



Generation Multiplex: The Image of Youth in Contemporary American Cinema

Timothy Shary

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When teenagers began hanging out at the mall in the early 1980s, the movies followed. Multiplex theaters offered teens a wide array of perspectives on the coming-of-age experience, as well as an escape into the alternative worlds of science fiction and horror. Youth films remained a popular and profitable genre through the 1990s, offering teens a place to reflect on their evolving identities from adolescence to adulthood while simultaneously shaping and maintaining those identities. Drawing examples from hundreds of popular and lesser-known youth-themed films, Timothy Shary here offers a comprehensive examination of the representation of teenagers in American cinema in the 1980s and 1990s. He focuses on five subgenres—school, delinquency, horror, science, and romance/sexuality - to explore how they represent teens and their concerns, how these representations change over time, and how youth movies both mirror and shape societal expectations and fears about teen identities and roles. He concludes that while some teen films continue to exploit various notions of youth sexuality and violence, most teen films of the past generation have shown an increasing diversity of adolescent experiences and have been sympathetic to the particular challenges that teens face.

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