

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In life, society imposes rules and expectations on individuals. “Society is a human product, an objective reality, and Man is a social product” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 79). They stated that individuals are largely shaped by societal conditions. It perpetuates that external factors, such as societal norms, shape individual behaviors. Societal norms act as a collective conscience that regulates behavior within a community, manifesting as peer pressure. Societal expectations have a significant role in shaping an individual’s behavior. It is stated that societal expectations are “prognostic expectations about the subject, object, or a certain course of events in the possible future, which help to navigate the socio-psychological reality, and are based on cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements and are regulators of social behavior,” (Semenov et al., 2021:128). These expectations are often deemed to come into full effect during adolescent years in the form of peer pressure. Peer pressure is a form of “social influence that affects sharing information through the socialization process and how this information affects behavior,” within society (Libisch et al., 2022:119). Aligning with society can affect how one behaves, dresses, and makes decisions, which is characterized by reciprocity to social evaluation (Bogdan et al., 2023). As the idea of a teenager’s consciousness of peer pressure associates itself with many practical studies, the media industry simultaneously picked up the idea in many fictional media, and the American film industry is not an exception. The

movie *Mean Girls* (2004) is one of the many products that took advantage of said idea and was released in 2004. This study focuses on how societal expectations influence Cady Heron's transformation in *Mean Girls* (2004).

The main setting of *Mean Girls* (2004) is a high school in the United States of America. It fulfills the trope that school years are deemed to be the blooming period of a teenager. Understanding high school culture is crucial for the writer to continue conducting this research. The high school culture itself is the social environment in American high schools, characterized by cliques, social hierarchies, and an emphasis on popularity and social status. America is a product of the belief in the *American Dream*, which refers to the statement that anyone can attain their own version of success, and high schools are no exception. The American media has long been vocal in portraying these high school experiences, reinforcing certain expectations of behavior among teenagers. Popularity, beauty, and social status are the main perpetrators guiding the audience to Cady's character. By aligning themselves with these norms, students like Cady Heron seek to navigate the complicated social environment of high school.

By conducting this study, the writer contributes to the usage of societal peer pressure as a study issue. This study's significance is to connect Cady Heron's transformation and peer pressure. The experience of the audience watching Cady's transformations based on external pressures which may influence her internal motivations is a possible medium for an analysis. Through the lens of society, the writer brings a new perspective to American film literature and the discussion of adolescent societal behaviors.

The movie follows Cady Heron, the protagonist, who was homeschooled her whole life by her mother until the start of the film. After her family moved from Africa to America due to her father's profession, Cady was forced to attend a public school, North Shore High School. The effect of an American high school hit her, including the major control the teachers have, the division of students into cliques, and most importantly, the unwritten laws. She unwillingly found herself joining the highest of the cliques, *The Plastics*. Ever since then, everything that made her who she is has changed for the worse and the better.

Throughout *Mean Girls* (2004), high school society is portrayed as putting societal expectations in relation to popularity as the main perpetrator. It includes appearance, status, verbal statements, and even decisions in which groups one associates oneself with. By analyzing specific moments in the film, such as Cady's inner thoughts before she was influenced by societal flaws, her interactions with each character from the film, her actions after she joined *The Plastics*, and even her redemption in the end, this study will prove that the entirety of her actions is a response to societal peer pressure.

This study will focus on the influence of societal peer pressure through the protagonist of the film, Cady Heron. Having acquired the requisite background knowledge on peer pressure and their impact on appearance, behavior, and attitude, the writer will analyze the stills and dialogue transcription of *Mean Girls* (2004) to provide a detailed examination of Cady Heron's transformation. This analysis will allow the writer to explore the complexities of social influence in high school culture, demonstrating how Cady's behavior is not based on personal choice but rather a response to the external expectations

imposed by her peers. The combination of relevant social psychology theories and an analysis of the film's transcription will help this study prove that Cady's transformation is a product of societal expectations.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Based on the background of the study, the problems of this study are divided into three main analyses. The research problems are as follows:

1. What are the intrinsic elements of *Mean Girls* (2004) in which societal peer pressure takes place?
2. What are the societal peer pressure expected towards Cady Heron depicted in *Mean Girls* (2004)?
3. What are the effects of societal peer pressure on Cady Heron in *Mean Girls* (2004)?

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

Based on the research questions listed above, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the intrinsic elements of the movie *Mean Girls* (2004), in which societal peer pressure takes place, including narrative and cinematography elements.
2. To analyze how societal peer pressure expected towards Cady Heron are depicted in *Mean Girls* (2004).
3. To analyze the effects of societal peer pressure on Cady Heron in *Mean Girls* (2004).

#### 1.4 Scope of the Study

In this study, the writer examines both intrinsic and extrinsic elements surrounding the film *Mean Girls* (2004). The analysis focuses on intrinsic elements, including the plot, characters, conflicts, and setting, to understand how these components contribute to the portrayal of societal peer pressure and their influence on Cady Heron's transformations. The writer will explore how societal norms and peer pressure of North Shore High School's students shape Cady's appearance, behavior, and attitude throughout the narrative. To analyze the dynamics of societal expectations, the writer uses Berger & Luckmann's 1966 theory regarding society as an objective reality. This study specifically limits itself to how Cady's actions reflect the pressures exerted by her peers and the high school-related environment, rather than a mere analysis of general exploration of adolescence or social behavior. By concentrating on these specific elements, the study aims to provide an analysis of Cady's character, from the neutral newcomer, to the leader of *The Plastics*, and later to her ultimate rejection of societal expectations and its role in said processes. While the study acknowledges the complexity of adolescent experiences and the various factors that may influence behavior, it specifically narrows its focus to the interaction between societal expectations and individual identity within the context of the film. This narrowed approach allows for a clearer examination of how these dynamics are illustrated in *Mean Girls* (2004) contributing to an understanding of the main character's transformation and the implications for adolescent social behavior in contemporary American culture.

## 1.5 Previous Studies

In the process of conducting this study, the writer has reviewed several previous studies that are relevant to this study. Consequently, the reviews will mainly focus on the character's behaviors. The writer has reviewed six previous studies that are relevant to the writer's study.

In *Relational Aggression on Film: An Intersectional Analysis of Mean Girls* (2014), Meyer et al. analyzed the portrayal of relational aggression among female characters in the film, connecting it to broader cultural discourses around female violence. The authors highlight how the film reflects and perpetuates societal norms surrounding girlhood, particularly through the mechanisms of competition and body politics among teenage girls. They argue that these portrayals not only normalize aggressive behaviors but also reinforce hegemonic ideals of femininity and race, positioning white women as central figures in the perpetuation of relational aggression. While this study provides a comprehensive examination of relational aggression in *Mean Girls* (2004) it does not explicitly address the influence of peer pressure on the characters' behavior or how these expectations shape their identities. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how the characters' aggressive interactions are informed by societal norms and expectations through Cady Heron's identity. By focusing on how any character can navigate societal pressures and engage in behaviors that reflect or resist these norms, the writer can provide an understanding between verbal statements and identity formation.

The second article, titled *Bullying Portrayed in Mean Girls Movie* (2017) by Nun Ayu Waya Sirly and Nine Febrie Novitasari, examines the issue of

bullying as depicted in *Mean Girls* (2004). Through the lens of psychoanalysis, the authors identify and categorize various types of bullying, whether in the form of verbal, physical, psychological, or social. The study highlights the detrimental effects on the characters involved. It discusses the impacts of bullying on psychological well-being, such as low self-esteem and poor social adjustment, while suggesting that the film ultimately promotes a message of reconciliation. The paper analyzes bullying behaviors and their impacts on victims without exploring the internal psychological processes that shape Cady's responses to peer encouragement. This study will fill the gap of including not only the bad side of Cady's environment, but also the good side of it. This research will explore her internal conflicts and identity formation, offering a more diverse view of how both sides of the external pressures influence her actions. The paper also suggests a resolution to bullying in the film, but it did not analyze the long-term effects on the characters' identities and relationships. The writer will investigate how Cady's experiences affect her self-perception and relationships even after the *The Plastic* phase of hers.

The third study, "*Stop Trying to Make Fetch Happen*": *The Disempowerment of Women's Voices in the Film Mean Girls* (2019) by Anna Kaplan, utilizes critical rhetorical analysis to examine the portrayal of female archetypes within the film. The author explores how certain roles utilize language to navigate the dynamic power play of the high school. Kaplan concludes that these characterizations contribute to a competitive atmosphere among teenage girls, ultimately undermining women's empowerment by portraying anti-feminist stereotypes. Kaplan's analysis provides a deep understanding of female

interactions in *Mean Girls* (2004) examining every different archetype of multiple girls, resulting in the disempowerment of women during the conflicting parts of the movie. This presents a research gap to further investigate the relationship between peer pressure and specifically Cady Heron's transformations in the film. This also provides a gap where language can also be a medium that influences agency and identity forming. This approach provides a comprehensive perspective on how external influences affect the adolescent development and relationships of Cady Heron, whether girls or boys.

Another related study is *Mean girls? the influence of gender portrayals in teen movies on emerging adults' gender-based attitudes and beliefs* (2008) by Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana E. Mastro. In their study, they examine how media representations influence individuals' perceptions of gender roles, particularly through the lens of the film *Mean Girls* (2004). The research highlights the impact of stereotypical portrayals on emerging adults' beliefs about gender and female relationships, illustrating how social aggression is normalized in the context of female friendships. The study effectively documents these influences by taking surveys and addresses the immediate effects. The authors had done a content analysis of gender portrayals, leaving a significant amount of gap, including an analysis of how the society of North Shore High School pressures Cady Heron and the long-term implications on identity development.

In *Regina George in 'Mean Girls': An In-Depth Psychological Analysis* (2023), Daniel Holback, specifically examines Regina George's character and personality. The paper researched her aggressive leadership through established psychological theories such as social dominance theory and the dark triad traits.

Although Regina is the focal point, the paper also has a small dedicated section to Cady Heron, positioning her as the foil of Regina's influence. Holback also traces Cady's moral development using Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning. This finding opens a new groundwork for this study to specifically analyze Cady Heron, and how Regina is a part of the societal spectrum influencing Cady's behaviors.

Lastly, in Ahyar Saleh Tanjung and Frans Sayogi's study, *The Use of Profanity Uttered by Female Characters in Mean Girls Movie (2023)*, the analysis of profanity among female characters provides insight into adolescent social dynamics. Tanjung categorizes profanity into abusive, emphatic, and dysphemistic forms, illustrating how these linguistic choices reflect emotional states and social hierarchies among teenage girls. Furthermore, the gap allows writer of this study aims to examine how all verbal, physical, and mental statements made by Cady Heron are a product of the influence of her surroundings. By exploring societal peer pressure, the writer can uncover how the characters from *Mean Girls (2004)* navigate the complexities of their social environment, affecting the main character of the film.

## **1.6 Research Method**

### **1.6.1 Method of Research**

This study uses a library research method, which refers to “the act that involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal / expert opinion on a research question,” (George, 2008:6). The writer draws from two primary sources: the movie *Mean Girls (2004)* as the primary source and relevant books, studies, and journal articles as secondary sources. The

writer will first watch the film to understand its narrative and themes, then analyze the transcription of the movie alongside existing theories on peer pressure within society. This analysis will focus on identifying key dialogues to be integrated with insights from secondary sources to draw conclusions about the impact of societal peer pressure on Cady's character development.

### **1.6.2 Method of Approach**

Regarding the approach towards the intrinsic elements of *Mean Girls* (2004), the writer utilizes the objective criticism approach. Objective criticism refers to the approach that treats a work of literature as something free of its extrinsic relationship with anything else, but rather treating the product as an autonomous object analyzed by intrinsic criteria (Abrams & Harpham, 2012:70). Through this approach, *Mean Girls* (2004) is analyzed as an independent work, focusing on its intrinsic elements. Therefore, the analysis specifically focuses on the characters, plot, and interaction depicted in the film.

### **1.6.3 Method of Analysis**

To analyze the impact of societal expectations on Cady Heron's transformation in *Mean Girls* (2004), the writer mainly utilizes Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's 1966 book about the creation of human reality through societal norms and interactions, *The Social Construction of Reality*, alongside other minor society-related works. The writer hypothesizes that Cady's transformations were influenced by the expected societal peer pressure. The writer will analyze how society's expectations and norms done by other actors depicts peer pressure and the effects on Cady Heron on multiple aspects such as appearance, behavior, and attitude.

## **1.7 Organization of the Writing**

### CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, previous studies, and research methods.

### CHAPTER II: INTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The second chapter presents the intrinsic theoretical framework and methodology used in this study. It describes the narrative elements such as plot, characters, setting, and conflicts. The chapter also describes the cinematography elements such as camera techniques, lighting, soundtrack, costumes, and sets.

### CHAPTER III: EXTRINSIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The third chapter presents the extrinsic theoretical framework and methodology used in this study. It covers the key theories on societal peer pressure within institutionalization.

### CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter contains the analysis and discussion of the research problems. It examines how societal peer pressure influence Cady Heron's transformation in *Mean Girls* (2004) by analyzing specific scenes and dialogues

### CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The final chapter summarizes the findings of the research, concludes the impact of societal peer pressure on Cady Heron, and explains how this study contributes to the research of societal peer pressure in movies.

### REFERENCES