

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AS A HIGH CLASS SOCIETY FOR TEENAGER IN ALYSON NOËL'S *FAKING 19*

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the Alex's desire to be acknowledged as a high class person. Alex comes from a middle class background. When she enters high school, she started to change. In this paper I analyze the changes that happened to Alex. In the analysis, I use Georg Simmel's theory about fashion and metropolitan lifestyle. I divided this analysis into three parts. The first part, it discusses what Alex does to get the acknowledgement. Second, it discusses the reasons and result behind her desire to be acknowledged as a high class. Finally, it discusses what Alex learns from her encounter with the high class. Through the analysis I find that *Faking 19* shows an important moral lesson. Being acknowledged as a high class is not the most important thing in life. The most important thing in life is when someone can be themselves.

Key Words: Acknowledgement, Society, Teenager, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Teenage literature is one of the most popular genres which always stand out among the other genres. The stories are associated with problems such as romance, bullies and fights. Teenage literature can also be called as a reflection tool for teenagers to see and relate their life to their society. For this reason, teenage literature has become very popular and attracted a lot of reader. Alyson Noël, one of teenage literature writers who previously attained success because of her works, has got an award as *New York bestsellers* for her teenage literature novel, which is enjoyable to read. One of Alyson Noël's popular novels in teenage literature is *Faking 19*. *Faking 19* is a story about a journey of a young teenager named Alex. It shows a clear explanation on how teenagers are struggling with their problems in school and family, and even with themselves.

I am interested in discussing one issue that *Faking 19* explores, an issue that always exists in teenagers' life, that is the behavior of the main character, Alex. In discussing this issue, I want to show the ways and the efforts that Alex uses to be acknowledged as someone of the high class society. I also want find out the reason and result of Alex's desire to get the acknowledgement as well as lessons learned that she gets.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In so doing, I use George Simmel's theory about Metropolitan Lifestyle and Fashion. Metropolitan Lifestyle explains that every individual lifestyle nowadays is always related to money and modernism. Modernity, which closely related with economy level on each individual, creates 'false' needs in society. As seen in following quotation: "To Simmel: modernity is a cultural system based on an advanced, capitalist monetary economy which creates a false consciousness of stability, security, order and a serenity of mind and action." (Mackonytė, 2010) People behavior in consuming things become uncontrollable and the purpose of consuming things has changed as well. Next, Fashion theory talks about how fashion can help people maintain their existence in society. It explains that fashion has an important role in society to satisfy people's desire of differentiating one to another. Simmel also argues: "But fashion is also a remedy for envy, because, in imitating the person I admire, I become or appear like them, and thus I identify myself as one who appears admirable." (Benvenuto, 2000, pg.3) It means that fashion products that they put on become the representation of their identity.

ANALYSIS

1. Alex And Her Desire to be A High Class

This part will discuss the ways and the efforts that Alex, as the middle class, uses in order to be acknowledged as the high class. Alex was a middle class when she was a child, before her parents got divorced. This part will discuss the ways and the efforts that Alex, as the middle class, uses in order to be acknowledged as the high class. When she was a child, she did not see many differences between her and her friends. However when she grows up as a teenager, she starts to realize that there are many differences between her and her friends. Since then on, Alex's desire to be acknowledged as a high class appears. She tries to cover her inferiority feeling about her family financial condition. There will be some factors that make Alex's desire appear.

1.1 Alex's ways in order to be acknowledged as a high class

In order to be acknowledged as a high class person, the way that Alex takes is mimicking the fashion and lifestyle of the high class. mimicry is an individual behavior which tends to do what others are doing, or in short, it is an act of imitating. Like what Melzoff and Moore said in *Perspectives on Imitation: Imitation, human development, and culture* book: "One of the psychological functions that early imitation subserves is to identify people. Infants use nonverbal behavior of people as an identifier of who they are and use imitation as a means of verifying this identity." (Hurley and Chater, 2005, pg.228) As for Alex, she does imitate M's behavior to equate her identity with M. As one of Simmel's principles states: "For fashion to exist, society must be stratified, some members must be perceived as inferior or superior - or simply as worthy or unworthy of being imitated" (Benvenuto, 2000, pg.2) For Alex, she does imitate M's behavior to equate her identity with M.

Besides the fact that there is an economic gap between Alex and M, Alex does not let that situation let her down. She starts to imitate M's fashion and lifestyle. Alex does not let her family's financial condition prevent her from being accepted as a high class by her friends.

Alex feels that she can be accepted at least when she has the same fashion style as M. According to Simmel: Fashion that people wear can serve as a sign of modernity. (Benvenuto, 2000) It is because modernity fulfills the characteristic of high class people. The first way that Alex uses to imitate M is through fashion. Alex shows her highclassness to her high class society in school through her taste of fashion. By having the same taste of fashion as her friends who comes from high class, she can have a good friendship in school and she hopes she can be accepted.

Besides imitating M's fashion, in order to be considered as coming from high class society, Alex also follows M's shopping lifestyle. Alex often accepts M's invitation easily for shopping. Actually one of Alex's reasons of accepting M's invitation to shop is because she loves buying clothes. However, because of her financial condition, she does not have much money to shop as often as M. At first, Alex shops just because she likes clothes, but now Alex sees shopping as a way to show her class.

In addition to shopping, in a certain society; in school for example, society is not only looking at the outside appearance but they also will see the brand of someone's fashion to determine whether a person will be accepted in *in group* (inclusion) or *out group* (exclusion). That is why, branded products also being used to show someone's identity. It happens because the brand of the product possesses symbolic function. This can be seen in Alex's case, she is not only paying attention to her appearance but also to the brand. In his book, Buckingham stated: "From this perspective, consumer culture is seen to provide symbolic resources that people use to communicate and make meaning, and thereby to signify or make claims about their identity." (Buckingham, 2011, pg.167) Alex tries to show her class to her friends through high standard of her fashion.

In addition to fashion and shopping, Alex also follows M's lifestyle in partying which categorized as a modern one. It is because partying also becomes one of the characteristics that modern people do. Even though Alex refuses M's invitation to go to a party at first, but finally she accepts M's invitation because in her opinion partying can show that she is high class and modern. In Alex's opinion, partying is one of high class's lifestyle. By going to a party, she thinks that she can be considered as a high class person as well. Therefore, Alex tries to get used to going to party even though she does not feel comfortable. Her discomfort can be seen in the party when she prefers to be alone and thinks about everything around her. It explains that partying life is not really her

lifestyle as a middle class because she cannot get along with any people at the party. She does not confidence with her appearance and not comfortable to be at the party.

However, from all the acts that Alex has done, she has to do some more hard efforts to get all of it. She cannot get and do it easily. There are many steps and ways that she uses to maintain her image as a high class in front of her friends.

1.2 Alex's efforts to be seen as s high class.

Since Alex's parents got divorced when she was twelve, she has been living in financial constraints. This condition forces Alex's family not to spend much money because they have to full fill their daily needs first. Alex's father is not responsible man. Alex's father who is very rich does not give any financial support to Alex, her mother, and her sister. Because of this reason, in order to be able to get branded products and go to the party, Alex has to collect more money.

In order to collect more money, Alex works part time in one of department store in her town. Alex thinks that she needs to work because she has to fulfill the needs that she needs to be looked like a high class person. It is because, Alex as the mimicker, is instructed to consciously mimic the target. Even though working is very tiring for Alex as a student, but Alex feels it is much better to be tired of working than tired of begging for child support her father.

Alex who is financially inferior, cannot afford to buy things that create the fashion of the financial superior like M. It is because the price of branded products is so expensive that the financial inferior cannot afford to buy. As a result from avoiding buying the expensive branded products, she has her own way. She always tries to find a way by buying the products when there is discount. Besides looking for discounts, Alex also likes to buy the products that have inferior quality. Alex may not buy the real ones if there is no discount, so she just tries avoiding buying it and just find the similar products.

In order to maintain her fashion, besides looking for discount, Alex does her hobby to decorate her clothes. She uses her creativity that she decorates her old clothes or her simple clothes, so it can be looked like the expensive one. It is another Alex's effort to maintain her standard of high class fashion. Alex never runs out of ideas to maintain her image and to get acknowledgement as a high class. Start from her willingness to work part time, desire for discount, until pour out all of her creativity to decorate her old clothes. Therefore, there must be reasons behind it that makes Alex desire to be acknowledged as a high class becomes very strong.

2. The consequences of Alex's efforts to be a high class.

As people grow up in particular society, they will start imitating others in order to get their existence accepted in their society (Mackay, 1997). Without an acceptance, Alex cannot get along with her friends. It is important because acceptance will not make Alex lonely. That is why, in order to be accepted by her friends, she has to have similarities with her friends. In this case, she does it by imitating M.

As in Buckingham book says that "As children get older, what they wear, what they eat, what they play with -- is increasingly subject to negotiation with their peers." (pg.164). It happens to Alex. She starts to think what others people think about her because she does not want to be rejected. She needs an acceptance from her friends. In the teenage age, they will spend most of her time with her friends than with her family. Alex will get the clues where she stands from her friends. Her friends are the ones who give Alex the emotion to be accepted (Brown, Larson, and Saraswathi, 2002, pg.316). It is not just about an acceptance, but an acceptance as a modern person.

Through her appearance which never been touched of high class 'taste', her new friends can directly accept a signal that she is different from them. The first impression that Alex brings to the class was being considered as the bad one by her friends. Since then, Alex starts paying attention to her new surroundings and tries to get along with them. It is because, by doing so, she can get an acceptance from her friends who come from high class.

2.1 Alex's satisfaction in being able to imitate M.

When everyone ignored her, Alex felt hopeless. Alex's friends who come from high class family seem do not want to be friends with Alex who is not a high class. The gap between Alex and

her friends is being formed immediately. Fortunately, Alex can get her hope goes up when M, a high class person, accepts her. Since then she starts imitating M. After imitating M, her friends start communicates with Alex and be friend with Alex. For others, making friends might be a simple and an ordinary thing to do, but for Alex, it is something special. The satisfaction that Alex gets after being accepted by her friends in school is something incredible for her. Because of Alex's background who does not have much, it makes Alex appreciate more about what she has.

Another satisfaction that Alex gets comes when she wears branded products. She uses branded products which has 'power' to express her identity. When Alex walks or shops together with M in branded shop, she will get satisfaction of acceptance from people around her outside her school. It is because when people see M, they know that M is a high class. It indirectly says that Alex, the one who is with M must be also comes from high class. Therefore, Alex can get a good response and respect from others.

2.2 Alex's satisfaction to be acknowledged as a high class

The reason behind Alex's desire to be acknowledged as a high class person is a sense of togetherness that she gets after imitating her high class friends. Alex can get closer not only with M, but also with her other friends. The feeling of togetherness that Alex has plays much in her unconscious mind. It is what makes Alex imagination to be a high class appears. After she feels the changes that happen between her life and her friends in school, it pushes her to do more. It means that she not only imagines how it feels to be a high class person, but also wants to experience what the high class people also experience.

After getting the acceptance from her friends, she feels comfortable with what she has now. It is what makes Alex unconsciously keep doing the imitating in order to maintain the acceptance. She has to blend with her friends in order to keep her relation with her friends.

After she gets result from her effort to be accepted in her society in school, now she can feel that now she is part of her high class friends. She really can feel the feeling of togetherness with her friends and making good communication and relation with her friends both verbally and non verbally like what The British Psychological Society article says: "This 'doing' can take many forms, both verbal and non-verbal." (Stel and Vonk, 2010, pg.311). In Alex's case, in doing the mimicry, she does much in non verbal action.

3. Alex's newly found values.

Through all the processes that Alex experienced in order to be acknowledged as a high class, she starts to realize something in her life. Like what I have explained before, in doing the mimicking Alex has to do extra efforts in order to make it. Day by day she feels that she is being tied with her society and it makes her feels that what she has done it is not something right. It is stated in Stel and Vonk's article in The British Psychological Society: "A second benefit of mimicry is feelings of bonding towards the interaction partner." (Stel and Vonk, 2010, pg.313). It is true that after doing the mimicry Alex has sense of togetherness with her friends, but Alex cannot deal more with situation that tied her. Even though bonding interaction seems like a good effect of mimicry, but Alex does not feel that way. It makes Alex wants to leave that way of live instead.

Teenage age is a very crucial time of life for people. It is because, in the age of teenager, the process of people's changes occurs. Teenager is those who are in the age between 12 to 18 years old. In this case Alex is 17 years old, so she is being considered as a teenager. Alex is in the transition age from a child to be a teenager and from a teenager to be an adult and she starts looking for an identity. According to Erik Erickson's theory about psychological stage, Alex's age makes her wants to be more dependent without her family. She is in the stage when identity becomes a very important thing to have.

At first, the result of this stage makes Alex tries hard to be accepted in her society. Alex not only wants to be just accepted, but also to be accepted as a high class person. After going through many processes in doing the mimicry in this stage, Alex starts to think in different way as she grows up. It is supported by the statement of Saul McLeod: "It is during this stage that the adolescent will re-examine his identity and try to find out exactly who he or she is." (McLeod, 2013). After doing all of the things to be acknowledged as a high class, Alex starts to re-think about her life. She realizes that all of the things that she has done are pointless.

As she grows up and can be more mature, she starts to understand the meaning of life and starts a new life as herself. She has decided to break her friendship with M which also means she also ready to lose her friendship with her other friends in school. She realizes that the friendship that she has had given her bad influence for her life. Alex starts her new life as who she is as a middle class person.

CONCLUSION

The importance of acknowledgement as a high class society for teenagers in *Faking 19* by Alyson Noël is the important point in this analysis. Her life as an ordinary middle class person starts changing and becomes more complicated since she has entered high school. When Alex enters the high school, I find that her desire of being a high class teenager appeared. It can be known from her acts. She wants to change herself to look like a high class person. In order to find the changes that Alex did and the reason behind her desire, I use Georg Simmel's theory about fashion and metropolitan lifestyle in analyzing this problem. Understanding the theory, I find that what makes Alex changes is because she was being influenced by her high class friends in school. Alex's pride is being degraded in school by her economy class. Since then, she has been trying to prove to her friends that she is not a middle class person that can be unwanted in school.

First, this thesis analyzes what Alex does in order to be acknowledged as a high class person. At first, Alex starts making friend with M. After knowing that M is a popular student and accepted by all of the students in school, Alex's thought to imitate M appears. Alex does many things in order to be looked like M both through her appearance and style. Unfortunately, she finds it hard to imitate M because of the financial condition that she has. That is why Alex needs to find her own way to have more money besides money from her mother.

She starts working in order to earn more money even though it does not give her much money. She works part-time in one of department stores in her town. Not only working part time, but Alex also waiting for discount when she wants to buy things. It is because she can save more money when she wants to buy her favorite things that can help her looked like a high class person. Next, the interesting thing that I find about Alex's effort is that she can use her creativity to get the new clothes. By doing so, Alex can have new and fresh appearance to be showed off to her friends. Seeing all the acts and efforts that Alex does in order to be acknowledged as a high class person, I find that there are several reasons that make Alex's desire appear.

The most important thing that makes Alex's desire appears is because Alex needs an acceptance from her society in school. An acceptance is an important thing to each individual in order to survive in particular society. It is what makes Alex looks for an acceptance by imitating M. After imitating M, Alex looks like a high class and her friends start to accept her in school. Moreover, after Alex gets the acceptance, I also find that Alex gets more comfortable with it. She also gets a sense of togetherness in school with her friends which makes Alex sure that she is being well-accepted in school. However, I find that it does not happen last long. The more Alex is being accepted, the more Alex feels pressured. Alex finds it really hard to keep imitating M in order to be acknowledged as a high class person.

Finding the changes of Alex's mind, I can conclude that Alex is a teenager who still looking for a real identity. As she grows up, she realizes that being acknowledged as a high class in not the most important thing in life. She finds that being herself and has people who really love her no matter who she is, is the most important thing that she must have. She finds that it is useless for her, as a middle class person to imitate the high class.

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