



Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film

Sarah Hentges

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Although the "coming of age" story has been a popular film plot for decades, producers have only recently realized the commercial potential of targeting films to adolescent girls. Movies like *Clueless*, *Legally Blonde* and *Mean Girls* have been successfully marketed to teenage girls, as have several well-known independent films. Important as both cultural indicators and catalysts, these films simultaneously demonstrate pop culture's influence on girls' films, and the ability of girls' films to affect pop culture and perceptions of girlhood. This critical survey of film and the modern girl concentrates largely on films of the last two decades, addressing key themes for girls within "coming of age" films, the changing (but not always improving) young feminine paradigm, and the ways these films can be powerful determinants of culture. The first chapter explores the ways in which girls' films construct, reinforce, challenge and dismantle mainstream conceptualizations of sexuality, race and power. The second chapter discusses mainstream limitations of "coming of age" narratives, including recycled plots and stars, treatments of parental and male authority, and adult conceptualizations of adolescence. The third chapter describes girls' experiences within these narratives through such conventions as attitude, teen fashion, music and dance, unsanctioned rites of passage, and race. The fourth chapter covers the negotiation of sex and sexuality, virginity and sexual empowerment.

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