage, Youth, Movie, Young Femininity, Audience

1. Introduction

During adolescence, individuals often confront the paradoxical crossroads of immaturity and exuberance, a juncture characterized by the turbulent nature of youth. At this stage, there exists a yearning for excellence juxtaposed with the allure of diverse temptations accompanying rapid life changes. This phase, notably for young women, becomes rife with missteps in matters of love and decision-making, offering valuable lessons that lay the foundation for their transition into subsequent life phases.

Within this context, the film *Lady Bird* (2017) adeptly portrays the journey of mending relationships and self-discovery. The film's central narrative revolves around Christine, a young woman navigating the challenging terrain of high school. While aspiring to explore the broader world in New York City and experience romantic love, her reality sharply contrasts these dreams. She finds herself ensnared in her underappreciated hometown, wrestling with relational challenges involving her parents and friends. What distinguishes *Lady Bird* is its distinctive depiction of young female characters.

As suggested in the book 'Feminism at the Movies: Understanding Gender in Contemporary Popular Cinema' [1], contemporary assessments of popular cinema have shifted away from the traditional motives of defining feminist counter-cinema, an authentic woman's cinema, or a representation of 'woman as a woman.' The film industry has moved beyond these traditional tropes, which often depict women through various lenses, such as the male gaze or conventional notions of womanhood, rarely offering characters that resonate with the audience's experiences. *Lady Bird* captures the essence of adolescent girls, providing a portrayal that is both enthralling and relatable.

The director's storytelling prowess weaves a narrative that is both serene and emotionally resonant. This paper aims to investigate *Lady Bird* and its transformative impact on the audience. Specifically, it will analyze selected scenes and shots chosen for their profound influence on viewers, evoking a range of emotions from empathy and nostalgia to affection and antipathy. This analysis will delve into the techniques used to achieve these effects and examine the interplay of colors and objects within the film's visual composition, serving as conduits for conveying sentiments and ideas, enabling viewers to connect on a deeper level.

The primary focus of this essay is to unearth the essence of each shot and decode how objects are transmuted into emotions within the film. Furthermore, it seeks to illuminate the depth of the feminist themes present in this cinematic masterpiece, which has left an indelible mark in the realm of filmmaking. This article aims to present a comprehensive analysis of the film's portrayal of youth empowerment through specific cinematic techniques.

Meanwhile, in the book 'Teen Film: A Critical Introduction' by Catherine Driscoll [2], it is indicated that "One apparently central and transparent fact about teen movies is that they are for adolescents." Therefore, this paper will also be exploring how this movie appeals to adults, eliciting empathy and resonating with their experiences as the story of the movie goes.

2. Analysis of The Images and Its Impact On Teenagers And Other Female Readers

2.1. The First Shot: Conveying the Unpredictable Nature of Youth

In the realm of art, the theme of familial discord has frequently been explored, and the film commences its analysis by selecting an opening scene that effectively encapsulates the typical tension between a mother and her daughter. In this specific scene, Christine and her mother have just returned from a visit to a community college. Prior to this moment, the audience remained unaware of the power dynamics and the nature of their relationship. However, through the director's straightforward yet compelling cinematography and the authentic dialogues exchanged between the mother and daughter, a picture emerges of the heroine's defiance, her longing to leave home, and their occasional disagreements, often sparked by trivial matters. The director's choice of filming techniques serves to convey a unique impact on the audience.

A medium shot is employed, allowing viewers to see only partial views of the interior of the car and the upper portions of the two characters. This choice diverts the audience's attention to the characters placed on opposite sides of the frame, effectively highlighting the opposition and mutual resistance between the two figures on the screen. It subtly alludes to the complex relationship dynamics by emphasizing the distance and positioning of the characters within the frame. This approach is further complemented by the use of a static shot, where the camera remains stationary for an extended duration. The static shot enhances the viewer's focus on the protagonist's animated dialogue, ensuring a deeper engagement with the content. As the audience listens to the conversation, they become privy to the trivial subjects of contention, such as differing music preferences. The content of their conversation is really down-to-earth and apparently commonly seen in many mother and daughter relationships, they talk about college and future and entertainments, etc. These

immersive details render the exchange more genuine and relatable, as it mirrors the common experiences of individuals who have engaged in similar disputes with their parents over trivial matters.

The film is notably appealing to teenage girls and female audiences. As discussed in Timothy Shary's work, "Film Genre Reader" [3], American cinema during the late twentieth century exhibited a consistent cultural fascination with narratives and images centered around young individuals. The film reflects this fascination, capturing the essence of youth styles and promoting specific perspectives on the celebration or, in some cases, the endurance of adolescence. Christine, like many teenage girls, is portrayed as a sensitive and impulsive young woman, and the director skillfully employs fundamental yet precise filming techniques to underscore her emotional state. This is evident when Christine impulsively exits the car, clearly perturbed by her mother's actions like she always does in other parts of the movie at the conclusion of the static shot.

2.2. The Second Shot: The Immature but Ambitious Aspirations Of Youngsters

However, the director adeptly accomplishes the task of imparting a sense of hopeful but unpredictable longing for a splendid future to the audience. This is achieved through a skillful use of contrasts, both in terms of physicality and color choices that establish the scene's tone.

The shot in question is a wide-medium and static one, signifying that the human figures within it are comparatively diminutive, while the camera remains stationary. In this particular scene, a symmetrical, grand house dominates the visual frame, unequivocally serving as the focal point. In the immediate foreground of the house, two figures occupy a small portion of the composition. This striking disparity in the relative proportions of the house and the characters mirrors the concept of 'nobodies' or the aspirations of young people within their grand vision of the future.

The director's strategic composition of this frame aligns perfectly with the context, as the two girls—the protagonist and her close friend—are engrossed in a discussion about the house, which holds significance as their dream home and represents their future aspirations. While their candid dialogue directly explicates and elaborates upon their yearning for a better future, the carefully constructed visual composition by the director amplifies this contrast in size and the emotional resonance surrounding their aspirations.

The selection of colors in this scene also merits exploration. The house is painted in a dynamic and vibrant shade of blue, a choice that harmonizes exquisitely with the theme of youth symbolized by Christine. The director's thoughtful placement and color selection of objects and characters within this scene facilitate the audience's multi-faceted perception of the heroine's longing for the future.

Additionally, the color of the building carries another deeper significance. A video essay from The Take on YouTube suggests that the inspiration for the color palette was drawn from the rivers of Sacramento [4], incorporating blues, which are elegantly paired with pastels reminiscent of the everyday object paintings by Wayne Thiebaud, an artist hailing from Northern California. This choice of color palette not only enhances the visual aesthetics but also conveys valuable information to the viewers. It underscores how the producer's personal experiences have a direct impact on the color scheme and, consequently, the overall tone of the film, since the producer lived in the same place as Christine was placed in.

In the work 'The Use of Color in Theatres and Films' by Ivan Magrin-Chagnolleau [5], it is noted that directors' decisions regarding color are influenced by a multitude of factors. These factors encompass their knowledge of color, cultural influences, experience in employing color, contemplations on color-related questions, and the possibility of a dialogue on color with their lighting designers or cinematographers. Furthermore, the choice of color is highly contingent upon the specific production and its requisites concerning color utilization. This observation supports the understanding of the origins and significance of the blue color in the film.

2.3. The Third Shot and Features of the Ebullient and Courageous Acts Of Teens

In this section, the analysis delves into the examination of the third shot and its ability to vividly capture and elucidate the ebullient and courageous acts of adolescents. A plethora of cinematic techniques exist that can effectively convey the innocent vivacity of youth, and the director adeptly exemplifies this in the ensuing scene.

In this particular instance, the protagonist, Christine, is found dancing and exuberantly vocalizing her emotions amidst the backdrop of a neighborhood street enveloped in the shroud of night. This shot primarily adopts a basic medium framing, akin to the ones discussed previously. Furthermore, it employs a tracking shot, with the camera positioned in front of her, meticulously tracing her movements as she advances towards the foreground.

The ensuing visual spectacle is a manifestation of unrestrained and irrational gestures coupled with fervent outbursts, thus imbuing the camera lens with a profound tapestry of emotions. Through the lens, it is as though Christine is a captive bird, confined to a cage, incapable of liberation or catharsis. This shot attains a certain poignancy owing to its seamless synthesis of meaning with the age of the central character. It is within the realm of youth that such irrational yet perfectly comprehensible actions can manifest, in stark contrast to the gravitas and contemplation that often accompany adulthood.

In the essay "Psychological Conflict of the Main Character Reflected in *Lady Bird* Movie" by Kicki Herdayanti and Robby Satria of Universitas Putera Batam [6], the unique essence of Christine is underscored with the argument that "...the main character in this film is primarily governed by her id, which constitutes the core of one's innate personality."

The choice of color and lighting in this particular shot is another facet worth exploring. Firstly, the protagonist is attired in remarkably ordinary garments, which impeccably align with her current disposition. Secondly, the director deliberately opts for a nocturnal setting instead of the daytime, thereby intensifying the overarching sense of melancholy and the protagonist's state of emotional breakdown. It is as though she is entrapped within the obscurity of the night, yearning for release. Simultaneously, the dimly flickering streetlights mirror the tumultuous chaos of her thoughts, offering only a modicum of illumination amidst the pervasive darkness.

Within this frame, an unbridled and exuberant soul is witnessed. Christine may be ensnared by the constraints imposed by life, yet she exhibits no qualms about immersing herself in the present moment and expressing her innermost self within the solitude of the night. This shot holds great significance, as it unveils the distinctive realm of youthhood for each individual. It enables the audience to intimately sense the affinity between themselves and the central character, thereby fostering a profound sense of empathy.

Crucially, this shot efficaciously fulfills its role by establishing a palpable connection with the audience, as opposed to elevating the protagonist to an unrealistic and less convincing pedestal.

2.4. Program Code

Within the film industry, diverse scenes are crafted to accommodate a range of thematic content. Among these scenes, those grounded in realism tend to resonate most profoundly with audiences. An article titled 'What is Realism in Film? Cinematic Realism Explained' by Cris Heckmann, featured on Studiobinder's website in August 2021, posits that cinematic realism, often referred to as "life pieces," draws its essence from the principles of the realist art movement and philosophical realism [7]. To determine a film's "realistic" quality, objective elements can be examined, such as the absence of sensationalized events or the presence of a coherent narrative. Realism frequently serves as a cinematic tool to weave intimate narratives that connect viewers on an introspective level.

In this particular shot, the author delves into the application of realism in the film and its impact on the audience's emotional connection with the characters, shaped by scenes and dialogues that mirror life itself. Firstly, the entire scene unfolds within a modest shopping mall, where rows of neatly arranged racks fill the frame, exuding a sense of order and aesthetic simplicity. Positioned amidst this clothing selection, the protagonist and her mother embody a portrayal of everyday life, a scenario intimately familiar to many middle-class mother-daughter pairs.

Turning the attention to the cinematographic technique employed, the shot mirrors the initial scene by using static shots and medium shots to direct the viewer's focus toward the unfolding conversations. The characters are in the midst of selecting a prom dress—an occurrence that epitomizes realism, as proms are customary events in the lives of American high school students, akin to Christine. This choice of event fosters engagement and empathy within the audience, infusing the narrative with vitality and accessibility. A noteworthy facet of this scene is the utilization of film filters to evoke a distinct mood.

The overall picture is characterized by darkness, projecting a damp and somber ambiance. This bluish hue aligns with the minor discord between the mother and daughter, born from their gloomy dispositions. An informative article published on FilmDaft's website, titled 'The Five Types of Lens Filters You Need for a Cinematic Look,' suggests that movies typically employ five types of lenses, which can help the director to convey different emotions and vibes. In the case of *Lady Bird*, color filters were not an absolute necessity, but colors were strategically used to enhance specific atmospheres [8]. In the movie, the prevalence of the bluish mood not only imparts a cooler and more dynamic tone but also resonates with the overarching zeitgeist of the early 2000s, the era in which the story is set. This kind of setting draws the viewer's attention closer to the content and creates special effects as it distinguishes itself from real life.

2.5. The Fifth Shot and The Concept of Struggle In Teen Movies

Christine strolls through the streets of her dream city, New York. According to SD Katz's 'Film Directing Shot by Shot: Visualizing from Concept to Screen' [9], a tracking shot serves to convey a panoramic view without specifying the framing, while still maintaining a clear sense of camera positioning and action staging. This technique effectively immerses the viewer in the environment with the characters.

Throughout this shot, the camera meticulously tracks Christine's journey, ultimately revealing her sense of isolation and vulnerability. She finds herself in New York, a place where her mother and best friend are absent, and it's no longer the familiar hometown she once knew. As she walks, Christine reflects on the memories of her hometown back far away from New York, prompting the audience to sympathize with her inner turmoil. With her newfound surroundings, she begins to appreciate her homeland and her parents more deeply. In the context of a coming-of-age film targeted primarily at a female and young audience, the protagonist has undergone significant transformation from the film's inception to this concluding scene.

This medium-wide shot affords a comprehensive view of the character, enabling close observation of her overall movements. At this juncture, she appears adrift, akin to a lost soul wandering the streets of New York City. The director continues to employ fundamental shooting techniques, such as the horizontal tracking shot that follows the character's movements.

The film *Lady Bird* is unequivocally successful, as suggested by Ryan Shand's article, 'Excitement lies elsewhere: Teenage film-makers and popular culture' [10]. Shand indicates that filmmakers often provide profound insights into the challenges faced by young people, particularly their transitional or liminal status. Although the movie itself wasn't created by the director when she is in her teenage years, but she surly presented it as a teenager's perspective. Teenagers stand at the cusp of assuming full responsibility as independent individuals with their unique ideas, opinions, and identities. Yet,

they remain uncertain about the security of their transition into the adult world. Filmmaking serves as a secure platform to explore the interplay of conflicting emotions and thoughts through characters and narratives.

In Christine's hesitant steps and her curious gaze, her internal struggle is witnessed, intertwined with positive emotions like longing and hope. This scene elicits a range of emotions as the entire film revolves around her conflict regarding leaving her hometown for New York. Her ambition's self-assured pursuit led to the erosion of her close bond with her mother. However, upon her arrival in New York, her demeanor defies both her own and the audience's expectations. Despite her initial curiosity about the new city, she becomes reserved and reticent, and started to accept her true identity. It's apparent that her values and priorities have been reevaluated, leading her to choose her hometown and her mother rather than things she has been longing to pursue for years.

The sensation of temporary isolation and immersion in one's personal world becomes palpable in this scene. The peculiar yet profound feeling of a gap and sudden homesickness is something that every student can relate to when they leave their hometown to attend college. People often fail to recognize the value of their youth until it becomes a part of their past. It is within this scene that the protagonist's growth becomes strikingly evident. She sheds her arrogance, takes the initiative to reconcile with her mother, and ultimately embraces her hometown and her name once more.. It is a feeling that the majority can empathize with, as people often leave their hometown at a certain age and figured things are different as they expected. Things they took for granted before become more precious, just like how Christine's value has changed through time.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, the utilization of classic yet highly effective cinematic language, along with proficient picture layout techniques and adept color application, enables the audience to effectively engage with and convey intense personal emotions. These emotions encompass a web of sentiments such as entanglement, anger, and longing. Simultaneously, cinematic techniques serve to comprehensively depict various scenarios, ranging from mundane disputes between mother and daughter, the spirited camaraderie and playfulness among friends, to the internal contemplations of the protagonist. This journey unfolds from initial confusion through disorientation, ultimately leading to an awakening.

Throughout these poignant and vivid scenes, female viewers can readily identify with the typical yet unconventional lives of high school students. This enables a profound resonance with the film's intended impact. The central narrative thread of the film revolves around the struggles of the protagonist, Lady Bird, or Christine, during her high school years, and her intricate, nuanced relationship with her mother. We witness her maturation as she copes with the loss of friendships and shattered dreams during her final year of high school. Additionally, her wistful nostalgia for her hometown, triggered by the jarring transition to a new city, is poignantly portrayed.

It's worth noting that this paper does not delve into the romantic aspects of the heroine's journey. Her yearning for an idyllic first romantic encounter and the experience of shedding innocence is overshadowed by the disappointment encountered from her supposed "true love" during that time. This emotional trauma significantly influences the heroine's growth and awakening, although it isn't explored in-depth within this article. The theme of naive love should resonate with many who have experienced adolescence, deepening their connection to and understanding of the narrative.

Recognizing this limitation, there is an aspiration to conduct more comprehensive analyses in the future when scrutinizing the textual elements of films and various media forms. The goal is to diligently examine every detail and causal relationship, thus gaining a holistic understanding of the cinematic landscape.

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