

## How far does *Clueless* follow genre conventions?

From the outset of the 1995 hit film “*Clueless*”, genre conventions are followed throughout the opening scene. In the first clip of the opening scene, genre conventions are immediately denoted through the use of the cartoon-like overly bright-coloured typography in the opening title sequence. Conventions of the teen genre are drawn from this due to the fun childlike connotations of the typography, signifying the teen audience as well as the teen cast, which is later anchored by popular teen actress Alicia Silverstone, further signifying the genre. As well as this, the typography encoded denotes the decade in which it was made, due to the conventional iconic signifiers of the bright colours and graffiti/cartoon-like font which are featured in other 90s teen films like “*10 Things I Hate About You*”.

The addition of the non-diegetic soundtrack “*We’re the kids in America*” covered by punk-pop band The Muffs further signifies the genre conventions, as not only was the song popular among teens of the decade, but also holds connotations of the rebellious nature of teenagers and their care-free attitudes – this is signified by lyrics such as “*Friday night and everyone’s moving*” and “*Downtown the young ones are going*” connoting the party-life of teenagers, conventional to the teen genre. Punk-pop soundtracks were conventional to teen films of the time as they were commonly seen in the opening credits of popular teenage films and TV shows like “*Freaks and Geeks*.”

The opening scene itself is produced in a montage-like sequence, playing homage to music videos of the decade, demonstrating conventionality, however this music video-like sequence was original of the time, despite the familiarity of it in films after its initial release. This therefore is a demonstration to what theorist Steve Neale claims “*genre are instances of repetition and difference,*” as the montage is familiar to not only teenagers of the 90’s as they can relate it to the MTV scene, but also to contemporary audiences who recognise the montage sequence and relate it to films such as “*10 Things I hate about you*”.

In the following clip in the opening scene, the protagonist is denoted from a high angle wide shot of her driving recklessly through the streets of Los Angeles. This connotes the rebellious and naïve nature conventional in teen films, as well as further complying with Neale’s theory of repetition, due to the denotation of driving in an open top car is a conventional feature of teen films and can be seen in such films like “*Mean Girls*” – such clips conventionally include the popular group or clique usually connoting their status, wealth, and popularity.

Furthermore, in the following clip another denotation of the protagonist is seen through a mid-shot of her shopping in a mall. The overly positive attitude denoted, and the flipping of her long blonde hair establishes the idea that she is

the embodiment of the “dumb blonde” stereotype, conventional to the teen genre, as she appears in the clip to have no pressing commitments, therefore spends her time shopping instigating this stereotype and she gives a shortcut into the narrative. The “dumb blonde” stereotype is not only another utterance of Neale’s theory, but also complies with David Chandler’s theory of familiarity, as such stereotypes as the “dumb blonde” are evidently conventional to the teen genre, and has been seen in many films before “Clueless” and after its release (*Legally Blonde*), therefore resulting in an outcome the audience cannot be disappointed in.

Conventions of the teen genre are established further in the opening scene of the film, through the low angle mid-shot denoted of the protagonist and her friends laughing in an over-the-top manner in a school setting, a familiar and conventional setting of teen genres. In the last clip, again we denote a mid-shot view of the protagonist picking out her clothes on a modern closet system, further connoting the ideology of the “dumb blonde” stereotype as it is denoted throughout the montage that the only things that matter to her are her friends, shopping, and clothes, further establishing the teen genre through the conventionality of the “valley girl” stereotype.

The 1995 teen rom com “Clueless” establishes the genre of teen romcom through its narrative and conventionality of the genre. During the film, protagonist Cher makes a mission out of makeovering misfit new girl Tai into a fellow “Valley Girl”, as quoted in the film by fellow popular girl Dionne, it’s Cher’s “main thrill in life” and “it gives her a sense of control in a world full of chaos”. Though the makeover troupe has been labelled as “cinema’s most problematic”, Director Amy Heckerling subverts this conventional teen film feature, and encodes it as a way to create a short-cut into Cher’s character development and how Tai’s makeover allows her to ironically give herself a makeover from the shallow person she is perceived as.

During the makeover scene later on in the film, we see a high key lighted mid-shot of protagonist Cher along with her best friend Dionne and new girl Tai in Cher’s bathroom. In the clip, we denote Tai flip her wet hair out of the bath while laughing joyfully during the course of her makeover. The high-key lighting connotes Tai’s light-hearted nature and the unstylish clothing Tai wears signifies her care-free attitude towards the makeover. As well as Tai’s clothes and make up is simple, plain and in the scene, in contrast to Cher and Dionne’s bright, body-hugging feminine clothing, further anchoring Tai’s low-key personality. Makeover troupes are extremely conventional to the genre of teenage romcoms and have been a significant troupe for many iconic films, therefore provides a sense of familiarity for the past and contemporary audience.

Throughout *Clueless*, the teen romcom genre is established through the encoded conventions of the genre. Early on in the film the audience are introduced to protagonist Cher’s high school and the people enrolled, through a

walkthrough of the school with best friend Dionne and new girl Tai. This is an iconic and conventional feature of teen romcoms and can be recognised by audiences in other texts like “Mean Girls” with the cafeteria cliques, “The Breakfast Club” or in “10 Things I Hate About You”, a film that is extremely conventional to not only the teen genre, but also holds similarities to “Clueless” itself. Through the walkthrough we denote many iconic signifiers of stereotypes such as the nerds, the jocks, the RV club etc. This signifies a short-cut into the narrative of how the high school hierarchy works, and how Cher tries and influence new girl Tai.

The poster produced for hit teen romcom “Clueless”, denoted is a full shot of protagonist Cher in the centre, with her sidekick friends Dionne and Tai either side. On the poster, conventionality of the teen genre is established through the mise-en-scene, written codes, as well as visual and technique codes. The high key lighting signified in the poster is a common feature throughout romcoms, to connote the idea that everything is bright and happy. Although, due to the context of the film, the high key lighting could have been encoded to connote Cher’s wealth and privilege in the film, as well as her status among others being high and looked upon. This is anchored by the positioning of the characters, as although Dionne and Tai are pictured on higher step on the stairs than Cher, Cher is still front and centre, denoting a focus on her further connoting her popularity. The purple stairs and ornate stairs in the foreground of the poster connote femininity in the poster, acting as a targeting point for the female teenage primary audience- this is anchored by the actresses portrayed in the image.

Within the poster Cher is denoted in a costume consisting of a red dress, red heels, simple makeup with a red lip and a white feather bower. The white feather power could act as a symbolic signifier in the text, as white has connotations of innocence, angel like nature and naivety, which are evident traits of the protagonists in the film. However, her predominantly red costume holds different connotations, as red could connote lust and love, which is anchored by the written code of the slogan at the top of the poster “Sex. Clothes. Popularity.”. However, the use of the contrast between the white and the red could signify the naivety of Cher’s character at the beginning of the film to the maturity she gains at the end in this coming-of-age narrative.

In addition to this, Dionne and Tai are also seen in red, which could connote the idea of how their fashion and social status is a reflection of Cher’s, anchoring the “clique” conventions throughout Clueless and other teen films. Props such as school folders, textbooks, car keys and phones are denoted on the poster; these not only are signifiers of school life, but also act as signifiers for teenage representation, establishing the teen genre. It also gives an insight into the film’s narrative, just like the written code “Sex. Clothes. Popularity. Is there a problem here?”. The slogan adds additional insight to the film's narrative and the recognisable themes, complying with Chandler's theory.