



FILM: **PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN**

FDG RATING: 3.3 ☺☺☺○○

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Emerald Fennell: *director, writer*
Carey Mulligan: *actress, Cassie*
Bo Burnham: *actor, Ryan*

DATE: March 21, 2021

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN**

Winning the 2021 Oscar for best original screenplay, *Promising Young Woman*, is a disturbing exploration into young adult sexual exploitation that is all too familiar to the 2015 assault by a Stanford University swimmer of an intoxicated and unconscious woman outside an on-campus fraternity party. A revenge thriller with elements of black comedy, actress Carey Mulligan deservedly earned her nomination for best actress as Cassie, whose best friend, Nina, committed suicide when they were both at the top of their class as outstanding medical students with promising futures. Cassie promptly dropped out. She now works days at a coffee shop and spends her nights roaming the night club bar scene, pretending to be vulnerably intoxicated so men see her as an easy pick-up, but as soon as they start to take advantage of her, she snaps into her sober state to call them out on what they are doing. Clearly she is on a vendetta. We learn that her best friend had been gang raped at a frat party after Cassie had decided to leave so she is guilt ridden that she wasn't there to save her friend and is now on a mission, determined to avenge men who take advantage of vulnerable women.

No one stood up for her friend. The system protected the criminal over the accuser. There was no investigation by the school or legal system. As one published critic said, "Cassie is trying to dismantle that system one shitty guy at a time." But director, screen writer Emerald Fennell, purposely paints a sugar coating on the disturbing situation by adding an element of too good to be true flirty romance with a former classmate turned pediatric surgeon, Ryan, who happens into the coffee shop. This allows for some entertaining, even musical scenes, such as when they happily romp amidst the shopping carts filled with groceries in a supermarket as their romance blossoms. After all, Ryan has shown he is a "nice guy".

Most discussion participants found the film intriguing, suspenseful, clever, original with continual twists. A few thought it was too long. We agreed it was definitely visually striking with eye popping colors in many scenes. One participant criticized the dialog as stiff and thought the confrontation with the attorney was the only authentic scene. A published critic described the film as razor sharp. Another described it as a tragedy masked as a comedy where an itch for justice is scratched by a twisted knife. A resident reviewer commented that the director, writer, captured every nuance of every male asshole. For those who appreciate music orchestrated to fit the film scenes, Fennell appropriately maneuvers the film's song "Once Upon a Time There Was a Pretty Fly" into the story. We applauded the excellent performances although for one discussion participant, the character of Cassie just didn't work.

When another former classmate surprisingly reaches out to Cassie to unburden herself of the tape of Nina's rape that had secretly circulated, something she has kept hidden all these years, *Promising Young Woman* once again pulls the rug out from under the audience, revealing Ryan was there to witness the tragic event. The former classmate mentions that the young man who assaulted Nina was soon to be married. Relieved of the tape, and with the upcoming wedding, she seems to imply the ugly stain of the past has been swept away and everyone has moved on. But for Cassie, the stakes have been raised. The plot thickens leading to an unexpected ending.

Promising Young Woman drives home the severe Impact of sexual violence on victims in a fictionalized story, teetering on entertaining exaggeration in the realm of black comedy, a technique often used when the actual reality would be too much to watch.

Quirky, with an important underlying, unnerving theme, *Promising Young Woman*, rallied our support with a slightly hesitant 3.3 on our scale of 1 to 5. 5 is the best.



See you at the movies!

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