

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter explores further fashion's function in fashion identity formation, social power, and cultural remembrance in *Mean Girls* (2004). Using George Lipsitz's Theory of Cultural Memory, the discussion shines light on ways in which fashion is used not only as an icon but also as a means for character formation, social stratification, as well as the broader cultural context for the Y2K fashion. In navigating this discussion, the author will concentrate on pivotal scenes with exact timestamps in order to demonstrate these ideas.

#### **4.1 Narrative**

##### **4.1.1 Characters**

###### **1) Cady Heron**

The film's protagonist Cady Heron, introduced through narration in a way that tells the viewer about her background and the initial personality she possesses.



Picture 4.1 Cady's big day  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.01.06)



Picture 4.2 Spelling bee  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.01.10)



Picture 4.3 Childrens repeating an unusual religious statement  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.13.40)



Picture 4.4 Cady's life in Africa  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.13.40)

- Cady Heron : *"I'm sixteen, and until today, I was home-schooled. I know what you're thinking, homeschooled kids are freaks..."*
- Kid 1 : *"X-Y-L-O-C-A-R-P. Xylocarp."*
- Cady Heron : *"Or that we're weirdly religious or something."*
- Kid 2 : *"And on the third day, God created the Remington bolt-action rifle so that Man could fight the dinosaurs. And the homosexuals. Amen."*
- Cady Heron : *"My family's totally normal, except for the fact that both my parents are research zoologists, and we've spent the last twelve years in Africa. I had a great life. But then my mom got offered tenure at Northwestern University. So it was goodbye Africa and hello high school." (Mean Girls, 00.01.01-00.01-41)*

Picture 4.1 uses medium close up (MCU) to focus on Cady Heron, who is sixteen and attending public school for the first time, and introduces herself with a light joke about being homeschooled. The film supports her comment with playful scenes in Picture 4.2 and Picture 4.3, including a spelling bee and some childrens repeating an unusual religious statement. These moments reflect common stereotypes and show that Cady is aware of how others might see her as different.

Having spent twelve years in Africa with her zoologist parents, Cady's childhood is portrayed through Picture 4.4 of animals, local communities, and her family. Her life was full of unique adventures, but it did not prepare her for the social world of high school. Her unfamiliarity makes her drawn to The Plastics, a well-known group led by Regina George. This marks the beginning of her struggle to find acceptance without losing her sense of self.

## 2) Regina George



Picture 4.5 Regina tells Cady to sit  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.10.31)



Picture 4.6 Regina's dominance  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.10.40)



Picture 4.7 Cady telling she was home-schooled  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.10.46)



Picture 4.8 Regina reacts with disbelief and amusement  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.10.59)

Regina George : "Wait. Sit down. Seriously, sit down. Why don't I know you?"

Cady Heron : "I'm new. I just moved here from Africa."

Regina George : "What?"

Cady Heron : "I used to be homeschooled."

Regina George : "Wait, what?"

Cady Heron : "My mom taught me at home—"

Regina George : "No, no. I know what homeschooling is. I'm not retarded. So you've actually never been to a real school before? Shut up. Shut up!"

Cady Heron : "I didn't say anything."

Regina George : "Homeschooled. That's really interesting."

(*Mean Girls*, 00.10.31-00.10.59)

Regina George stands out as the main antagonist in the film, embodying the familiar figure of the high school queen bee. She is beautiful, clever in her tactics, and consistently maintains control over her social world. Rather than using open aggression, she relies on charm mixed with quiet intimidation.

This dynamic is clear in her first extended interaction with Cady Heron. As Cady hesitates with her lunch tray in Picture 4.5, Regina looks up and commands, "Wait. Sit down," signaling her authority with ease. The image shows Cady in plain

clothing, standing uncertainly, while Regina in Picture 4.6 and her friends sit confidently at the table. In Picture 4.7 Cady mentions she was homeschooled in Africa, Regina reacts with disbelief and amusement. Her surprised expression quickly shifts into playful mockery, repeating “Shut up” in a way that blends interest with dismissal in Picture 4.8. This brief exchange highlights Regina’s ability to control the social tone, making herself the center of attention while subtly setting the boundaries of what is acceptable.

### 3) Gretchen Wieners and Karen Smith



Picture 4.9 Gretchen’s iconic line  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.11.20)



Picture 4.10 Karen’s unawareness  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.11.27)

Gretchen Wieners : “Oh, it's so fetch.”  
 Regina George : “What is fetch?”  
 Gretchen Wieners : "Oh, it's, like, slang. From England."  
 Karen Smith : "So if you're from Africa...why are you white?"  
 (*Mean Girls*, 00.11.20-00.11.27)

Gretchen Wieners and Karen Smith complete The Plastics trio, reinforcing Regina’s authority through distinct behaviours. Gretchen, in Picture 4.9 is shown as insecure and eager to please, seen when she excitedly uses the word “fetch” to gain approval, only to be dismissed. Her constant need for validation highlights the group’s power imbalance. Karen, in contrast, is simple-minded and literal, as shown

when she asks Cady, “Why are you white?” after hearing she is from Africa. Though unaware, Karen’s passive obedience helps maintain the group’s structure. Their influence plays a key part in shaping Cady’s gradual adoption of The Plastics’ social behaviour.

#### 4.1.2 Setting

The film is definitively situated in the year 2004 at the fictitious North Shore High School, distinctly situated in early 2000s American youth culture. The setting is permeated with specific signs, specific to fashion and technology that are used during the time.



Picture 4.11 School riot scene  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.06.58)

In Picture 4.11 during the school riot scene, Regina George stands confidently in low-rise jeans and a fitted top, while chaos unfolds around her. Her outfit, along with other early 2000s staples like Juicy Couture tracksuits and slogan tees seen throughout the film, anchors the story in its specific fashion era. Fashion journalist Veronique Hyland defines the style of the time:

“Y2K fashion was characterized by an embrace of excess—rhinestones, logo mania, and hyper-feminine silhouettes, all popularized by celebrities like Paris Hilton, Lindsay Lohan, and Britney Spears.” (Hyland, *Elle Magazine*, 2020)



Picture 4.12 Regina’s prank call  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.17.54)

This scene also highlights the early 2000s setting through the characters’ use of technology. In Picture 4.12, Regina is seen borrowing Gretchen’s iconic pink Motorola flip phone to call a classmate’s home landline. The split-screen shows a direct contrast between mobile and home phone use, reinforcing the transitional phase of communication during that period. In the early 2000s, nearly every teen had a flip phone, and calling someone’s house phone was still a normal part of making plans (Weiss, 2019). These technological choices enhance the narrative’s authenticity and reflect the social habits and modes of interaction typical of early 2000s teenage life.

### 4.1.3 Conflict

The main internal conflict is Cady’s struggle to put aside her original values in exchange for popularity and social power. At first, Cady is very sympathetic and

relatable. However, as she adopts the same behaviours and attitudes as The Plastics, she compromises her values and true friendships.



Picture 4.13 Cady reconnect with her friends  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.32.27)

Cady Heron : “I had gone from home-schooled jungle freak to shiny Plastic to most hated person in the world to actual human being. All the drama from last year just wasn't important anymore. School used to be like a shark tank, but now I could just float. Finally, Girl World was at peace.” (*Mean Girls*, 01.32.23-01.32.30)

Cady’s main conflict is choosing between staying true to herself or chasing popularity. After losing her way with The Plastics, she realizes how far she’s drifted from who she was. In Picture 4.13, wearing a plain white top and jeans, she steps onto the school lawn to rejoin her peers. Her posture is open and sincere, marking a moment of growth as she begins to reconnect with her friends and return to being her real self in Picture.

The external narrative conflict concerns the rivalry between Cady and Regina, and this conflict escalates when Cady decides to purposefully ruin Regina’s diet by

secretly giving her high-calorie Kälteen nutrition bars, telling Regina that they will help her lose weight.



Picture 4.14 Shane telling Regina about the bars  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.02.12)



Picture 4.15 Regina spit out the bar  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.02.22)



Picture 4.16 Regina screaming  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.02.24)



Picture 4.17 Regina's rage  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.02.33)

Shane Oman : "Why are you eating Kälteen bars?"

Regina George : "I'm starving."

Shane Oman : "Man, I hate those things. Coach Carr makes us eat those when we wanna move up a weight class."

Regina George : "What?!"

Shane Oman : "They make you gain weight like crazy."

Regina George : "Mother.."

(*Regina spits out the bar she is chewing and screams.*)

(*Mean Girls*, 01.02.07-01.02.37)

This crucial scene highlights the consequences of Cady's manipulations. It begins with Shane Oman in Picture 4.14 casually telling Regina that the bars are meant for athletes trying to gain weight, not lose it. The moment hits her hard, in Picture 4.15 and Picture 4.16 she spits out the bar in shock, and screams in horror ignoring Shane as he awkwardly leaves. The scene in Picture 4.17 cuts to her running through her lavish bedroom in a satin bomber jacket, ripping down photos in rage. These visuals vividly capture the emotional fallout of Cady's betrayal and mark a major turning point in their rivalry.

This detailed analysis shows how character, setting, and conflict are deeply interconnected, forming a well-structured narrative that sharply reflects and critiques the social dynamics of adolescence.

#### **4.2 Fashion as a Marker of Cultural Memory**

Fashion in *Mean Girls* (2004) functions not merely as a reflection of individual identity but as a potent symbol of cultural memory, anchoring the film within the social and aesthetic milieu of the early 2000s. George Lipsitz (1990) asserts that cultural memory is constructed through shared cultural practices and symbols that shape present-day identities. In the film, Cady Heron's sartorial evolution from modest, practical attire to the trend-conscious ensembles The Plastics visually narrates her social assimilation and internal transformation.



Picture 4.18 Cady's first day of school  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.02.24)



Picture 4.19 The Plastics shopping  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.49.01)



Picture 4.20 The Plastics hanging out  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.50.57)



Picture 4.21 Cady being the queen bee  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.54.49)

Cady Heron's evolving wardrobe throughout *Mean Girls* visually tracks her shifting identity and social alignment. At the film's beginning in Picture 4.18, she appears in practical, understated clothing, such as a plain red T-shirt layered under an olive green utility jacket with a large canvas backpack, signalling her outsider status and lack of concern for style norms. Her wardrobe becomes more curated and brand-conscious as she integrates into The Plastics. In Picture 4.19, she shops with the group, wearing a pink zip-up hoodie over a satin camisole paired with a pleated mini skirt, blending in with their coordinated aesthetic. Later in Picture 4.20, even in casual moments, like lounging at Regina's house, she wears a white fitted tee and

brightly patterned pants. In Picture 4.21, she fully embraces their fashion codes, seen in fitted pastel tops, body-hugging skirts, and branded slogan T-shirts like “Rebel”, highlighting her absorption into a more performative, fashion-driven identity. These pictures use long shots (LS) to show Cady's fashion evolution.

This transformation is emblematic of the broader fashion landscape of the early 2000s, characterized by distinctive and often extravagant styles. Vogue (2021) highlights that early 2000s fashion featured trends that were so bad that they were almost good: bodycon dresses, low-rise jeans, boho chic, It girls, and It bags. These elements are mirrored in the film’s costume design, with The Plastics donning mini skirts, pastel colours, and designer logos, thereby situating the narrative within a specific cultural and temporal context.

By embedding these iconic fashion references into its narrative, *Mean Girls* operates as a vessel of cultural memory, utilizing costume as a visual language to evoke the feeling of the early 2000s. In doing so, the film not only entertains but also preserves and circulates the fashion codes of a specific generation, rendering fashion a powerful marker of cultural memory.

### **4.3 Fashion and the Power Dynamics of Identity**

Fashion in *Mean Girls* is closely related to power. Regina George, as the leader of The Plastics, uses clothing to enforce dominance and control over her peers. Her clothes are always a clear symbol of her social power, as people will follow her

style and make her a trendsetter. In contrast, characters like Janice Ian and Damian Leigh are categorized as marginalized not only because their personalities are considered odd by others but also because their clothing choices are considered nerd outfits, placing them outside of the dynamic of people that Regina successfully influences.



Picture 4.22 The Plastics Cafeteria scene  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.08.24)



Picture 4.23 The Plastics' rule  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.09.44)

- Gretchen : “So this is, like, a really huge deal. We wanna invite you to have lunch with us every day for the rest of the week.”
- Cady : “Oh, it's Okay...”
- Regina : “Coolness. So we'll see you tomorrow.”
- Karen : “On Wednesdays, we wear pink.” (*Mean Girls*, 2004, 00.09.32-00.09.44)

Picture 4.22 uses long shot (LS) and shows Regina with The Plastics's first appearance in the film is characterized by a trendy outfit that sets everyone standard. Their outfit emphasizes their dominance and position, especially Regina as the queen bee in the social hierarchy at North Shore High School. Those who control dominant symbols and memories have the power to shape social hierarchies and maintain cultural dominance (Lipsitz, 1990:8). One of the movie's most memorable moments

is when The Plastics establish the rule by Regina, “On Wednesdays, we wear pink.” in Picture 4.23, further highlighted in the dialogue above.

This rule symbolises her way of showing control and power over the group. Fashion here is not just about clothes but also about deciding who belongs to the group and who does not. By making everyone wear the same thing, Regina uses fashion to show their exclusivity in society.



Picture 4.24 Cady’s complete fashion transformation  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.43.30-00.43.37)

Cady : “Because being with The Plastics was like being famous. People looked at you all the time, and everybody just knew stuff about you.” (*Mean Girls*, 2004, 00.43.30-00.43.37)

Cady Heron’s journey in *Mean Girls* illustrates how fashion is a performance of identity shaped by social context. As she transitions from outsider to a member of The Plastics, her clothing choices begin to reflect the expectations of her new environment. Drawing on the idea that identity is something performed rather than fixed, her shift from modest, practical outfits to trend-driven looks mirrors her desire to belong and be recognized. When Cady wears fitted tops, and short skirts in Picture

4.24 she emulates the group's style, signalling her internal shift toward a curated, socially approved version of herself. George Lipsitz's theory of cultural memory helps to explain how these visual codes, inherited from early 2000s media and celebrity culture, become embedded in how young people learn to present themselves. Based on the dialogue, Cady's clothing becomes both a reflection and reinforcement of the identity she is trying to inhabit, shaped by the memory cues shared within her social world.



Picture 4.25 Janice ripping Regina's tank top  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.31.49)



Picture 4.26 Regina feeling confident wearing her ripped tank top  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.32.00)



Picture 4.27 The whole school wearing ripped top as a trend  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.32.08)

Regina appears at a low-shot angle wearing a tight tank top with a hole in the chest. She uses fashion to set trends, control others, and influence them. In this scene, Janice in Picture 4.25 rips off her fitted tank top to bring down her name. However, Regina confidently wears it in Picture 4.26, and soon, the whole school starts wearing the exact ripped tops shown in Picture 4.27. This depicts how Regina uses fashion as a means of power to set trends and make others follow her. Each character in the movie uses clothing to assert who they are and fight for their place in a social game full of competition and manipulation.

#### **4.4 Fashion and the Game of Power**

In the film, fashion acts as a means in the power game played by the main characters, particularly between Regina George and Cady Heron. Fashion is used to express self-identity and as a strategy to maintain or seize power in a highly structured social environment, such as school.

Regina George, as the leader of The Plastics group, uses fashion to control and regulate the social dynamics in the school. Regina's always luxurious and flashy dressing style, with top brands, symbolizes her social status and influence. In this way, fashion not only reflects social class but also serves as a means to reinforce her position in the social structure.



Picture 4.28 Gretchen criticize Cady's basic outfit  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.13.51)

Gretchen : “You can't wear a tank top two days in a row, and you can only wear your hair in a ponytail once a week. So guess you picked today. Oh, and we only wear jeans or track pants on Fridays. Now, if you break any of these rules, you can't sit with us at lunch. I mean, not just you. Like any of us. Okay, like, if I was wearing jeans today, I would be sitting over there with the art freaks.  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.13.51-00.14.21)

In this scene, Regina along with The Plastics opens Cady's eyes to the truth that fashion is not just about personal style, but a means to influence social relationships. In Picture 4.28, when Gretchen looks at Cady's clothes, she seems to be reminding her that what she wears can represent who will be on top of the social structure.

Initially considered an outsider, Cady began to adopt the group Plastics' dress style, reflecting that it changed how one sees themselves. In this respect, fashion became a symbol of social status that was highly influenced by Regina George and The Plastics' power.



Picture 4.29 Cady began to gain more recognition  
(*Mean Girls*, 00.43.40)

- Student 1 : “That new girl moved here from Africa.”  
 Student 2 : “I saw Cady Heron wearing Army pants and flip-flops, so I bought Army pants and flip-flops.”  
 Student 3 : “That Cady girl is hot. She might even be hotter than Regina George.” (*Mean Girls*, 00.43.40-00.43.52)

However, over time, Cady begins to use fashion to twist control from Regina. In Picture 4.29, two students shot in medium close up (MCU) are talking about Cady and she begins to gain more recognition and we see a turning point in this power game, highlighted in the dialogue above.



Picture 4.30 Regina screaming at Cady  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.16.12-01.16.25)

- Regina : “No! Do you know what everyone says about you?”

They say that you're a home-schooled jungle freak,  
who's a less-hot version of me. (*Mean Girls*,  
01.16.12-01.16.25)

Cady, who once simply followed Regina's lead, begins to shift the group's social dynamic by using fashion to subtly compete with and undermine Regina's authority. As her influence grows, other students start imitating her style, which they now view as more appealing than Regina's. When Cady's betrayal is finally exposed, Regina in Picture 4.30 reacts with intense anger and lashes out at her in frustration.



Picture 4.31 Cady's authentic fashion that matches her true self  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.32.23)

Ultimately, fashion is not just a means to control but also a way to express resistance to wrongful power. Cultural memory not only reproduces dominant ideologies but also provides a site for resistance and the renegotiation of identity (Lipsitz, 1990:22). At the story's climax, Cady chooses to wear simpler yet still stylish and authentic clothing shown in Picture 4.31 signifying that she is letting go of fashion as a way to control social relationships. It also shows her growth and ability to achieve a healthier balance between fitting in and staying true to herself. She

makes peace with her friends, breaks down social barriers, and ultimately embraces a more genuine, authentic version of herself.



Picture 4.32 Regina joining lacrosse team  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.28.51)



Picture 4.33 Regina letting go her queen bee title  
(*Mean Girls*, 01.32.41)

Cady : “In case you're wondering, The Plastics broke up. Regina's spine healed, and her physical therapist taught her to channel all her rage into sports. It was perfect because the jock girl weren't afraid of her.” (*Mean Girls*, 01.28.23-01.30.30)

Regina loses her social status and is forced to face her own flaws. Over time, she finds peace and makes up with Cady, joining the lacrosse team in Picture 4.32 to channel her anger in a more positive way. She starts using a more basic outfit in the Picture 4.32. This more modest fashion choice reflects their decision to restore their true identity and end the game of power Cady previously played by copying The Plastics’ style and behaviour. In Lipsitz’s terms, these recurring visual patterns and emotional climaxes function as memory cues shaping how viewers recall the plot and the emotional and cultural lessons embedded in it. Through these conflicts, the film encodes memories of adolescence shaped by appearance, power, and the pressure to conform.