

## THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTING STYLE ON THE PROTAGONIST'S BEHAVIOR IN TODDPHILLIPS' MOVIE *JOKER*

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### **Abstract**

The research focuses on the influence of parenting style on the protagonist's behavior in Todd Phillips' movie *Joker*. Arthur as the protagonist in the movie is a man who suffers from mental illness which then transforms him to be a mastermind of criminal because of parenting mistake. The theory adopted in this research is proposed by Baumrind, who classifies parenting style into four broad categories: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful styles. This research adopts descriptive qualitative method and the data are collected from the movie script. The finding reveals that authoritarian and neglectful parenting styles lead a person to become rebellious, adopting problematic behavior and mastermind of criminal and disregarded by a society. The worst effect of parenting mistakes is that the protagonist transforms himself to be a psychopath.

**Keywords:** parenting styles, behavior, criminal, mental illness, authoritarian styles, authoritative styles, permissive styles, neglectful styles, psychopath

### **1. Introduction**

Parenting is the most important public health issue in society and all over the world. It is the single largest variable implicated in childhood illness, school disruption, accidental teenage pregnancy, child abuse, inability to become employed, juvenile crime, and mental illness. It plays a potential role in preventing health problems in children and the adolescent population. Therefore, increasing precise knowledge of the parenting style is a great necessity.

Williams et al. (2009: 1063-1075) states: "parenting style is thought to provide the emotional climate for interaction between parent and children and has significant impact on the family quality of life". Parenting style has a big impact on how children grow up and there are important implications for their future success. In general, parenting style has two types, there are behaviourism and humanism. However, other expert divides it into four specific types: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful (uninvolved) styles.

The objective of this research is to reveal the types of parenting style found in the movie and to reveal the influence of parenting style on the protagonist's behavior in the movie *Joker* by Todd Phillips.

This research contributes valuable significance either practically and theoretically. Practically, this research might give good life lesson. Parents have to apply a good parenting style to minimize psychological mental disorders and children's bad behavior because of parenting mistake. Theoretically, other researchers may take the findings of this research as

one of their references in their research. Hopefully, this research inspires other researchers to develop or to conduct other research in the same scope with different subjects.

## **2. Literature Review**

Hoghugi & Long (2004:5) state that parenting is a positive and purposive activity which is specifically aimed at promoting and nurturing a child's welfare or ensuring the survival and development of children, neither of which presumes a biological or age relationship. It is the activities of parents that provide care, support, and love in a way that leads to a child's total development. Brooks (2011) also defines parenting as a process that refers to a series of actions and interactions that parents take to support the child's development. The parenting process is not a one-way relationship in which the parent influences the child, but more than that. Parenting is a process of interaction between parents and children that is influenced by the culture and social institutions where children are raised.

Basically, all parenting styles can be divided into two broad categories: behaviorism and humanism. Behaviorism is parenting with more strict, detached and inflexible approach. Humanism is parenting with the soft, involved and flexible approach. Furthermore, these types are further developed by Baumrind (1966) into four broad categories: authoritarian, authoritative, permissive and neglectful styles.

According to Baumrind (1966: 887-907), the authoritative parents provide guidance to their children on issue oriented and rational manner. Authoritative parenting has high demandingness and high responsiveness. It means that authoritative parents have high expectations for achievement and maturity, but they are also warm and responsive.

Authoritarian parenting has high demandingness and low responsiveness. Although authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles have similar names, they have several important differences in parenting beliefs. While both parental styles demand high standards, authoritarian parents demand blind obedience. These parents use stern discipline and often employ punishment to control children's behavior. According to Nijhof and Engels (2007:709-720), the authoritarian parenting style is related with the lower level of ability and self-confidence and thus restricts a child to explore his/her capabilities and social interactions, eventually resulting in the child's dependence on parental guidance and direction.

Permissive parenting (indulgent) has low demandingness and high responsiveness. Permissive parents set very few rules and boundaries and they are reluctant to enforce rules. These parents are warm and indulgent but they do not like to say no or disappoint their children. Laura (2018) says that permissive parents have a hard time setting limits with their children. Therefore, parents are more likely to ignore bad behavior, and to 'give in' against their better judgment when their child gets upset. The result is that they don't set or enforce age-appropriate expectations for behavior."

Neglectful parenting (uninvolved) has low demandingness and low responsiveness. Neglectful parents do not set firm boundaries or high standards. They are indifferent to their children's needs and uninvolved in their lives. It is in line with the definition of neglecting parents that show a very low level of involvement as well as strictness with their child (Kremers, Brug, de Vries, & Engels, 2003:43-50).

## **3. Research Method**

The method of research which is used in this paper is qualitative descriptive method. The researcher attempts to describe and interpret the objects in accordance with reality.

The descriptive method is implemented because the data analysis is presented descriptively. The script of the movie *Joker* directed by Todd Phillips is the main source of the data collection in this research.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Types of Parenting Style

In this movie, there are two types of parenting style that have been applied by the parents of the protagonist, Arthur. These types of parenting style influence the protagonist's behavior and play important role in the transformation of Arthur Fleck as a main character from a good person to a psychopath.

#### 4.1.1 Authoritarian Parenting

The authoritarian parenting style is characterized by parental use of high levels of control behavior which shows low levels of warmth and support. It is associated with many external and internal problems in children's life. In this movie, the parent of protagonist, namely Penny Fleck, has applied authoritarian parenting style in which her child is forced to obey her rules and doctrines. Through the movie, his mother constantly calls Arthur with the name '*Happy*', it is seen in the following conversations:

##### SCENE 8 INT. MOM'S APARTMENT, FRONT DOOR – EVENING

- MOM** : (*shattering the moment, calls out*)  
*Happy?! Did you check the mail before you came up?*
- JOKER** : Yes, Ma. Nothing. No letter.
- MOM** : You sure you looked? Sometimes I don't know where your head is.
- JOKER** : Yes I'm sure. And my head's right here.  
I'm gonna make you some dinner, okay?

(Todd, 2019: Scene 8)

The conversation above tells that the protagonist's mother has applied an authoritarian parenting because she calls her son with the name '*Happy*'. It is classified as an authoritarian doctrine in which a parent always wants her child to be happy all the time and does not want her child to show sadness to her.

Penny Fleck has never given an opportunity to her son to feel other emotion except happiness, such as anger, hurt, sadness, and disappointment. Because of this authoritarian parenting, Arthur is forced to bury his sadness, anger and disappointment in order to obey the rule of his mother. It is seen when Arthur says that he has been forced to be happy all the time even the environment and the people around him make him extremely depressed. "It's just so hard to try and be happy all the time, you know, when everything's going to shit all around you" (Todd, 2019: Scene 77). This quotation shows that the protagonist feels forced to be happy all the time.

#### 4.1.2 Neglectful Parenting (Uninvolved)

An uninvolved or neglectful parenting style is arguably the most detrimental effects for children that extend into the teen and adult years because children do not receive attention, care, and support they need from their parents. Penny Fleck has applied neglectful parenting. It is seen in the following conversations:

**SCENE 9 INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT**

*Joker brings the food to his mother, PENNY (70's), lying in her bed. The TV is on, playing the local news. Joker sets the food down in front of his mother. He covers the pain from his eating the best he can-- His mother doesn't seem to notice anyway.*

**MOM** : He must not be getting my letter.  
*(Joker sits down on a chair next to the bed)*

**JOKER** : He's a busy man.

**MOM** : Too busy for me? I worked for that family for 12 years. He always had a smile for me. Least he could do is write back.

**JOKER** : Ma, eat. You need to eat.  
(Todd, 2019: Scene 9)

From the scene above it is seen that his mother has never cared about how Arthur's feeling and condition. Even when he looks in pain from being beaten by street guys, his mother does not seem to notice anything or pay a little attention and provide care for him. Every day she only cares and asks Arthur about email from Thomas Wayne.

In other scene, a neglectful parenting (uninvolved) has also been applied by Penny Fleck to his son since a long time ago. She never cares about what his son needs, it is a father's love. For years, she covers up the facts that Arthur actually still has a father, he is Thomas Wayne, a rich man to whom she sends an email every day. Finally, everything is revealed when Arthur reads one of Penny's letters to Thomas. One of the letter says that she asks Thomas to help to support and take care of his son, Arthur. The letter sounds as follows: "Dearest Thomas, I don't know where else to turn..." "I need your help..." "You have a son. We have a son. His name is Arthur".

After reading the letter, Arthur confronts his mother about the letter. He is getting mad and disappointed with her because Penny has never told him about his father. It is seen in the following conversations:

**SCENE 50 INT. MOM'S BEDROOM, APARTMENT - EARLY MORNING**

*Joker's sitting in a chair in his mother's room watching her sleep. He has clearly been up all night. Still wearing the same clothes. He's holding her letter in his hand as the sun is just starting to rise outside the windows, light just beginning to crack the gloom.*

**JOKER** : What is this? How come you never told me?

**MOM** : Is, is that my letter? Is that my letter, *Happy?*

**JOKER** : How could you not tell me, Ma?

**MOM** : You told me you dropped it off.  
You have no right opening my mail.  
Who do you think you are?

**JOKER** : Apparently I'm Thomas Wayne's son  
How could you keep that from me?

**MOM** : Stop yelling at me, you're gonna  
kill me, give me a heart attack!

**JOKER** : Please.  
**MOM** : He is an extraordinary man, Arthur.  
We had a connection. I was so beautiful then. We were in love.  
**MOM** : His wife could see it. She was jealous from the moment I started working there. She fired me before I even knew I was pregnant with you.  
**MOM** : And, I never told him or anybody because, well, you can imagine what people would say about Thomas and me, and, and what they would say about you.  
**JOKER** : What would they say, Ma?  
**MOM** : That I was a whore, and Thomas Wayne was a fornicator, and that you're a little, unwanted bastard.

(Todd, 2019: Scene 50)

The conversation above shows that Penny never tells him about his father because she does not want to make Thomas' life bad by having a son from his affair with his servant. Thomas is a billionaire and a public figure with political aspirations while Penny is a servant who works at Thomas' house. Therefore, she worries that the scandal between them will disturb his life.

## **4.2 The Influence of Parenting Style on the Protagonist's Behavior**

Parenting style is an important factor for children's development and their future success. In this movie, both authoritarian parenting and neglectful parenting are found. These might have some effects to the protagonist's life and behavior. The following are the analysis:

### **4.2.1 Triggering the Protagonist to Have Mental Illness.**

Mental illness is a health condition involving emotion, thought and behaviour changes. Mental illness is associated with distress or incapability of someone in his social life either in his family or his environment. The main cause of mental illness is psychological trauma such as emotional, physical, sexual abuse, and loss of parental role and neglect.

In this movie, the protagonist, Arthur Fleck suffers from mental illness. It is called PBA or *Pseudobulbar Affect*. PBA is also known as *Pathological Laughter and Crying* (PLC). It is a condition that is characterized by episodes of sudden uncontrollable and inappropriate laughing or crying.

This condition might be caused by several factors including childhood traumatic experience, a parenting mistake, and the doctrine which is always given by his mother. In the life of the protagonist; his mother is an authority figure who gives the name "Happy" to him. It is no matter in a good or bad condition, his mother forces him to be happy in all situations. This condition triggers the protagonist to have mental illness and to be psychopath.

The protagonist realizes that he suffers from a mental illness. However, he feels that no one cares about his mental illness and all people force him to behave as a normal person

“The worst part about having a mental illness is people expect you to behave as if you don’t.”, Arthur writes in his journal. (Todd, 2019: Scene 10).

Furthermore, the protagonist’s mental illness is seen in a scene when Arthur visits his psychiatrist to check his condition. On the bus riding home, a small boy looks at Arthur. Then, he makes a silly faces to amuse the boy, but the mother tells Arthur to leave him alone. Having a warning from the boy’s mother, suddenly Arthur begins to laugh hysterically. When the mother questions him, he hands her a card that explains his condition of mental illness that causes him to laugh the way that he does. The following are the analysis:

**SCENE 4 INT. CITY BUS (PULLING OUT) - HEADING  
DOWNTOWN – DUSK**

**WOMAN** : Can you please stop bothering my kid?  
**ON BUS**

**JOKER** : I wasn't bothering him, I was--

**WOMAN** : Just stop.  
**ON BUS**

*And suddenly joker starts to laugh. Loud. He covers his mouth trying to hide it-- Shakes his head, laughter pausing for a moment, but then it comes on stronger. His eyes are sad. It actually looks like the laughter causes him pain.*

**WOMAN** : You think that's funny?  
**ON BUS**

*Joker shakes his head no, but he can't stop laughing. He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a small card. Hands it to the woman. Close on the card, it reads: "Forgive my laughter. I have a condition (more on back)". It's a medical condition causing sudden, frequent, uncontrollable laughter that doesn't match how you feel. It can happen in people with a brain injury or certain neurological conditions."*

(Todd, 2019: Scene 4)

The card explains that he suffers from mental illness. It is called PBA. The PBA suffered by Arthur is caused by brain injury and trauma in his head.

#### **4.2.2 Triggering the Protagonist to be A Psychopath**

The parenting mistakes made by the protagonist’s parent do not only make him suffer from mental illness, but also trigger him to be a psychopath. Arthur is a kind man who always spreadS the joy and laughter to the world, but he is raised in a negative ways by his mother. He is lack of a fatherly figure and also disregarded by society. This condition makes his life pushed too far which finally leads him to have a brutal violence. He transforms himself to be psychopath, a sadistic killer, who will feel happy and satisfied after killing someone who has hurt him.

His transformation to be a psychopath starts when he kills three young Wall Street men. It happens in a train. The three young Wall Street men beat him because his mental illness makes him laugh and mock them when they harass a woman in the train. After getting beaten by them, he then pulls out his gun and kills them by shooting with his gun. He shocks over what he has done. Then he announces and admits that he has killed the three young Wall Street men on the subway in his dialogue in Murray Franklin Show:

**SCENE 113 INT. TALK SHOW SET, STAGE - STUDIO 4B –  
CONTINUOUS**

**JOKER** : Sorry. It's been a rough few  
months, Murray. I mean, after my  
mother died, the police came to  
question me at her funeral. Who  
does that?  
**MURRAY** : Oh really? Were you a suspect?  
**JOKER** : Very funny, Murray. No, they came  
because I killed those three Wall  
Street guys.

(Todd, 2019: Scene 113)

The conversation shows that Arthur admits that he is the murderer of the three young Wall Street men. He tells Murray his admission about the death of them. Murray is a host in Murray Franklin Show.

As the protagonist has transformed to be psychopath, he does not kill three young Wall Street men only but also his mother. It happens when Arthur meets his mother in the hospital after she suffers from a stroke. Arthur finally kills her in the hospital by smothering her with a pillow. He kills his mother because he thinks that his mother has made his life destroyed. It is seen in the following conversations:

**SCENE 84 INT. CITY HOSPITAL, HOSPITAL ROOM (SHARED) – MORNING**

*joker walks into his mother's shared hospital room, passing  
an elderly wheezing woman in the bed closest to the door.  
Sees his mom in her bed by the window.*

*He pulls the blue curtain separating the beds, giving him and  
his mother some privacy. Sits down on the edge of her bed.  
She smiles when she sees him. Still fairly incapacitated. He leans  
down close to her. Speaks softly, but filled with rage--*

**JOKER** : Ma, remember how you used to tell  
me that God gave me this laugh for  
a reason. That I had a purpose. To  
bring laughter and joy into this fucked up world.  
*She looks at him confused.*  
**JOKER** : HA! It wasn't God, it was you or,  
or one of your boyfriends,--  
how could you let that happen? What kind of  
woman are you? What kind of mother are you?

**JOKER** : What's my real name?  
**JOKER** : C'mon, Ma, I know I was adopted.  
What's my name? Who am I really?  
*She looks back him, struggles to speak--*  
**MOM** : H-h-happ--  
**JOKER** : *(interrupting, snaps at her)*  
Happy?! I'm not happy. I haven't  
been happy for one minute of my  
entire fucking life.  
*He reaches behind her, grabs one of her pillows--*  
**JOKER** : But you know what's funny? You know  
what really makes me laugh?  
Leans down closer, face-to-face with her—  
**JOKER** : I used to think my life was nothing  
but a tragedy, but now, now I realize  
it's all just a fucking comedy.  
(Todd, 2019: Scene 84)

The third victim of the protagonist is Randall, his coworker who gives him a gun and slanders him until he is fired from his job. He kills Randall when he starts to get ready for his appearance on Murray's show. Randall and another former coworker, Gary visit his house to offer condolences for his mother's death. During their visit, Randall tells him that detectives, Burke and Garrity meet and question them about the subway murder. Hearing this Arthur then brutally stabs Randall to death, but he lets a scared Gary go home since he is the only one at Ha-Ha's that is nice to him.

Another person who becomes a victim of the protagonist is Murray Franklin. It happens in the studio when he will perform a comedian. Unfortunately, Murray, always shows the protagonist's video on TV in which the content makes him ridiculed and mocked by the audiences. Knowing this, the protagonist gets angry to Murray. Then, he kills Murray by shooting him.

The last victim of the protagonist is his doctor/psychiatrist. The protagonist is suspected to be the murderer of his doctor. It happens when Arthur is locked up in Arkham Hospital. He meets a new psychiatrist then he is interviewed by his psychiatrist about his feeling and his condition:

Surprisingly, when Arthur steps out of the room, he leaves a trail of bloody footprints behind then he is chased around by orderlies. They think that he has killed his psychiatrist at the hospital. It is assumed if he thinks that his psychiatrist has never intended to cure his mental illness seriously because she just asks about his journal and condition without providing a solution for his recovery. Arthur feels satisfied when he has killed people who ruin his life and he does it without the slightest guilty feelings. It is seen when he is always dancing after he kills someone.

#### 4.3 Findings

After analyzing the influence of parenting style on the protagonist's behavior in movie Joker by Todd Phillips', there are some points that can be stated as the findings of this research. They are as follows:



1. A parenting mistake is one of the major factors that makes the protagonist suffer from mental illness and have a negative behavior.
2. The parenting mistakes found in the movie are authoritarian and neglectful parentings.
3. The effects of parenting mistakes are:
  - The Protagonist is getting bully and disregarded by people around him
  - The protagonist suffers from mental illness.
  - The protagonist transforms himself to be a psychopath.

## 5. Conclusion

After the influence of parenting style in Todd Phillips' movie *Joker* was analysed, some conclusions can be put forward as the following

1. Parenting mistake, surely, affects negatively to child's mental development.
2. Parenting mistake is mostly caused by parents' selfish attitudes. They think that they are always right.
3. A child needs to know his or her biological mother or father.

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