Exploring Moral Values of the Main Character in "Dead Poets Society"

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Abstract

This study conducted a qualitative analysis of the moral values depicted by the main character in the movie "Dead Poets Society." The film centers around students in an all-boys preparatory school, guided by an inspirational English teacher. The study explored the moral values demonstrated by the main character and their impact on the perceptions and actions. The data comprised the main character's dialogues and actions, as presented in the film, while considering the film's social and cultural context. Ethical and moral philosophy approaches were employed to identify and assess the exhibited moral values. The findings unveiled several key moral values embodied by the main character. Firstly, the main character's rebellion against societal norms displays the importance of freedom of thought and self-expression. Secondly, the character's display of courage emphasizes the value of standing up to pressures and following one's conscience. Thirdly, the significance of friendship and solidarity in confronting life's challenges is evident in the narrative. Lastly, the film underscores the importance of embracing uniqueness and individuality in the journey of self-identity. This study provides profound insights into the moral values depicted by the main character, serving as a valuable basis for discussions and reflections within the realms of moral education and personal development. Moreover, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the far-reaching influence of moral values in shaping individuals' lives within society's fabric.

KEYWORDS: *Dead Poets Society, Main Character, Moral Values.*

Introduction

Many people think moral principles can be taught. This implies that instead of being something we are born with, they are something we learn by our experiences and relationships with other people. We learn how to share, tell the truth, and take care of others from an early age. We continue to pick up new moral principles from our friends, family, and the larger community as we become older. Television, literature, and movies are just a few of the media that teach us moral principles (Neolaka et al., 2021; Netta et al., 2022; Sarair et al., 2023). According to Barcalow in Fajar (2017), morality is something that can be assessed by observation; individuals can determine what is

morally right or wrong, permitted or prohibited, and positive or negative depending on their behavior. Chowdhury (2016) asserted that values are the standards that society holds as the basis for people's behavior, and morality is how people behave toward a situation or object.

Moral principles are widely applied in our society as the main means of directing people's behavior in day-to-day interactions; these principles apply to social interactions, athletic endeavors, and the creation of art, including literature. Our ancestors' values come from their culture, customs, and religious beliefs. One of the main forms of media, literature needs to include values, especially moral values, in order to teach and entertain readers at the same time (Guerin et al., 2005; Sarair et al., 2023).

The remainder of the movie is based on books or novels, with the majority of the story being based on genuine stories from across the globe. Most people watch movies in order to be informed, amused, criticized, or advertised. People learn lessons from the films on morality, inspiration, belief in God, science, and other subjects. The finest movies for writers to watch and research are those with inspirational themes. One of the most inspirational movies is "Dead Poets Society," a drama film from 1989 that was based on a real-life storybook by Tom Schulman. In the film Dead Poets Society, an English instructor, named John Keating, uses poetry to motivate his students (Rotten Tomatoes, n.d).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The moral of a tale or incident is the lesson or message that may be drawn from it in literature. Knowledge the moral foundation of leadership requires a knowledge of moral identity, which is defined as a person's strong sense of morality and the significance of moral values to them (Aquino and Reed 2002; Hardy and Carlo 2011). Blasi (1995) contends that our understanding of the steps a person can take to forge a solid and mature moral identity is, nevertheless, somewhat narrow. Ideally, an integration process leads to the development of a higher degree of moral centrality.

Exploration is the process of looking into many identity alternatives that fit in with one's own interests, skills, and values; commitment, on the other hand, is deciding on an identity-defining course of action that one intends to follow for the foreseeable future. Although identity cannot be directly observed, it is possible to view the processes of commitment and exploration that people describe in their identification decision-making as indicators of the underlying traits of their overall identity (Kroger and Marcia 2020).

However, as time passes, other concerns emerge, such as the increasing crime rate in the country, which indicates an immoral culture. A lack of moral precepts at a young age might have a negative impact on a person's life. As a result, he tends to do things on his own accord, such as stealing, acting aggressively, uttering inappropriate remarks, and insulting elders. The surroundings or what he observes can have an impact on his character formation (Batubara et. al., 2021).

VALUE

Values and attitudes are inextricably linked because values express our views about how we should conduct ourselves and the ultimate goals we believe are worthy or unworthy of obtaining. Laursen (2018) states that the results are focused on the process of creating value, and that four main activities have been identified to produce value: building infrastructure, producing knowledge, influencing people's opinions, and managing value captured.

Ekpiwre (2008) asserts that moral principles influence social cohesiveness and individual personalities. Fundamental moral principles dictate people's recognition of profound quality and ethical consciousness in society. Honesty, tolerance, obedience, reliability, integrity, hard effort, obligation, regard, resistance, devotion, flexibility, respect for human life, and respect for others are some examples of ethical ideals. Others include decency, equity, and correspondence.

MORAL VALUE

According to Thien and Tu (2019), morality is what defines each person's behavior in respect to the standards and guidelines of right and wrong deeds, and without it, humans as social creatures will perish. Religious and cultural values are directly related to moral standards. The moral precepts that all religions educate their followers to uphold are to always act morally righteously toward God and other people. Morality is the most useful thing in life; hence, humans must educate themselves and develop their morals in order to become good individuals (Thien & Tu, 2019). This is because no human being is born perfect.

In addition to applying sound morals to individuals who behave appropriately, moral values are used to advance and enhance moral education. Consequently, moral principles must be introduced and upheld in society (George & Uyangga, 2014). Moral values are taught to be formed in moral education as beneficial qualities that support the formation of a good and healthy character, according to George and Uyangga (2014). Moral ideals play a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions of moral consciousness in society. Moral principles such as honesty, respect, patience,

responsibility, obedience, integrity, respect, hard work, loyalty, fairness, equality, and tolerance are essential for an individual to thrive in social situations.

Respecting the process of understanding and incorporating human and divine values into one's life leads to moral ideals. These ideas will therefore appropriately guide human knowledge and creativity (Eyre & Eyre, 1997). Eyre and Eyre (1997) divide values into two categories:

1. *Values of Being*

According to Eyre and Eyre (1997), people have evolved to incorporate the value of being into their behavior and interactions with others. First, it entails being truthful in one's interactions with others, organizations, society, and oneself. I had tremendous strength and confidence since I had nothing to conceal. Secondly, bravery is the willingness to attempt amazing things even when they are difficult. Who dared to question the ignorance of the present majority, to decline an offer to make a mistake? Courage to follow your heart even if it involves sorrow and exclusion from others. Third, peace capacity (the disposition of composure and patience), and fourth, dare to be hospitable and nice. The propensity to concede other people's viewpoints instead of contesting and denying them. Recognize that confrontation is rarely the best way to resolve conflicts and that someone who is stubborn is likely experiencing anxiety or a problem and is looking to you for support. Fourth, confidence (individuality; awareness of boundaries and development's uniqueness); willingness to comprehend other people's feelings rather than reacting to them right away; emotional control. All of his behaviors are the result of his attitude. Conquering the tendency to place the blame for misfortune on others. The fifth is self-control and moderation (money, mental, and physical self-control), which is based on self-belief. Recognize the boundaries about eating and chatting times. Recognize your physical and psychological limitations. Remain unbiased while being conscious of the dangers of adopting extreme opinions. The ability to strike a balance between spontaneity and self-discipline), sixth, purity and pureness (knowing that chastity is necessary both before and after marriage, and comprehending how marriage and sexuality are related). Understanding the potential long-term (and extended) implications of unethical sexual behavior, and lastly, hard work—the maximum effort possible put forth to meet the needs of this world and the next, along with an optimistic outlook. In this world and the next, everyone needs to work to provide for their fundamental requirements.

2. *Value of Giving*

According to Eyre and Eyre (1997), values cannot be recognized as given unless they are presented or practiced. This is another argument made on the value of giving. First,

loyalty (trustworthy): We owe loyalty to our families, jobs, states, schools, organizations, and other institutions. Ready to lend a helping hand, ready to be of service, ready to help and trust in honoring ongoing commitments), second, respect (respect for life, respect for one's own property, respect for one's parents, elders, the environment, and the rights and opinions of others). Civilized and courteous conduct, respect yourself and prevent detracting from yourself). Third, love and affection: being devoted to someone goes beyond simply being obliging and polite. It also emphasizes the lifelong responsibility to say to the family). Fourth, selfless and sensitive (more empathy for others). Develop empathy and a sense of solidarity with others, e.g.., brotherhood, empathy, and tolerance (attentive to the needs of others and circumstances). Fifth, be kind and modest. It is more admirable to take a kind and humble approach than a harsh and severe one, understanding being prioritized over conflict, kindness, particularly toward the more impressionable or young, and able to maintain current relationships and make new ones. The last fair and humane (play games, follow the law, and be fair at work) and the lightest hand to help. Comprehension of cause and effect laws and natural consequences. Understand that seeking revenge is pointless and applaud the kind and forgiving attitude.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative method, falling within the purview of qualitative research. Qualitative research adopts a person-centered and holistic approach to comprehend the human experience, encompassing a broader perspective rather than concentrating on specific topics. The research object of this study was the main character in the movie "Dead Poets Society," directed by Peter Weir and written by Tom Schulman. As this study is a literary analysis, the primary research materials are the film and its content. The main source of data for this research was the dialogue from the film "Dead Poets Society." All verbal indicators, including words, phrases, and sentences spoken by the characters, were included in the research data. Material analysis was employed as the method to acquire data for this study. Documentation, in this context, refers to the written or printed version of the film that serves as the original and official evidence or information source.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

MORAL VALUES IN THE MAIN CHARACTER OF "DEAD POETS SOCIETY"

a) Self - confidence

People who are self-confident are selfless (tolerant), do not require encouragement from others, and are happy and optimistic (Lauster, 2002). The trait of having self-confidence is presented in the following dialogues:

❖ Dialogue between John Keating and his class (Time: 00:14:00):

John Keating: "No matter what anybody tells you, words and ideas can change the world."

Knox Overstreet: "To quote from Whitman, 'O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring; of the endless trains of the faithless... of cities filled with the foolish; what good amid these, O me, O life?' Answer. That you are here — that life exists, and identity; that the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. What will your verse be?"

John Keating encourages his students to recognize their own worth and potential impact on the world. He believes that every individual has a unique voice and the power to contribute something meaningful to the larger narrative of life.

❖ Dialogue between John Keating and Todd Anderson (Time: 00:40:52):

John Keating: "Now, we all have a great need for acceptance, but you must trust that your beliefs are unique, your own, even though others may think them odd or unpopular."

Todd Anderson: "But why should I be afraid to say what I really think?"

John Keating: "Because you're an individual."

John Keating encourages Todd Anderson to trust in his own unique beliefs and not be afraid to express them. Keating recognizes that the fear of rejection or disapproval often leads individuals to suppress their true thoughts and conform to societal expectations.

❖ Dialogue between John Keating and Neil Perry (Time: 01:21:58):

Neil Perry: "My father will kill me!"

John Keating: "Neil, you're gonna have to find the courage to pursue the course that you want. Do you understand?"

Neil Perry: "But it's not that easy!"

John Keating: "Nothing worthwhile is ever easy. You have to decide if you're gonna conform to what people want, or if you're gonna be yourself. And if being yourself means that you're gonna bring harm to people, then maybe you need to consider other options. Because, believe me, I've seen it before, and I'm not gonna let that happen again."

John Keating encourages Neil Perry to find the inner strength to pursue the course he desires, even in the face of potential conflict with his father. Keating understands that taking the path one truly wants may require bravery and the willingness to face challenges.

❖ Dialogue between John Keating and Charlie Dalton (Time: 01:28:55):
John Keating: "You're not going to let anyone else tell you who you are, are you?"
Charlie Dalton: "No."
John Keating: "You have to trust yourself. Never follow anyone else's path, unless you're in the woods and you're lost, and you see a path. By all means, you should follow that."

John Keating encourages Charlie Dalton to not let others define his identity. Keating inspires Charlie to have confidence in his own thoughts, beliefs, and choices, rather than relying on external validation or following someone else's path.

Context: These dialogues provide inspiration about the importance of having confidence in self-expression, pursuing personal dreams, and being yourself.

b) Independence

Those concerned with education are becoming increasingly interested in the concept of independent learning. This is because, first and foremost, every individual has the right to fulfil their learning needs in order to learn what they want (Crabbe, 1993). The trait of having Independent is presented in the following dialogues:

❖ Dialogue between John Keating and his class (Time: 00:15:53):
John Keating: "We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. Medicine, law, business, engineering… these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love… these are what we stay alive for."

This dialogue highlights the importance of nurturing our emotional and creative sides, recognizing that life is more than just practicality and functionality. It encourages individuals to seek out and celebrate the beauty in the world, the emotional connections with others, and the power of art to inspire and touch the human soul.

❖ Dialogue between John Keating and Todd Anderson (Time: 00:41:03):
John Keating: "Don't you forget this. You must strive to find your own voice because the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all."

Keating encourages Todd Anderson to strive to find his own voice. Keating believes that each person has a unique perspective and a distinct way of expressing themselves. By finding their own voice, individuals can tap into their creativity, authenticity, and personal growth.

Context: The dialogues show that John Keating encouraged his students to be independent in thinking and acting. He emphasized the importance of pursuing their passions and finding their own uniqueness, not following a path predetermined by someone else. Keating taught them to value freedom of expression and to be bold individuals, unafraid to step outside their comfort zone and pursue an authentic life. These dialogues highlight the importance of independence in pursuing dreams and determining a life path that is in accordance with personal desires and values.

c) *Optimism and Courage*

Optimism is the belief and hopes that resides within an individual that things will turn out well. An optimistic attitude can assist a person in overcoming numerous issues and frustrations by viewing problems in a more positive light, allowing a person to rapidly overcome the problems they are facing (Riadi, 2021). According to Sari (2021), courage is the courage to do something scary and risky, yet chose to act despite the risks for reasons such as humanity, love, passion, promise, truth, duty, and so on. Consideration and mindfulness result in courage. The traits of having optimism and courage are presented in the following dialogues:

> ❖ Dialogue between John Keating and his class (Time: 00:11:03):
> John Keating: "They're not all that different from you, are they? Same haircut. Full of hormones, just like you. Invincible, just the way you feel. The world is their oyster. They believe they are destined for great things, like many of you. Their eyes are full of hope, just like yours. Did they wait until it was too late to make out of their lives even the tiniest bit of their abilities? For you see, gentlemen, these children are now fertilizing daffodils. But if you listen carefully, you can hear them whispering their legacy to you. Come on, lean in. Listen. Do you hear it? Carpe. Listen? Carpe. Carpe diem. Seize the day, children. Make your life extraordinary."

Keating encourages his students to embrace the present moment, to make the most of their abilities, and to live their lives to the fullest. He highlights the importance of not waiting until it's too late to pursue their dreams and aspirations.

> ❖ Dialogue between John Keating and Todd Anderson (Time: 01:24:03):
> John Keating: "Don't you forget this. You must strive to find your own voice because the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all."

Keating urges Todd to strive to find his own voice. Keating emphasizes that each person has a unique perspective and way of expressing themselves. Finding one's voice allows for personal authenticity and the ability to contribute something distinct to the world.

❖ Dialogue between John Keating and Charlie Dalton (Time: 01:20:34):
Charlie Dalton: "Do you side with Nolan? How about "carpe diem" and sucking out all the marrow out, out of life and all that"
John Keating: "Sucking the marrow out of life does not mean clogging up the bones. sometimes there is a time to be brave and a time to be careful."

The dialogue highlights the value of thoughtful decision-making and recognizing that different situations require different approaches. Keating implies that while it's essential to embrace life and seize its opportunities, it's equally important to consider the potential consequences and exercise care when necessary.

Context: In these dialogues, John Keating inspires his students to have an optimistic outlook on life, take risks, and dare to pursue their dreams. He encouraged them to live passionately and take the opportunities that were in front of them. These dialogues reflect the values of optimism and courage shown by John Keating in the film "Dead Poets Society".

d) Love
Love is a collection of feelings and behaviors defined by closeness, passion, and commitment. It entails tenderness, closeness, protection, attraction, affection, and trust (Cherry, 2023). The trait of having Love is presented in the following dialogues:

❖ Dialogue between John Keating and Todd Anderson (Time: 00:53:00):
John Keating: "Don't just walk off the edge like lemmings. Look around you. What is the matter with you people? Don't you understand? This is the time to build your character. To seize the day. To follow your own passion. To grab hold of the beauty and the wonder and the meaning of this thing we call life."

The dialogue underscores the value of seizing opportunities and embracing the present moment. Keating encourages his students to build their character, follow their passions, and grab hold of the beauty, wonder, and meaning of life. This emphasizes the significance of living in the present, taking action, and making the most of the opportunities that come their way.

Context: In these dialogues, John Keating reveals the importance of love in life. He highlighted that love is one of the things that make life meaningful, and invited his students to find love in what they do. John Keating also inspires them to live life with passion and to seek beauty and meaning in every moment. These dialogues reflect the values of love expressed by John Keating in the film "Dead Poets Society".

THE IMPACT OF MORAL VALUES OF THE MAIN CHARACTER ON THE OTHER SUPPORTING CHARACTERS IN "DEAD POETS SOCIETY"

In the movie "Dead Poets Society," the moral values of the main character, John Keating, have a profound impact on the other supporting characters. John Keating, played by Robin Williams, is an unconventional English teacher who inspires his students to embrace their individuality, pursue their passions, and challenge societal norms. His moral values of nonconformity, free-thinking, and the pursuit of personal fulfilment deeply influence the students and ultimately transform their lives. one of the primary ways Keating's moral values impact the supporting characters is by encouraging them to question authority and societal expectations. He teaches the students to think critically and independently, encouraging them to break free from the rigid structure and conformity imposed upon them by their parents and the conservative Welton Academy. Through his teaching methods and passionate speeches, Keating empowers the students to challenge the status quo and pursue their dreams, despite the potential consequences.

Keating's moral values also inspire the students to find their own voices and express themselves creatively. He introduces them to poetry, which becomes a means for self-expression and a way to explore their emotions and individuality. Keating teaches the students to seize the day, embrace life's beauty, and seek fulfilment in their own unique ways. This influences the supporting characters to develop their own passions and talents, and they form the "Dead Poets Society," a secret club where they share their love for literature and engage in creative pursuits.

Furthermore, Keating's moral values have a profound impact on Neil Perry, one of the central supporting characters. Neil is a talented and passionate actor, but his strict father expects him to pursue a career in medicine. Inspired by Keating's teachings, Neil becomes determined to follow his passion for acting, despite his father's disapproval. Keating's encouragement emboldens Neil to pursue a role in a local production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, leading to a conflict with his father and tragic consequences. The moral values embodied by Keating create a ripple effect among the supporting characters, as they witness the transformative power of embracing individuality and pursuing personal fulfilment. The students begin to break free from societal expectations, take risks, and explore their true passions, even if it means going against the wishes of their parents and facing potential repercussions.

Overall, the moral values of John Keating in "Dead Poets Society" have a profound impact on the supporting characters, empowering them to question authority, find their own voices, and pursue their passions. Through his guidance, they experience

personal growth and embark on journeys of self-discovery, forever changed by Keating's philosophy of embracing life and living authentically.

The examination of these moral standards reveals the complexity of Keating's personality as well as the impact of his teachings on his students. While some regard him as a transformative and inspiring person, others see his acts as irresponsible and dangerous, resulting in unintended consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

The moral principles espoused by the main character, John Keating, in "Dead Poets Society" provide profound insights into the importance of individualism, critical thinking, and living life to the fullest. Keating motivates his students to reject conformity and accept their true selves through his unconventional teaching methods. However, the repercussions of his actions highlight the delicate balance between freedom and responsibility in education. This study adds to the knowledge of moral principles in cinematic portrayals and serves as a foundation for future research on character-driven narratives in films and their ethical consequences.

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