



The portrayal of teacher's domination in *Whiplash*: (2014) *The Movie*

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the teacher's domination in *Whiplash* film by utilizing power relation theory by Foucault (1995). Particularly, the study aims to examine the portrayal of domination in the teacher-student relationship. With regard to research design, this study employed a descriptive qualitative research design since the aim of the study is to explore a certain social phenomenon, which is the teacher's domination in the film, entitled *Whiplash*. By using a close film's dialogue and character development analysis, segmentation of scenes was classified into parts of domination action in the movie. The findings of this study reveal that power relations are exercised through three stages of power domination: disciplinary, negotiation, and resistance. This finding shows us that power relations are all around us, from a minor scale of family, education, and politics. Overall, this study has shed light on the portrayal of teacher-student relationships in media and its potential impact on societal perceptions and expectations of these dynamics.

Keywords: Film and power; power relations; Teacher's domination; *Whiplash*

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INTRODUCTION

In this globalization era, movies have become one of the forms of expression and cultural products which took a significant role in society. Thereafter, the categorization of the movie genre served as a preface for the audiences to introduce the topic or theme presented. Heintz and Stracey (2006) stated that, drama as one of several movie genre aims to develop relationships between fiction and everyday life, the personal and the social, as well as its examination of relationships for empowering imagination exercises. Moreover, *Whiplash* (2014) is a movie portray a relationship between teacher and students power relations through manipulative speech, intimidation, harsh training, and punishment to erode the psyche of his highly motivated students to build a figure of an 'ideal' musician in his view.

The portrayal of power relations as part of the story, depicted in the film *Whiplash* (2014), focused on teacher's method in keeping his dominance and exercise it through his students. The film portrays a drama in which its main character Andrew Neimann was manipulated by his teacher, Terence Fletcher. Fletcher dominated his students by abusing them mentally and physically. Fletcher as the top hierarchical power holder in school manipulate and took advantage of Neiman's goals to be the main

drummer in school and Neiman's struggle to be a good drummer as his idol.

Power relation was exercised and ran unconsciously in our society. Foucault (1995) stated that power domination conceives as an act to influence another person as a center of acts and other people that have a plurality of possible acts at their disposal of a measure of freedom. Therefore, power relation is a dominant position in which its particular set of ideas is associated with their designation of dominant position; legitimating norms and ideas. Moreover, Foucault states that power is a relational thing, power will be exercised towards at least two entities. Gallagher (2008) explained that power will function between the correlation of the personal character of actors involved and its resources (social, cultural, and material). Discipline also needed to increase forces to diminish the barrier between an 'aptitude' and 'capacity' which seeks to increase the energy into a relation of strict subjection (Foucault, 1995). This ideology that students must follow their teacher's speed and teaching method is shown to be a domination of practical power relations.

The study of power relations has been widely discussed as part of the study of film studies. For example, Fauziah (2020) explained that the color uniform in *Mariposa* (2020) the movie classified the

representation of masculinity and femininity concerning the context of power. On the other hand, the research on power relations conducted by Wedawati and Lasiana (2021) reveals the struggle of the economy class based in subaltern class in *Snowpiercer* (2014) movie. Another study conducted by Shin (2008) discussed on how America as the center of action genre movies examined its power hegemony production with *007 James Bond* movie series as a case. An article by Kutlu (2021) explain on power relations through family relationship. And Abhipraya, et al (2020) reveals domination on power relations in the scale of traditional society. Those studies deal with power as grand issues such as gender, economic status, and several society environment but few studies have not discussed power in a specific and small scale, such as between teachers and students. Although the teacher is explicitly more powerful than the students, it is not yet analyzed how the teacher exercised his power.

With Michel Foucault's theory on power relation and power domination, the significance of this study was to understand how power relation works for the teacher's interests as the top hierarchical power relation top holder in a class. Departing from the gap, this study aims to answer these questions: 1) How is teacher's domination portrayed? 2) How does the villain of the movie, the teacher, shape the main character to reach his paradoxical dreams? The objective of this study is to explain how the teacher exercised his power dominance towards his students found in *Whiplash* (2014). The analysis will be focused on the power relation structure and describe the portrayal of power relations in the movie through a literature scope of film analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An article entitled by Kutlu (2021) proposed that according to Foucault, power can be exercised by control, discipline, hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination. Kutlu claimed that in the films of Yorgos Lanthimos, the director often establish power through family, relationships, individuals and structures by an absurdist narrative. In the art direction of *The Killing of A Sacred Deer*, he distinguishes between yellow of the Hotel (civilization) and green in the Forest (nature). These two are example of fields and different powers by tools of hierarchical observation and colored accordingly.

Another studies by Abhipraya, et al (2020) also claimed that power can be exercised by control. Bu Tejo dominantly exercised its control by polarizing information which not owned by other social groups of mothers. By polarizing information in the traditional society, Bu Tejo spreading its control to

other groups in order to help his husband to get elected in the upcoming local head of village election.

Foucault theory on power relation acknowledge tools to maintain power. Its examination can be throughout many medium in everyday relationship: family, student-teacher relation, and individuals.

Disciplinary as Form of Power Domination

In this stage, Foucault stated in his book entitled *Discipline and Punish* (1995, p. 138) that discipline produces subjected and practised bodies. Furthermore, discipline dissociates power from the body, creating standards to obey in several applied conditions. Disciplinary coercion establishes a stricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination.

Negotiation

In *Discipline and Punish* (1995, p. 297) Foucault stated that power negotiation is possible because it is diffused and not concentrated, the process of between power domination and its resistance are deeply bounded. Since it is bounded, it resulted in a widespread amount of counter-movement form.

Resistance

Resistance according to Foucault in *History of Sexuality* (1976, p. 92-95) is a form of power relations that came in from dualistic relation between the powerful and the powerless. Moreover, Foucault also stated that resistance is never outside of power, resistance can not be separated from the form of power since it is a cause and effect form.

METHOD

This paper was conducted with qualitative research method that utilized Michel Foucault's theory of power relation as the basis to support the data analysis of the film. Qualitative research is a descriptive research method in which the data consists of the process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study (Creswell, 2002). This study engaged the literature theory approach to literature media to reveal the power relations' interests in the film. Primary data samples were collected directly from the movie *Whiplash* (2014). The movie had an overall length of one hour and 47 minutes; this study analyzed several scenes related to the power relations issues.

In this study, the data were collected through several movie aspects: the dialogue, the mise en scene, and the described cinematography found in the movie related to the issues. The three stages of power relation in the teacher and student context according to Foucault's theory were disciplinary, negotiation, and resistance.

In analyzing the data, the researcher divided the analysis into two steps. The first step is to collect the scenes which indicated power relations through dialogue and cinematography. Then, the segmented stages of movie aspects were analyzed accordingly to Michel Foucault's theory of power relations. This method was chosen to be utilized as the purpose of this study was to analyze how the power relations theorem was utilized in the movie which the researcher deemed to be an appropriate method.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part reveals how power relations exercised through three stages of power domination: disciplinary, negotiation, and resistance. In this film, Fletcher, who is shown to be the teacher in his music class, controls the students through manipulative speech and treatment of his students. This exercise of domination by Fletcher may result in self-depression and fear of study to his students. Foucault's interpretations in view power relation as something to be exercised over time to finally reach the final stage as form of power effect, which is resistance (Foucault, 1995).

The main character of *Whiplash* is Neiman, who is an innocent student dominated by his teacher, Fletcher. The story of the film followed Neiman from becoming a freshman to nearly achieving Neiman's goal; of becoming a number one drummer in his jazz school's band. As a teacher who played a significant role in the school, Fletcher followed Foucault's definition of power relations to exercise his power through his students.

To further elaborate on the three phases of power relations, let's move on to a specific section to explicate detailed portrayal information of disciplinary, negotiation, and resistance in the film.

1. Disciplinary **a) Intimidation**

In teacher-students relationships disciplinary is the starting stage which often appears to show absolute power relations held by teachers in schools as it is exercised over time between teacher and students. Students should obey the teacher 'tempo' as students hope it might lead them to achieve their goals in their studies. This is the beginning of the power exercised by Fletcher in order to maintain his authority and domination.

The film starts with a dark nuance which indicates cold, isolation, and ominous. The first line of dialogue between Fletcher and Neiman (the student) also shows Fletcher that he is the one who will hold the domination theorem in the class. Moreover, the first stage of domination in power relations can be seen in the introduction dialogue

between Fletcher and Neiman regarding 'tempo' as Fletcher tests his domination.

Fletcher: Do you know who I am?

Neiman: Yes sir

Fletcher: So you know I'm looking for players?

Neiman: Yes sir

Fletcher: So why do you stop playing?

Neiman start playing the drum, but stopped out of sudden

Fletcher: Did I ask you to stop playing?

(02:37-03:54)

From this dialogue, it is implied that Fletcher exercised his power through an intimidating indirect introduction. Through his gestures and words, Fletcher knew he did not need a detailed introduction to his students. Fletcher realized that Neiman should be recognized in the first place as his teacher. The stage of domination with an intimidating introduction made Neiman respond as it is necessary to avoid any awry responses from Fletcher. Fletcher, as the teacher, introduced himself without shaping and gaining consensus as Fletcher, who is shown as a teacher, knew that he has an absolute top theorem of power relations in classes.

Scene (10:35-11:08) shows the next level of intimidating introduction entries in which Fletcher introduces himself as the substitute teacher. With the dark nuance of color grading, Fletcher emphasizes that he is more competent than the previous teacher and could detect those who are out of tune in his band quickly. This occurrence is necessary for proving his capability to lead the band into his 'tempo' by forcing any possibility of ruining the power relations exercise.

Fletcher: Whoever it is, this is your last chance. Now, either you deliberately sabotaging my band or you don't even know you're out of tune which I'm afraid even worse. (20:09-21:45)

In the scene (20:09-21:45) is Fletcher's interrogation of those who are playing out of tune. By using a medium-full shot angle, the whole expression of the students in the class is shown. He started the mass interrogation by saying suppressing words so that his students feel nervous and oppressed.

b) Punishment

Punishment is needed as Fletcher who holds domination in class try to maintaining and exercise it to make sure that his students obey every instructions.

Fletcher: If you deliberately sabotage my band, I will fuck you like a pig. Now are you a rusher, or are you a dragger? Or are you gonna be on my fucking time?

Neiman: I will gonna be on your time (tempo).

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*Fletcher: Were you rushing or were you dragging?
Answer!*

Neiman: Rushing.

Fletcher: You must be upset, are you upset?

Neiman: No.

Fletcher: So you don't care?

Neiman: Yes, I care.

Fletcher: So yes, you are upset. Say it.

Neiman: I'm upset.

Fletcher: Louder!

(25:50-29:15)

From this dialogue, it implied that Fletcher, as the authority in class, knew that domination does not always work well. Punishment is needed to increase the forces of the body to diminish the barrier between other forces and turn it into an 'aptitude' and 'capacity,' which seeks to increase the energy to turn it into a relation of strict subjection (Foucault, 1995). That counter-movement may result in students who are to rebel or oppose the system either actively or passively (Crossman, 2018).

In this scene (25:50-29:15), Fletcher tests one of his punishments (confession) to erode other students mentally as he wants to maintain his domination over time. The scene uses medium shots and several extreme close-up detailed shots to shoot Neiman's expression as he confesses his disappointment in front of the class. Neiman, as Fletcher's student, accepted Fletcher's challenge to follow his 'tempo' as Neiman hopes he could fulfill his dream to be the number one drummer in his band. Though Neiman knew that it might be a rough journey to follow his dream to be the number one drummer in his band and followed Fletcher's 'tempo'.

Fletcher: Dont tell me it is you, Elmer Fudd.

Fletcher: It's okay, play it.

Fletcher: Do you think, you are out of tune?

Elmer Fudd: Yes.

Fletcher: Then, why the fuck you didn't said so?

Fletcher: I've carried your fat ass for too long. I won't have you cost us a competition, because your mind's on a Happy Meal instead of on pitch.

Fletcher: Jackson, congratulations, you're fourth chair

Fletcher: Metz, why are you still sitting there? Get the fuck out!

Fletcher: For the record, Metz wasn't out of tune. You were Erickson. But he didn't know...and that's bad enough.

(21:45-22:10)

With manipulative gestures and words, Fischer hints to his student that he knows who is playing out of tune. After testing some lines of specific musical

instruments, Fletcher finally found and accused Metz (Elmer Fudd) that is playing out of tune. All of his students respond with anxiety, nervousness, and oppression by Fletcher's statement, but the students know that they can't resist the power relations which Fletcher holds. After knowing the problem, Fletcher instantly expelled the student (Elmer Fudd) in front of the class to note his students that it was one form of his punishment. Fletcher as a teacher, is the one who controls the music tempo, way of learning and selects those who will perform in the band.

c) Regular Training

Fletcher realized that as power can be exercised over time, he must also maintain domination in the form of routinuity (regular training). Five out of eight scenes show Fletcher training his band regularly, and three Neiman's training as he shows his ambition to be the number one drummer in the class.

In the scene (12:25-12:40), Fletcher tells Neiman to meet him at a specific time and place personally and also not to come late. Neiman got no choice except to obey Fletcher's instruction. Fletcher as a teacher arbitrarily did not come as promised, and Neiman just realized the right time for his band to train is at 09:00 AM, not 06:00 AM (promised time). This scene (15:12-15:30) is taken in a wide shot to show the audience about the complete emptiness of the room as he follows Fletcher's arbitrary and absurd instruction. Fletcher shows Neiman hidden domination towards his students in this scene. Neiman as a student realized that he must obey Fletcher's instructions to fulfill his dream to become the primary drummer and follow the teacher's standards though it is an arbitrary instruction.

2. Negotiation

Fischer also realizes that his power domination is sometimes unstable. Fischer, as a teacher figure, offers alternatives to reduce his power domination as a form of giving hope to his students to keep them on track and studying. Power negotiation Fischer offers in the movie form in two forms: giving manipulative motivation and alternative play below his standards.

Fletcher: Please just listen to me a minute.

Fletcher: Six years ago, I came across a kid that practice on a kid that working on his scale. He was only in the second year and he started here with a lot of hope.

Fletcher: Like all you guys.

Fletcher: But he was really struggling to get in the band.

Fletcher: The faculty were out and telling him, that it isn't for you.

Fletcher: But I didn't see what I saw. The scared, skinny kid, pushing himself because he couldn't get his scale right.

Fletcher: I saw a drive in him. And I put him in studio band. When he graduated, Marsalis made him the third trumpet player in Lincoln Center. A year later, he was first.

*Fletcher: Yes he was the one you're listening now, his name is Sean Casey.
(53:49-56.00)*

In this scene (53:49-56.00), Fischer is giving a manipulative speech motivation as he realizes that he may have a negative teacher figure by his students. Manipulative motivation is a form of hope Fischer has given to his students as he is reducing his power exercises and offering alternatives to his students that his goals are linear with his student's goals.

Fletcher: You Know Whiplash by heart?

Neiman: Yes sir, every rhythm

Fletcher: Alright, I hope your fucking memory doesn't disappoint you. I hope you play a lot better than the last month rehearsal. Because I don't want to lose another player again. Now, get your stick and go on stage. On Stage!

Neiman: (nodding)

As the authority in the class, Fletcher tests Neiman, who lost his music sheet in a training scene (40:34-41:50), and accepts Fletcher's challenge even though Neiman played without a music sheet. Neiman negotiated Fischer's power to test his capability and wanted to know whether it is fully fulfilled Fletcher's tempo or not. Fletcher seems surprised to know Neiman's full capability, and he grants Neiman as his number one band drummer.

3. Resistance

Resistance is the last stage of power relations, where it appears as a form of exercise and a decision whether the students can be 'fully' dominated or not. Resistance is the final stage of power relations as it is a form of response to domination. Neiman, as a student dominated by Fletcher, responded to Fletcher's domination with forms of verbal, physical and action.

Fletcher: Neiman, you're done.

Neiman: Fuck you Fletcher, fuck you.

Neiman: You're fucking piece of shit, I'm fucking gonna kill you.

Fletcher: Get the fuck out of me.

In the scene (01:03:32-01:10:10), Neiman came late on D-Day of the Dunnellen Competition and left his sticks in his rental car. Neiman got no choice but

to be responsible for picking up what was left and his position (the main drummer in his band). Several shots of this scene use medium shots, and extreme detailed close-up as the director wants to tell the audience about Neiman's expression and his rage at Fletcher. As Neiman was in a hurry, he didn't see a truck coming his way, and thus his car crashed into the truck. It made Neiman's body covered in blood. Neiman, in this situation, still decided to go to his band as promised. He fulfilled his promise but couldn't finish the music, and Fletcher stopped the band from the plays. Neiman's resistance appears in this scene and chooses the form of physically picking a fight with Fletcher and verbally abusing him. It made Neiman upset that he couldn't fulfill his teacher 'tempo' from an unwanted accident he got that day.

Fletcher: You think I'm fucking stupid?

Neiman: What?

Fletcher: I know it was you.

Fletcher: (giving welcoming speech). And we're gonna do some old standards for you but, first, we're gonna start out with a new tunes by Tim Simonec called 'Upswingin'.

In scene (01:27:55-01:42:29), Fletcher traps Neiman as he gives Neiman false hope of being the main drummer in a music festival. Fischer tells Neiman that he is looking for a drummer that knows every note of Whiplash and Caravan. However, on stage, Fletcher opens the show with music called Upswingin, which is Neiman's first time playing on it. Neiman, on the opener song, plays his drum just to accompany the band. After the opener song is finished, Neiman will stay on stage as he wants to show his full capability to play solo drums in a bridge between the song. Fischer was amazed at how Neiman played and led the others to accompany Neiman to play the next song.

Several movie aspects of the movie in Wedawati and Lasiana (2021) article reveal the struggle of the economy class based in the subaltern class in Snowpiercer (2014) movie has several similarities with Whiplash's (2014) movie. In Snowpiercer movie, many shots are taken in wide angle, and dark color grading scheme, as the director wanted to show the oppression that happened in the train. In Whiplash, wide shots and dark color grading schemes are also used to portray cold and isolation in the teacher-student relationship.

CONCLUSION

Whiplash, directed by Damien Chazelle, well-portrayed the three stages of Foucault's theory on power relations in student and teacher relationships. Over time and sequentially, the film fulfilled each act of power relations on domination. As the top power

holder in class, Fletcher applies several acts to test his domination of his students.

The study portrays teachers' domination through discipline and negotiation. As a villain, Fletcher gradually tests his domination to the students to maintain his power in class and keep his learning on 'tempo'. Furthermore, by doing so, Neiman, the main character, made several resistance actions as is the effect of power domination happened by Fletcher.

This film shows us that power relations are all around us, from a minor scale of family, education, and politics. Whiplash (2014) well portrays the three stages of Foucault's theory on power relations, specifically domination. The aspect of cinematography, such as color grading, camera angle, and dialogue, supports the delivery of power domination. Thus this film is well-arranged as it sequentially portrays the domination of the teacher-student relationship in learning.

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