

# Theme of the coming of age in the films the fault in our stars, and me and earl a...

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The films *The Fault in Our Stars* (TFIOS) by Josh Boone, and *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* (MEDG) by Alfonso Gomez-Rejon, both explore the comprehensive idea of coming of age.

TFIOS is narrated by 17-year-old Hazel who suffers from lung cancer. One day at cancer support group, she meets 18-year-old Augustus Waters. The two characters fall deeply in love and the film focuses on this intimate relationship. In contrast, MEDG is narrated by 18-year-old Greg. Greg's life forever changes after befriending Rachel, one of his classmates who has been diagnosed with leukaemia. The two characters develop a unique friendship, not knowing the impact it's going to have on their lives. This creates an underlying difference between the two films because the audience hear MEDG and TFIOS take place through two diverse perspectives.

A defining similarity between the two films is the way in which they each convey the idea of coming of age. In TFIOS, Hazel's relationship with Gus allows her to express herself, transitioning her into adulthood by realising the true value of life. Similar to this, in MEDG Rachel allows Greg to discover himself and pushes him into adulthood even though it frightens him. The film makers of TFIOS and MEDG use a variety of techniques such as camera angles, dialogue, sound and narrative point of view, to communicate the various ideas explored within coming of age; such as identity, love and death. In both films, identity is an underlying idea that allows for character expression and development. Through first person narration, the audience develops an intimate understanding of the main characters emotions and behaviours. Greg is a self-loathing, self-hating introvert, who wishes to be

invisible to everyone. As Greg is the narrator of MEDG, his personality sets the tone of the film. However, this narrative point of view differentiates immensely in TFIOS as Hazel is the narrator. She is the one suffering from cancer whereas Greg is not, ultimately changing the perspective in which the story is being told. Since being diagnosed at the age of six, Hazel generally relies on her words and feelings to express herself, forcing a high level of maturity at a young age. Greg is yet to discover such a level of maturity; his narration often incorporates quirky humour as he is depicted as a realistic representation of a typical young adult. Through adversity faced, Hazel is yet to experience any social or romantic growth in a similar way to Greg. Greg tells the audience that he organises the world into groups, believing that he doesn't identify with any of them. " In the typical high school life, you belong to one nation, which can never guarantee you total security." He explains to the audience that you must casually interact with everyone once in a while, in a way that is invisible to others. Hazel expresses to the audience through first-person narration her desire to avoid relationships also. " I'm a grenade, and one day I'm going to explode and obliterate everything in my way". Hazel is explaining that she wants to " minimise the casualties", meaning she doesn't want to hurt any more people than she has to. She is seen pushing any form of a real relationship away, which is something she has become accustomed to. Both Hazel and Greg exhibit a desire to isolate themselves from others.

In TFIOS, Hazel does this due to the impact her illness has on others and in MEDG Greg does this because of his fear of having any sort of real

relationship. When Hazel grows closer to Gus, similar to when Greg initially meets Rachel, their identities differ. Greg doesn't realise he has potential, but when he meets Rachel he begins to discover himself, and Rachel's death almost forces him into adulthood. Similar to this, Hazel watching Gus die forces her to further mature. Their unique, romantic relationship guides Hazels' transition from childhood to adulthood. Through the use of narrative point of view, TFIOS and MEDG communicate in an intimate way how the main characters transition due to the relationships they form. Death is another idea within both films which forces the main characters to maturely develop. Music and camera angles effectively allow this idea to be communicated to the audience. Both films include the death of a character due to illness, but are communicated in different ways through the use of these techniques.

In MEDG, the death of Rachel differentiates immensely from the death of Gus in TFIOS. In MEDG, the non-diegetic sound of an intense, fast pace song is playing whilst Greg and Rachel are watching the film he created for her. Rachel's cough signifies to the audience that she is dying. The music continues to build, masking the frantic movements of the nurses and her mum trying to assist her. The intensity of the music suggests that nothing is working. The words being spoken and the extreme cries for help cannot be heard by the audience. Therefore, causing a sole focus to be on how the non-diegetic sound is relating to the emotions being displayed by Rachel and Greg. TFIOS handles the death of Gus in a different way, cutting to Hazel lying in bed where a soft and gentle soundtrack is playing in the background.

The music is suspenseful and then fades to complete silence, whereby a phone call then interrupts causing Hazel to awaken. Complete silence fills the scene and only the sound of Hazel crying uncontrollably can be heard. Hazel in a voice over says, “ it was unbearable, every second of it, to the last.”

The use of silence in TFIOS displays a sense of reality, and the pain Hazel is suffering from can be authentically seen by the audience. Silence almost forces the audience to solely focus on Hazel, as no non-diegetic or diegetic sound is existent to be of distraction. The use of a non-diegetic sound in MEDG eliminates that sense of reality and consequently is not as successful at exhibiting the strong emotions being felt between Greg and Rachel. Therefore, the use of silence in TFIOS proves to be more effective than the use of a non-diegetic sound in MEDG. Camera angles were used within both films, influencing the audience’s perception of the characters. In TFIOS, close up and extreme close up shots were used, capturing the tears running down Hazels cheeks as she sobs into her hands. Although the tragic death of Gus dominates this scene, it also encapsulates the strong love that exists between Hazel and Gus. The transition from a long shot into an extreme close up shot creates tension and suspense. The scene is shot in a continuous manner allowing it to feel real and authentic, giving the audience a deeper and more personal understanding of what Hazel is feeling. Gus was everything to Hazel, and through the use of these specific camera angles, the audience can see this.

Similarly, in MEDG extreme close up shots were used to capture Rachel's struggle to survive. Her eyes revealed a deep sadness and the dark blue circles beneath them emphasised illness and tiredness. These extreme close up shots cut rapidly back and forth to a wide, medium shot. This medium shot allows the audience to become Rachel, looking through her eyes. Rachel looks at Greg one last time and through the use of these specific camera angles, the audience can see through her eyes that she admires Greg. This is a powerful moment that the audience realise has ultimately changed Greg. Dismally, in TFIOS the audience never experience a different perspective and only see Hazel through the view of a close up shot. This consequently impacts the intimacy between the audiences' relationship with Hazel and her feelings. By putting the audience in MEDG into Rachel's perspective, they are forced to experience two diverse perspectives which better develops their understanding of the impact Rachel's death causes for not only others, but her as well. Allowing the audience in MEDG to experience different perspectives proves to have more of an impact, in comparison to the audience in TFIOS experiencing one singular perspective.

In both films, love is an idea that demonstrates the impact an intimate relationship with another has on adolescent growth. The main characters in both films experience the feelings of love for the first time, simply on different levels. Hazel falls deeply in love with Gus in a romantic way, whereas Greg develops a non-romantic friendship in which he has never loved someone as much as he loves Rachel. TFIOS is heavily focused on romance and young love, whereas MEDG has a comedic feel to it, focusing

on the reality of adolescents. Through dialogue, the audience can see the development of the characters relationships personally because it expresses their thinking and beliefs. Dialogue in TFIOS exchanged between Hazel and Gus exhibits high maturity. Hazel expresses her deep feelings for Gus in the eulogy she reads for him. " But Gus, my love, I cannot tell you how thankful I am for our little infinity. You gave me a forever within the numbered days." Even though they had a limited amount of time together, it was valuable enough to count as an " infinity". In contrast to this, dialogue in MEDG never exhibited such maturity. This is because Rachel and Greg never spoke about their feeling towards one another. Greg's ' co-worker' says to him, " I'm so tired of you treating this girl like she's a burden because somebody actually cares about you. Her life is over after this!" Greg is too self-absorbed to see this himself. He is treating Rachel as a " burden" when really, she is someone who for the first time, truly cares about him. In both films, the use of dialogue allows the audience to form a bond with the main characters. Although dialogue in TFIOS exhibits maturity, it is often excessive and fantasised. In contrast, dialogue in MEDG is powerful because it realistically communicates what the adolescents are undergoing, realistically expressing the feelings they have towards one another. Hence, in MEDG the use of reality in dialogue is more effective than the use of excessive and fantasied dialogue in TFIOS.

In both films, the audience see what difficulties the adolescents are experiencing, and how these difficulties influence their maturity and growth. Despite their differences, both film makers have engaged the target

audience by including complex issues and relationships that maintain interest and provoke the appropriate emotions in relation to adolescents. This successfully conveys the main idea of coming of age in both films, accomplished through the use of techniques including narrative point of view, sound, lighting, dialogue and camera angles. Therefore, it is obvious that Josh Boone and Alfonso Gomez-Rejon have successfully conveyed the idea of coming of age.

The aspect of youth culture hence plays an important role in each film. Because they both focus on adolescents, this demonstrates the way their lives differ from older generations. The ways in which they form relationships, their beliefs and values and the way they view themselves, are all characteristics that shape their individuality and differentiate them from other generations.

The Fault in Our Stars and Me and Earl and the Dying Girl share the same purpose. Each film has successfully incorporated techniques respectively, to convey the common idea of coming of age. Both films effectively use techniques such as narrative point of view, sound, dialogue and camera angles. However, these techniques are used differently to ensure the audience feel a particular way. The Fault in Our Stars focus on romance and first love between two adolescents and how love allows you to develop. Whereas, Me and Earl and the Dying Girl focuses on humour and how true friendship can transition you. Thus, each film achieves its purpose and engages the audience in a story of coming of age.