

Examining Personal Freedom and Society Restriction in Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society*

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Abstract

Personal freedom is fundamental human rights allowing individuals to make decisions. However, it is undeniable that in society there are society restrictions that prevent people from exercising their personal freedom. The issue between personal freedom and society restrictions is discussed in the film Dead Poets Society directed by Peter Weir. Dead Poets Society tells the story of the students who live in a restrictive preparatory school named Welton Academy. In their school, the students experience restrictions because they cannot do what they desire to do, that is why they want to break free from it. In the film the characters, like Neil, Todd, and Mr. Keating, want to exercise their personal freedom. However, their social environment, such as school, parents, and teachers, prevents them from doing so. From the analysis, I can conclude that the director has successfully highlighted a message that society restrictions and personal freedom must coexist to create balance.

Keywords: Peter Weir, *Dead Poets Society*, personal freedom, society restriction, film

Introduction

Personal freedom is basic human rights to make decision and do what people desire (Arumsari, 2023). Therefore, most people desire to have personal freedom in their lives—freedom to choose, freedom to think, and many other freedoms. However, it is undeniable that in society there are some restrictions that prevent people from exercising their personal freedom. This type of restriction can be considered as society restrictions. Society or social restriction means “the limitations imposed on individuals or groups by societal norms and values, which can dictate behavior, roles, and opportunities” (“Social Restrictions,” n.d.). Society restrictions can happen anywhere, including in a preparatory school. Based on Merriam-Webster (n.d.), preparatory school means “a usually private school preparing students primarily for college.” Students may experience society restriction in this type of school because this school provides higher expectations of the students than a regular school. For example, “students are academically pushed beyond the status quo, so they have the grades and GPA necessary to apply for elite colleges and universities” (“4 Ways That Prep School Differs from Traditional High School,” 2022). Not to mention that most of the students that are enrolled here are coming from a middle to upper social class family, making the expectations that they face much higher. According to Winterton and Irwin (as cited in Thomsen, 2023) “middle-class children are more often met with uniformly high expectations from parents, peers, and teachers...” This means that not only the school that has high expectations to the students, but so do the parents, making the students feel more restricted and controlled. The issue regarding

society restrictions that prevent people from exercising their personal freedom has been discussed in many films, one of them is a film that is going to be discussed here, entitled *Dead Poets Society* directed by Peter Weir.

Peter Lindsay Weir or better known as Peter Weir is an Australian film director and screenwriter. He was born in Sydney, Australia and has contributed a lot to Australian filmmaking. He has six Oscars nominations and he is also recognised as “a director of consummate skill and artistry whose work reminds us of the power of film to reveal the full range of human experience” (Maddox, 2022). He is known for writing and directing intelligent emotional drama movies that explore the characters’ relationship with their social environment (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.). For example, one of his most notable works, *The Truman Show* (1998) explores an individual’s fight for authenticity in a media-constructed reality world (“Peter Weir,” n.d.). Moreover, Peter Weir managed to win an Oscar from a film that he directed which explore how society restriction interfere with the preparatory school students’ personal freedom entitled *Dead Poets Society* (1989).

Dead Poets Society has been nominated in four categories in the 1990 Oscars and won the Best Writing Screenplay Written Directly for Screen. According to Hoffman (2022), “[the film] has been cited as one of the greatest inspiration films by many critics and just regular viewers, as it makes them look at the world differently.” *Dead Poets Society* is a film about teenage boys living in a conservative preparatory boarding school named Welton Academy. All their life, they have no freedom to make decision for themselves and do what they desire the most. However, their new Poetry teacher, Mr. Keating, helps them to break free from their parents and school restrictions and to gain their personal freedom.

The significance and popularity of Peter Weir as a director inspires many research based on film *Dead Poets Society*. Therefore, it is necessary to review some of the research that has been conducted on the film for the purpose of obtaining the research gap. Some focus on the main protagonist in the film. The journal conducted by Muro (2018) analyzes the portrayal of masculinity and identity in the three main protagonists of the film through the four sites – the body, the action, the internal world, and the external world. This study reveals that the development of the characters and Mr. Keating’s role in it are portrayed in different ways in the four sites. The four sites have also found the characters’ truest personality. Meanwhile, a journal by Qaniu et al. (2024) discusses the moral values that are portrayed by the main characters in the film. The study reveals that the characters portrayed here displays the importance of freedom of thought and self-expression. It also emphasizes the value of standing up to pressures and following’s one conscience, the significance of friendship and solidarity, and the importance in embracing uniqueness and individuality in the journey of self-identity.

Another research, a thesis conducted by Rumaria (2015), focuses more on analyzing the speech act that one of the protagonists in the film, Mr. Keating, performs in his teaching in the film. The study reveals that Mr. Keating is a good teacher as reflected from the speech act that he performs in *Dead Poets Society*.

There is also another research by Anam and Thoyibi (2023) which focuses on identifying and elaborating the issue about freedom of self-expression in the film with an Existentialist point of view. The researchers use dialogues and monologues in the film to analyze it. This study reveals that the movie depicts many kinds of freedom of self-expression as implied in the elements of the movie.

Based on the literature review above, there has been no research using the film that focuses on analyzing the aspect of society restriction that the characters experience in exercising their personal freedom. There is also no research that analyzes the film's cinematography and mise-en-scène. Therefore, this research could fill the research gap by analyzing the society restriction that the characters experience in exercising their personal freedom in the film through the visual aspects such as the cinematography and mise-en-scène to further analyze it.

Method

In analyzing the scenes, this research is conducted using formalism approach. According to Brewton (n.d.) formalism means “an interpretive approach that emphasizes literary form and the study of literary devices within the text.” Since the information and data that need to be analyzed already exist in the film itself, it is best to use this approach.

This research is also conducted using qualitative approach, specifically content analysis, which focuses on identifying the events happening in a “text” and analyzing them to know the deeper meaning behind it (Smith, 2017). The text that is used in this research is the film *Dead Poets Society* itself. The visual and the audio aspect in the form of dialogue of the film will also support the analysis.

The first visual aspect is the cinematography of the film. Cinematography is the art on the ability to use the camera to film a scene, so it is related to the use of camera: types of camera, lenses, camera distances, and positions in producing a film (Sutandio, 2020, p. 144). There are three aspects in cinematography which include shot sizes, camera angles, and camera movements (Sutandio, 2020, p. 145). Shot sizes means “how much of the setting or subject is displayed within a given frame of a video, photo, or animation, hence the scope or size of the shot” (Lannom, 2025). Besides, shot sizes are categorized to eight, which is extreme long shot, long shot, medium long shot, medium shot, medium close-up, close-up, big close-up, and extreme close-up (Sutandio, 2020, p. 146).

The other visual aspect of the film that I am going to analyze is the mise-en-scène of the film. Mise-en-scène is derived from French which means “to be placed inside a frame/stage” (Sutandio, 2020, p. 160). It is then adopted to the film industry by the filmmakers, which means it is how the director uses the space inside an individual shot to create a dramatic and emotional effect, or to give symbolism in the film (Sutandio, 2020, p. 160). This refers to the set design, property, costume, facial expression, body language, lighting, framing, and depth of space inside the film frame to create a meaning for the audience (Sutandio, 2020, pp. 160-179).

Furthermore, the audio aspects in the film will also help to analyze. In this case, it is in a form of dialogue. Dialogue is the words that the characters inside the film utter. Dialogue can be used to shape a character or the relationship of a character with the other. Both what the character said and how the character said it are very important in the context of the characterization and the plot development in a film (Sutandio, 2020, p. 187).

Results and Discussions

In this section, I would like to analyze several scenes in the film that shows the different stances between the characters in regards of personal freedom and society restriction. At the beginning, some students in Mr. Keating's English class, namely Todd Anderson and Neil Perry, are living under restrictions, but as Mr. Keating shows up and teaches the concept of seizing the day, they begin wanting to break free from the restrictions they experience and to exercise their personal freedom. However, in the midst of doing that,

they face many struggles and oppositions caused by society restrictions that is represented by the students themselves, the parents, and the school, which prevent them from exercising their personal freedom.

The first scene that shows the clash between personal freedom and society restriction happens when two of the major characters, Neil Perry and Todd Anderson, have an argument. After learning the concept of seizing the day from Mr. Keating and successfully exercising his personal freedom by reviving the club Mr. Keating mentioned to the students, Neil brings a flyer about an audition for a play to his room. Neil, who finds out that his passion is acting, wants to audition for a play and tells Todd about it. The scene happens after Neil proceeds to say that he will audition for the play even if his father disagrees, implying that he will not tell his father about the audition he is going to do. However, Todd disagrees with him because if he does not, his father would be mad at him. This can be seen in the following dialogue:

TODD. Neil, Neil, hold on. How are you gonna be in a play if your father won't let you?

NEIL. First I gotta get the part, then I can worry about that.

TODD. Won't he kill you if he finds out you went to an audition and didn't tell him?

NEIL. No, no, no, no. As far as I'm concerned, he won't have to know about any of this.

TODD. That's impossible.

NEIL. Bullshit, nothing's impossible.

TODD. Why don't you just call him and ask him? Maybe he'll say yes.

NEIL. That's a laugh. If I don't ask him, at least I won't be disobeying him.

TODD. Yeah, but if he said no—

NEIL. Jesus, Todd, whose side are you on?

[silent for a few seconds]

NEIL. I mean, I haven't even gotten the part yet. Can't I even enjoy the idea for a little while? [silent] (Weir, 1989, 00:46:25-00:47:12)

The dialogue above shows how Neil, who has found his passion in acting, is trying to exercise his personal freedom by trying to go to the audition even without his father's permission. As such, Neil represents personal freedom because he wants to break free from all the restrictions his father has given him his whole life. Right in this moment, he has the will and chance to do it, so he wants to take it. On the contrary, Todd's disagreement with Neil's decision shows that he is still restricted by his parents' and school's expectations of him to be a good and responsible student, which is following rules and has good grades. Thus, in this scene, Todd is projecting his own belief to Neil and strongly suggests Neil to tell his father about the audition. In this scene, Todd represents society restriction because by projecting his own belief, he prevents Neil from exercising his personal freedom.



Figure 1. Todd does not agree with Neil’s decision to audition without his father knowing and suggests to just tell Neil’s father about it
Source: Weir, 1989, 00:46:38



Figure 2. Neil does not want to do that because he knows his father will disagree
Source: Weir, 1989, 00:46:40

The cinematography of this scene can further support the conflicting ideas between Neil and Todd. Both figures use shot-reverse-shot, which is a technique “that takes two separate shots—usually a medium or a close-up—and cuts them together to appear as if a continuous conversation is happening” (Fraser, 2023). The use of shot-reverse-shot here shows that they are talking while facing each other. This shows that Neil and Todd are arguing about telling Neil’s father about the audition Neil wants to do. Moreover, both figures use medium close-up shot, which is a shot used to emphasize certain expressions or emotions from the subject who is being filmed (Sutandio, 2020, p. 150). It can be seen that both Neil’s and Todd’s expressions are visible here. In this scene, Todd is seen to patronize Neil because of his decision not to tell his father about the audition, as Todd thinks that Neil cannot audition without his father’s permission. Todd’s behaviour and expression here show that he is condescending towards Neil. On the contrary, Neil is seen offended by Todd’s disagreement because he expects Todd to support his decision since Todd is his friend.

Both of their facial expressions are shown in the *mise-en-scène* in both figures. In figure 1, Todd is seen smirking, showing that he is condescending towards Neil. When someone is condescending or patronizing another person, they are smirking (“Character Trait: Condescending,” 2023). Opposite with Todd, Neil is seen offended at Todd’s disagreement because he expects Todd to support his decision. It can be seen from his

eyebrow that is lowered and put together. According to Cuncic (n.d.), when someone is angry, they are often seen lowering and knitting together their eyebrows. The difference between Todd and Neil's expressions here further shows the opposing ideas that Neil and Todd have regarding Neil's decision to audition without telling his father about it.

The other *mise-en-scène* aspect in figures 1 and 2 also supports the different stances between Neil and Todd. Both figures use shallow space, which is a technique of filming that places an object in the frame without giving any depth to the object (Sutandio, 2020, p. 181). As can be seen from both figures, Neil and Todd are placed in front of a wall, which makes them look trapped in the frame. This can be interpreted that both of them are still trapped and restricted by their school's and parents' expectations on them. However, the distance of the wall between the two characters is different. It can be seen, in figure 2, the distance of the wall from Neil is much wider than Todd in figure 1. This shows that Neil is ready to break free from the school and his parents' restriction on him, and finally exercise his personal freedom to pursue his passion in acting. This can be seen from Neil's decision to audition for a play without telling his father. On the contrary, the distance of the wall from Todd in figure 1 is much closer than Neil because Todd is leaning to the wall. This shows that Todd is still restricted by his parents' and school's expectations of him. That is why, he projects his own belief to Neil by disagreeing with Neil's decision. Furthermore, the way Todd is sitting down in figure 1, while Neil is standing up in figure 2, also shows that Todd is still restricted, but Neil is ready to break free from all the restrictions he experiences and exercise his personal freedom. Moreover, the difference between the distance of the wall and the position of both of the characters in both figures also show the opposing ideas between the two characters.



Figure 3. Neil eventually goes to the audition without telling his father

Source: Weir, 1989, 00:52:24

In the end, Neil goes to the audition without telling his father about it. Afterwards, he manages to get the part and announces it to all of his friends in the dorm. However, in order to participate in the play he needs to write a letter of permission that is supposed to be written by Mr. Nolan, the school principal, and his father, which can be seen in figure 11. This can also be seen in the dialogue below:

TODD. Neil, how are you gonna do this?

NEIL. They need a letter of permission from my father and Mr. Nolan.

TODD. You're not gonna write it.

NEIL. Oh, yes, I am. (Weir, 1989, 00:52:21-00:52:32)

This shows that Neil has successfully exercised his personal freedom by pursuing his passion for acting and decides to go to the audition without telling his father about it. Neil's decision here may represent how in order to exercise one's personal freedom in a society that puts restrictions on people, one may not be able to do it openly due to the opposition from others. This can be proven by how Neil can pursue his passion for acting but he needs to do it without his father knowing, and in the midst of doing that he faces opposition from Todd, as well as his father if he were to tell him. That is why, he writes the letter of permission for the play himself, even though his father and Mr. Nolan should be the ones who write it.

The cinematography further proves this. Figure 3 uses medium close-up shot to emphasize certain expressions or movements from the characters. According to Lannom (2020), "the idea of a medium close-up shot is that you can still easily register the actor's emotions and facial expressions while also retaining some of the background." It can be seen that in figure 3, Neil is writing a letter of permission to participate in the play himself, even though the letter is addressed to his father and Mr. Nolan. This means that Neil decides to audition for the play without his father knowing. It also further proves that in order to exercise one's personal freedom, one may not be able to do it openly. This can be seen in figure 3 when Neil is seen smiling while typing the letter, which implies that he manages to exercise his personal freedom by auditioning for the play and getting the part. However, in order to do that, he needs to do it in secrecy without his father knowing.

The second scene focuses on the argument between the principal, Mr. Nolan and the English teacher, Mr. Keating. After seeing Mr. Keating teach the student in an unusual way, Mr. Nolan confronts Mr. Keating about his teaching method. The scene happens after Mr. Nolan asks Mr. Keating about what he sees the other day when Mr. Keating is teaching in the courtyard instead of in the classroom. They argue about how they perceive the purpose of education. Mr. Nolan wants Mr. Keating to just follow the curriculum that has been proven to work for years in teaching the students in Welton instead of doing what Mr. Keating has done. However, Mr. Keating does not want to do that and disagrees with Mr. Nolan because he thinks that the idea of education is to learn to think for oneself. This can be seen in the following dialogue:

MR. NOLAN. What was going on in the courtyard the other day?

MR. KEATING. Courtyard?

MR. NOLAN. Yeah, boys marching, clapping in unison.

MR. KEATING. Oh, that. That was an exercise to prove a point. Dangers of conformity.

MR. NOLAN. Well, John, the curriculum here is set. It's proven, it works. If you question it, what's to prevent them from doing the same?

MR. KEATING. I thought the idea of education was to learn to think for yourself.

MR. NOLAN. At these boys' age? Not on your life. (Weir, 1989, 01:19:30-01:19:49)

This dialogue shows their two contrasting ideas about how they see the purpose of education. Mr. Keating, who represents personal freedom, leans more towards giving the students the freedom to think and choose for themselves. He implies that the students need to be able to exercise their personal freedom and be their authentic selves. Meanwhile, Mr. Nolan represents the society restriction that prevents the students from exercising their personal freedom at Welton. He thinks that at the students' age, all they need to do is to follow the rules and traditions that have been implemented for years in the school. He argues that the students need to be disciplined so that in the end they can

all be successful according to society's standards. He thinks that their job as a teacher is just to prepare the students for college.



Figure 4. Mr. Keating thinks that the purpose of education is to think for oneself
Source: Weir, 1989, 01:19:38



Figure 5. Mr. Nolan questioned Mr. Keating's teaching method
Source: Weir, 1989, 01:19:40

The cinematography of the scene can further support the argument happening between Mr. Keating and Mr. Nolan. Both figures use over the shoulder shot, which is a shot that shows two characters having a dialogue while standing up or sitting face to face with each other (Sutandio, 2020, p. 149). This shows that they are having an argument regarding their different stances about the purpose of education. Moreover, figure 4 uses medium close-up shot, which is a shot used to emphasize certain expressions or emotions from the subject who is being filmed (Sutandio, 2020, p. 150). Meanwhile, figure 5 uses medium shot, which is defined as a shot that showcases almost all of the character's body so that the audience can see the physiological and psychological aspects of the characters through their actions (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). It can be seen that Mr. Keating and Mr. Nolan's expressions are visible in both figures. In figure 4, Mr. Keating is seen happily telling his view about the purpose of education to Mr. Nolan; he is confident that the purpose of education is for the students to think for themselves, and he values his own opinion. On the contrary, Mr. Nolan is seen condescending Mr. Keating about his perspective on the purpose of education by looking down at him. He thinks that Mr. Keating's view is invalid because the system is already proven to work, so all the students

need to do is to just follow the rules and traditions that have already been implemented. This can be seen in one of the *mise-en-scène* aspects which is facial expression. It can be seen in figure 4, Mr. Keating is seen smiling a little at Mr. Nolan, indicating that he values his own view about the purpose of education and is happy to tell it to Mr. Nolan. It is said that “When we have a great smile, it shows that we value ourselves” (“The Psychology of Smiling: How Good Teeth Can Boost Confidence,” n.d.). On the contrary, in figure 5, Mr. Nolan is seen raising his eyebrows and tilting his head, which shows that he is condescending Mr. Keating’s opinion about his perspective on the purpose of education. When someone is condescending, they raise their eyebrows and tilt their head (“Character Trait: Condescending,” 2023). The difference between Mr. Keating and Mr. Nolan’s expressions here further shows the opposing ideas that they both have regarding the purpose of education.

The other *mise-en-scène* aspects can also further prove the different stances happening between the two characters. Figure 4 uses tight framing, which is “a shot in which there is little visible space around the main subject(s)” (“Tight Framing,” n.d.). This shows that Mr. Keating cannot freely express his opinion or view about the purpose of education. He is cornered by Mr. Nolan regarding his view because Mr. Nolan thinks that in Welton that is not how it works. The curriculum is already set in Welton and it has also already proven to work, so Mr. Nolan forces Mr. Keating to just simply follow the rules and tradition here. On the contrary, figure 5 uses loose framing, which in film is defined as “...a shot in which there is plenty of visible space around the main subject(s). Loose framing emphasizes a subject’s freedom of movement...” (“Loose Framing,” 2021). This shows that even though Mr. Nolan’s opinion about the purpose of education is restricting the students to do what they want, he has more freedom because he is in an environment that supports his view, so he has more of a say regarding how things should work in Welton.



Figure 6. Mr. Nolan insists that Mr. Keating just prepare the students for college
Source: Weir, 1989, 01:19:53

In the end, even though Mr. Nolan tells Mr. Keating that he should just prepare the students for college, Mr. Keating still stands on his ground with his belief about education that the students should think for themselves. Mr. Nolan also still stands on his ground about his belief that the students should just follow the rules and traditions that have been implemented in Welton so that the students can be disciplined and in the end be successful according to society’s standards. This can be seen from the following dialogue:

MR. NOLAN. Tradition, John. Discipline. Prepare them for college and the rest will take care of itself. [silent] (Weir, 1989, 01:19:50-01:19:59)

The silence from Mr. Keating and Mr. Nolan leaving after he states the dialogue above shows that both characters do not let go of their beliefs. This may indicate that both beliefs are important and have their own justification. Mr. Keating's belief is important because it allows the students to be themselves and be authentic. Meanwhile, what Mr. Nolan believes in is also important because when the students enter the bigger society, the society also has its own standard for success. Thus, he wants the students to be successful according to society standards.

The cinematography of the scene can also further prove this. Figure 6 uses medium close-up shot, which is a shot used to emphasize certain expressions or emotions from the subject who is being filmed (Sutandio, 2020, p. 150). It can be seen here that both of the characters' expressions are visible. Mr. Nolan is seen a little angry while insisting that Mr. Keating just prepare the students for college and nothing more. On the contrary, Mr. Keating is just standing straight there listening to Mr. Nolan without agreeing nor disagreeing with Mr. Nolan's request, implying that Mr. Keating is confident in his own belief. This can be seen from one of the *mise-en-scène* aspects, which is facial expression and body language. In figure 6, Mr. Nolan is seen to furrow his eyebrows and make intense eye contact, indicating that he is a little angry while insisting that Mr. Keating follow his belief. It is said that "...intense eye contact [and] furrowed brows...are facial signs of anger" ("What Does Angry Body Language Look Like?," n.d.). On the contrary, Mr. Keating is seen to be standing straight and making eye contact with Mr. Nolan, which implies that Mr. Keating is confident about his own beliefs and that he will not be swayed by other people's opinions about it. According to Cuncic (n.d.), when someone is confident, they maintain eye contact and stand up straight. The difference between both of their expressions and demeanour here further shows that their argument is not solved because both of them are still keeping their beliefs about the purpose of education. Mr. Nolan still thinks that the students need to follow the rules and tradition in Welton, while Mr. Keating still believes that the students need to be able to think for themselves and not for others.

The third scene focuses on Neil and his father. After Neil's performance in the play and his father finds out about it, he forces Neil to come home with him. In his home, Neil's father is very disappointed in Neil and tries to understand why Neil defies both of his parents. Neil's father then decides to withdraw Neil from Welton so that he can focus on his future career as a doctor and forget about his passion for acting. However, Neil wants to stay in Welton and wants his father to listen to him about his passion for acting. This can be seen in the following dialogue:

NEIL'S FATHER. We're trying very hard to understand why it is that you insist on defying us. Whatever the reason, we're not gonna let you ruin your life. Tomorrow I'm withdrawing you from Welton and enrolling you in Braden Military School. You're going to Harvard and you're gonna be a doctor.

NEIL. But that's 10 more years. Father, that's a lifetime.

NEIL'S FATHER. Oh, stop it. Don't be so dramatic. You make it sound like a prison term. You don't understand, Neil. You have opportunities that I never even dreamt of. I am not going to let you waste them.

NEIL. I've got to tell you what I feel.

NEIL'S FATHER. What? What? Tell me what you feel. What is it?
[silence]

NEIL'S FATHER. Is it more of this—? This acting business? Because you can forget that. (Weir, 1989, 01:40:15-01:41:18)

The dialogue above shows that Neil's father is representing society restriction by preventing Neil from exercising his personal freedom. Neil's father has already been fed up with Neil's defiance; he has sacrificed a lot for Neil to be able to enrol in Welton. Thus, whether Neil likes it or not, his father will enrol him in a different school so that Neil can focus on the future career that his father has decided for him. This shows that Neil's father is the dominant one in this scene. On the contrary, Neil is representing personal freedom by wanting to pursue his passion for acting. Neil's refusal to be withdrawn from Welton by his father and his insistence to tell his father about what he truly wants to do shows that he still wants to exercise his personal freedom, so he fights for it.



Figure 7. Neil's father is trying to understand why Neil keep defying him
Source: Weir, 1989, 01:40:16



Figure 8. Neil's father tells Neil that he will withdraw him from Welton and that he can forget about his passion on acting
Source: Weir, 1989, 01:40:45



Figure 9. Neil refuses his father; he wants to stay in Welton, and he wants his father to listen to him about what he truly feels
Source: Weir, 1989, 01:40:51

The cinematography of this scene can further prove the conflicting ideas between Neil and his father. Figure 7 uses medium long shot, which is a shot that showcases almost all of the character's body so that the audience can see the physiological and psychological aspects of the character through their actions (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). In this figure, it is seen that Neil is sitting while his father is standing up, which proves that both of them have a different stance in regards of Neil's future. It is also said that standing up while the other person is sitting can be an act of asserting dominance ("Body Language of Dominance," n.d.). This proves that Neil's father is the dominant figure in this scene while Neil is the weaker one.

Both figures 8 and 9 use shot-reverse-shot, which is a technique "that takes two separate shots—usually a medium or a close-up—and cuts them together to appear as if a continuous conversation is happening" (Fraser, 2023). This further shows that Neil and his father are having an argument about their different stance on the scene between them about Neil's future. Moreover, figures 8 and 9 use medium close-up shot to emphasize certain expressions or emotions from the subject who is being filmed (Sutandio, 2020, p. 150). It can be seen that Neil's and his father's expressions are visible in both figures. In figure 8, Neil's father is seen angry at Neil for defying him, so he forces Neil to enrol in another school. On the contrary, in figure 9 Neil is seen getting up from his seat and pleading to his father to listen to him about what he truly feels and wants to do.

Both Neil's father and Neil's expressions can be seen through the *mise-en-scène* aspect of both figures, which is facial expression. In figure 8, Neil's father is seen tensing his lips and jaw, furrowing his eyebrow a little, and showing his teeth, which indicates that he is angry at Neil at this moment. According to Song et al. (2021), "anger could be described as... furrowed brows, tense jaws and lips, [and] the showing of teeth..." Anger itself can be identify as a dominant characteristic. According to Hareli et al. (as cited in Cabral & de Almeida, n.d.), "Individuals expressing anger are perceived as more dominant than those expressing other emotions or in neutral situations." This further proves that Neil's father is the dominant figure here in this scene. Meanwhile, it can be seen in figure 9, Neil is lifting his inner brow. It is said that "one very strong and reliable sign of sadness is the angling-up of the inner corners of the eyebrows" ("Sadness," n.d.). This indicates that he feels sad by his father's decision to withdraw him from Welton and enrol him in another school. Thus, he pleads sadly to his father to listen to what he truly

feels and wants to do. Moreover, their contrasting facial expressions further show the opposing ideas that they both have regarding Neil's future.



Figure 10. Neil realizes that there is no chance his father will listen to him, so he gives up and sits back down

Source: Weir, 1989, 01:41:32



Figure 11. Neil is staring at the gun he found in his father's drawer

Source: Weir, 1989, 01:45:51



Figure 12. Neil's hand is seen laying on the ground with a gun beside it, indicating that Neil has shoot the gun at himself

Source: Weir, 1989, 01:47:20

In the end, seeing his father being so dismissive about his passion, Neil realizes that his father will not listen to him, so he gives up on trying to tell his father about what he truly feels and wants to do. This can be seen from the dialogue below:

NEIL'S FATHER. What? [silence]

NEIL. Nothing.

NEIL'S FATHER. Nothing? Well, then, let's go to bed. (Weir, 1989, 01:41:19-01:41:32)

Afterward, Neil's father tells Neil to go to sleep, but he does not do what his father said. Instead, he decides to find a gun in his father's office drawer and shoot it at himself. This shows Neil's feeling of hopelessness because he may not be able to exercise his personal freedom anymore if he does what his father wants him to do. As can be seen from the dialogue above and figure 10, he feels hopeless due to the fact that he cannot exercise his personal freedom anymore. That is why, he decides to shoot himself with a gun as an act of freeing himself from the restriction his father has imposed on him all his life. Neil's decision here shows that if people's personal freedom is being put under too much restriction, they may feel the need to fully escape it by doing an unthinkable act, such as suicide. In this scene, Neil's father is constantly denying Neil's right to exercise his personal freedom because he refuses to understand and does not give Neil a chance to express what he truly feels and wants to do. For that reason, in the end, Neil decides to commit suicide.

The cinematography and *mise-en-scène* can further prove this. Figure 10 uses medium shot, which is a shot that showcases almost all of the character's body, so that the audience can see the physiological and psychological aspects of the character through their actions (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). A medium shot specifically is a shot that makes the audience interact with the characters on a personal level (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). The use of medium shot here is to show that Neil is sitting down again after his confrontation with his father, which shows that he is giving up to tell his father about his feeling. This shot is also used to convey Neil's sadness and hopelessness to the audience because he will not be able to do what he is most passionate about, which is acting. This can be seen from the *mise-en-scène* aspects which are body language and facial expression. Sadness can be indicated when the person lowers their eyes and head, hunch over, and their eyelids and mouth are drooping ("Sadness," n.d.). In this figure, Neil is seen lowering his eyes and head, hunching over a bit, and his eyes and mouth are drooping, which indicates that he is sad.

In figure 11, it uses medium long shot to also showcase almost all of the character's body so that the audience can see the physiological and psychological aspects of the character through their actions (Sutandio, 2020, p. 148). As Bedard (2024) said, medium long shot is "...also useful for keeping...character[s] in the frame while also revealing information about their setting." It can be seen in figure 11, Neil sits in his father's office room in the dark while looking down at the gun that is covered in fabric on the table in front of him. This shows that Neil is preparing himself to do an action that cannot be undone, which is suicide.

Meanwhile, in *mise-en-scène* aspects, it can be seen here that Neil is almost naked. According to Redmond (as cited in Biddlecombe, n.d.), "There is something ultimately freeing and grounding about being yourself in your truest form of nature." This shows that by being half naked, Neil wants to free himself from all the restrictions he experiences from his parents. Furthermore, figure 11 also uses motivated lighting, which is a technique to mimic natural light sources, such as the sun, moon, and many others

(Sutandio, 2020, p. 170). According to Deguzman (2021), “[This technique] also creates more cinematic lighting styles with more depth and contrast.” It can be seen in figure 11, there is a light coming from the windows that shines on Neil in the room. It mimics moonlight that shines in the night through the window. It creates a clear depth and contrast between Neil, who is shined through by the moon, and his surroundings, which is very dark. Forceville and Renckens (2013) said that darkness sometimes can “...evokes...unhappiness...” This can mean at that scene Neil is surrounded by unhappiness. He knows that if he stays and does what his father wants him to do, which is enrolling in another school to become a doctor, his life will not be happy. That is why, he decides to commit suicide. The darkness in this figure can also be interpreted as the reflection of Neil’s state of mind that is already clouded with darkness, which makes him decide to commit suicide.

Meanwhile, figure 12 uses close-up shot to “signal...the audience that something is important, and this can be a prop or reaction” (“Close-Up Shots: Examples of Camera Movement & Angles,” 2022). In figure 12, it can be seen that Neil’s hand is on the ground and there is a gun beside him, which indicates that Neil has committed suicide by shooting himself. The close-up shot emphasizes Neil’s action on this scene which further proves that when people’s personal freedom is being put under too much restriction, they may feel the need to fully escape it by doing an unthinkable act, such as suicide. Moreover, Neil’s action can be interpreted as him finally free from the restrictions that his parents and the school put on him.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that first, people who want to exercise their personal freedom may get oppositions from the society that they are in. This is shown from how the characters in the scenes like Todd, Neil, and Mr. Keating are struggling to exercise their personal freedom in the film because of their own struggle, their friends, Mr. Nolan, and their parents that restrict them.

Second, Peter Weir has succeeded in highlighting a message that society restriction and personal freedom must coexist in balance, which can be seen from the second scene between Mr. Nolan and Mr. Keating. It is shown with how the argument ends with both of them not agreeing with each other and still firmly standing on their own beliefs. The film also shows when one dominates the other, it will only cause problems and conflicts between people. In the movie, it is shown in the first scene when Todd and Neil argue because of their different stances in regards of Neil auditioning for the play, and in the third scene where Neil decides to end his own life when his father does not want to listen to what he truly wants to do, which is to act.

The film has managed to discuss and portray an important issue that is still relevant today, even though this film is set in the 1950s and was released in 1989. For instance, some schools and parents can be too restrictive to their students and/or children to the point where they cannot do anything they are passionate about. As a result, the children are not able to explore their curiosity and passions, and this sometimes makes them want to break free leading to their rebellious actions just like the students in the film. This can harm both sides and create more problems in the future. That is why allowing people to have the freedom to explore their passions while maintaining a reasonable amount of restriction is important. I believe this is what makes this film worth watching and analyzing, as it becomes a reminder that sometimes rebellious actions come from an

excessive restriction that people put on someone, so both society restriction and personal freedom must coexist together to create balance in life.

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