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'Clueless,' 20 years later: A second opinion from 2 teens and an adult

by Wendy Hathaway, Community Contributor @WisWendy

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As *Clueless* approached the 20th anniversary of its theatrical release on July 19 (old enough to drive; not yet old enough for a brewski), I started to wonder if what I felt for the film was true love—major, total, butt-crazy love—or if youthful nostalgia was clouding my judgment.

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Who better to weigh in on the lasting impact of the Amy Heckerling classic than a pair of 16-year-old girls? While I settled in for a studious rewatch on DVD (hot pink "Whatever!" Edition, circa 2005), they logged into Netflix to decide for themselves if *Clueless* is still dope, or totally buggin'.

Wendy H., age 33

I was 13 years old when *Clueless* hit theaters in the summer of 1995, but my mom wouldn't allow me to watch it until it hit video stores a year or so later.

It was love at first sight.

I was enthralled by the beautiful fashion, and fashion risks; by the hyper-articulate dialogue and brand-new (to me) slang; and especially Cher's romantic entanglements. Despite the "sex-related dialogue and some teen use of alcohol and drugs" (PG-13 warning), the bright soundtrack, the bold colors, and sweet romances were more my speed than *Kids*, or *Hackers*, or even *Empire Records* (a favorite later in life). And I've been lusting after Cher's wardrobe and quoting the film ever since.



So what did I find when viewing it for the first time with a critical eye?

The details feel dated, which shouldn't be a surprise. When the film was released, it was fabulously hip, and there's little room for a snapshot of teen life like that to stay fresh over time, especially when it's exaggerated for effect. But in an odd way, I find all of those dated details sort of comforting.

You know immediately what decade you're jumping into. The first seconds of the graphic opening credits, from the screaming neon colors and wipes to the camera movements and editing, are very mid-'90s. They're just a bit more advanced than *Saved by the Bell*'s jazzy animated shapes.

Obviously the fashion, makeup, and hair are of another time, along with the soundtrack and the pop-culture references: the Mentos "Freshmakers" jingle; Marky Mark planting a tree; *Beavis and Butthead* and *Ren and Stimpy* on TV. Even ska superstars The Mighty Mighty Bosstones make a cameo at a college frat party.

The technology seemed like a status symbol at the time, but today feels dated: flip phones that didn't even have GPS to help them navigate to the Val party. I absolutely coveted Cher's digital wardrobe management system, even if I still don't understand how it seemingly had touchscreen capabilities. Even Elton's oversize CD binder (minus The Cranberries) and Tai's "Rollin' with the Homies" cassette tape probably seem so old to anyone born in the 21st century.



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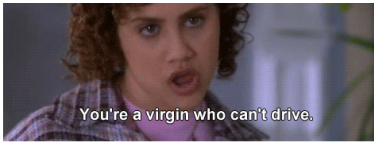
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Upon closer inspection, there are also a few social issues I'd never noticed that bother me now. The girls use the "R" word not once but twice. No one bats an eyelash when it's revealed that Christian is gay (in fact, Cher is the only one who seemed to be totally clueless about it), but that doesn't stop Murray from using off-putting descriptors like "cake boy" and "Streisand ticket-holding friend of Dorothy."

As a former teenage girl, I was also disturbed by how obsessed the main characters are with body image, especially weight. When Elton dumps Tai, her first reaction is to ask, "It's my hips, isn't it?" To cheer her up, they indulge a calorie-fest, but probably only after alternating *Buns of Steel* or Cindy Crawford's *Aerobicise*. Cher feels like a heifer for eating two bowls of Special K, three pieces of turkey bacon, a handful of popcorn, five peanut butter M&M's, and, like, three pieces of licorice. (The sad thing is, this sort of dialogue isn't gone from movies even 10 or 15 years later. Remember how Cady gets back at a dieting Regina George by tricking her into gaining twice as many pounds as she wants to lose in *Mean Girls*?)



But take the girl out of Beverly Hills, and Cher's teen problems are still fairly relatable today. She mothers her strict father, a very sweet relationship despite his many remarriages and refusal to eat right. She's not a perfect student, or a great driver (that came out of nowhere!), but she's not a total ditz, either, and

she has a big heart. She's the most popular girl in school, but still battles insecurity and the power of cliques. She's gorgeous, but still can't seem to find the right boy to settle down with, already—including the dreamy new kid who'd rather just be friends (Christian), and the friend who wants to maul her in a liquor-store parking lot (Elton).

Find me one teen who's never experienced jealousy, wondered where they fit in, worried they'd never find love, felt awkward at a party, or stressed over tests or learning to drive. And find me a teenager who's never felt the joys of flirting and friendship, and making a difference, even if it's just in your own little world.

These things are universal no matter what your zip code, or the decade in which you're growing up.

SECOND OPINIONS

Franny D., age 16

The old look adds a layer that you don't see in movies today. But I was surprised at the way it was done and how dated the fashion was. It was weird.



The movie feels old, but I liked it, and the plotline is still relatable today.

The Clothes: The fashion was pretty laughable: over-the-top accessories, and especially Dionne, who wore REALLY over-the-top outfits.

The Characters: I felt like the movie was pretty relatable. I didn't relate to how rich Cher was, and how she lived in a mansion. I DID relate to her struggles in driving.

I feel like most of Cher's friends were one-dimensional and hard to relate to. It was good to see a platonic relationship between a boy and girl, when Cher and her ex-step-brother would talk.

The Slang, the Cell Phones, and the Soundtrack: They referred to one character as so sweet, she gave somebody a toothache. No one uses that wording or phrasing!

The music was VERY '90s. It's like music you'd hear in the old episodes of *Scooby-Doo*.

The big cell phones and pagers showed how it was back then. But those details didn't take away from the story.

Molly J., age 16

I really liked the movie. I thought it was funny, and would watch it again.



It felt dated because of the slang and songs they listened to. I got some references, like Marky Mark and Tina Turner. But the slang is very different from today, like "buggin'" and "jeepin'." I only recognized the Cindy Lauper song ("Girls Just Wanna Have Fun") and the

very first song, "Kids of America."

The fashion was plaid skirts for girls, and baggy pants for guys. Dionne's hats were very crazy, and Cher's outfits were always very preppy—way different from how we dress now.

Dionne and Murray were my favorite, because they were funny and dramatic. Elton was my least favorite, because he acted like jerk and just left Cher in the Valley.

Cher, as a whole, was not relatable to my life, but I understood a few aspects, like wanting good grades and having a strict dad. Tai was the most relatable, because she wanted to fit in and have friends.

wanted to in it and have menus.

At first I didn't like Josh. But when he picked up Cher in the Valley, it showed that he cared enough about her to help her out. When Josh and Cher get together at the end, though, it is a little strange because they were step-siblings, and he is 19 or 20, and Cher is 16. The only thing I found strange about it was the fashion and slang. What I found funny was the fact that high school kids then were obsessed with their phones, just like how teens are now!



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Wendy Hathaway, Community Contributor

Wendy's DVR is often full to the brink of automatic deletion with a wide range of television programs—from the fiery, violent romances of *The Vampire Diaries* to the fiery, violent romances of *Deadliest Catch*.

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