Representation of Women/Introduction to Nicole

Tom Beasley suggests that Whiplash offers a poor representation of women. If we consider the introduction of Nicole, it can be argued this is certainly the case. We are introduced to Nicole at the movie theatre through a series of quick edits showing her doing a menial customer service job; filling a drink, scooping popcorn. This representation of Nicole is in stark contrast to Andrew who, while presented as naïve and somewhat emasculated in the introductory sequence by Fletcher, still has some command and power in the scene via his drumming and potential. Nicole’s hunched body posture and dull grey t-shirt introduces her as a character who perhaps lacks the drive of Andrew or is happy to simply slot into the background.

Despite this, in the next scene through a close-up shot, Nicole is bathed in a golden hue. Arguably this ‘angelic’ lighting creates her as someone who is desirable and in Proppian terms the ‘Princess’ or ‘Prize’, for Andrew. The soft lighting on her face in the close-up works to highlight and enhance her stereotypically feminine features; red smiling lips, welcoming dark eyes. It could be argued that this type of cinematography and lighting actively portrays Nicole as a tool for Andrew to affirm and reach stereotypical conventions of a male: to have a heteronormative relationship. Casting Nicole immediately in this light, as a ‘prize’ potentially to be won by Andrew, feeds directly into Beasley’s argument, and gives her minimal agency outside of being something for Andrew to use to fulfil a hyper-masculine identity.

These ideas can be reinforced when we consider the sequence where Andrew asks Nicole out on a date. In order to do this we must consider the scene directly before this sequence, where Andrew competes with Ryan Connolly for a place in Fletcher’s band. While Connolly appears physically more imposing than Andrew, and has, perhaps, more traditionally desirable masculine features: a squarer jaw line, more symmetrical features and he has a girlfriend, Andrew triumphs and seemingly gains Fletcher’s approval. In gaining Fletcher’s approval; the approval of a male who is physically and verbally aggressive; thus hyper-masculine, Andrew is one step closer to his masculine utopia. As such in the following scene we see Andrew march up to Nicole, dressed in dark colours – almost mirroring Fletcher’s costume – and ask her out. While he does appear nervous, he is somewhat direct in his request – again, attempting to mirror his masculine ideal Fletcher, reaffirming that Nicole is simply an object to aid Andrew on a quest to his hyper masculine goal.