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about 1142 words

Juno: Predatory Power Left Unchecked

Elliot Page's breakout role as Juno MacGuff of Jason Reitman's *Juno* triggered an onslaught of aggravated gender dysphoria for the star through the highly feminized promotional material seen after the film's release. In an interview with TikTok user, elizabday, he expands on his feelings about the film by commending the character's "fresh" gender presentation and complex feminist commentary. *Juno* allows predatory adult men control over the frame through proximity, visual weights, and shifting focus to expand on Juno's dangerous naivety. Unpacking male visual control in the film elevates the narrative beyond the obvious—a discourse on teen pregnancy—and into a dialogue about the underestimated manipulative power of an abuser over the undeveloped, gullible teenage mind.

Before Juno's questionable relationship with Mark, the film implies these themes through a brief shot of Juno's best friend, Leah, interacting with a teacher she has a crush on. Nothing

comes of this relationship, and the teacher isn't named, nor is he featured in any further scenes. It exists not to characterize Leah or the teacher, but rather to introduce Juno's detached, warped sense of appropriate



boundaries between teenage girls and adult men. The shot is framed from her literal perspective, both through the visuals and narration. Her humorous voice over about "freaky girls" and the upbeat, positive music contrasts with the dark implications behind

the unsettling visual. The framing adds a voyeuristic tension to Leah's conversation. Nearly half of the screen is occupied by the backs and shoulders of other students, as if the viewer is witnessing a moment not meant to be captured on screen. Neither character faces the camera directly, and the side of the teacher's face currently facing the camera is underlit. Rather than being positioned in the center of their conversation, the teacher is both centered and the dominant visual weight, leaving Leah in the right third of the screen. She flirts with him as if she's the person in control, but the camera reveals who really has the power in this exchange. The medium wide shot size allows the viewer to see her legs from under her skirt, adding another disturbing, subtly sexual layer to the implications of their interaction. Narratively framing their exchange from Juno's naive third-person perspective and contrasting it with disturbing imagery pulls the viewer into her headspace and sets up the tone for her later relationship with Mark, her baby's prospective adoptive father.

A later scene where Juno invites herself into Mark's home after their relationship has developed builds on the unsettling tone of the relationship through contrast in their environment and the continued use of framing as a vehicle to portray power imbalances. After they have decided to

watch an old horror movie, the film signifies a passing of time through a shot of the television where a woman is being cut through the abdomen. Most of the screen is red with gore, and the woman's exaggerated, somewhat disturbing screams continue to play in



the background as the camera cuts to Mark and Juno, uncomfortably close on the couch. Though Juno eventually begins to laugh at the corny, deafening screams and excessive gore, her first reaction is entirely different from Mark's. She appears disturbed, grimacing while he grins at the screen, causing him to appear inhuman in comparison to her. He's dangerous—uncanny. The camera is level with Juno's head, privileging her

human grimace and body language over Mark's to exaggerate these differences. She is small, appearing almost like a baby herself; a baby has no business coping with pregnancy, nor being this close with an adult man. Mark towers over her as the dominant visual weight, controlling the scene much in the same way as Leah's teacher had. He controls the man Juno sees sitting next to him. His arm and head encroach on the open framing behind Juno's body as if trapping her there, adding a suffocating, tense feeling to the already eerie, uncomfortable mood.

Many of the details of their environment, much like the open framing behind Juno, double as symbols for the dynamic between Mark, Vanessa, and Juno. The aforementioned gore and screams along with their drastically different reactions gesture toward the horrors of pregnancy in the mind of an underprepared teenage girl. She grimaces at the sight of a woman being cut through the abdomen, which is not entirely dissimilar from a young mind's fearful, unrealistic, horror-movie inspired image of a cesarean section. Despite Mark's lack of involvement with the pregnancy and preparations for birth, represented by his nonchalant expression and lack of interest in helping Vanessa with the nursery, Juno both literally and figuratively looks up to him. Their clothes are eerily similar in style, down to the shade of their blue jeans. They've become too close for comfort. Vanessa's influence hangs over Mark in the background through her decor—something he has already demonstrated disinterest in during previous scenes. Her spotless shelves are decorated with what are likely family photos. Mark's hobby room, shown in an earlier scene, lacks both her tidiness and visible familial values, foreshadowing his later abandonment. When considered with the open framing behind Juno, Vanessa's shelf behind Mark alludes to his feelings about his marriage. She has him trapped in her spotless, manicured dreams of family and motherhood. Juno, conversely, represents his desired freedom from familial chains.

Mark's power wanes the moment those chains—Vanessa—enter the scene. She enters during the sequence's peak: Mark's dialogue has transitioned from harmless to



obscenely forward. He tries to remove Juno before Vanessa catches on, but Juno's naivety obscures his ulterior motives. The camera visualizes his power struggle by shifting to the left, increasing his visual dominance, but not allowing him to be fully centered. Juno laughs off his attempt and stands to greet Vanessa, diminishing his control. The camera shifts back to include more of Juno as his power over the situation continues to dwindle. The final shift back to Mark features more of Vanessa's shelf in the background than was visible before her arrival. Before, her presence was a distant, suffocating memory for Mark.



Now, even without her literal presence on screen, her healthy, positive influence over Juno has crippled him. His expression is shadowed and dark as he looks toward the two



in the kitchen. Instead of Juno, his partner in the scene has become the beige, framed photo in the background, likely of Vanessa. She not only anchors him to the clean, familial life he despises, but fundamentally disrupts his unchecked power over Juno. Visualizing his power struggle

through the unseen Vanessa emphasizes the power of the mother over male manipulation.

Juno's attention to detail when depicting power imbalances between adult men and young girls alleges that there is no greater threat to predatory male advances than the mother figure. Predatory male desire holds a silent, yet suffocating power over the girls' trust by subsisting on their naivety. Through the film's attention to Mark's unnerving subtlety, teen pregnancy is no longer a parent's worst nightmare, taking second place to the morbid reality of a predatory man's level of influence over naive young women.