

Sarah Cain

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Philip Longo

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Societal Norms Will Never Be Fetch

Intersectionality plays an important role in social construction, as it explains just how complex identity is and how each piece of one's identity comes together to form a cohesive, inseparable whole. In *Gender in Communications*, Victoria DeFrancisco describes intersectionality as "a way to understand the ingredients of cultural identities," and it has proven to be considered "multiplicative rather than additive," (8). Because your identity is a multi-layer, intricate system, taking away one part of your identity or switching a couple factors can completely change your identity and how people view you. This being said, a single aspect of identity, such as race, cannot define an entire person. The American teen comedy, *Mean Girls* (2004), ridicules social constructions and societal norms by mocking the "Plastics", the four most popular girls at North Shore High School: Regina, Karen, Gretchen, and Cady. Intersectionality is an underlying theme throughout the entire movie as Cady Heron tries to change her identity to lose the "new girl" label, and the Plastics use their power gained from gender, race, and social class characteristics to rule the school. They use these classification groups to define a person's identity, instead of focusing on someone's personality to express themselves.

The Plastics conform to countless blatantly obvious gender stereotypes displayed throughout the movie, incorporating the most emblematic female characteristics out there. The exclusive clique follows strict rules for attire such as having to wear pink on Tuesdays, only

wearing jeans and track pants on Fridays, and not being allowed to have their hair in a ponytail more than once per week. If members do not follow these standards, they are unable to join the rest of the Plastics at the lunch table. Regina George, dictator of the Plastics, represents an extremely stereotypical female with her blonde hair, busty chest, and thin body, which she uses to gain power and popularity at her high school. Regina becomes obsessed with counting calories and losing weight because she feels that in order for guys to like her, she must be skinny. While trying to find dresses for the Spring Fling dance, the Plastics stop by the store 1-3-5. Regina asks for a dress in a larger size, and the saleslady tells her to try Sears because 1-3-5 only sell sizes one, three, and five. After gaining weight, Regina experiences a loss of power on multiple occasions, like when she was scorned for wearing sweats twice in one week and not allowed to sit with the Plastics during lunch. The behaviors of the Plastics led many young women into believing that appearance and status should be of main importance in a girl's life which creates a false assumption that thinness is essential for beauty, popularity, and happiness. What the movie shows is that female camaraderie is based on nothing more than conforming to gender stereotypes; this indicates that the only way to have friends is to conform to these stereotypes.

Another overarching concern within the Plastics' alliance is the belief that women will appeal more to men if the man feels more intelligent, which is commonly associated with power and masculinity. The Plastics portray themselves as dumb, embarrassed by their intelligence, and highly dependent of men because of the common misperception that men are intimidated by smartness. Cady Heron, the new girl from Africa, continuously dumbs herself down to try to fit in with the Plastics and the popular girl stereotype. She pretends to be confused with math in order to get attention from and talk to Aaron, eventually becoming obsessed with the idea of being in a relationship with him. Karen is portrayed as the typical dumb blonde. She thinks

cousins and first cousins are different, says her breasts can tell when it's going to rain, and is failing almost all her classes. In her book, *We Should All Be Feminists*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues that "the harder a man feels compelled to be, the weaker his ego is," leading women to believe that we must "cater to the fragile egos of males," (27). All members of the Plastics were shown spending a lot of their time catering to their male counterparts.

Characterized by their behaviors and attitudes, the Plastics are an atrocious representation of female characters being highly dependent on men, conforming to gender roles and stereotypes, and caring a lot about their physical appearance.

Heteronormativity is a common view among the Plastics, who prove to be exceptionally homophobic by using their power. In *Privilege, Power and Difference*, Allan Johnson states that "people... use difference to include or exclude, reward or punish, credit or discredit, elevate or oppress, value or devalue, leave alone or harass" those who are different, leading people like Regina George to use their power in any way, shape or form, to exhibit dominance over their peers (16). Throughout the film, there are many instances of the Plastics exploiting their peers by abusing the power that has been handed to them. Janis is falsely perceived as a lesbian because of how she looks and dresses, and Damian is depicted as a stereotypical, flamboyant homosexual who is "too gay to function". These two characters are unpopular because of their assumed homosexuality and how the Plastics have labeled them. However, towards the end of the movie, Janis begins to find acceptance and gain popularity as she begins dating Kevin. Those who do not fit perfectly in the heterosexual social standard are perceived as social outcasts, while the popular girls associate heterosexuals with normalcy and happiness. It is exceedingly apparent that the Plastics view heteronormativity as a strong aspect of popularity and acceptance, while homosexuality is continuously satirized.

Racism is remarkably evident through the Plastics' treatment of their peers. The main characters are predominantly white, and the popular clique consists only of white members. Janis describes the different lunchroom groups by race, labeling them as "unfriendly black hotties", "Asian nerds", and "cool Asians", which perpetuates the negative stereotypes that engulf complete races. DeFrancisco argues that "races do not exist in the biological sense," further proving how today's society uses race as a "primary social category... to identify people," (14). What he means is that racism is being used as an identifying, grouping measure, instead of a biological trait born within us. Since Cady is a transfer student from Africa, students and teachers assume that she is black. Ms. Norbury welcomes an unfamiliar black student to class, thinking that she must be from Africa simply because of her skin color. Another instance of racism is when Karen asks, "so if you're from Africa, why are you white?" Each racial incident involves at least one of the Plastics and is shown to be an indicator of privilege resulting from higher power.

The importance of socioeconomic class is revealed in numerous different ways, with the Plastics leading a strong social hierarchy as the dominant group on campus. The Plastics are wealthy and spoiled, wear expensive clothes, and have the most influence on the school. In *Is Everyone Really Equal*, Robin DiAngelo expresses how those who are "valued more highly... set the norms by which the minoritized group is judged... [and] have greater access to the resources of society and benefit from the existence of inequality," (25). Regina experiences power because of her wealth, causing her to adopt a hegemonic, dominating social position in her school. Regina's hair is "insured for \$10,000", and Bethany Byrd even said "it was awesome" when Regina punched her in the face. Compared to Regina, Gretchen has a similar socioeconomic class. One of the most important aspects of Gretchen's character is that her father

invented the toaster strudel. Throughout the movie, Gretchen clings to this aspect of her identity, mostly mentioning it to get her out of trouble. The movie demonstrates how socioeconomic class determines the amount of happiness you feel and how much power you receive, largely apparent within the Plastics.

On the other hand, Cady represents the middle class and is lucky enough to make it into the Plastics because of her natural beauty and interesting life. Her capability to improve her social status is influenced by her beauty and race. Attempting to fit in better with the Plastics, she tries to change herself by buying more expensive clothes and wearing more makeup. Cady thinks improving how she looks will make her more likeable and increase her popularity. This is a prime example of how people use their social class to create privilege for themselves. The dominant group is shown gaining privilege and exhibiting power because of the specific intersections of each of their identities. The Plastics confirm how intersectionality crucially affects society's view of an individual.

Throughout the movie *Mean Girls*, the Plastics use features of their identity, including race, gender, sexual orientation, and income, to unveil their privilege and power over the entire school. Intersectionality leads these young teenagers to display how each part of one's identity influences another, and this proves that all "facets of identity are integral, interlocking parts of a whole," (DeFrancisco et al 8). Identities can completely change when parts are ignored or forgotten, shown when Regina gains a small amount of weight and her female stereotypes are overlooked, or when Cady begins to receive more power because people are under the impression that her social class is improving. The Plastics continuously use their privilege to prove their control over the less powerful: non-whites, homosexuals, lower-class individuals,

etc., while clinging to societal norms in order to believe that they are better than the rest of the school because they are rich, white, straight, stereotypical girls.

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