Josh Thompson

Ms. Thomasen

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Raising Identity

Everyone’s **identity has been influenced** at some point in their life. *Good Will Hunting* directed by Gus Van Sant is a movie about a young genius, Will Hunting, from South Boston in the late 90’s, however, he never puts his intelligence to use as all he wants to do is go out drinking with his friends, be a blue-collar worker, and be a tough guy. This plan of his gets interrupted by a math professor at MIT who discovered his intelligence. “Last of her Sons” by Alden Nowlan is a short story about a mother’s youngest son Skipper. Skipper’s mother hopes for him to grow up and leave the hard life that his father and his brothers live but ultimately, he falls down the same path to becoming hard. *The Outsiders* by S. E. Hinton is a novel about Ponyboy Curtis, a young greaser raised by his brothers that has to go on the run after Ponyboy’s friend, Johnny kills someone while protecting him. ***Good Will Hunting,* “Last of her Sons”, and *The Outsiders* are all stories around identity. In *Good Will Hunting* and *The Outsiders* the protagonists both do not have parents; Will, being an orphan who was in foster care, and Ponyboy, losing his parents and being raised by his older brother and his friends. In “Last of her Sons” Skipper has an alcoholic father but a loving mother who wants the best for him. In addition, all sources show the impact that one’s environment has on identity as they are all set in rough areas. Furthermore, it is evident that one’s personal identity is formed in early life and what one is surrounded by.**

In *Hunting,* Will has a tough guy identity that he uses to cope with his rough upbringing as an orphan in South Boston. In foster care he was abused by his foster father. He would put a “a wrench, a stick, and a belt on the table” (Sant 1:48:30 – 1:48:56) and give him the option of what he wanted to be hit with. Will would end up choosing the wrench because of how much he hated his foster father. This abuse from a young age lead to Will growing up tough and having attachment disorders, which is why Will ends up breaking up with his girlfriend when she tries to learn more about his past. He does not want to discuss with her because he does not want to be vulnerable. Will even acknowledges his issues when talking to his therapist: “Fear of abandonment? Is that why I broke up with Skylar?” (Sant 1:49:30 – 1:49:58). He knows that he has issues with trust and vulnerability so when his relationship gets serious, he gets out of it. A big factor in Will’s roughness comes from his upbringing in South Boston. He was surrounded by blue-collar workers his whole life. Leading to him getting in trouble with the law a couple times over minor offences. Due to being around this environment his whole life Will hides his intelligence and just wants to get by just like everyone else in his life. He can be very wealthy through some of the potential careers that he could do but instead would much rather just lay brick: “What’s wrong with laying brick? That’s someone’s home I’m building,” (Sant 1:36:20 – 1:36:40) demonstrating how he feels that he does not want to use his intelligence to get a job as he believes blue-collar work is an honorable work. Will wants to be a blue-collar worker just like his friends, he feels that if he takes a high paying job, he will get soft and end up like the people who grew up hating. The abuse in foster care, as well as growing up in South Boston, has lead to Will developing a tough guy identity.

In “Last” Skipper ends the story by developing a hard identity. This comes from his father’s influence and environment. When Skipper was young, he had an awful relationship with his father, Judd. Judd was an alcoholic and would come home from drinking and abuse Skipper or his mother. Skipper loved his mother and swore to her that he would not go down the same path as his father or his older brothers. Judd felt that “a man had to be hard to survive,” (Nowlan 51). Judd instilled this on Skipper from a young age, but his mother would encourage him to dream. As Skipper got older, he began bonding with his father over things such as hunting. Skipper had been so starved for love from his father from a young age so when his father was proud of him after hunting, Skipper felt good. It is evident that Skipper wanted to chase that feeling and would end up becoming hard to gain his fathers approval. Growing up in a small town had a big influence on Skipper as well. Everyone worked at the mill and then all go out drinking on Saturdays. Many of the boys in the town dropped out of school to work at the mill because it was what most people had done. “Most of these boys had already left school and gone into the mill,” (Nowlan 52) these were the people that Skipper had surrounded himself with as friends. Ultimately, Skipper would end up going into the mill, just like the rest of them, and then become hard just like his father.

In *Outsiders* Ponyboy wants to have a hard identity. Due to his brothers and all his friends being tough, as well as growing up in a poorer area. Ponyboy was raised by his brothers and friends who are all greasers. Greasers were “poorer than the socs and the middle class,” (Hinton 3) leading to them being wild. Ponyboy, however, wasn’t tough as he was one of the smallest and youngest in his friend group. He was raised to be a Greaser which meant he had to be tough. Where he lived the greasers always had rivalry’s the rich kids who were known as socs. The socs would jump greasers which meant that Ponyboy had to learn how to fight back. Growing up in this area Ponyboy needs to be strong to survive but fortunately for him he has a lot of his friends to protect him. “Steve Randal, Soda’s best buddy, had once held off four guys with a busted pop bottle,” (Hinton 4). It can be inferred that this story influences Ponyboy to act hard as this story makes Steve seem very cool to Ponyboy. The rough area combined with the people in his life leads Ponyboy to have a desire to act tougher.

Ultimately, one’s identity is influenced by what surrounds them as they experience life, whether that be how they are raised or just the neighborhood they grew up in. In *Hunting* Will was an orphan in foster care that grew up in a rough area leading him to have a tough guy identity. In “Last” Skipper’s father and his town influenced him to end up working in the mill. In *Outsiders* Ponyboy was raised by greasers in a poorer area with a lot of gang-like activities giving him a desire to be tough. It is clear to see that upbringing is a major factor in identity, so people must remember this when raising children.

Works Cited

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