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*Legally Blonde* Film Analysis

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The “dumb blonde,” an age-old stereotype that, even though it has no real premise, has carried on for years unstopped. The idea that blondes are bimbos who just want to party and have fun all the time is something I have heard my whole life as someone who has been blonde since birth. While there is also the stereotype that “blondes have more fun,” there is still the implication that blondes are not serious. Growing up, I felt pressured to overcome this stereotype, even in elementary school as a child. Why should any child feel this way? Not to mention the fact that for the most part the stereotype is applied to mainly women, making it inherently sexist. This unnecessary stereotype that shaped my childhood should never do the same to any other blonde young woman.

*Legally Blonde,* directed by Robert Luketic, deals with this stereotype and directly challenges it. The film follows the life of Elle Woods, a soon-to-be college graduate whose boyfriend broke up with her because she is not serious enough for him and his prestigious East Coast family. To get her boyfriend back, Elle decides to go to Harvard law school, but no one believes she will make it. She works hard with the help of her sorority sisters, the Delta Nus, and gets in. Her goal is to get her boyfriend, Warner, back, but when she gets there and finds out that he is engaged, she decides to break up the relationship. In time, she realizes that Warner will never see her as smart enough for him, even though she got into the same school as him and moves on and works hard to win a spot in her law professor’s internship. During a meeting with her professor about the court case they were working on, he makes a pass at Elle, expecting her to humor him to further her career with his firm. As a beautiful woman who may not otherwise be taken seriously, he is surprised and upset when she declines, and gives a vague threat about her not making it through law school as a result. The next day, Elle takes over the court case as the leader on the defense team from Brooke Windham, a fellow Delta Nu and famous fitness
guru accused of killing her husband, who Elle has become friends with throughout the process. No one believes she will succeed, and she starts out on rocky ground, but eventually comes into her own and wins the court case, surprising everyone in the room. The movie is essentially about overcoming stereotypes that made Elle underestimate herself, which she learns do not define her and she can achieve anything she puts her mind to, even law school.

*Legally Blonde* does not only deal with the “dumb blonde” stereotype, but gender stereotypes as well. In one scene, we see the professor who is running the internship ask only women interns to get coffee, which turns their role as law interns into something much more demeaning and subservient. Blaine (2017) describes this as Hostile sexism or “a set of attitudes that regards women as inferior to men, assigns women to traditional and subordinate roles” (p. 125). This perfectly describes the way he treats one of the interns, Vivian, in a lot of the scenes. In later scenes, it seems as if the only reason why the professor values Elle is because she is an attractive woman. According to Kim Parker of the Pew Research Center (2018) this is seen fairly frequently in male dominated work places nationwide. Men and women report vastly different work experiences, and this can be directly seen in *Legally Blonde* dealing with the intern scenes alone, not to mention the scene where the professor sexually harasses Elle. Blaine (2017) even discusses that Glass Ceiling effect, a phenomenon where women are made unable to attain high level positions in their jobs, which limits women in their careers (p. 140). This is seen in the film when Warner doesn’t think Elle is smart enough for the internship.

The film is very good for showing young girls that they can overcome stereotypes despite what everyone else in their lives are saying. One scene I found particularly powerful is when Elle is talking to Warner’s new fiancé, Vivian, and she finds out that he got into Harvard because his father called in a favor. I found this scene to be very ironic, because Warner doesn’t believe that
Elle is smart enough to be where she is, when he is the one who needed the help. The final court scene is very effective at showing Elle as a strong and empowered woman. I get chills every time Elle wins her case and the entire court room has an “oh my god” moment. This is the most pivotal scene in the movie, displaying Elle’s confidence in herself rising and gaining her the win. She knows that no one believes in her, a young, female, first year law student, and yet she does not let anything stop her from proving her client innocent. Warner then tries to tell Elle that she really is the one for him, and she just shoots him down, saying she needs someone who will really support her. This shows that while he may have been her original motivation, she doesn’t need him anymore. The final scene is the graduation scene, where Elle is the student chosen speaker. The end tells the viewers that Elle graduated at the top of her class and has job offers from prestigious law firms in Boston, driving home the fact that Elle succeeded all on her own. On the other hand, Warner, the ex-boyfriend, got dumped by his fiancé, and has no job offers, solidifying Elle’s achievement.

I have one main complaint about the movie, that while all of this is going on, Elle still ends up getting another boyfriend. I understand that it is supposed to be an example of Elle growing, by choosing a man who is better for her, but I thought it almost undermined the point of her getting over Warner. It begs the question of why does she even need to have a boyfriend at all? She is enough on her own and doesn’t need even the potential idea of a new boyfriend.

Overall, *Legally Blonde* not only does a good job displaying stereotypes, but also showing young girls who watch it that those stereotypes can be overcome. Elle Woods went from having her life planned out to facing discrimination she never thought she would have to face directly. But in the end, she relies on herself and is able to prove wrong those who didn’t
believe in her, even herself. She proves to everyone that she is serious, talented, and wins the respect of her friends, family, professors, and the law community.
References


Luketic R. (Director). (n.d.). *Legally Blonde* [Video file].