

Simon birch

Sociology



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Simon Birch The smooth peaceful appearance that touches ones soul when entering a flourishing small town often instills the idea of the most appropriate setting for a child to develop. However, many will find that this environment will quickly try to make or break the human potential for success as harsh view points on what perfection should be emerge from all directions. This case could not be better depicted than through the tale of Simon Birch's childhood where he encounters the feats of overcoming the disability of small stature in a town were any defect is looked down upon. Meanwhile his close friend Joe, who seems to receive all the love that Simon is missing, looses it all in an entangled array of events. While the two friends search for Joe's father, an unknown man residing within their small town, Simon searches for the answer to his existence on earth. Although he is only a few feet tall he has a strong faith that God planned something big for him. Through his tremendous battle with what the socialization of his town tries to do with a defective child, he manages to hold onto hope that, in what will be a short life time, he will achieve something honorable. The theme of socialization and what it does to a child could not be more prevalent than in the transition from the limitations Simon started his life with, the growing struggles that surrounded himself and Joe, and finally his ability to override the looking-glass self that his small town had bestowed upon him. Simon Birch's journey stands as excellent evidence that as the viewer witnesses his life they will realize that society as a whole does not, and can never change. The fact that through the process of socialization although certain norms may change, their will always be a negative push on those who do not meet the proper standards of the time. Due to this, certain individuals will not be permitted to reach their potential. While society does not change, individuals

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perspectives on how socialization should occur, will change. By the end of Simon Birch's trial he is able to succeed in altering the views that many in his town have placed upon him. Unfortunately, many moons after Simon's departure the society that he tried to change in order to make a name for himself, will fall back into what can be described as raw human nature. Meaning that they will be quick to look down upon anyone who appears to be defective from their norm. The strong theme of socialization is portrayed all throughout the film as a type of conflict perspective. From the very moment Simon's father sees that his son has been born in a very defective size he is instantly as hard as a rock to his new born. Because of the fathers reaction we know that he is realizing that his son has already been eliminated from any successful group. With the father standing as a perfect example of the rest of the community it is now known that because Simon is in the group of handicaps, he will receive less acknowledgment as a human being than the cohort of other children within his age group. This alone proves that, at least prior to his achievements, the film is based on a conflict perspective. The family that surrounds a child is known to be a major affect on socialization in many ways. Many times this family unit is more important than any other human interactions that will occur. With taking a look at the most basic unit of socialization the viewer can first pick up the beginning of what will become struggles for both Simon and his friend Joe. Simon's parents appear to be the kind of rugged folk who would have desired a son that could go on to make them proud. With him being of such small size and also having an undersized heart he is not predicted to live far into adulthood. Due to this his parents do not want to waste a second of their time transforming him into the socialized human that he deserves to be. In the case of Simon's best

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friend Joe, whom is the narrator of Simon Birch's tale, family problems of a different nature seem to be of an issue. Joe was blessed with the most loving and, what many of his friends agreed to be, most attractive mother within the town. However, she withheld from Joe, and anyone else for that matter, the mystery of who his father was. Obviously, being raised in small Graves Town Maine in the fifties without a father was not a glorified position to hold. With Joe lacking what the community considered to be a proper family, and Simon having parents that were nonexistent both characters play into the dilemma of missing the socialization that is considered to be desirable. Along with this a subtheme of social stratification, or a system by which society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy, can be seen. Through the rugged life that Simon's parents lead on the outskirts of town with little money in their pockets, and the single mom that is raising Joe, both boys are exposed to the stratification of society. Luckily Simon manages to survive through a having what many do not, a driven personality. A person's personality is made up of fairly consistent patterns of acting, thinking, and feeling. Because of Simon's crummy home life he spends much of his time at the homestead of Joe's grandmother where Joe and his mother reside. Joe's mother stands as the highlight of Simon's world, not only is she the most beautiful woman he has ever laid eyes on, but she is also the only adult figure that shows him love and affection. As they make their way through town Simon faces many insults. Even passing Joe's Grandmother within her house he is labeled with the word creature. Because he has such a strong willed personality the patterns of his thinking process never falter and he continues to not even be slightly effected by what is being said about him. Along with having such an outstandingly personality he also has a very

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uniquely developed ego for a child his age. An ego can be described as a person's conscious efforts to balance innate pleasure-seeking drives with the demands of society. Simon's profound ego has developed through his realization that he will never be able to have everything he wants. A good example of this understanding can be shown through Simon's love of baseball. Although he and Joe are continually placed on teams that are not good, and neither of them actually do much playing Simon fully accepts this and continues to love the sport. Another example of this truly remarkable ego comes into play after first meeting Joe's mother's new boyfriend, Ben. Ben brings Joe and Simon a paper bag with a gift inside in order to win them over. Joe is not interested in his poor attempt to draw him in and refuses the gift. After Ben's statement that the bag may move, the two boys cannot bare the curiosity of what may be inside the bag. When Joe finally breaks and tells Simon to just open it already Simon replies with " what I want to do and what I do are two separate things. If we all went around doing what we wanted to do there'd be chaos. " This quote alone gives excellent proof that Simon's ego is far advanced for a child. The stages of preadolescence, a time when children strike out on their own and search for accomplishments, and adolescence, a time when teens struggle to find their identity, completely describe the world that Simon finds himself a part of, as he is trapped between the two. Simon's main goal in life is to find honor in his accomplishments. This characteristic ties him to the preadolescence he is transitioning out of. However, a good example of his adolescent ways can be seen through his trials and errors in discovering who he is. While joining Joe and his mother to church Simon finds that he does not agree with the fact that God would make the church bake sale a priority in order for one to show

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their Christian faith. He decides to take a stand and express his view point on the topic. Simon's ability to stand up for what he believes in often times brings him much trouble. This scene at the church leads into what the view will discover to be in a way a type of resocialization. Resocialization can be described as a type of change that occurs generally with inmates personalities as their environment is carefully controlled in order to shape them into the person they should be. Obviously Simon's case was not as severe of that of an inmate, but from the viewpoint of a child it would almost seem as harsh. After causing controversy in church the preacher and Simon's short tempered Sunday school teacher try to push him to apologize for his outburst. Simon once again displays his consistent ways of thinking through his sharp personality and refuses to apologize for something he is not sorry for. Without the answer that the two adults were looking for they determine to leave him locked away in the church office until he can be molded into a boy that keeps his views to himself. Even his baseball cards are snatched away, but Simon stays true to his words and the resocialization process of these two adults does not affect him. The possible reason behind Simon's ability to speak his mind could be in thanks to the phrase known as the looking-glass self. This self image is created based on how one thinks others see them. Prior to the outburst Simon had continually had the fact that he was a disruptive little creature drilled into his head. After stepping out of class, Simon's cruel Sunday school teacher returned to find the other students passing him around like an object, due to his unique small size. She quickly scolded him, blamed him for the disruption, and reminded him that he was good for nothing and much less a human than the other children. With the idea that he is the source to all disruption pushed deep into his

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mind, the looking-glass self image that he creates for himself is one of disruption. The characteristics that society gives a person many times stick to them. So with this in mind it is no wonder that Simon quickly allows himself to not pay any mind to causing an outbreak of frenzied emotions. The idea of the generalized other can in many ways tie into the looking-glass self that Simon perceives of himself. This term refers to widespread cultural norms and values we use as a reference in evaluating ourselves. A scene in the film that represents this very well occurs while the boys discuss their growing interest in girls. After an encounter with two girls on the lake the boys begin joking around with one another about the body changes that are occurring with the adolescent girls. Joe tells Simon that the girls were talking about how cute and little he was, and that maybe they'd be interested in him. Due to what Simon has been exposed to and the generalized other that has been created in his head he reminds Joe that the girls mean "cute like a baby turtle, girls don't want to kiss a baby turtle." This clearly shows that because of how Simon has been socialized he knows what girls mean when they refer to him as cute. After experiencing what is the most tragic event in the boy's life so far, the viewer will realize that Simon is very much encountering what is known as the concrete operational stage in his life. This stage is known as the level of human development at which individuals first see causal connections in their surroundings, and they question how and why things happen. This very dramatic scene in the movie occurs at the boy's baseball game. The coach is ready to call it a day so he comes up with what seems to be a clever plan. Normally when Simon is up to bat he advises him not to swing due to the small batting area he will surely be able to walk the bases. Today however he tells him to swing away hoping the game will end

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after he strikes out. A turn of events take place and for the first time, although it is a foul ball, Simon hits it with more might than anyone on his team. Unfortunately the ball comes into contact with the only motherly figure that Simon has ever known, Ms. Wentworth. As Joe's mother lies lifeless upon the earth and all the community gathers around her, Simon is hammered with emotions he could not have prepared for. Up until this point Simon has gone through his life trying to explain to everyone that he knows God has some kind of special plan for him. Now after ending the life of the purest love he has ever known Simon screams out and questions why this horrific thing could happen. He is left uncertain if his goal of accomplishing something great will be achieved or not. Being essentially an orphan Joe's world is in many ways turned upside down. After spending some time away from Simon, Joe tries to make sense of everything in his mind. He finds that Simon left his most valuable possessions on his porch. Through the stage known as formal operation Joe is able to piece everything together. In this stage of development individuals are able to think abstractly and critically. The situation of Joe's mother is never truly brought up much, as the boys simply look past it within their friendship. Simon and Joe begin to find themselves getting into all kinds of trouble in search of the possible father that Joe is craving to know of. Once again due to the looking-glass self that society has created for Simon by telling him that anything he does causes trouble, drives him to ultimately find his way into trouble on his own will. Along with the strong theme of socialization, another subtheme can be withdrawn by the viewer. For instance social deviance, or recognized violation of cultural norms, is a subtheme that is apparent all throughout Simon's life. The reason behind this theme is once again due to the looking-

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glass self that his community has created for him. With teachers and adults constantly telling him that he is the reason for all disruption and distraction he eventually allows himself to become just that. He knows exactly what the cultural norms are and chooses to go against them when ever he does not agree with them. A good example of this would be depicted during the Christmas play. Over and over the teacher tells him he will mess it up, and to avoid this from happening she makes him baby Jesus. With the prettiest girl in his class playing the role of Marry, Simon can not put aside his desire to grab a feel of her changing adolescent body. As he allows his hands to escape him the entire play goes awry. He obviously knows this is wrong, but since he is already seen as a disruption he minds as well do what ever he pleases. While away on a church ski trip the boys uncover a very hard to accept discovery that the reverend is Joe's father. With this major piece of the puzzle solved Simon unknowingly heads directly into the next. While traveling along a winding road home from the winter trip the school bus comes upon a deer sprinting into their path. Next, before the viewer can realize, the school bus is quickly becoming submerged and all of the children, mostly younger than Joe and Simon, become filled with fear.

Through much drama, Simon is the one who brings a sense of calm over all the children and is able to organize them in a way they can all escape. He manages to free the last child from the bus and his unconscious body is then pulled from the bus by an adult who arrives on the scene. While by his side in the hospital Joe realizes something about Simon. Unlike most people even those of old age, Simon's outlook on death and dying is unlike anyone else.

Normally there are five stages to the dying process: denial anger, negotiation, resignation, and acceptance. Miraculously Simon does not seem

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to experience any of these stages, for he has prepared for this moment his entire life. Finally he has realized that his goal of accomplishing a heroic task in the eye of God has been followed through. To Simon his heroic feats have seemed to reach the mass media. As everyone in his small town has now realized the accuracy behind what he has been saying his entire life. The story of Simon Birch, told through the eyes of his best friend Joe many years later, is an excellent representation of socialization. Socialization, or the lifelong social experience by which people develop their human potential and learn culture, was something that Simon received in a different way than all the other children around him. As he fought to make everyone see that he too had potential to learn culture and interact as a member of society, he was continually turned away due to his short life expectancy and external appearance. However, Simon Birch was able to teach everyone surrounding him that he was far more valuable to society than they would have ever given him credit for. Although for Simon this is a very happy ending to the life he wanted to lead. The reality is that society as a whole can never be changed. Generations after his existence, limitations will once again be placed on someone standing in Simon's shoes, holding back their human potential just as his was withheld. Simon Birch stands as excellent proof of the human desire to reach one's potential, and gives a clear look into the different struggles that society places on every individual as they attempt to reach this goal.