

# **THIRD CULTURE KID'S EFFECT ON CHARACTER OF CADY HERON IN *MEAN GIRLS***

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**Abstract.** This thesis focuses on the movie, *Mean Girls*, specifically one of the character, Cady Heron, as a Third Culture Kid trying to adapt in new society. The purpose of this study is to understand the effect of Third Culture Kid in the movie character in socializing with the new surroundings and explain the way how one of the characters in *Mean Girls* adapts to the new surroundings. The writer uses library research to collect the data with the novel as the main data, and several relevant books, journals, articles, also online documents and websites are used as the supporting data. The intrinsic aspects cover characters, setting, and conflicts. In the extrinsic aspect, the writer uses Irwin Altman and Dalmás Taylor's Social Penetration Theory which is applied in the thesis to analyze the problem. The result of this thesis proves that according to Irwin Altman and Dalmás Taylor's Social Penetration Theory, Cady Heron uses her Third Culture Kid context to evade social isolation whilst preserving her identity through several roles in adapting in the new surroundings.

**Keywords:** Third Culture Kid, Social Penetration Theory, Mean Girls

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

As known for its attainment in the movie industry, America, has contributed various ideas that is given to medias. America uses the most popular media which is movie that is an audio-visual media to express ideas, critiques, and opinions through the message delivered in the movie to the audiences. Many movies were and are released till this day and on forward. America has improved its brilliancy in movies.

Growing up outside of America and or mainly outside of the culture, people are shaped in different ways. Starting from the lifestyle, the society, the culture, and many more. From growing in different cultures, people are assured to adapt to a new society when entering the American culture. Adapting to new cultures takes time and socialization.

One is called a Third Culture Kid when entering a new place from the first place and adapts to a new culture. According to Pollock and Van Reken on their book, *Third Culture Kid: Growing Up Among Worlds*;

A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her development years outside of the parents' culture. The TCK builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership of any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background (Pollock 19).

In brief, Cady Heron, one of the character in the movie, is a 16-year-old teenage girl that has lived in Africa for 12 years. Both Cady Heron's parents are research zoologists in Africa. Cady's mother got offered tenure at Northwestern University and at that point, it was time for Cady to say goodbye to Africa and hello to high school. It was hard for Cady to adapt in her new surroundings because she was rather different as a Third Culture Kid but the time goes along, she starts to be one of them unconsciously. The purpose of this study is to understand the stages of being a Third Culture Kid in the movie character in socializing with the new surroundings and explain the way how one of the characters in *Mean Girls* adapts to the new surroundings.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **a. Social Penetration Theory**

Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor's Social Penetration Theory will apply in the thesis to analyze the problem. According to Altman and Taylor in their book *Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationship*, "The social penetration theory states that as relationships develop, communication moves from relatively shallow, non-intimate levels to deeper, more personal ones." (1973) In Altman and Taylor's perspective, they compared people to onion or in other words, Onion Metaphor. Hence, the onion is multilayered and when each layer is peeled off then one by one it uncovers itself. There are number of stages in the Social Penetration Theory according to Altman and Taylor, which are;

- A. Orientation**, in this Orientation stage, it is more known of something as, "...play safe with small talk and simple, harmless clichés...". (Altman and Taylor, "Social Penetration Theory", par.1) As the foremost stage where individuals are not yet open to their surroundings, feeling cautious in their relations and give little information about themselves to others.
- B. Exploratory Affective Exchange**, according to Altman and Taylor's perspectives, it can be considered that, "...this may not be the whole truth as we are not yet comfortable to lay ourselves bare. We are still feeling out way forward." (Altman and Taylor, "Social Penetration Theory", par.2) As the following stage where individuals start to feel more relaxed with their guard and shares more information about themselves beyond the orientation stage. Individuals in this stage are more friendly than the first stage.
- C. Affective Exchange**, at this point, the third layer, Affective Exchange, is opened which the individuals, "...start to talk about private and personal matters". (Altman and Taylor, "Social Penetration Theory", par.3) As the next stage where the fences of the individuals are broken down gradually, and an open exchange occurs between individuals. According to Altman and Taylor, this stage is considered as the stage where close friendships and relationships are built.
- D. Stable Exchange**, as specified by Altman and Taylor that in this phase is where, "the relationship now reaches a plateau in which personal things are shared and each can predict the emotional reactions of the other person". (Altman and Taylor, "Social Penetration Theory", par.4) In this stage is where individuals are open to other in interactions which understand each other and have better communication in a high level.

**E. Depenetration**, in the Social Penetration Theory, this last stage, Depenetration is, “when the relationship starts to break down and costs exceed benefits, then there is a withdrawal of disclosure which leads to termination of the relationship”. (Altman and Taylor, “Social Penetration Theory”, par.5) In this stage, the individuals begin to have a problem in the relationship and it could end the relationship itself because of a certain problem.

## **F. METHODS OF THE STUDY**

In order to support the study, thesis must have a base to build up the body. The writer uses two methods, which are method of research and method of approach. In method of research, the writer uses library research to support the research as for essential in resource, such as library books, journals, newspapers, and other printed medias. Also, this thesis is also supported by electronic sources such as e-books and websites. In method of approach, the writer uses objective approach, sociology of literature approach and Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor’s Social Penetration Theory which will be applied in the thesis to analyze the problem. As stated by Wellek and Warren, an intrinsic approach is “a concept including both content and form so far as they are organized for aesthetic purposes. The work of art is, then considered as a whole system of sign, or signature of signs, serving a specific aesthetic purpose” (1977 : 141). As digging out the movie will be the work of art, this thesis will be analyzed through various elements, such as, setting, character, and conflict.

## **G. ANALYSIS**

### **I. INTRINSIC ASPECTS**

#### **I.I. SETTING**

#### **I.I.I. SETTING OF TIME**

In the movie of *Mean Girls*, there is no written time that is stated. However, from watching the movie carefully, the writer makes conclusion that the time of the story is in the beginning of the year 2000s. The proof about the time is from the fashion or the clothes that are worn in the movie. Another proof about the time is from one of the songs presented in the movie, which is Milkshake, by Kelis. It was played in one of the scene where Cady, Janis, and Damian were sitting by the grass and Damian and Janis were introducing The Plastics to Cady. According to Billboard, it is known that Kelis' single, Milkshake, was released on the year 2003.

### I.I.II. SETTING OF LOCATION

According to the movie, there are some location in the story. The first location is in Namibia, Africa where Cady and her family lives before moving to the United States. It is stated: CADY. *“My family’s totally normal. Except for the fact that both of my parents are research zoologists and we’ve spent the last 12 years in Africa.”* (00:01:27-00:01:33) The second location is located in the United States, to be exact, in Evanston, Illinois where Cady goes to school. Cady goes to North Shore High School. As stated, CADY. *“But so far, none in Evanston.”* (00:05:05-00:05:08) The third location is located in University of Chicago, more precisely in the auditorium where Cady and her mathlete team compete for state mathematic championship.

### I.II. CHARACTER

#### I.I.I.I. CADY HERON

Cady Heron is considered a Third Culture Kid because she moved from Africa to the United States. Cady Heron is a 16-year-old teenage girl that was homeschooled whilst living in Africa for 12 years. Both of Cady's parents are research zoologists in Africa. Cady's mother got offered tenure at Northwestern University. Cady explains that she is from Africa and was homeschooled to Regina George at lunch time where she was invited to sit with The Plastics. As stated by Cady, CADY. *“I used to be homeschooled. My mom taught me at home.”* (00:10:43) Cady Heron was such a simple girl that does not care about things around her. She was just a down-to-earth type of girl from Africa. Cady Heron is not the type of girl who cares about her look as she just wears a cowgirl shirt topped with a basic green jacket and

brown flare pants. Her hair is just put into a low ponytail and she basically has no make-up on. As the story goes on, the more Cady changed and become one of them. Aaron even said that Cady has changed in becoming a clone of Regina in one scene. Cady has changed the way she dresses, the way she talks, and the way she treats people until everyone in school knows her but in a bad way. She was gradually known as a bad person because of what she became after joining The Plastics.

### I.II.II. THE PLASTICS

The Plastics are the teen royalty. It consists of Regina George as the “Queen Bee” or the head of *The Plastics*, she is the cruelest and controllable person, Karen Smith as the dumbest girl that is clueless about everything, and Gretchen Wieners, which is the gossip girl, she knows every story about everyone but she acts mean because of Regina.

### I.III. CONFLICT

Cady has some conflicts with herself which happens in the movie. In one scene, she was possessed of herself, she has gone crazy, she was not the old self she was. It can be seen on the monologue below;

CADY (V.O.) : “I was a woman possessed, I spend about 80%of my time talking about Regina and the other 20% of the time I was praying for someone to bring her up so I could talk about her even more...I could hear people getting bored with me but I couldn’t stop, it just kept coming up like word vomit.”  
(Cady, *Mean Girls*, 00:44:12-00:44:32)

Cady also had conflict with her surroundings, especially her close friends, Damian and Janis. Janis and Damian are the ones who became her first friends in high school and even though they had the sabotage plan but it turns out that Cady was betraying them indirectly until one scene where the friendship crashed when Cady hosted a party but did not invite Janis and Damian but at that time as well, it was Janis’ art show that Cady’s invited to. It was bad enough that Cady did not attend

Janis' art show and using the excuse that she has a plan with her family when she actually held a party at her place and not inviting Janis and Damian.

## II. EXTRINSIC ASPECTS

### II.I. SOCIAL PENETRATION THEORY

Throughout the movie, Cady experiences stages of Third Culture Kid as stated by Altman and Taylor, which helps her evade social isolation while preserving her identity through some roles. As being a "spy" in The Plastics, Cady is able to change roles naturally and this is so she could fit it and also, as a Third Culture Kid, it is natural to change identities according to the people, surroundings, and cultures.

#### II.I.I. Orientation

On this stage, Cady is not very open to anyone nor to her surroundings. This is shown in the beginning of the movie where on the monologue below, she seemed to be not so open because Cady was just answering Damian's question very basic and not much of information were given. Moreover, she seemed very gullible as said before.

DAMIAN : Is that your natural hair color?

CADY : Yeah.

DAMIAN : It's gorgeous.

CADY : Thank you.

DAMIAN : See, this is the color I want.

JANIS : This is Damian, he's almost too gay to function.

CADY : Huh..nice to meet you. (Damian, Cady, and Janis, *Mean Girls*, 00:05:39-00:05:50)

#### II.I.II. Exploratory Affective Exchange

On this stage, Cady starts to open a little bit more than the orientation stage. Cady starts having a deeper conversation with Janis and Damian as seen in the conversation below.

JANIS : Why don't they just keep homeschooling you?

CADY : They wanted me to get socialized.

DAMIAN : Oh you'll get socialized alright a little slice like you.

CADY : What are you talking about?

JANIS : You're a regulation hottie.

CADY : What?

DAMIAN : Own it. (Cady, Janis, and Damian, *Mean Girls*, 00:07:07-00:07:19)

## H. CONCLUSION

Naomi Wolf argues that women have been poisoned by the myth of beauty. The myth of beauty influences women into thinking that they are not beautiful enough in the society. Consequently, women are trying hard to beautify themselves. The best way to beautify appearance is by using cosmetics. Cosmetics are able to enhance certain features of the body and cover flaws of the body. Beauty myth manipulates women into thinking that they are ugly no matter how they look. It is because the beauty myth has set standards of ideal beauty which deem beautiful woman as someone tall, thin, fair-skinned, and has perfect shape of face. The women close to that ideal standard of beauty are the women in magazines— the result of photoshop and airbrush. The female students of English Department Undip apparently has been affected by beauty myth. They value themselves so little compared to how they value the women in magazines. They do not believe that they look more beautiful even after using cosmetics.

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