

EXEGESIS

PART ONE: GENRE ANALYSIS

PART TWO: MY SCRIPT

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In this exploration of Genre, I will explore the ways in which my screenplay 'Like what' resembles past productions and discuss the ways in which it offers a fresh perspective for modern day audiences. In part one I will explain the Genre of the script; 'Like What' is a twenty-something coming of age relationship story, set against a backdrop of Social Media. I will also give examples of which it can be compared to, films that focus on relationships going from High-school to college age such as, the 2012 film 'Perks of being a wallflower' 1994's 'Reality Bites' and 'Ingrid goes west' from 2017. In the second part of this essay I will explore the specific aspects of 'Like what' and how it fits into the 'twenty-something coming of age' genre, with examples of theme, character and key turning points.

IDENTIFYING THE GENRE

An important thing to note when exploring films of this genre, or any films that is, is how rare it is to find the inclusion of social media, since it is such a specific modern day quality that hasn't been displayed in many projects thus far. Due to the specific nature of 'Like what' being so heavily set against a background of social media, it means direct comparisons are exclusive to films made in more recent years, such as the 2017 film 'Ingrid goes west.' Matt Spicer and David Branson Smith penned the final shooting script of this instagram-themed film in 2015 and it is one of the first social media films to move from documentary style; ie 'Catfish' 'the social network' and 'terms and conditions may apply' and instead focus on the effect social media usage has on young women. Which would make sense, seeing as 59% of 18 - 29 year olds use instagram in America alone and 38% of those users are women. (Pew Research Centre, para. 6)

The film follows Ingrid, a mentally unstable 29 year old woman whose obsession with a

particular influencer results in her attempting to replicate her interests and secure involvement in her life. The massive theme throughout this film is a common thread in most films in this genre, Ingrid's desperation to make real friendships that look exactly like the "perfect" ones other people appear to have. Comparison is a massive part of being a young woman, and with Instagram's ability to showcase what the perfect life looks like, the idea that a person's life doesn't measure up is a massive driving force when telling these stories.

Although social media is a new creation, and Instagram has only existed since 2010, there are comparisons to be drawn from older films that focuses on the complexity of relationships in a realm of documentation. Notably the 1994 film 'Reality Bites' written by Helen Childress, which obviously differs in the specific ways that documentation is shared, is similar in the depiction of young people struggling to come to terms with real life. The film follows Lelaina, after graduating Valedictorian only to realise that might have been the peak of her life. As an aspiring filmmaker she documents her friend's struggles as all of them face the brutal reality of life after college, only to have her art manipulated by producer Michael and made into a trashy reality show that capitalizes on their lack of ambition. Regardless of the generational gap between Lelaina and Mac, Generation X and Millennials, the idea that the truth is warped in order to be made into whatever content sells, gets views or gains attention is the lesson that both protagonists learn, and in typical "twenty-something coming of age" fashion, their friends are the main factors in a character's resolve.

'Perks of being a wallflower' written by Stephen Chbosky has it's blatant differences, the protagonist's use of a typewriter to pen letters to David Bowie acts as his emotional outlet as opposed to using social media like the characters in 'Like what.' The protagonist Charlie struggles with making friends in High School until eventually he befriends Senior misfit Sam, falls in love and then has to say goodbye as she goes off to college. The concept of using social media in a film can be used as a replacement for the narration, I do note the difference. For example as Charlie uses letters read to us in voiceover but never published for any of the other characters to see, those are his personal thoughts shared only with the audience, whereas if a character were to post of social media, it is fair to assume all other characters active on the platform would know this information. It is a way to clearly distinguish those characters that prefer their thoughts private, but it also adds to the speed in which characters find out information, making it clear that only certain types of characters in this genre would benefit from the addition of social media.

There is no shortage of 'Coming of age' stories, but there is a separation that comes from the specific traits, like the environment, and more specifically, the age of the characters. There are some focused more on friendships, the likes of 'Stand By Me' showcasing the importance of friendship in youth, a lot that focus on the high school experience the likes of 'Ten things I hate about you' and 'Clueless' and then some that focus more on relationships like 'Scott Pilgrim VS the world.' As much as I believe the core values of these stories are the same, I think it is important to focus on the growth from teenage to adulthood while including social media as a

pillar in the means of telling a modern and realistic coming of age story, as it is extremely rare to find a young person today that doesn't exist heavily on these platforms.

REPRESENTATION OF THIS GENRE IN MEDIA

As hard as film-makers try to keep away from the use of technology in film, there are exceptions as social media creators start to spill over to the side of traditional storytelling.

'FML' is an independent film, made by Vine star and Youtuber Jason Nash, that follows two unlikely friends on a roadtrip with the aim of collaborating with as many creators as possible in order to gain online traction. The use of social media is potent in not only the scriptwriting, but also in the casting, which is almost entirely made up of online content creators.

The online entertainment company and multi-channel network 'Fullscreen' (established in 2011) has spent the last few years attempting to capitalize on just that, creating a hub for online content creators to produce scripted works to cater for their large followings. People such as Logan Paul, Grace Helbig, Hannah Hart, Mamrie Hart, Alexis G Zall, Kian Lawley, Jc Caylen and Cody Ko are among some of the social media stars that have attempted to make the jump to traditional media by creating and starring in a variation of movies, sitcoms, skit shows and talk shows on this global network.

HISTORY OF THIS GENRE

Although there are companies that offer content with this in mind, and there are coming of age stories scattered through history, the first of which dating back to 8th century BC with Homer's Odyssey, it made it onto film in 1942 with 'Bambi'. As the years went on and 1985 gave us

‘The Breakfast Club’ and ‘Almost Famous’ in 2000. As the demand grew, we saw the genre moving into blockbuster series such as ‘Harry Potter.’ It appears that creating a romantic relationship story amongst the chaos of “coming of age” was explored frequently, but the addition of online content creation is a new age opportunity that is just waiting to happen. ‘Like what’ showcases a few tropes from each of these niches, but makes it relatable to the modern day youth while keeping the the most specific idea within the coming-of-age genre.

THE KEY SIGNIFIERS OF THE GENRE

This stems from Bildungsroman, the ‘literary genre’ that focuses specifically on the psychological growth of a protagonist, heavily relying on character development as we see a character move from youth to adulthood. Each film in the genre of twenty-something coming of age scripts has a character or characters that build and lose relationships, usually dealing with the transition from highschool to a fresh environment, whether it be the strains that puts on friendships or the new experience of falling into a romantic endeavour while struggling to understand their own relationship with themselves first.

AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS

Contemporary audiences have expectations when it comes to this genre of film, they want to be able to see themselves in these characters, in the events that take place and they want to be able to utilize the information presented, to develop a stronger sense of how they can target similar emotional situations. Usually when a character is trying to fit in, we can see the truth of what that person is willing to do to be loved and accepted.

The film 'Perks of being a wallflower' depicts such raw relatability with a character wrestling with abuse, making friends and subsequently saying goodbye to them while falling in love and growing up. All of which happen in a condensed highschool environment, giving the protagonist incentive to maintain a reputation that makes surviving in society possible. In addition to the overall honesty of such a vulnerable age, an audience in this instance is also presented with another feature of modern times, the coming-of-age themes are relatable enough, but placing it in the current space of social media gives them a whole new concept to identify with. 'Ingrid goes west' places an unstable young woman in a position where she is exposed to the intimate details of that character's life, details that are accessible, but not necessarily accurate.

'Reality Bites' gives a more vintage take on characters portraying images of themselves on the smaller screen, as the group of twenty-something's create a documentary of the struggles they face, exploring the idea that they don't need to pretend to have it better than they do, instead they speak openly about how hard they are finding the transition. These models all showcase the difference between a characters true inner feelings, and the image they show to the world.

Subtext which usually is in the form of body language or action but now with the extension of social media, we are given a whole new level of false honesty.

WHY 'LIKE WHAT' FITS THIS GENRE

'Like what' very openly depicts the juxtaposition of sharing a life online that doesn't quite line up with the life a character is living and it takes the conventions of a coming-of-age story, like highschool friendships trying to survive moving into adulthood and forming a new romantic

relationship while adding the tension that comes from maintaining a perfect reputation. The common themes of the genre are displayed through the protagonist Mac, who struggles with trying to fit in so she joins social media to appease her friends, she then gets wrapped up in trying to become the ideal social media influencer in order to keep a new relationship resulting in her compromising her morals and adding stress to her friendships. Whether audiences relate to the fear of not being accepted as is and needing to change oneself, the apprehension of falling in love and being unable to be certain that their intentions are pure or the importance of friendship which is often times lost in the mess of growing up, I believe 'Like what' showcases the stress of modern living while staying true to the aspects of the "twenty-something coming of age relationship story."

HOW GENRE DICTATES BEHAVIOUR

The genre dictates the behaviour of the characters in quite a specific way, everything is intimate and relationship focused, usually in a close knit environment which in this case is the shared living that the main four girls do for the majority of the film. The audience's reactions are also controlled by the genre, the characters are created to be relatable and vulnerable, so the audience is encouraged to become involved in the protagonist's growth. The common theme that filters through films of this genre is friendship, even when the romantic relationship is the forefront of the emotional damage, the platonic friendships are often the only ones that survive.

HOW IT OFFERS A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

As mentioned previously, the previous works only encapsulate some of the themes or tropes that comes from such a specific meshing of genre and technology. 'Reality Bites' offers the struggle that young people have while trying to create a foundation for life and develop a romantic relationship, 'Perks of being a wallflower' shows the emotional impact of a young person desperate to form meaningful relationships despite keeping secrets and 'Ingrid goes west' showcases the pressure of social media and how this can affect an already vulnerable person. 'Like what' is the first film that takes the ideas presented in all three of these films, and similarly the film 'FML' which focuses on friends with a desire to reach social fame, and places it in terms of a young woman who already knew who she was, forced to question that as she attempts to fit a mould to be loved by someone who appears to be perfect for her. I think it is important for films, especially in this genre, to have more female representation and seeing as there aren't many films that centre on friendships between young women, that is something that this story can offer audiences.

PART TWO

In this part I will identify the aspects of my script that are clear indicators of this particular genre, while giving an in depth explanation of theme, character, the key turning points and the main relationship line.

'Like what' synopsis:

Mackenzie Stewart moves with her two best friends, Zoe and Chye-Ling to pursue big city life. After being encouraged to get involved in meeting their Instagram Idol Taylor, who convinces them that she needs a place to stay, Mac discovers the allure of online content creation and begins to prove herself as a threat to Taylor.

As Mac grows in popularity, she begins to get closer to Heath, a popular Youtuber, and Taylor's boyfriend, confused between what is real and fake, she finds herself quite literally, in the middle of the biggest love triangle on the internet.

Furious, and tired of watching her life being stolen, Taylor begins to sabotage Mac's success from the inside, convincing Zoe and Chye-Ling that they will soon completely lose Mac as she gets absorbed into the lives of popular social media influencers.

Mac gets so caught up in the life of glamour and attention, straining to fit the mould of a "social influencer", she doesn't see what's happening around her. As she loses her friends and loses what humanized her, she gives Taylor the ultimate idea - to steal *her* life. Rebranding Taylor as someone sweet, with genuine human connections, the competition becomes less about fame, and more about who gets the real life.

The genre relies heavily on personal growth and the development of engaging relationship, one of the most important aspects of this concept is highlighting what protagonist is risking in any giving situation, thus giving the audience something to be connected to, and ultimately concerned for.

CHARACTER

In the romantic relationship line that follows Mac, in her attempt to find a genuine connection with Heath, she risks relationships that were built on a foundation of honesty for a world that has proven to be fake. When Mac meets Heath, who she is warned not to get involved with, she chooses to ignore her friend's advice, meaning Chye-Ling and Zoe become jeopardised when Mac starts prioritising Heath, and in turn her social media reputation, over the values and trust that the three girls had developed together. As she gets closer to Heath, she gains a following on social media, which starts dictating her behaviour as it's another factor that she could lose, if she chose to distance herself from the situation. The escalations only show her pulling further away from what grounded her, and as she becomes more involved with Heath, determined to prove that she can be the exception in an apparently fabricated world, the risks start to get personal, as she becomes invested in their relationship and vulnerable to heartbreak.

ARC

That being said, when identifying the personal growth of Mac and how it sits in the genre's expectations of her, Mac starts as someone who doesn't understand the allure of self indulgence. She already has strong morals but then becomes wrapped up in the concept of projection, she abandons her morals for more instant rewards. She risks friendships and integrity to present the perfect image and attempts to recreate herself in a way that no longer feels the things that are deemed ugly, but are ultimately 'real life.' The rise and fall of Mac's fame and her inability to juggle her lives result in her losing friends, getting her heartbroken and then deciding to see the

one-sided attention for what it is; a distraction. Ending with Mac choosing real connection over fame, she becomes more herself.

CORE

Mac is the audience's eyes, so she has to have apparent moral dilemmas that the viewers can either agree with or not, but as long as they understand that she is only doing so in an attempt to grow and learn love and respect. Like anyone who has blurred the lines of reality, she spends her journey convincing herself that there is no difference between real life and online life. Doing her best to believe that she can make genuine connections with these people who only care about numbers, while refusing to acknowledge that it is separating her from the friendships she had beforehand, she compromises her moral values for Heath, over and over, only to find out that he was never as emotionally invested in their relationship. As a young person who has yet to develop the ability to be ok alone, coming to terms with heartbreak and humiliation in such a public forum while desperately trying to regain the only true connections she had, Mac has a task that most people would never wish upon themselves, but will definitely be able to empathise with.

KEY TURNING POINTS

The key turning points in the romantic line between Heath and Mac make up the spine of the story structure, and all play important roles in the escalation of stakes within these character's journeys;

1. Starting from scene 14 Mac attends the search for Taylor, where she goes to confront Heath and tell him the truth about Taylor's whereabouts. After meeting Heath, and finding herself attracted to him, Mac decides to withhold the information in order to spend more time with him. This is the start of a significant pattern for Mac, showing that she is willing to do questionable things to be a part of his life.
2. Mac is confronted by Taylor, who warns her that seeing Heath is going to cause major problems, telling her that Heath is actually seeing someone named Timmie. Mac begins trying to find information on Timmie and shows clear signs of jealousy. Mac chooses to ignore the warnings, and in scenes 28 - 31 sneaks out to see Heath. This is when Mac slowly starts becoming more separated from her real friends, telling them less and less and Heath becomes her priority. As they flirt, Mac brings up Timmie and Heath deflects, telling her to stay away from her, so instead Mac confronts Timmie and warns her that if she doesn't stay away from Heath, Taylor will target her. This is Mac reaching the point of peak competition, showing what she is willing to do to be the only girl in Heath's life.
3. Mac finds out that Heath is going to reconnect with Taylor, and is upset. She can't seem to convince him not to, and despite being hurt, has to plaster on a smile and kiss him for the camera, highlighting the separation between her true emotions and what she is

projecting on the internet. She comes home to the cold shoulder from Chye-Ling and Zoe, who only see that she is happily dangling Heath in front of Taylor for the whole world to see, and she becomes a home-wrecker in their eyes. This is the point in which her friends begin to buy into Taylor's version of Mac, the man-stealing social climber.

4. Heath tells Mac that him and Taylor are through, and instead publicly declares his relationship with Mac, parading her around the town. Mac attempts to confess her feelings to Heath, and although he doesn't let her say it, he reciprocates physically and the two have sex. This marks the point in which the real-life relationship goes further than their online relationship, truly blurring the lines, and giving us an indication that maybe this relationship is for real.

5. Mac finds out the truth of Heath's involvement of the plan, and his intentions to use her to gain followers. Heartbroken, she attempts to mend her friendships and throws out the reminders of Heath and instead of blocking him, chooses to delete her social media page entirely. Marking the point in which Mac decides to focus on her life outside of the screen, choosing genuine human connection.

DRAMATIC QUESTION:

What are we waiting to see happen?

When looking into the dramatic question in Mac's story, there are clear signals within the genre for what the audience expects. Typically with coming of age stories, the protagonist is attempting to overcome obstacles as they leave their teenage life behind, which brings up questions such as 'will they be ok?' or 'will they learn from their mistakes?'

With the main line in the film being romantic, Heath adds to the pressure of Mac's decisions, leading the audience to focus on the likelihood of Mac getting her heart broken, watching Heath and Mac dance around a complicated situation, which arises with Taylor's appearance in Mac's life (and disappearance from Heath's) opens up the questions of *how long will Mac be able to keep this up before she gets hurt?* Something that keeps coming back in multiple ways, with her friends, her reputation and her romantic interest in Heath, there are a lot of opportunities for Mac to lose it all, and that's what the audience is waiting to see, what is going to break her and will she survive?

CORE CONFLICT

Heath wants to gain more followers through a publicity stunt with Taylor, where as Mac wants to develop a genuine connection with him, despite hiding the fact she knows where Taylor is. Heath begins to enjoy the relationship, allowing it to go too far before realizing that he can't have the fame from Taylor and the relationship with Mac.

Although the Mac and Heath line is the main line in regards to the relationship portion of this story, there are other lines that are crucial to Mac's development throughout the script. Mac and

her best friend's have the almost impossible task of holding onto a friendship that is tested when Mac starts becoming someone else. The core conflict that arises through the introduction of the romantic relationship is Mac wanting to be with Heath but Chye-Ling and Zoe clearly disapproving due to their new found loyalty to Taylor.

The girl's determination to keep Taylor around, forces Mac to start keeping secrets and creating a second life for herself, distancing herself from the trust and love that the girl's had previously provided. Her negligence presents a choice that nobody is willing to make until Mac becomes so preoccupied with her life with Heath, that the girls allow Taylor to replace her in the friendship.

Taylor, clearly the antagonist, has various conflicting situations with Mac as their purest desires are so incompatible. Taylor wants to rise in popularity by fabricating a story about her disappearance but Mac wants to develop realistic connections, making it hard for Taylor to control the story. Mac gets involved with Heath, who is pivotal to the plan, so Taylor makes Mac the new scapegoat, interfering in her friendships and intentionally hurting Mac. All while the girls are unknowingly used as leverage and are equally as disposable to Taylor, Mac is the only one genuinely hurt by their change in loyalty.

ENDING

By the end of the script Mac must decide between the perks of fame and the attention of Heath, or true and genuine relationships with her friends that care about her. She has to change her learned behaviours, disregarding how many followers she has, and separate herself from unhealthy relationships, a simple decision made cloudy by Heath's true feelings. The nature of

her friendship with Zoe and Chye-Ling is something so honest that it takes her a while to realize there is even a possibility of losing it. Deciding whether risking her heart for Heath is worth the followers and drama or whether she rejects that whole life and goes back to the life she had before is a question that Mac deals with later on, only once she can actually see the consequences of her actions. Once it is made clear to Mac that there are only two genuine relationships in her life, neither one of them Heath, she can finally start to understand the parts of herself that she never knew existed and attempt to function in a way that favours healthy relationships.

THEME

The intention of the film is in the journey that Mac takes, finding yourself and accepting that nobody is who they publish online. I think it is important for modern audiences to see a narrative that focuses on the blurred lines that come from sharing your life online. It is so common for young people to get wrapped up in showing a projection of the kind of person you want people to think you are and completely ignore the complicated reality of being a twenty-something who is still trying to figure out what the real world is about.

It explores the complex stresses that come from trying to establish yourself as a young woman in the competitive nature of social media while still trying to juggle the trust involved in friendships and the vulnerability that comes from romantic relationships. I want the audience to be able to see themselves in one, if not all of these characters as they fumble through their early twenties while trying to project these images of perfectly curated people without a single flaw.

When trying to encapsulate the idea of the film in a image, two come to mind, since I think it is important to compare both sides of the emotional journey. The contrast of online vs offline life is vital to the theme of the story. Scene 77 shows Mac alone on the bathroom floor crying, with a pop tag of 7.5 million followers. Showing that the attention and perfection that is so commonly craved doesn't equate to love and affection in the real world. When you compare this image to the state of Mac in the final moments of the film, scene 89, where it shows her deleting her social media profile surrounded by her friends, in what I believe to be the most heartfelt moment of the story. Mac accepts herself in the present moment and can finally appreciate the life she has built around her without constantly comparing it to the life someone else appears to have.

That is a major theme in 'Like what' and it most of the other mentioned films that fall under this umbrella, comparison. Ingrid struggled with wishing her life looked more like the well groomed valley girl, Lelaina compared herself to her past and Charlie to David Bowie. Like What sees Mac doing what all twenty-something year old's do, try really hard to be someone else. That's what these films focus on, they capture the most relatable thing that comes from your youth, the inability to know if you're doing anything right, but the utter desperation you have to make everyone think you're one step ahead.

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