Social Class And Dirty Dancing Essay, Research Paper

Gender And Sexuality Play A Key Part Within The Film Dirty Dancing. Discuss.

The film is set in the year of 1963, John F Kennedy was still president and the Vietnam War was not considered a threat, the Beatles had yet not reached America and the Freedom riders were on. In reality the well known and loved, cult girly film, and classic romance was made in 1987. There have been many attempts throughout the film to represent the time in which it was set and yet there are clear indications that the film is of a more modern make. Essentially the film could be classed as both a dancing film and a romance in its genre. It aims to demythologise the myth of the American dream by portraying fundamental rifts within societies thinking. The idea of a relationship occurring between the workers (working class) and upper classes is not a new subject, yet it is obvious that many issues raised within the film, show a deep argument about moral ideas posed by sex.

The film opens with a stirring sound track with the montage of suggestive images in black and white gyrating across the screen. The viewer from the opening scenes maybe has an idea why the film is called dirty dancing. Right from the beginning it is clear that the majority of dancers are young, Caucasian, heterosexual couples. Within the view there is one black couple dancing with each other. Everybody appears to be equal in role when dancing. There is no swapping of partners and throughout the rest of the film each couple is for the majority, firmly set with that partner. The action begins with a Cadillac driving along a deserted road and a voice over explaining the year and name of the main character. Immediately we are alerted that the young girl is called Baby. The audience is also immediately aware of the desire of the character to have a man exactly like her father. The voice-over explains that and I thought I would never find a man as [good] as my father. This is clearly descriptive of the Freudian theory of the Electra complex. Freud describes how in order to move onto to another man the subject must first reject the dominant hierarchal father . This is exactly what happens in the film. Frequently other characters intercept the character of Baby. In a particular scene there is an instance where when Penny shouts, on the next turn you will meet the man of your dreams. Baby turns and reaches for her father and is intercepted by another person.

Similarly a particular idea that runs throughout the film is the idea of being paired up with a suitable man. Both sisters are paired with slim adolescents of a wealthy background. The bodily shape of the father is very slim also. Both candidates prove in some way to be absolutely wrong matches. In reality Baby chooses a muscled youth called Johnny, rejecting the figure of the father both metaphorically and physically.

Baby is witness to both rigid dance moves of dances such as the meringue and mambo as opposed to the highly erotic show of dancing of which is termed basement by. The rigid dances of the mambo are performed with an air of reserve and exhibition contrasting extensively with the virtual copulation of the next set of moves. Although the viewer is aware of excessively close and erotic moves, it is clear that there is no kissing throughout. The scene is flooded with a red light symbolising passion and perhaps a sense that this activity is seedy, criminal and shouldn t happen. The cousin of Johnny remarks that they would have to close the place down before they allowed dancing like this to occur. Ironically it is performed at the end when it is clear that Kellermans may well need to be closed in the future because of the publics change in holiday destinations and views. When Baby is subject to theses moves it is almost a visual deflowering of a young girl. On another occasion Baby is instructed to feel the music by Johnny during the training for a dance. This seems the first time that she is in touch with herself and not being protected. Baby s transition from being an awkward dancer to being a fluid and confidant dancer show in her movements and represents the transition from childhood to adulthood. Johnny then refers to her as Frances as opposed to Baby. Right at the end of the film he kisses her. This is totally in contrast with previous scenes where the action is only hinted at in the fading-out of a tableau.

Baby is shown throughout the film as a virginal young girl dressed in the majority of scenes in white, baby blue or pink. Often covered up by a large pullover. She is also shown in two separate scenes curled up in a foetal position, asleep. As she progresses and gains maturity the character removes more clothes. Whilst dressing for the dance she reveals her bra to Penny revealing trust and a friendship. Previously the only view of her bra was in the water when her wet top slides over her shoulder. She places the top back up to its position after seeming embarrassed slightly. It is only when she fully trusts Johnny that she allows her bra to be seen fully by him. The rest of the film has specific moments where confident women reveal their chest or bras. Many dancers have tight accentuating clothing. One particular dancer has her bar strap on show and swaps dancing partners frequently. A woman described as a Bungalow bunny because of her sexual freeness has an extremely revealing dress revealing nearly all of her chest. This expression denotes an idea of almost prostitution and whores. This is echoed in the dancer Penny. She is always seen wearing red and her room is covered in red drapes. Her illegal abortion also raises the moral question posed to both Baby and the audience on the idea of sexual expressiveness and promiscuity rather than monogamy. The sound track even includes the song Will you love me tomorrow? and She s like the wind both hinting at the idea of wanton activities. Robbie-the-creep is a good example of this. The Jewish upper class visitors, namely Baby s family, dislike him because he sleeps around. . Lisa taunts Baby with the threat of humping the entire army. The waiters are told, behind closed doors, to show the daughters a good time and the entertainment staff are strictly warned that nothing else should happen. They are all examples of Sexual promiscuity being seen in a bad light throughout the film.

Both Baby and Penny show that this is not necessarily true. Penny explains that she doesn t sleep around . The ideas that by portraying oneself as a being intent on sexual behaviour doesn t automatically mean licentious viewpoints. She confesses that she thought Robbie loved her. Johnny also reveals that his previous flirtatious behaviour with female guests is simply for financial stability. There is an equal power share by the two lovers. He has previously dared her on two occasions to dance now she dares him. Previously she has been instructed to follow his lead. She now instigates movements and actions. He responds and they move in a fluid and uninterrupted dance of sexual feelings. Neither gets any gain over the other.

Dirty Dancing has not only an insinuating title but also to a certain degree, the themes and ideas raised by the film revolve around the idea of sexuality and the varying viewpoints surrounding it. This is not only by different generations but also by different genders. It enlightens the viewer and audience to these varying perspectives without imposing a strict point of view.