

Cathryn Hennes
COM331: Gender in Communication
10/10/2006

The 1950's and "Mona Lisa Smile"

Overall, I think the movie was very well done. It was a movie about a woman, who tried to change the minds and attitudes of college women at Wellsley College in 1953.

Standpoint Theory:

What it means to me: The class you are in in society and the experiences you have influence your communication.

From the movie: In the beginning of the movie, as Catherine Watson teaches her first class, you find her astonished that everyone in class has read the entire book before starting class. The syllabus she is using seems to be directly from the book. This gives the impression that the women from this college, Wellsley, have nothing better to do but read and study. True that the majority of these women are upper class may be why they know everything they need to know for the whole class on day one.

Also, when Giselle asks her if she is a doctor for her academic level, she tells them, "No, not yet." It seems that because her academic level isn't high enough that they think they know as much as Catherine, so there is no need for them to stay in her class. They end up leaving and walking out to independent study.

Cognitive Development Theory:

What it means to me: My experiences with others define who I am.

In the movie, Catherine talks to Joan about her being a pre-law student. Going through the movie, Catherine interacts with Joan to tell her why she can be a lawyer and a wife at the same time. "She can have her cake and eat it too." Joan realizes that she wants to attend Yale

Law School. Catherine brings her the application for which she applies and is accepted. In the end, even with Catherine's pushing, she decides she will follow Tommy, who proposes to her, and get married and have children. Just because she gave up her shot at law school doesn't mean that she made a bad decision or that she is a bad person. Catherine agrees grudgingly and congratulates her. I believe given more time with Catherine, Joan might have changed her mind. Tommy says to Catherine that she did something to impress Joan. Catherine says the same of Tommy.

Anthropology:

What it means to me: This is the study of how men and women live in cultures outside of the U.S. During the 1950's, the culture was: 1. man meets woman, 2. man marries woman, and 3. man and woman have kids. Anything else was uncalled for and not talked about.

After her first day of class, Catherine is introduced to Amanda Armstrong, the school's nurse and third room mate in the house Catherine has rented a room. Nancy Abbey, the owner of the home and first room mate, tries to gossip with Catherine about Amanda's sexual orientation. It was not common to find lesbians in the 1950's, at least not common for them to be in the public eye. Nancy gossiped by calling Amanda's partner, her "companion." The tone of Nancy's voice made it seem like she was putting down Amanda for her ways were for of the current culture. People during that time just kept things like this hush hush.

Role:

What it means to me: The behaviors I am expected to have as a woman.

In the 1950's, the woman was to play the role of wife and mother. As the wife, the woman was to dress nicely, but also keep the house spotless, cook and clean dishes, wash laundry, and care for the children. To accomplish these tasks, the women at Wellsley took

classes in poise and etiquette. You had to be the perfect woman for your husband. And no back talk. The woman was to be demure and quiet all the time. The woman did not have thoughts of her own.

In the class, they talk about a dinner party and what you would do to help your husband earn a much-needed raise from the boss. You have a dinner party, inviting the boss and boss' wife, but realize there are problems when the boss invites the competition to dinner. Now there are four more mouths to feed. How do you do it? The women thought they were getting an easy grade in poise and etiquette, but the real grade would come from the husband years later when he needed you for his job. He would need you to make him shine with any party you arrange for his job.