**Evaluating Youth Themes in *Quadrophenia***

“Look, I don't wanna be the same as everybody else. That's why I'm a Mod, see?” Jimmy tells his childhood friend Kevin, a member of the rival subculture, the Rockers, “I mean, you gotta be somebody, ain't ya, or you might as well jump in the sea and drown.”

The turmoil of searching for one’s identity is a typical characteristic of adolescence, but the 1960s created a unique climate for self-discovery. Young people during this period engaged in unprecedented cultural transformation, dressing, dancing, partying, thinking, and living in ways which horrified older generations. Teenagers sought to dismantle the status quo, the archaic traditions which restrained people from true happiness and freedom. Music acted as a catalyst for many of these youth movements. *Quadrophenia* (1979) chronicles the reality and rebellions of Jimmy Cooper (played by Phil Daniels), a member of the Mods, a subversive British subculture which revolved around dressing in tailored suits, riding motorbikes, listening to bands like *The Who*, and creating chaos. Being a Mod gives Jimmy a sense of community within a society which he largely doesn’t identify with. However, as he pursues the milestones and achievements which are celebrated within the subculture, it becomes clear that he conflates his personal identity with the ideals of the group, ultimately inhibiting his personal growth.

At the beginning of the film, director Franc Roddam presents a vivid portrait of a rebellious young man. The opening shots of the film picture Jimmy riding a motorcycle through the streets of London at night in 1964 with *The Who’s* song “The Real Me” playing in the background. Jimmy grins and shouts profanities at groups of bikers who try to pass him, obviously pleased by the “bad boy” image he projects. Similar to the youths described in *Gangsters Without Borders*, many teenagers may have joined the Mods for “independence, protection, respect, access to alcohol and drugs, affiliation, friendship, sex, to escape problems in the family and/or at school, and as rebellion against discrimination” (121). Having a sense of belonging is crucial for adolescents and young people; according to theories on the stages of social-emotional development, middle adolescence -- which ranges approximately from ages 14 to 18 -- is characterized by the tendency of youths to be independent, withdrawing from and rebelling against parents, and depending more on peers. The Poverty of Relationships Theory argues that when young people don’t feel sufficiently supported by their families or communities, they seek acceptance and affirmation from peer groups (Kaplan Lecture). This is certainly the case for Jimmy, who hates his job at the post office and the bureaucratic elites who work there, and whose parents and sister don’t understand him. They happily carry out conventional lifestyles and constantly criticize him for pursuing his interests and neglecting his possibilities. “It’s not normal,” Jimmy’s especially harsh mother remarks when he comes home late, and when she finds him asleep in his clothing from the night before. Jimmy’s friends, however, seem to share his rebellious disposition and obsessions with dressing suave, riding motorcycles, taking (and stealing) prescription drugs which they colloquially call “blues,” and living by the emerging rock music of the times, especially that of *The Who*. Like to the gang members described in Ward’s *Gangsters Without Borders*, Jimmy seeks status within the Mods; obsessing over a tailored suit that he bought despite working a menial, low-paying job, keeping drugs within arm’s reach, and being fiercely loyal to the Mod way of life.

One way Jimmy tries to elevate his status is by pursuing Steph, his beautiful, highly desired peer. The role that women play in the film hints at a binary which is described in Thomas Ward’s book *Gangsters Without Borders*, where female gang members were seen either as “tomboys or sex objects” (121). Female Mod members were often portrayed with gender-neutral clothing, short haircuts and minimal makeup, or were seen as an object of pursuit, exemplified by Steph and by the ubiquity of posters and images of nude women seen at the office Jimmy works at or on his bedroom wall. It is clear that the Mod culture, much like the gang lifestyle that Ward describes, is extremely male dominated, where Jimmy sees women merely as tools for his own validation and pleasure.

During a scene toward the beginning of the film, Jimmy nearly gets into a fight with a Rocker at a public bathhouse when the Rocker refuses to stop singing a Gene Vincent song, leading to an exchange of vitriol and a screaming (and singing) match. Eventually, the tension comes to a head and Jimmy looks into the Rocker’s stall. Immediately, their belligerence dissipates as Jimmy recognizes the Rocker, Kevin, as a friend from his childhood. The pair exchange kind words, and even sit next to each other for lunch. When a group of Mods enter the restaurant, however, Jimmy acts like he doesn’t know Kevin in order to maintain his perceived allegiance to the Mods. This upsets Kevin, but later, their conflicting loyalties cause an even greater problem.

Adolescent Peer Culture Theory asserts that peer groups have social norms which they act on in response to novel situations. For the Mods, one of these norms establishes that when Rockers hurt one of them, they seek revenge in the same violent manner. One night, a group of Rockers beats up one of Jimmy’s friends on the side of the road. Later in the night, Jimmy and his friends find a pair of Rockers and chase them down. When they have them cornered, Jimmy realizes that one of the Rockers -- neither of whom beat up his friend -- is Kevin. At first, he screams “Leave him alone,” but it becomes clear they will not. Obviously upset and unwilling to admit to being friends with a Rocker, Jimmy drives away, leaving Kevin to suffer. Witnessing Kevin’s pain as a result from the actions of his friends pangs Jimmy’s conscience, and feeling powerless in his effort to stop it makes enduring the situation so unbearable that he drives away to escape the conflict. When a situation interferes with the regular response to a norm established within an adolescent peer group, individuals have to improvise and adapt to the situation, often resulting in poor, illogical choices. This tendency was exhibited in the case of the Central Park 5; when the detectives told the teenagers that their peers had falsely implicated in the rape of the Central Park jogger, the norm of honesty and solidarity was broken. Thus, the teens each lied as well, as the novelty of the situation prompted fear, confusion, stress, and anger, which clouded their judgement and led to responses which would cause problems for them in the future. Though Jimmy did not have to deal with corrupt, racist cops pressuring him, his emotional ties to Kevin makes it impossible for him to act according to the group norm. Instead he panics, his emotions similarly clouding his judgement and resulting in a poor response. After leaving the scene, Jimmy drives to a riverside, where he silently contemplates his complicity in the brutality against his friend before going home. Throughout the film, water acts as a recurring motif; Jimmy consistently revisits it whenever his identity as a Mod conflicts with his personal values or beliefs. Perhaps, the endless, dark waves hint at Jimmy’s skeptical future and tangled thoughts.

The first half of the movie captures Jimmy and his friends’ eager anticipation for their trip to Brighton, a seaside city where the Mods previously caused a riot. Jimmy pastes newspaper articles detailing how the riot police are preparing for their arrival, grinning dreamily. Like most of the Mods, Jimmy seems to worship chaos and dysfunction, picking a fight whenever he can and riding his motorcycle over flower gardens. This predilection for destruction is deeply tied both to the characters’ age, and the time in history when this story takes place. Ideologies of the 1960s sometimes centered around the idea that in order for things to be rebuilt, previous constructs had to be destroyed. Moreover, physical destruction was a statement in itself -- *The Who* famously smashed their instruments after every performance. However, the Mods’ violent inclinations are not merely philosophical, but visceral. At Brighton, a riot does ensue after one of Jimmy’s friends spots a Rocker who ran him off of the road on the way there. Hundreds of Mods and Rockers viciously fight, and when the police show up the Mods take them on as well. They gleefully march through the streets, vandalizing businesses and chanting “We are the Mods” over and over again. This act seems not only to mark the participants’ fidelity to the Mod movement, but it also asserts their presence, their importance, and their power. Adolescents commonly struggle with self-confidence and identity. Jooyoung Lee describes how such feelings of insignificance are especially dire among neglected communities in *Blowin’ Up: Rap Dreams in South Central*. Lee describes how Black youths often feel unwelcome in conventional spaces where their self-worth can be validated -- such as in school or jobs -- so they turn to rap -- or to the gang lifestyle -- in order to find purpose and meaning. While most of the Mods did not have to overcome the hurdle of racism, most were poor, working class teens who felt restrained, bored, and misunderstood. Thus, violence and chaos was their method of asserting their existence.

“You’ve got to be a Mod, or this, or that… I mean haven’t you got a mind of your own?” Jimmy’s father yells after he comes home late from partying with his friends. Later in the film, after Jimmy is arrested during the riots in Brighton, a judge echoes this sentiment in his condemnation of the upheaval the Mods caused. “These sordid Caesars, who can only find courage, like rats, by hunting in packs, came to Brighton with the avowed intent of interfering with the life and property of its inhabitants,” he scolds a particularly well dressed Mod, Ace Face, who Jimmy silently idolized. To his delight, Ace Face comes up with a snarky reproach to the judge, but after this moment everything goes downhill. Jimmy returns home and spontaneously quits his job, telling his boss off and splurging his paycheck on a bag of blues. His mother disowns him and kicks him out of her house after seeing what the Mods did in Brighton and finding drugs in his room. He finds that all of his friends abandoned him in Brighton, which they justified by saying that they needed to go to their jobs. During the riots, Jimmy has sex with Steph, but later he discovers that she coupled up with one of his best friends, Dave, while he was in jail. He gets into a fight with Dave, ending their friendship, and when he confronts Steph about his betrayal, she says that their entire whirlwind romance was “just a giggle.” During this phase, his eyes increasingly become sunken and his dark circles become exaggeratingly prominent highlighting his unstable mental health and signs of addiction. He seems to come to terms with the fact that the Mod ideology -- which he lived by and sacrificed his livelihood for -- is merely an aesthetic choice for his peers. This is proven by his friends’ retreat into conventionality, and their ultimate disloyalty. To them, it’s just a giggle.

After his motorcycle is destroyed, Jimmy journeys back to Brighton by train. It’s immediately clear that he heads to the beach for an entirely different purpose this time, however, as he wanders manically through the cars and even throws his clothes out of the window of the moving train. When he arrives, he discovers Ace Face once again, but this time he does not look so cool. As it turns out, he is a bell boy at a hotel; Jimmy watches him as he scurries around in his silly outfit, taking orders from rude old men. This vividly solidifies the message that was communicated to Jimmy by his friends, that the Mod lifestyle is a facade, and participation in that culture is just another form of conformity. The insecurity and confusion inherent to adolescents renders teenagers particularly vulnerable to peer pressure. Validation from friends becomes precious when you want to feel understood. The film ends with Jimmy stealing Ace Face’s motorcycle and pushing it off of a cliff, a moment that acts as an emblem of him relinquishing being a Mod. By doing so, Jimmy ascends to a higher level of maturity. Perhaps, signaling that he is in the late adolescence stage of development, which tends to range from ages 19 to 21. A characteristic of this stage is the development of a stronger sense of identity, one which does not depend on others, when one has the strength to care for oneself, form healthy relationships, and lead a productive life.

*Quadrophenia* is an elaborate yet timeless throwback, slice-of-life drama that brings out the themes of youthful rebellion and chaos, transcending through *The Who* soundtrack and varied, realistic locations in the streets of London. While the film feels like a low-budget production, the concept of following *The Who* soundtrack, detailed scenes portraying the subculture of the Mods and Rockers, and the bittersweet moments of teenage identity crises, provides the audience with insight on the lawless freedom of these teenagers exhibit in each scene. Roddam creates an indisputably universal, but unique film suited for young adults and older. Jessica believes that the first half of the film presents exceptional content, aesthetic, and storyline, but the latter half of the film begins to feel rushed and abruptly concluded. Despite this, we all believe the film deserves five stars: Eliza, because it captures a nuanced image of the turbulent inner life of a young person with both humor and heartbreak; Jessica, largely due to the brilliant performance of Phil Daniels portraying a typical Mod; Ben, because the relatability of Jimmy to practically anyone in the young adult stage of their life made this film so excellent. *Quadrophenia* would be the most suitable for audiences looking for a timeless coming-of-age classic that highlights the themes of teenage vulnerability, the influence of pop culture on adolescents, conformity and nonconformity, and self-discovery, set within the world of the fascinating youth subcultures of London during the mid 1960s.