

Teenagers' Resistance in John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club*

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ABSTRACT

Many problems appear in our education field lately. Most of the problems emerge because of the punishment given by the teachers during the learning process. The use of punishment has always been the debatable issue in education field. It is still questioned how effective the punishment is or the boundaries which should be considered in giving the punishment for the students. The same issue is also depicted in the movie entitled *The Breakfast Club*. *The Breakfast Club* is a Hollywood movie directed by John Hughes in 1985. This movie depicts the life of five teenagers, who spend a Saturday in detention together. This paper aims to scrutinize teenagers' resistance to the school policy presented in the movie. This paper uses psychological approach in analyzing the movie. Psychological approach allows the researcher to apply the theory of psychosocial development to find out the stereotype of teenagers, how the family affect teenagers' personality and also how friendship affect the act of resistance against the school's policy. This paper argues that *The Breakfast Club* presents the resistance in the education field. It depicts how the main characters try to criticize the school policy and perspective about the requirement to be considered as good students through the conflict in the movie.

KEYWORDS: *The Breakfast Club, resistance, school's police, psychological approach.*

The importance of education is never questioned by all of us. Without any doubts we all know that education is important in order to support our life. Education enables us to better our life. Education prepares us to face the fast changing of the world. In short, the importance of education cannot be denied in human life. Moreover, we can get an access easily to educate us, one of them is in school. Since

a very young age we were introduced to school such as play group or kindergarten until getting higher education level like university.

Furthermore, one of the values taught in the school is moral value. This value is taught in order to prepare the students to have both qualified ability and attitude. This purpose can be also observed in our education curriculum which adds the moral education as the first value which needs to be learnt in the class. However, introducing and teaching moral value is a challenging chance for teachers. Coming from different family background and also environment resulted the different personality among the students.

In addition, there is no absolute method on how to teach moral value to the students. As the result, punishment is considered as a good tool discipline the students from any inappropriate attitude. This kind of situation is also depicted in John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club*. This movie portrays the situation in which five different students named John Bender, Brian, Claire, Andrew and Allison who are grounded in the library of their school on Saturday. During the movie, the viewers are presented by the conflict between teacher and students and also among the students themselves. Therefore, this paper aims to find out the importance of the family in developing the students' behavior. Therefore this paper is completed by research questions as follows

1. How does society stereotype the teenagers presented in *The Breakfast Club*?
2. How does family affect the development of teenagers' personality in *The Breakfast Club*?
3. How does friendship affect the act of resistance against the school's policy in *The Breakfast Club*?

Theoretical Framework

This paper is supported by psychological approach in analyzing *The Breakfast Club*. Pope noted that the use of psychology can be defined as the understanding of mental and emotional process related to language, literature, and culture. This means that psychological approach enables us to apply some psychological theory in the analyses. Therefore, this paper is supported by psychosocial development theory proposed by Erik Erickson. He proposed a series of stages of psychosexual development during each of which an individual has to establish changing concepts of self and reality. The stages of psychosocial development will be elaborated as follows:

1. Stage 1: Trust Versus Mistrust

Erickson argued that a healthy personality requires a sense trust toward oneself and the world, a trust that develops during the first year of life. It means that a sense of trust is important to be developed since a very young age. Developing trust towards the world is very important for the children because later they need to interact with other people outside the family. Therefore the use of parents is very important in this stage. Erickson also argued that infant derive security and comfort from warm relationship with their parents whereas cold parental care and rejection cause mistrust and affect all later development.

2. Stage 2: Autonomy Versus Shame and Doubt

Erickson noted that the second stage happened during the toilet training. During this stage, personality is shaped by the child's learning of the meaning of self-control. Furthermore, parental reactions are crucial, since the objective of this stage is the child's development of self-control with no loss of self-esteem. In

addition, loss of self-control because of parental overcontrol results in self-doubt and shame.

3. Stage 3: Initiative Versus Guilt

In Erickson's third stage (ages 4 to 5 years) children show greater freedom of movement, perfection of language, and expansion of imagination. Moreover, a sense of initiative emerges that will serve as a basis of realistic ambitions and purpose. Erickson argued that the important contribution of this stage to later identity development is to free the child's initiative and sense of purpose for adult tasks that promise fulfillment of human capacities.

4. Stage 4 : Industry Versus Inferiority

The fourth stage occurs between the ages of 6 and 11 years. In this stage, children possess a sense of being able to do things well; they want to win recognition by producing things through their own industry. During these years the school becomes a proving ground. Several basic questions emerge in this stage such as being able to establish positive relationship with the teachers and classmates, master the subject and some degree of success contributions to both personal adjustment and social acceptance.

5. Stage 5 : Identity Versus Identity Confusion

This stage (12 to 18 years) is the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. Youngsters become concerned with what others think of them, and peer opinion plays large part in how they think about themselves. According to Erickson, the young in our society are searching for something or someone to be true to.

6. Stage 6 : Intimacy Versus Isolation

In this stage, intimacy versus isolation, encompasses the years of young adulthood (ages 18 to 35). Erickson believes that a sense of intimacy goes beyond

being sexual, and involves the capacity to develop a true and mutual psychosocial intimacy with friends, the ability to care for others without fearing a loss of self-identity.

7. Stage 7: Generativity Versus Stagnation

During middle age, from about ages 35 to 65 years, individual thinks about the future of both society and their own children. Furthermore, an outstanding characteristic of this period is care for others which implies an obligation to guide the next generation by passing on desirable social values.

8. Stage 8: Integrity Versus Despair

This is the last stage of Erickson's psychosocial development. Erickson noted that in this stage individuals who have taken care of things and people over the years have adapted to the triumphs and disappointments of life are the people who reap the harvest of the first seven stages.

This paper uses psychological approach in order to be able to apply a psychological theory in this case psychosocial development by Erik Erickson. This psychological theory is applied in order to find out how the main characters personalities develop by examining their psychosocial development stages. However, this paper will only scrutinize the first five stage of this theory because the main characters in *The Breakfast Club* are Senior High School Students that considered as teenagers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses the data taken from John Hughes' *The Breakfast Club*. The data will be collected after watching the movie for several times. After that the data will be analyzed using some theories from psychological perspective. In the end, it will draw conclusion about how teenagers is seen by the society, how family affect

the development of teenagers' personality and how friendship affects the resistance done by the main characters against the school punishment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Before going directly to the discussion, it is better for the researcher to explain the main characters of the movie in brief. The main characters are the students of Shermer High School which means that the age of the students is around 15-18 years old which consider them to be teenagers. Thus, in analyzing this movie, the researcher uses two terms which are "students" and "teenagers". However, these two terms refer to the main characters of the movie.

Furthermore, this section will be divided into three big parts according to the research questions proposed in this paper.

A. Teenagers' stereotype presented in *The Breakfast Club*

1. Trouble Maker

Adolescence is one of stage in human development. Santrock explained that in early Greece, the philosophers Plato and Aristotle both commented about the nature of youth. According to Plato reasoning does not belong to childhood but rather first appears in adolescence. Plato thought that children should spend their time in sports and music, whereas adolescents should study science and mathematics. This means that adolescence is the stage when a human is considered to be ready to think about some important things in his or her life including their future.

Furthermore, Aristotle argued that the most important aspect of adolescence is the ability to choose, and that self-determination is a hallmark of maturity. Aristotle's emphasis on the development of self-determination is not unlike some contemporary views that see independence, identity, and career choice as the key themes of adolescence. Aristotle also recognized adolescents' egocentrism,

commenting once that adolescents think they know everything and are quite sure about it (as cited in Santrock, Adolescence p.3). No wonder that sometime adolescence is called as an experiment stage where a human experience many thing in finding their own identity.

However, there are many stereotypes about adolescence owned by the society from time to time. Santrock noticed that the adolescence stereotypes are plentiful such as lazy, irresponsible, and also self-centered. Furthermore, these kinds of stereotyped can be found in *The Breakfast Club*. In the beginning of the movie, the viewer is presented by boy's voice that read the letter for Mr. Vernon, the principle of the school.

We accept the fact that we had to sacrifice a whole Saturday in detention for whatever it was we did wrong. What we did was wrong but we think you're crazy to make us write an essay telling you who we are. What do you care? You see us as you want to see us in the simplest terms, the most convenient definitions. You see us as a brain. An athlete, a basket case, a princess, and a criminal, correct? (02:27)

This part of the movie explains the situation in which the main characters are asked to write an essay explained who they really are. On the other hand the same scene of the movie also explains that the according to the students the job of writing an essay is not really effective since the headmaster only consider seeing the students as what he wants to see them without considering their own opinion about themselves. This scene proves that that the headmaster always considers the students who get a detention as troubled students who need to be treated with a high disciplinary value.

2. Arrogant

The second stereotype about adolescence is arrogant. This stereotype can be observed when Mr. Vernon complains about the students' behavior to Carl, the janitor of the school " Carl, I've been teaching for 22 years and each year, these kids get more and more arrogant" (1:05:29). This scene shows how Mr. Vernon strongly assumed that the students are getting more arrogant because he feels it is difficult to handle them even getting detention seems not really effective for them.

B. The importance of family in developing teenager's personality

As we know that family as the smallest social institution in human life. Family is the first place when children learn about moral value. Family is also the first place to learn how to behave in the society. Erikson in his book entitled *Childhood and Society* noted that personality develops according to one's ability to interact with the environment (as cited in Stephen N. Elliot and friends 1999: p. 120). This means that what the children learn or get in the family will affect the development of their personality. This also happened in *The Breakfast Club*. The different personality as the reflection of the family condition can be seen from the beginning of the movie. Furthermore, to make this analysis of this section smooth and deeper, the analysis of personality will be divided into five subsections based on the number of the main characters in the movie.

1. Andrew Clark

In this movie, Andrew is called "Sporto" by his friends because of his ability in sport especially wrestling. Andrew is depicted as a strict and tough person. He tends to show his strength in sport to his friends. As an athlete, Andrew is taught

to be discipline especially by his father. This fact can be observed when Allison asked Andrew the reason why he gets a detention

I'm here because my coach and my father don't want me to blow my ride. I get treated differently because, uh, coach thinks I'm a winner so does my old man. I'm not a winner because I want to be one. I'm winner because I got strength and speed, kind of like a racehorse. That's about how involved I am in what's happening to me. (34:14)

This scene proves the way Andrew sees himself. Andrew sees himself as a brave person that full of strength. Furthermore, Andrew realized that actually his own life was used to fulfill his father ambition. This fact can be seen when Andrew explained the real reason why he joined the detention.

I taped Larry Lester's buns together. The bizarre thing is that I did it for my old man. I tortured this poor kid because I wanted him to think that I was cool. He's always going off about, you know, when he as in school all the wild things he used to do and I got the feeling that he was disappointed that I never cut loose on anyone, right? So I'm sitting in the locker room and I'm taping up my knee and Larry's undressing a couple lockers down from me and he's kind of skinny. He's weak and I started thinking about my father and his attitude about weakness. And the next thing I knew I jumped on top of him and started wailing on him and my friends, they just laughed and cheered me on. And afterwards when I was sitting in Vernon's office all I could think about was Larry's father and Larry having to go home and explained what happened to him and the humiliation, fucking humiliation he must have left. It must have been unreal. I mean, how do you apologize for something like that? There's no way. It's all because of me and my old man.

God, I fucking hate him he's like this... He's like this mindless machine that I can't relate to anymore. Andrew! You've got to be number one! I won't tolerate any losers in this family. Your intensity is for shit! Win! Win! Win! You son of a bitch.

This scene strongly proves that Andrew comes from a very strict family and also an ambitious father. He needs to fulfill his father's will. He also tries to impress his father by hurting his friends. Actually, Andrew realized that what he did is a huge mistake because he only tried to impress his father without thinking about other feelings. In the end Andre realized that his father was not a perfect role model for him.

2. Brian

Brian is considered as the smartest student in the group. This fact can be seen from the beginning of the movie. When Mr. Vernon asked them to write an essay so that they could consider whether they want to return or not to school, Brian directly answer that he did want to return to school (07:26). This scene proves that Brian really took his study seriously. Brian also joined some academic clubs in his school (13:22). Because of his smartest, Brian was asked to write an essay which represented all of his friends feeling about being detention. However, Brian also lived in a strict family. He was forced to be perfect in his academic life. This can be observed in the very beginning of the movie, when all of the characters come to the school. Brian was accompanied by his mother.

Brian's mom : Is this the first time or last time we do this?

Brian : Last

Brian's mom : well, get in there and use the time to your advantage.

Brian : Mom, we're not supposed to study. We have to sit there and do nothing.

Brian's mom : Mister, you figure out a way to study. Well (03:39)

This conversation proves that his parents educated him to be perfect in academic field. On the other hand, this kind of parental style left a problem in Brian's personality. Because of being forced to be perfect, Brian found that it is impossible for him to fail in one of the subject.

You know why I'm here? Do you? I'm here because Mr. Ryan found a gun in my locker. I can't have an "F" I can't have it, and I know my parents can't have it. Even if I ace the rest of the semester, I'm still only a "B". Everything's ruined for me. (1:24:37)

Failing to pass the class perfectly, Brian felt so bad about himself then he tried to hurt himself using flare gun. He knew that his parents did not tolerate any failure in the family. Brian lived in order to fulfill his parents ambition.

3. John Bender

Compare to the rest of his friends, John Bender is considered as the trouble maker. Bender is depicted as the rude and impolite person who always tried to insult people. Because of his personality, Bender was not the new comer in the detention program. His aggressive personality can be observed when he removed the door's screw (12:15-12.20). Unfortunately, Bender is also the victim of incorrect parental style. This fact can be observed when Bender imitated his family in front of his friends "Stupid, worthless, no-good goddamn freeloading son of a bitch. Retarded, big mouth, know it all, asshole, jerk. You forgot ugly, lazy, and disrespectful..." (41:17 - 41:56). Based on the words used by Bender, it can be concluded that he

lived in a very rude family. It was usual for him to see or hear rude act and impolite words between his parents.

4. Claire

Claire is depicted a queen in the group. Her environment was full of party and perfection. Being a part of high social level in the school, result Allison to be so selective even in choosing her friends. This can be seen when Allison tried to explain that they would be friends especially after the detention because she realized that Andrew and her came from the different environment than the rest of them (1:20:35 – 1:20:53). Family also played an important part in developing Claire's personality and the way she saw things. As the result of broken home family because her parents are divorced, Claire was fulfilled by the material need. On the other hand, this fact put her in a very hard environment.

I hate it. I hate having to go along with everything my friends say. You don't understand. You're not friends with the same kinds of people Andy and I are friends with. You know, you just don't understand the pressure they can put on you (1:23:14 – 1:23:31).

5. Allison

Allison is depicted as an outcast in the group. She is considered as the weird person because of her behavior of clicking her nail (08:09). Furthermore, she rarely spoke to the rest of the group. Her weirdo personality was the result of being ignored by her parents (1:04:08 - 1:04:55). Being ignored makes Allison felt so lonely. She did not even have friends. She also planned to run way from her home and she did believe that no one would notice that.

C. Friendship as the Tool in Resisting.

Based on the analyses about the psychosocial development on each character, it can be concluded that all of them have a problem in the fifth stage. Erickson argued the fifth stage is the transition part from childhood to adulthood. The importance of peer opinion becomes crucial in this stage. Thus, friendship also plays an important role about how teenagers see themselves. This fact can also be observed in the movie.

Though five main characters come from different family background and result different personality, all of them have a similarity. All of them are the victim of wrong parental style. Coming from troubled family, makes them realize that the values owned by their family bring the bad impact for their personality and behavior in the society. In the end, they realize that they see each other is really affected by their parents' point of view. The power of friendship also enables them to resist the school's policy. The act of resistance can be observed in the last scene of the movie.

We accept the fact that we had to sacrifice a whole Saturday in detention for whatever it was we did wrong. What we did was wrong but we think you're crazy to make us write an essay telling you who we are. What do you care? You see us as you want to see us in the simplest terms, the most convenient definitions. You see us as a brain. An athlete, a basket case, a princess, and a criminal, correct? (1:34:28)

This scene proves that they resist the detention because it is strongly assumed that the detention is not effective to control their behavior. Being asked to write an essay makes them realize that the way they see themselves is never considered so important. They realize that they are brainwashed by the parents in seeing other friends. They are brainwashed by the wrong values owned by the parents.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, education is indeed important. Education enables us to improve ourselves to be better. The importance of education cannot be denied in human life. School as one of the way to educate human applies some policy in order to control the students' behavior as one of the ways to discipline the students. The use of school's police is also depicted in *The Breakfast Club*.

The analysis shows that there are two stereotypes of teenagers presented in the movie. The first stereotype is trouble make. Teenagers are seen as the trouble makers who like to create trouble and tend to be so aggressive. The second stereotype is arrogant. Teenagers are considered as arrogant and they are difficult to be controlled. These stereotypes affect the way the headmaster reacts to the student. Mr. Vernon as the headmaster tends to ignore the students.

The second analysis shows that family really affects the development of the personality of five main characters. All of the main characters' personalities are the reflection of the value owned by the parents.

The last analysis shows friendship Erickson argued the fifth stage is the transition part from childhood to adulthood. The importance of peer opinion becomes crucial in this stage. Thus, friendship also plays an important role about how teenagers see themselves. This fact can also be observed in the movie.

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