

Blog posting # 4

Title satisfying good-title requirements (i.e., informative *and* eye catching) 100

All statements and positions are clear and to-the-point 100

All statements are grammatically accurate and easy-to-follow 100

Average earned = 100 (of 100)

A few thoughts about compliments and silly pink dresses

Tonight I mentioned a scene from one of my favorite TV shows as an example of how women can be very hateful to other women when offering "backhanded" compliments. You can view a clip of the scene from "Firefly" on YouTube at <http://youtu.be/1M-yMMcZBdU>. (Also, if you have Netflix, you can watch the entire season on instant view. Just search for "Firefly.")

This scene shows Kaylee, a female mechanic, attending a formal party. Most of the time, her character is greasy and dirty; she is an obvious tomboy and a bit of a country bumpkin. In this episode, however, she has the chance to show her feminine side by wearing a frilly pink dress. The audience knows she bought the dress from a store since Kaylee had commented on it earlier in the episode when she and her crewmates were walking around town. When she arrives at the party, she is obviously out of her league, but she tries to make small talk with the people there. Her first attempt is at 1:50 in the clip when she addresses a man who bows and leaves without speaking to her. To me, this is a polite, if abrupt, way to signal to someone that you think they are not of the same social status as you are. The man does not say anything to her, keeping whatever comments he may have about her or her dress to himself. Kaylee realizes he doesn't approve of her or think they are equals, but since he kept quiet, she doesn't seem to be offended or hurt by his actions.

Next, Kaylee tries to speak to a group of women who are about the same age as she is (this is at 2:07 in the clip). Unlike the man, the women are all smiles and charm at first, but their words make it clear that Kaylee is not welcome. When Kaylee comments on how great the food is, one woman says, "It's not as good as last year." When Kaylee asks what they had at the previous party, the woman states, "Standards." Ouch. Another woman then comments on Kaylee's dress, and at first, Kaylee thinks she's receiving a genuine compliment. She replies, "Oh, do you like it? When I saw the ruffles, I just couldn't resist." The woman then says, "It looks like you bought it in a store," which is her way of saying, "You look like a cheap tart." The other women probably would have continued to make fun of Kaylee if an older man hadn't interrupted them. The action of the scene then shifts away from Kaylee, but when we see her again at 7:13 in the clip, she's surrounded by a group of men and is clearly impressing them with her knowledge of ships and engines.

The gender differences in this clip leave me with two thoughts. First, the man Kaylee spoke to who basically ignored her did so because he was trying to be polite. Judging by the culture as it is shown in the episode, he was probably taught that it was impolite to insult a woman. The women Kaylee interacts with, however, were allowed to insult her because they were also women. Their insults were hidden by smiles and polite words, but their speech acts were clearly meant to hurt Kaylee's feelings. Second, the scene places Kaylee in a situation where she is expected to be more feminine than usual, and as such, she needs to behave more like a "woman." For example, Kaylee's dress is pink, and she is only able to leave the conversation with the women after being rescued by an older man. In her feminine role, Kaylee is not allowed to stand up for herself and needs a man's help. Later when she is talking to the group of men, the older man saves her again by stopping a younger man from interrupting Kaylee's speech. To me, it seems as if Kaylee gave up her strength and power when she put on that ridiculous pink dress and tried to behave more like a stereotypical woman.