

PROJECT: SCREENPLAY

FINDING ANDY

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ABSTRACTS

This paper is about my screenplay entitled *Finding Andy* which I use as my final project. The screenplay itself is a story about a teenage girl who wants to improve her family's poor communication. For my theory, I use John Gottman's "*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Model*" about family conflict. The theory helps me to shape my characters' behavior towards each others. Since my characters has better relationship even though the brother dies in the end, I tend to use the worst level of family conflict in the beginning of the story and it gradually changes into successful communication which leads to good relationship. The theory helps me to give example of family's poor communication to the audiences. I also do an observation on some families with poor communications and Rangkah Rejo neighborhood in Eastern Surabaya to build the setting's circumstances. From this creative work, I expect that it is made into films, like what screenplay is for, so that the audiences realize that this kind of family exists.

Keywords: family saga, family drama, family communication, communication failure, family relationship, psychological drama.

INTRODUCTION

I would like to explain why I choose screenplay writing instead of other kinds of creative works to finish my bachelor degree in English for Creative Industry. First of all, screenplays are intended to be converted into films. I choose screenplay over stage play because I am both a visual and auditory person. Film has the freedom to play with time and it tends to be less chronological than drama (Reiner, 2009). Patrick Doyle states, "[Film] should [be] like good music; it should have structure to it. But basically it should be musical and listenable. And it should be able to, away from the picture, conjure up the same sort of feeling and images that it was meant on screen" (2016). As a visual and auditory person, I hope that my visual side will help me in composing the pictures and my auditory side will help me to choose suitable background music and sound effects for the script. Another reason why I choose screenplay is that my writing style tends to be more conversational and less descriptive. I am better at describing a condition, in this case, scene with dialogues than long narrations. Even if I have to describe a condition in my screenplay, I usually make it brief and simple, not detailed like in novels.

My main subject is family communication. I choose this subject since communication is a very important element in any family. Communication has big role in shaping its members' behavior and personality. However, communication is not always successful all the time. Some family has failed in term of communication and it has big impact on its members in some sectors in their lives, namely social, academical, and psychological. The most serious problem which poor communication can make is poor family member relationship. I have seen some families have bad relationship just because they never listen to or even ignore each other. The connection between family's communication and relation cannot be separated since communication is the backbone of any relationship.

My creative work applies John Gottman's "*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Model*" about family conflict using psychological and sociological approaches which I explain more in 1.5.1. I choose this model as my theory because it appears that there are stages of family conflict in that theory with clear divisions. The theory itself has four stages of family conflict which are easy to understand and apply in the creative work I make. Other than that, family conflict cannot be avoided since it is a part of any family, but a healthy family should have minimum conflict. When the conflict

becomes more serious, or even worse, when the family members start neglecting one another, the family no longer has good communication (Gottman, 1994). When the worst conflict stage, named stonewalling, is present in a family, it means that the family is in the worst condition because communication barely exists. It is true that stonewalling reduces chance of conflicts greatly, but when the family members have no communication, they have no relationship and they cannot be called as a family.

I do hope that my creative work can make people aware that dysfunctional family exists in a very normal family in outsider's point of view. Dysfunctional family damages its members' psychological growth which also affects their lives in some sectors, namely academic, social, and emotional (Whitfield, 1987). When a family member feels lonely in the house because nobody cares of him, he will 'fill' his emptiness from what he can get outside the house (e.g. friends). Since nobody cares of them, children of dysfunctional families are vulnerable from having miserable lives. The outcome can be as terrible as drug abuse, alcoholism, and crimes. To make things worse, in the future, when the children finally become parents, there is a good chance that they will make their new family dysfunctional again and it will continue from generation to generation. In this project, I want to present that children have the ability to contribute a change to their family's relationship so that their family stop being dysfunctional and their family members can live as a normal family, not a family which looks fine outside but not inside.

Since my story has problem and solution relationship, I will start by the problem. My main problem is poor family communication. Poor family communication is not shaped in just a matter of days, but it is forged for years. In my creative work, I show the process by using Stephanie's flashbacks from her childhood until a week before the story began. The poor family communication has forged its members' relationship for around a decade since the childhood and it is not instantly 'just happens'. I have showed the examples of the effects of poor communication to the family members which are poor relationship, followed by their individuality to each others which causes Andy to abuse drug.

To answer the problem above, I choose to use children's role. In my case, I use Stephanie's effort to unite her family since her family members neglect each others to avoid conflicts. Although it is not easy, she puts herself as a middleman and try to bring her family together. I also give examples of the hardships that may be faced when a family member wants to unite a family with long-term poor communication in the story. It involves a lot of blaming and problem escapism and it proves that being a middleman in such condition is not an easy task.

Since family communication failure exists in the society, I want to make my audience aware that communication among family members is very important. When there is no communication, there is no relationship, and it triggers arguments and even fights. It is true that arguments cannot be avoided in a family's relationship, but what the family members can do is reducing the arguments as minimum as possible so that the family members' relationship keep being maintained well. I do hope that by seeing the film people who have poor communication with their families can try to fix it so that their relationship with their families becomes better.

For communication theory, I will use John Gottman's, a Dominican psychologist from the University of Washington who focuses his studies in family relation and psychology, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Model. "There are four disastrous stages in which a family member will sabotage any attempts at productive communication during a conflict" (Gottman, 1994). In fact, people have a tendency of not to listen to what others say when they quarrel. What usually happens in quarrels is giving counter-arguments instead of listening. The four levels, in order of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse Model, are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

The first, least severe level is 'criticism'. Gottman implies that complaints and criticism cannot be avoided when having an argument. He even points out that complaints mostly use the word *I* (e.g. I do not care about this family anymore!) and criticism involves *you* (e.g. you never listen to me!). Criticism exploits the other family member's weaknesses on personality and character and involves a lot of blaming (p. 73). For the screenplay, I use it not verbally in the parents' way of communication toward each other because they keep blaming each other for not having time for the family even though personally they also do the same thing.

The second, more serious level is 'contempt'. Contempt refers to more serious argument than criticism. In a simple definition, 'contempt' means provoking the other person to get angry by

using psychologically abusive words such as incompetent and, even worse, stupid (p. 79). Some nonverbal communication may also express contempt, for example, not respecting one's hard effort. For the screenplay, I use contempt when Stephanie, my main character, has failed to find her missing brother, Andy. Her parents blame her for her failure even though she has tried her best to find Andy.

The third level is 'defensiveness'. Defensiveness may have Criticism and Contempt included within the process, but to make things worse, the people start to be irresponsible to their own behavior. Making excuses and disagreeing are commonly found in this stage. In my screenplay, I make my characters, especially the parents, to make excuses so that they are not blamed by each other for not caring of their son, Andy. It does have some contempt and criticism elements, but they tend to avoid their consequences of ignoring Andy.

The fourth, most fatal, level is 'stonewalling'. As the name suggests, stonewalling is talking to a person, but the person responds as minimum as possible like a stone wall. Instead of intense conflicts, stonewalling involves some meaningless and unconfident answers, for instance, "Uh-huh" or "Hmmm" to avoid communication. Since the communication is limited, the conflict becomes less likely to occur because that is their intentions. In a long term, stonewalling is not good since the participants will have no relationship. In my screenplay, I use it in the beginning of the story when Oeibowo siblings have an awkward conversation because they are not used to it. The stonewalling process goes further into worse ignorance.

To support this theory, I will use Paul Tillich's, a German-American 'last major theologian in the nineteenth century', quote saying, "The first duty of love is to listen". Firstly, the 'listen' is related to the communication part in my subject. Listening is a very important action in communication because without listening, communication will not be successful. Secondly, the 'duty of love' can be associated with relationship. In other word, if the quote is rephrased, it will be "Good relationship starts with good communication".

For my primary research, I do a lot of observations on some families with poor communication I know, ranging from some relatives to close friends and even my own family to enrich my characters. The 10 families I observe have Chinese-Indonesian ethnicity, two or more children, and well-educated parents (at least High School graduates). After doing observation on the families, I find out that the family members have poor relationships. The parents argue by themselves and show 'contempt', the children also tend to have poor relationship toward each other and apply 'defensiveness', and finally parents and children relationship is poor because of various reasons, namely, drug abuse, gambling, and cheating. These families usually have a person, usually one of the children, who tries to unite their family. These people have the hardest hardship compared to their other family's members since they are pressured by the others. Since no one listens to them, they tend to pour their feeling to their best friends who they trust.

For the setting, I intend to make my main character's family economically strong but not necessarily very rich even though they can afford a mansion; instead, they choose to live in modest neighborhood. To build the atmosphere of my setting, I do an observation on a neighborhood I am familiar with named Rangkah Rejo in Eastern Surabaya. Rangkah Rejo is a pretty clean neighborhood and most of the residences are able to go to private schools which mean their economic condition is supposed to be decent.

For my secondary research, I gather readings on family problems and screenplay writing. I find out that most problems in family are caused by poor relationship with the four stages of family disaster in Gottman's model. I also watch some films related to my project. The readings themselves help me to learn the mechanics of family conflicts and how to make screenplay based on the knowledge. There are some good family saga movies which have been released, but some helpful ones are *The Last Brickmaker in America* (2001), *Nanny McPhee* (2005), *Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang* (2010), and *A Story of Us* (1999). These four films have helped me to make a story of messy family since all four movies have different kinds of messy families.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

My genre is family saga, a subgenre of drama, for the screenplay. Family saga genre has the element of family's life, including the harmony and struggles. Family saga genre may have single

family or multiple connected families in the story. The plot usually involves chronological series of events and multiple perspectives (Malatesta, 2013)

For the storyline, I am inspired by *The Last Brickmaker in America* (2001). The movie gives me the inspiration to use children for my story's subject. It is true that parents have the authority over a family, but children have their right as a human being to say their opinion. Other than that, my creative work is influenced by *Nanny McPhee* (2005) and its sequel, *Nanny McPhee and the Big Bang* (2010) which talk about in-family education, and *A Story of Us* (1999) which talks about parents' relationship issues. I realized that children's education is not limited to school, but also parental education. Parental education is easier to start in early childhood and as children grow older, it is harder to educate them because they think that it is too sudden (Pickhardt, 2011)

The difference between my creative work and the works I have mentioned is mainly the point of view. My creative work tends to focus on Stephanie, my main character's ways of thinking and action which makes the story subjective. She is the main and key character who will make her family members aware of the importance of family function.

In every screenplay. There are three sentences which tell the whole story briefly. The sentences are called pitch. Below, I show the pitch:

1. Stephanie is a daughter of a family with poor communication and she wants to unite her family as one.
2. However, Stephanie does not know how to do it and to make things worse, her parents and Andy, her brother, do not support her intention due to their poor communication and relationship.
3. Stephanie ends up getting support from her classmate, Agatha, and Stephanie gets what she wants: her family's reunion and improved communication and relationship even though Andy passed away in the end.

From this pitch, I develop it into 38 scenes with some montages and flashbacks included. I have written the scene-by-scene step outline in my proposal's second chapter and the next section is the brief synopsis.

CREATIVE WORK

Stephanie's (17) family has poor communication. She has awkward relationship with her brother, Andy (15). Since Andy is not going home for some days, Stephanie asks help from her mom, Ling-Ling (41), but she is busy working. Andy starts changing his clothing into Gothic-style and Stephanie has no choice but to ask help from Agatha (17), her classmate who is also her best friend. Still being responsible, Stephanie tells her parents what happened but she got blamed since she is the elder child in the house which means that she can be Andy's parents' figure if they are not around.

Stephanie starts thinking about her family's past from her childhood, where the problem had started, but not as terrible as the present days, a year before the story begins, where the family keeps having worse arguments, until a month before the story begins as a result of the family members' attitude for years. She feels sad about it, but she still wants to unite her family. She started to look for Andy in various places in Surabaya, starting from the landmarks (e.g. Malls and Plazas, City Hall) until the places where Andy usually goes (High school, some small restaurants, gym, etc). Agatha finally spots Andy in front of a night club and Stephanie approaches him the day after, but it ends with argument.

Stephanie tries to ask her parents' help again, but this time she gets ignored. Therefore, she does not give up even though she has hardship. The parents get home in a weekend and they and Stephanie end up blaming each other. A few days after that, Andreas (42) and Ling-Ling are more cooperative with Stephanie after realizing that Andy is more important than their job. They try to make time in their busy schedule and for Andy together with Stephanie, but they have no luck.

Andy appears to use drugs in the nightclub and he has been hidden by the people there. Andreas wants to check the place but the Stephanie even spots Andy shopping in a nearby minimarket, but he escapes after Stephanie notices what happened. Later, the nightclub is busted by cops and Andy has an overdose which kills him.

CONCLUSION

After finishing the creative work, I learn four things from my story: how dysfunctional family affects children, how a child should finish his problem if his family members are not supportive, how important parenting is for children, and how important family time is. From my journey of writing the screenplay, I learn how to make not only meaningful but also easy-to-understand story.

Firstly, I learn that dysfunctional family may change children's behavior. The problem may not be severe if the children keep being supportive and optimistic like Stephanie. However, the children have better chance to try to fill their emptiness in their life by committing negative things such as drug abuse in Andy's case. Children have psychological need that has to be fulfilled and it means that fulfilling their financial need is not necessarily enough to make them satisfied with their family.

Secondly, from the children's point of view, I learn that children have an important role in making his dysfunctional family functional again. In my story, it is true that Stephanie has hardship in getting her parents' cooperation to help her to find Andy, but since she never gives up, she is finally successful in getting her parents' attention since Andy is in grave danger. I also learn that family members are not the only hope in facing hardship. In fact, some family members may have ignorance or even destructive response to the child. However, that is not the end of the world since friends may be the best hope for unsupportive family. Since Stephanie's parents are too busy to help her to find Andy, she is lucky enough that her loyal best friend, Agatha willingly aids her in her parents' place.

Thirdly, I learn that parents' love is not limited to fulfill children's financial need, but also psychological need. Working parents are normal, but children need to feel their love directly. Simple actions like asking about the children's day may make the children feel their parents' love. Stephanie never feels the direct love from her parents even though they fulfill her financial needs. She is alone in the house and has no one to talk to.

Fourthly, I learn that family time is important. Every family member has daily routine whether it is going to school or work. Family time plays a great role in keeping the family's relationship close even though the members rarely meet. I notice that having a good time by not ruining precious family time is a key to gather family members in their free time. A contradictory example can be found in my screenplay when the family has a lunch in a small restaurant but the parents keep answering calls from their clients in the precious family time.

Lastly, I learn to make meaningful but simple story and create better characters. I used to make my story complicated with too many leading characters but after finishing this screenplay, I learn how to make a straightforward story so that the audience can focus on specific message in the text. For the characters, I learn how to create two-sided characters, showing their good and bad sides since no matter how good or evil a character is, they always have the opposite sides in their personality. After learning both of these story elements, my story tends to be less melodramatic.

My future plan is to find a producer who wants to make a film based on the screenplay I make. After all the effort I have done, I want this screenplay to be produced so that the audiences are aware that dysfunctional family exists in the society and there is still a hope to stop it. I do not think that I will make an adaptation of the story in form of other kinds of creative work, but this screenplay helps me to make a better story since I work as a game planner and scriptwriter in my own game developing studio. Since my studio's games are mostly story-based Role-Playing Games (RPG), I need to have a better way to build my story and characters so that the story is more enjoyable for the players and gives better value for the games since story is an important element in most RPGs. In conclusion, I want this screenplay to be converted into film, but not adapted into other kinds of creative works.

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