

Human alienation

Life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

My research report is focused on the reasons behind alienation (forced/chosen) within the human race. I looked into three vastly different sections of society which all reflect alienation. Schindler's list, directed by Steven Spielberg and the Telephone conversation by Wole Soyinke strongly express racial alienation. One is from a historical background in Europe during world war two and the other in modern European society (2002) Both of these texts show similar aspects of the human race that cause alienation.

The next section I investigated was psychological alienation. I studied Girl Interrupted, directed by James Mangold and Wrestling with the Angel by Michael King. There is a twenty year gap between these texts but not a lot of difference in the treatment of those believed to be mentally unstable. The last segment of society I looked into was religion. I chose to research the Crucible, directed by Nicholas Hyther and a text set in modern society - Plain Truth by Jodi Picoult.

Both texts show how nonconforming leads to alienation no matter the religion. After exploring three different aspects of society and history it became clear that no matter what, humans will always find a way to alienate others as it is a way to personally benefit. Through the racial aspect, power of numbers against another race is used to gain overall power. In the psychological segment it is the urging of society that wants a 'normal' way of life that causes alienation of those who don't conform.

Religiously, people want power of numbers and to be a part of that group you must conform without failure. It seems that alienation is impossible to eradicate as it is human nature to compete against one another - in the end it is 'survival of the fittest.' Racial Alienation: Power is the cause of racial

alienation. Humans thrive off and starve for power-we need it to control our lives and have order and strength in society. Sometimes power can become a negative when in the wrong hands. This is obvious from the disasters of the Holocaust in Germany, World War Two.

Schindler's List, directed by Steven Spielberg showed (throughout the film) the alienating effects of the Jewish ghettos and concentration camps where Jews were segregated and killed by the thousands. This was due to the unstoppable power of the German Nazi party lead by Hitler. One scene that is effective in conveying this is when the Jews are being forced from their homes into the ghetto. Close up shots of fear on their faces and high angle shots show their vulnerability to the immense power of the Germans.

The parallel of Oskar Schindler moving into a luxurious, spacious room accents the consequences of power for those on the wrong end. Spielberg's use of contrast between the situations shows how grim life is for the Jewish people being alienated from their own lives. The Telephone conversation by Wole Soyinke expresses racial oppression caused by power of the English white race. This oppression is on a lower scale than the Holocaust but it is still wrong. After the horrors of the Holocaust etched in history, many think that we humans would learn from our mistakes.

I believe people cannot-however it is improving from history but alienation still occurs in the modern world. Wole Soyinke uses mood sarcasm and irony in his poetic satire about racism in western modern society. The poem concentrated on a small telephone conversation but is employed by the poet to apply to a broader level to show alienation throughout society. The poem begins peacefully as visual judgements are non-existent at this stage. When

the man reveals his race the whole mood changes. A sudden caesura in line six emphasises the impact that the man's revealing his race has.

From here on the mood is uneasy and apprehensive as the white woman makes it uncomfortable for the "African man". Soyinke's use of the word "confession" to describe the exposing of the man's race is very sarcastic in that being an African must be sinful. This is an obvious display of how humans alienate each other without even giving one the chance to prove their worth in society. Both Spielberg and Soyinke use certain techniques to try and convey how those who have more power such as German Nazi's and white English race, alienate those they see as 'below' them to benefit themselves.

By looking at the time difference of these text it is obvious that racial alienation continues throughout society no matter the time/place. The main purpose of both of those texts is to show the absurdness of racism and how ridiculous it is to judge someone on the way they look. Both texts display the evil of human nature in the way we intentionally alienate others to improve our own situation. The Germans during the Holocaust were of an advanced economy with a sophisticated education system, yet they entrusted their fate to a man who made no secret of his mass murder and segregation. I believe it occurred because Germany was in hard times after the placement of the Treaty of Versailles and they followed Hitler and forgot their morals in the hope that their lives would improve. While the Jews suffered miserably this thinking is the same of white English people that were shown as racists in Soyinke's poem. For them to hold and maintain the best jobs, houses and education, they as a group alienate blacks so they can't ever rise in social

class, or wealth. This technique is the same as the Germans, forcing another race into oppression to become the stronger, wealthier and better educated race.

It is clear that the white race is the cause of alienation throughout the world as they do not want to lose their societal position to races they believe are less civilised than their own. Maybe we will never live in a world of equality as competition is the way to keep the system moving-even if it causes alienation. Overall it is power that causes racial alienation, the human race naturally thirsts for it-the fittest hold it and use it to their advantage, this leads to racism and segregation of races. Psychological alienation; Mental illness has been confused with the non conforming nature of some in the past.

James Mangold, director of *Girl Interrupted* provides a sad truth of the diagnosis a young girl in the 1960's as having a 'borderline personality'. She narrates the story with a dispassionate voice which conveys the detachment and alienation she feels from life. Kayson was diagnosed with her illness because she had "uncertainty of long term goals, instability of self image and social contrariness." I believe she had every right to wonder why she was placed into a mental hospital when not all normal teenagers would satisfy that list either.

Through the character of Kayson we see the haunted life in the mental hospital and the seclusion from the real world. What's more is that Kayson really didn't have a mental illness, she just didn't always conform with the ways of society. Those who did conform saw her as a blemish to society and she was then to be 'purified' by the isolation of a mental hospital. It is a fault

of human beings that we are so quick to judge those who dare to be different from the social norm. This is also obvious in 'Wrestling with the Angel' by Michael King.

This biography is based in Janet Frame's life. Focusing on her time at Seacliff hospital we can see how wrongly she was judged by doctors. King used metaphor to show the alienation of the hospital: " Many patients who entered Seacliff had no name, no past, no future, only an imprisoned now, an eternal Island without its accompanying horizons. " The hospital really was a prison in the middle of nowhere with no way out. The use of the word " Island" illustrates how isolated Frame was from the world.

Not only was she physically isolated from the world, Janet felt personally alienated by society; " I felt as if my life were overturned by this sudden division of people into ordinary people in the street and the secret people whom few had seen or talked to but whom many spoke of with derision, laughter or fear. " This quote directly shows the judging by society of those who are labelled (wrongly in Frame's case) as mentally unstable. People cannot help but create division between those they believe that aren't normal and this is obvious through the characters Kayson and Janet.

The context of the two texts relate to the alienation of characters as at the times these are set, social conformance was necessary to be deemed as sane. In *Girl Interrupted*, the main character Kayson had her adolescence coincide with the rise of the late nineteen sixties youthculture. The older generations were startled by the dispatching of traditional values by young people. Their unconventionalmusic, anti war opinions and drug culture was in

fact alien to them. Because of this they placed people away in mental hospitals.

Kayson's rejection of her school and career was a mental disturbance to her parents and they never understood her uncertainty at a confusing time. This psychological alienation came down to nonconformance with traditional values and the superior group (elders) not understanding the youth. This idea of alienation caused by misunderstanding is also clear in *Wrestling With The Angel*. King argued that Frame's "strangeness of perception was misdiagnosed as schizophrenia" People at the time didn't understand her way of thinking. Doctors intercepted letters in which she described gorse smelling like peanut butter.

From this they took her as disordered, confusing a bread spread with a spiky bush rather than understanding her creative mind. From this it is apparent how society and those in positions of power (like the Nazi Germans and the white English are described under racial alienation) judge others who are non conformant with the strict guidelines most people follow. Characters Kayson and Frame portray uniqueness within a race that forces uniformity. They are stepping out of the majority. Society forces alienation upon them as they treat them like problems and isolate them.

This creates internal feelings of alienation when really these people have done nothing wrong. The people in positions of power and those who hide their true identity to conform are what cause the alienation of those brave enough to be different. The world would be a sad place if everyone was the same. Today medication and therapy can help people with real disorders rather than putting them away. This however never fixes the issue of

psychological alienation as humans will always judge others to either make themselves feel better or because they feel they are better than that person.

Anyone who stands out from the crowd would be judged, but thankfully today, people are more aware of the importance of acceptance and individuality.

Religious alienation: Religion can cause people to lose their freedom and identity as it forces them to conform. Those who follow a religion must abide by its rules in order to be accepted in the religious group. In the *Crucible*, directed by Nicholas Hytner, the entire nation follows the strict Puritan religion. This movie is set in a theocratic society where the state and the church are one and moral laws and state laws also.

There is no space for non conformity. One character, Elizabeth is alienated from the community as she was accused of performing witchcraft. Although it was untrue, this 'act' of non conformance led to her isolation from her livelihood. The intolerance of certain things at this time caused great alienation or death for many women if charged with witchcraft. The theme of Hysteria in this text shows how people thrive on it when they benefit from it. Those accusing Elizabeth of witchcraft benefitted from it as they gained her possessions. Hysteria suspends the rules of everyday life and allows the acting out of people's dark desires underneath their displayed 'righteousness.' " Not only has religion forced the oppression of people's true identities, it allows people to use it as a weapon to alienate others to benefit themselves. This theme is consistent throughout all of the texts studied. In life, there will always be selfish people trying to improve their position by hurting / alienating others. Strict religious societies cause this because it is

against human nature to always conform. Non conformity in religious groups is punished with alienation.

As described before, in religious groups if the rules are not followed there are consequences. In “ Plain Truth’ by Jodi Picoult a certain character (Jacob) is alienated because he chose not to conform. A rule in the Amish community is that education is banned from eighth grade onwards. For Jacob, his willingness to learn caused him to go to university and be banned from the Amish community which included the only people he knew. His father thought of him as a “ dead son” To the people in the Amish community they are one identity, one people. Speaking out against this is looked down upon.

For these people there is no room for deviation from their social norm so they continue to conform. I wonder why anyone would choose this; to lose their own identity for a community so strict you cannot choose what to do with your life. However, each member is entitled to stay or leave. The problem is that alienation is created either way - if you stay you lead a life of isolation from the modern world, if you leave you have all the freedom yet you are “ all alone when all you have ever known is how to be part of the group. ” Overall, religious groups that force conformity create alienation no matter what.

In the end what is important to the world on a whole is that diversity is expected and respected and everybody has a choice to be who they want to be without being judged. In conclusion, alienation is worldwide today, it will be tomorrow and it has occurred right throughout history. My research has shown that one of the main causes of alienation is the need for power. This is most obvious in Schindler’s list and the Telephone Conversation but it also

links in with control over groups in psychological alienation and religious alienation. When one group or single person has control over many they will use this to benefit themselves.

It is human nature to want what is best for yourself, this use of power is inevitable. In *Girl Interrupted* and *Wrestling With The Angel* it is obvious that at times of lack of scientific and psychological understanding, many people were alienated for not being what society had decided as 'normal.' Characters such as Kayson and Frame suffered because their individuality shone but it hurt the eyes of those in positions to diagnose mental illness. From these texts it was clear that human beings are too quick to judge those who are different from the rest, rather than accepting their uniqueness.

In saying that, in modern society we are becoming better at understanding others and the beauty in difference. Religious alienation has links with other types but more closely with psychological. In religious groups conformity is expected or alienation is put in place. Through the texts, *The Crucible* and *Plain Truth* one can understand how alienation is inescapable after being part of a strict religion. If you do not conform you are alienated. If you do conform you alienate yourself from your true identity. Leaving the group causes alienation also as you are all alone after only ever knowing how to fit in.

Whichever choice one would make would lead them to alienation. In the end the world entire cannot avoid alienation. People will always compete for a better position; it is the nature of any specie on this planet. The only way to have a positive result is to make sure that the wrong people who have murderous and revengeful motives don't gain positions of power as events

such as the Holocaust could repeat. Small scale alienation will always continue in the modern world, as will competition but outright racism and discrimination is wrong and should be stopped.