

Beyond delinquency: The portrayal and perceptions of troubled young students in Steve (2025)

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Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of troubled young students and the societal and institutional perceptions of them in the film *Steve* (2025). It aims to show that troubled young students do not entirely lack the qualities needed for their personal development and that perceptions of them can be reductive. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method using a multimodal approach. It draws on the theoretical framework of Petrie and Boggs's (2022) characterization, supported by Goffman's (1963) concepts of actual vs virtual identity, and the cinematography concept by Barsam and Monahan (2015) to investigate how the film cinematically depicts the selected issues. The results reveal that there is a discrepancy between the portrayal of the troubled young students and the perceptions of them. They are portrayed as complex individuals whose negative and positive traits coexist. Meanwhile, society perceives them as socially undesirable, educational authorities perceive them as incapable of change, and family perceives them as an emotional liability. In conclusion, these findings disclose how societal and institutional perceptions are predominantly reductive, thereby underscoring the importance of nuanced portrayals of troubled young students in cinema to move beyond deleterious assumptions that these students are inherently and entirely delinquent.

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals who display socially unacceptable behavior are frequently regarded and treated negatively. Their identities tend to be solely associated with their problematic actions, which limits the understanding of who they are. This brings into the discussion whether external perceptions reflect their identities. *Steve* (Mielants, 2025) addresses such an issue by offering insight into the lives of troubled young students in a reform boarding school. Although a teacher named Steve plays the main character, troubled young students are the primary object of analysis because the issues explored are manifested through them. The film explores how society and institutions

perceive the students differently from the teachers and school staff who appear to view them as requiring special educational care, while also suggesting that they possess positive qualities. This then raises the question of whether society and institutions' perceptions in the film objectively reflect who the students truly are and whether they are entirely bad. The ways they are portrayed provide a deeper comprehension of their character. Portrayals in film provide audiences with the means to understand individuals or a particular group, enabling them to hold a crucial capacity to influence society and increase awareness (Acquaye, 2022; Mittmann et al., 2024; Moazzam & Yousaf, 2023). This thus underscores how troubled young students' portrayal plays an

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important role in foregrounding their personal depth and complexity.

Troubled young people refer to underage individuals who display behavioural problems and emotional disturbance, which include substance use, violence, and mental disorders (Gagnon, 2022). The issues they have result in them being seen as at-risk young people who need professional intervention to supervise them and to regulate their behavior (Deakin et al., 2022). Within educational settings, these individuals are referred to as troubled young students. Reform schools serve as a crucial facilitation to nurture troubled young students by providing them with special educational care (Souverein et al., 2022). Although such facilitation is provided, their intricate needs to effectively foster their growth and reduce their delinquent behavior have often been difficult to appropriately meet (April et al., 2023). This may occur due to the disproportionate treatment where institutional and societal support is frequently withdrawn. The conditions that position them as a threat, a burden, or a challenge to society substantially influence other individuals to properly address them by narrowing who they are to such labels. Consequently, the lack of an apt approach to troubled young students becomes a hindrance to fully acknowledging their complexity and thus neglecting their potential for improvement.

Perceptions towards troubled young students may be reductive when individuals lack personal acquaintance that allows substantive interactions directly with them. This occurs because individuals frequently perceive certain groups that they deem to deviate from what they consider to be acceptable by solely focusing on their differences, leading to negative, biased perceptions (Woitzel & Alves, 2024). These perceptions include how troubled young students are perceived to have insufficient capacity to change their delinquency, which continuously poses danger and adverse impacts on society (Gultom & Subroto, 2023). When such perceptions are reinforced persistently, they can be detrimental and considerably influence how individuals act towards troubled young students. They can be subjected to marginalizing treatment, where access to their necessities and rights is limited or is deprived of them. This problem then draws

attention to the importance of understanding troubled young students beyond negative perceptions that confine their identities.

This study employs the characterization theory proposed by Petrie and Boggs (2022) using characterization through dialogue, characterization through appearance, and characterization through reactions of other characters. These approaches allow an in-depth and nuanced analysis of the troubled young students' character. In particular, characterization through reactions of other characters serves as an indirect characterization that offers an effective lens to analyse how society and institutions perceive the students. Goffman's (1963) concepts of actual vs virtual social identity are also used to examine the discrepancy between the students' actual identities and the identities others impose on them. The cinematography concept proposed by Barsam and Monahan (2015) is additionally employed to examine how the film visually represents the portrayal and perceptions of the students. Therefore, these frameworks enable this study to examine the discrepancy between how the troubled young students are portrayed and how they are perceived by institutions and society in the film.

Although no prior study of *Steve* has been conducted, several films with similar narratives have been analysed by various scholars. A study by U. Hani and A. T. N. Azzahra (Hani & Azzahra, 2024) investigates how racial discrimination is reflected in *Freedom Writers* (2007). They found that racial discrimination is reflected through individual and institutional discrimination, resulting in prejudice and violence among the troubled young students. Meanwhile, M. N. Izzati and Sumayah (Izzati & Sumayah, 2022) investigate how *Short Term 12* (2013) depicts anxiety and defense mechanisms. Their study found that anxiety is depicted as the result of the characters' past traumatic experiences, with repression, displacement, denial, and sublimation as their defense mechanisms. S. Z. Z. Nurjono, Y. Larasati, C. D. Johan, and T. Supriyadi (Nurjono et al., 2025) investigate how young students' delinquent behavior and the psychological implications are represented within *Galaksi* (2023). They found that juvenile delinquency is represented through physical, psychological,

verbal, and sexual violence, while C. P. Maharani and L. E. Rahmawati (Maharani & Rahmawati, 2025) found that the representation of juvenile delinquency constructs the students as inherently delinquent.

Based on previous research studies, troubled young students have been discussed through different approaches by exploring their representation and their behavioral and psychological problems. However, none of the studies have discussed troubled young students by exploring their personal complexity and external perceptions. This study thus addresses the remaining gap by examining the portrayal of troubled young students alongside the societal and institutional perceptions of them to reveal the discrepancy between these perspectives, specifically in the film *Steve*. It aims to show that troubled young students do not entirely lack the qualities needed for their personal development, with an analysis of perceptions towards them to disclose the reductive or superficial judgment of their character. Therefore, this study formulated two research questions: How are troubled young students portrayed in the film *Steve* (2025)? and How are troubled young students perceived by society and institutions in the film? By contrasting the complex portrayal of troubled young students with reductive societal and institutional perceptions, *Steve* suggests that positive traits and delinquent behavior can coexist within troubled young students, thereby demonstrating that delinquency does not completely define their character. This study is thus important for educational and societal awareness that all young people require sufficient support and guidance to develop and utilize their potential properly regardless of their conditions.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive method with a multimodal approach. Qualitative descriptive is a methodology that utilizes a significant amount of data to substantiate the findings (Fitria et al., 2023). It is a straightforward and flexible approach that highlights direct descriptions and remains closely aligned with the data (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024) and is employed to produce precise, systematic, and factual

descriptions regarding the issue being analysed, as it allows a detailed and comprehensive examination (Furidha, 2023). A multimodal approach is used to integrate textual and visual elements of analysis to answer the research questions (Sidabutar et al., 2025), specifically focusing on the dialogues of the characters and the visual representations taken from the film.

In conducting the research procedure, several steps are taken. First, the film *Steve* is thoroughly watched multiple times to gain a profound understanding of the narrative and the characters within the film. Second, the data are collected by identifying important pieces of evidence through certain scenes from the film. The scenes selected for analysis are those considered relevant to the research questions of this study, particularly those containing dialogues, character appearances, reactions, and cinematic elements that directly contribute to addressing the research objectives. Third, the existing data are meticulously reviewed to gather the information that are pertinent to the research topic. This data collection is deemed adequate when further viewing of the film no longer produces additional scenes that provide new and applicable analysis. It is determined based on the relevance of the identified data. Fourth, the data selected are then systematically organised to complete the data finalization before the analytical process. The reliability of the interpretation is ensured by grounding the analysis in the data, consistently implementing this study's theoretical framework, and aligning the interpretation with the research questions.

Furthermore, this study is theoretically grounded in the characterization theory proposed by Petrie and Boggs (2022) to effectively guide the analysis and interpretation in answering the research questions. First, characterization through dialogue and characterization through appearance are employed to analyse the portrayal of troubled young students. It is done by closely examining the students, namely Riley, Shy, Nabeel, Jamie, Benny, Tarone, and Ash. As two other students named Cal and Paul appear in the film with not enough data for analysis, the examination focuses only on the seven previously mentioned students because their data are sufficiently relevant and provide adequate evidence for the analysis.

Second, characterization through the reactions of other characters is employed to examine the perceptions of troubled young students that society and institutions, including educational authorities and the family, perpetuate within the film. In addition, Goffman's (1963) concepts of actual and virtual identity are employed to further interpret the discrepancy between the students' actual character and how they are perceived by society and institutions. Barsam and Monahan's (2015) cinematography concept is applied by examining the cinematic elements in the film to support the issues being analysed, focusing on characters for whom such visual techniques are most evident.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study reveals a discrepancy between the true character of troubled young students and the ways they are perceived in Steve. They are portrayed as complex individuals whose positive and negative traits coexist, such as aggression, emotional dysregulation, and frequent use of profanity existing alongside moral and self-awareness, creativity, ambition, and aspirations for their future. This complexity suggests that the film avoids letting delinquency define troubled young students entirely. These findings thus add further nuance to prior studies by demonstrating that troubled young students should not be understood or defined solely through their delinquent behavior, which helps to challenge simplistic assumptions that associate them inherently with delinquency. Meanwhile, societal and institutional perceptions tend to reduce the students to their negative traits by perceiving them as socially undesirable, potential criminals, an emotional liability, and valued according to expected outcomes. The discrepancy between the complex character of the students and the perceptions imposed on them reveals that society and institutions' perceptions are reductive, as they tend to define the students' identities solely based on their delinquent behavior and disregard their complexities. Therefore, these findings suggest that comprehending troubled young students requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges their broader personal identities.

The Portrayal of Troubled Young Students

According to Petrie and Boggs (2022), dialogues can be one of the effective ways to understand characters because their statements within interactions significantly disclose their personalities. This can be done by paying attention to their choice of words and the way they deliver them. Moreover, appearance is a visual way to portray characters. The way they dress, their facial features, physical stature, mannerisms, and gestures are important aspects of interpretations regarding their characterization (Petrie & Boggs, 2022). These characterizations are then applied in this section to aid the researchers in examining how the students are portrayed within the film.

Riley

An interaction between Riley and his teacher, Steve, greatly reveals the student's character. The interaction occurs when Riley engages in conflict with another student, showing how the students are frequently involved in fights with one another. This can be seen as follows:

[Steve]: "You can't keep having these little wars. It's no use."

[Riley]: "He licked my fucking face, Steve. He spitted in my mouth. That's sexual assault."

[Steve]: "Okay, Riley, I'm going to say something, and you're going to roll your eyes at me."

[Riley]: "'You're better than this, Riley'."

[Steve]: "Yeah! That's pretty much it."

(Steve, 00:08:25-00:08:37)

The quote above shows that Steve reprimands Riley for a fight with concern, and by describing his conflicts as "little wars", the teacher frames Riley's repeated aggression as a behavioral pattern. Riley's immediate use of profanity in "He licked my fucking face" demonstrates his difficulty in regulating his emotional response to the conflict. This difficulty aligns with Rosita et al.'s (2023) argument that insufficient emotional regulation may contribute to various problems in adolescents, particularly juvenile delinquency. In this regard, profanity is considered one of the most offensive vulgar expressions and is frequently deemed impolite because it violates widely accepted social norms (Rudinova et al., 2025). The use of the word "fucking" thus functions as a linguistic marker of Riley's frustration while also reflecting his emotional impulsivity and a lack of politeness.

However, Riley's completion of "You're better than this, Riley" indicates that despite his behavioral problem, Riley realizes that his action is inappropriate and recognizes the teacher's underlying positive expectation behind his reprimand. This response illustrates his moral conscience by suggesting that Riley possesses an awareness of the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable behavior and later openly admits it. Therefore, the interaction demonstrates that although Riley's aggression reflects his difficulties in managing his emotional responses, he remains receptive to guidance and is capable of self-reflection, foreshadowing his potential for growth as he is willing to restrain himself and learn to improve.

Shy

In the film, a production team from the TV programme *Points West* visits the school to record the daily lives of the students. They directly interact with them by asking questions, which helps to learn more about the students. A scene occurs where the presenter, Kamila, asks Shy to describe himself:

[Kamila]: "And if you could describe yourself in three words?"

[Shy]: "Uh, depressed. Angry and bored."
(Steve, 00:12:40-00:12:45)

Shy chooses to describe himself with three words that present different aspects of who he is and disclose his distinct emotional state: "depressed", "angry", and "bored". The combination of these words implies that emotional distress has become fundamental to his perception of his own identity. Arnett's (2000) concept of identity exploration in emerging adulthood suggests that young people are engaged in the ongoing process of discovering different possibilities regarding their identity. Shy's self-description reflects this process and indicates a sense of self shaped by multiple and contradictory aspects of his identity. "Angry" suggests that Shy lacks proper emotional regulation, while "depressed" reveals that he is experiencing psychological problems. Moreover, "bored" suggests his low motivation and thus results in losing his interest in engaging activities. The simultaneous condition of these states indicates that Shy has internal struggles that deeply affect

how he behaves. Shy's description thus discloses the contradiction of his character, where although he can identify what he feels, he seems incapable of effectively managing or overcoming these emotions. This is further apparent:

[Kamila]: "If the teachers could describe you in three words, what do you think they'd say?"

[Shy]: "That's what I'm saying. One day to the next would be mad different. Like, some days they'd say chatty, clever, chilled. And then, the next day, say...miserable and disruptive, pissy." (Steve, 00:48:29-00:48:52)

In another question, Shy assumes that his teacher would describe him inconsistently based on how he behaves day after day. Shy's response reveals that he is conscious of the contrast between his different behavioural states that demonstrates both the positive and negative aspects of himself. Although such inconsistency reflects the instability of his emotions, Shy's assumptions also suggest that he acknowledges how emotional fluctuations may influence his behavioral responses and consequently affect his interactions with others (Dragone et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). This acknowledgement also reveals that despite facing emotional difficulties, Shy is an individual with a sense of emotional awareness. However, as Wang et al. (2023) contend that individuals with high emotional awareness tend to have good emotional regulation to prevent the increase of psychological issues and have lower depression levels, the contrast between Shy's capacity to identify his emotional challenges and his ongoing difficulty in managing them underscores his limited self-control.

Nabeel

In contrast, another student named Nabeel describes himself during his interview with a different approach by shaping his identity through his interests and preferences confidently:

[Nabeel]: "Rap, jungle, drum and bass, funky house, fashion. I'm into the ladies, I can't lie. I'm into styling. I wouldn't mind being a model, you know? People say I can get into modelling, so... I can't blame them. I see where they get it from."

(Steve, 00:13:22-00:13:34)

Nabeel's mention of different music genres, "rap, jungle, drum and bass, funky house",

constructs him as an individual with creative interests. Along with mentioning that he is keen on fashion and styling, his dialogue reflects his creative and expressive personality. This suggests that Nabeel actively defines himself through personal preferences rather than permitting others to determine his identity, and portrays him as an individual whose identity extends beyond the stereotypical aggressive or troublesome student. The way he considers himself worthy of being a model and accepts being viewed by others in such a way according to his perspective also demonstrates his confidence in himself. Self-confidence allows individuals to believe in their capabilities and is important for personal growth by empowering them to pursue their goals with determination and confront difficulties with resilience (Halilsoy, 2024). Nabeel's confidence thus indicates that he sees himself as having good potential in realizing his interests, which also reveals his positive self-image. Consequently, Nabeel's dialogue illustrates that he is an individual whose artistic pursuits, positive self-perception, and aspiration challenge a simplistic portrayal of troubled young students.

Jamie

In another scene, Jamie is asked about what his future self would say if he had the opportunity to deliver a message to his past self. Jamie recalls his past experiences in a neutral manner by constructing his response as a collection of cautions, suggesting that he has cultivated a critical awareness of his prior actions and their repercussions.

[Jamie]: "Jamie, don't go to Freya's house party. Don't do coke. You're an ecstasy man. I could write a book. Don't smoke the squalids Nathan's brother give you. Don't headbutt the ginger girl."

(Steve, 00:17:02-00:17:14)

Jamie's initial warning, "don't do coke," suggests his understanding of how engaging in one form of substance use risks being pushed further into wider drug use. Prohibition on accepting "squalids" to smoke indicates how his vicinity outside the school can reinforce such harmful behavior, and his refusal to repeat this behavior implies that he is becoming more aware of the

factors that have contributed to his past delinquency. Moreover, his warning, "Don't headbutt the ginger girl", demonstrates how Jamie can not only recognise the adverse repercussions of his behavior, but is also aware that his actions have an impact on others. Jamie's repeated cautions thus reflect an emerging sense of self-awareness and accountability, where they position his future self as an individual who actively seeks to amend his past behaviors.

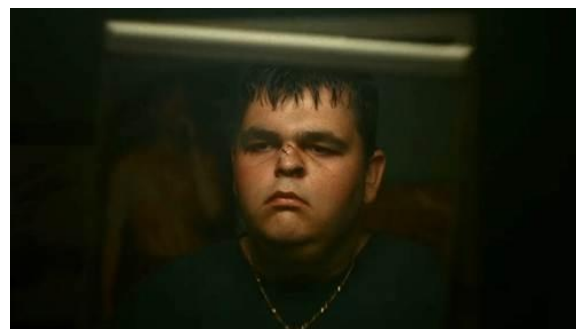


Figure 1. Jamie's appearance while looking in the mirror

The figure above depicts Jamie's injury on his nose, showing how he is frequently involved in physical fights with other students. The top lighting used to accentuate his face creates a dramatic effect that emphasizes his vulnerability. The background appearing out of focus creates a sense of detachment, isolating Jamie within his situation. As a result, this scene of Jamie looking at himself in the mirror suggests a moment of introspection. It further highlights his self-awareness of his aggressive behavior. The contrast between violence and vulnerability prevents Jamie's delinquency from solely defining his character. Therefore, by drawing focus into Jamie's vulnerability and his capacity to recognize and reflect upon his delinquency, this scene directs attention to the emotional and personal consequences that underlie his aggressive behavior and thus encourages the audience to perceive Jamie as more than just his delinquency.

Benny

An interaction occurs in a scene where Benny converses with the presenter from Points West regarding what he will do in the future, as follows:

[Kamila]: “So, uh, Shy and Benny, yeah? The drum and bass nerve center, I’m told.”

[Benny]: “Nah, listen, listen, innit? Atomic Bass Recordings, yeah, will be bigger than anything you’ve ever seen. You see Shy? He’s the CEO. He’ll run, like, the label side of stuff. See me? I’m the day-to-day boss of the club.”

(Steve, 00:30:31-00:30:43)

Benny expresses that he has a desire to establish a record label, “Atomic Bass Recordings”, and describes his vision with enthusiasm and confidence, particularly stating that it “will be bigger than anything you’ve ever seen.” The way Benny arranges his and Shy’s positions highlights his capacity for planning and organising how their shared aspiration could be realized, and Benny’s ambitious outlook for the label reveals that Benny perceives music as an important part of his future. Having personal purposes is a significant aspect in individuals’ lives, as it involves possessing a sense of meaning and direction that allows individuals to focus on achieving their targets and cultivate the ability to adapt in overcoming struggles (Boreham & Schutte, 2023; Yatmaz & Razi, 2022). Benny’s dialogue thus suggests that he has a clear sense of what he wants to achieve, which portrays him as a goal-oriented individual. This also illustrates youth agency, where Benny demonstrates the ability to direct his own path by actively envisioning his future through his artistic interest despite his surrounding condition (Mitchell et al., 2022; Siedlikowski et al., 2021). Through this dialogue, Benny’s characterization acknowledges that troubled young students have the ability to exercise agency and channel their personal interests towards their future positively.

Tarone

In the film, the school provides a therapist for the students to help manage their psychological challenges. A conversation occurs between Tarone and the therapist, Jenny, regarding his inappropriate sexual behavior towards one of the female teachers:

[Tarone]: “Of course you do, Jenny. ‘Cause you’re all the fucking same.

[Jenny]: “Careful, Tarone. I’ll say how it looks from here. May I?”

[Tarone]: “Go on, tell me.”

(Steve, 00:36:07-00:36:15)

In his dialogue, Tarone speaks in a raised tone and uses profanity to express his frustration over his situation, as stated, “‘Cause you’re all the fucking same”. This statement indicates that Tarone is distrustful of others and initially reacts defensively to Jenny’s intervention. However, when Jenny reprimands him calmly, he lowers his tone and demonstrates a willingness to listen. This suggests that Tarone acknowledges Jenny’s authority and remains manageable by responding to her guidance. Such a responsiveness is consistent with Sejati’s (2023) discussion of school-based counseling that emphasizes how counseling may promote improved emotional regulation and foster students’ socio-emotional growth. As a result, Tarone’s reaction implies that his delinquent actions do not inherently reflect an inability to positively respond to counseling intervention.



Figure 2. Tarone’s facial expression when listening to Jenny



Figure 3. Change in Tarone’s facial expression and gesture

The figures above illustrate Tarone’s facial expressions during his interaction with Jenny. Figure 2 depicts Tarone’s frustration through a close-up shot that emphasizes his sharp gaze. Low-key lighting used in this scene makes him appear intimidating and creates a tense atmosphere,

suggesting that he attempts to show dominance over Jenny. Meanwhile, Figure 3 depicts Tarone's change in expression as he listens to Jenny. He lowers his gaze and his head, reflecting his control over his frustration, and remains calm. This change of expressions and gesture during his dialogue demonstrates Tarone's ability to regulate his emotions when he is guided properly.

Ash

Ash's appearance considerably portrays his character:



Figure 4. Ash showcases his appearance

As seen in the figure above, a medium shot is used to present Ash's appearance. It shows that Ash frequently dresses in a collared shirt and jeans with a belt. This reveals that Ash chooses to dress neatly, which emphasizes his careful attention to his self-presentation. The choice of the colour white for his shirt also conveys a sense of cleanliness, reflecting his well-organized character. Moreover, his muscular physique highlights that, other than clothing, he takes care of his physical health. Clothing or appearance serves as a means for young people to express their identity (Rani, 2025), and Ash's carefully maintained personal image demonstrates his disciplined and conscientious personality. By presenting himself in such a way and being attentive to how he is viewed by others, this indicates that Ash's appearance functions not merely as a physical characteristic but also as a form of identity expression.



Figure 5. Ash's close-up appearance

Moreover, a close-up shot used in the figure above emphasizes Ash's injury on his eyebrow, which portrays his frequent engagement in physical fights. This further illustrates how acts of physical aggression are a common occurrence within the school. Certain forms of appearance, such as piercings and tattoos, may function as deviant markers through which young people may be stereotyped as less trustworthy and linked with criminality (Hauke-Forman et al., 2021; Sorby & Kehn, 2021). However, the contrast between Ash's meticulously curated appearance and his engagement in physical aggression challenges the common inclination to associate troubled young students with a single negative identity. Ash's appearance presents him as a character whose disciplined self-presentation coexists with his aggressive actions, suggesting that delinquency does not fully define his identity.

The Societal and Institutional Perceptions of Troubled Young Students

How an individual perceives someone can provide descriptive information regarding the person being perceived. This perception is shaped by experiences within social interactions that occur between the individuals involved (Mazzola et al., 2023). In social interactions themselves, some restrictions may influence how perceptions are constructed. If an individual has only interacted with or observed another individual from a distance or only several times, their perceptions are then formed solely based on those limited interactions. Petrie and Boggs (2022) argue that characters' perceptions of other characters serve as a good indirect characterization that offers information about what the characters are like even before their initial appearance in the film. However, such perceptions do not necessarily

reflect an individual's true identity. Goffman (1963) differentiates between actual identity, which pertains to the traits an individual actually possesses, and virtual identity, referring to the traits that others expect or ascribe to the same individual based on societal norms. He then elucidates that when there is a discrepancy between the two, the individual involved may be reduced from a complete person to one who is stigmatized and devalued (Goffman, 1963). Such a perspective thus helps reveal how troubled young students are positioned and understood through perceptions that may primarily identify them by their delinquent behavior.

[Kamila]: "Some call it last chance. Some call it a very expensive dumping ground for society's waste product. A radical progressive educational intervention or a waiting room for borstal? Maybe here, in Stanton Wood Manor, it's all of the above."

(Steve, 00:09:13-00:09:29)

At the beginning of the film, Kamila as the presenter of the TV programme *Points West* begins to deliver society's perceptions of the school, and some individuals call the school a "last chance" place for the students. Generally, schools are expected to equally provide proper and adequate guidance and nurture students' development (O'Toole et al., 2024), referring to the school as a "last chance" thus suggesting that society believes that regular schools are no longer willing to accept the students or offer further opportunities to support them. It indicates that society perceives the students as less deserving of sufficient support that can contribute to their improvement, reflecting how negative labelling can reinforce social exclusion and marginalization among troubled young people (Matos et al., 2023). Such a perception illustrates unequal treatment of the students because of their unfavourable, intricate conditions, which reveals a gap between normal students and these troubled ones. Moreover, "dumping ground for society's waste product" reinforces this gap, as it shows that troubled young students are perceived as individuals with no significant value. This metaphor further positions the students as undesirable members of society who are merely segregated from other students. The question of whether the school serves as a "progressive educational intervention" or a

temporary place before entering juvenile suggests that although the school was built specifically for troubled young people, doubts regarding the effectiveness of the school's role in dealing with the students persist. This highlights societal scepticism that stems from a sense of endangerment and fear of the students' unacceptable behavior, showing how society perceives them solely as delinquent individuals.

[Julian]: "What you have achieved here, um... well, the... You know I was just saying to Charlotte in the car over what these guys have achieved is, um... I'm rumbling."

[Charlotte]: "So, we had previously talked about two distinct phases, um, last time we met. And actually, it seems like, for various reasons, those two phases can become one. So, Stanton Wood being on the market has meant that... um... so we vacate the site in December."

(Steve, 00:23:12-00:23:57)

The quote above takes place when representatives of the educational authority who hold the school's evaluation and decision-making power, Julian and Charlotte, visit the school and unexpectedly discuss the plan for its closure with the teachers. The quote suggests that they make such a decision because they consider that the students have failed to meet their expectations, as stated, "You know I was just saying to Charlotte in the car over what these guys have achieved is, um... I'm rumbling", with Julian's hesitant manner of speaking that reflects his discomfort over the discussion. The unfinished statement implies that the educational authority demands actual achievements from the students. This shows that troubled young students are perceived as commodities that are valued based on their utility, denoting that they ought to give a contribution in return after the educational authority provides a specific place to educate and nurture them. It implies that institutional support may become conditional upon the students' capacity to conform to expected outcomes. This perception thus illustrates how institutional responses towards troubled young students may be shaped by their perceived behavioral and educational results, potentially leading to a neglect of the students' broader developmental requirements. When they regard the students as incapable of producing significant results, they choose to withdraw educational support by depriving the very

facilitation that is supposed to assist the students in their growth. Hulme et al. (2024) contend that ongoing and appropriate support plays an important role in preventing exclusion and aiding troubled young people to remain involved in education. The withdrawal of such support through the closure of the school may then lead to institutional abandonment for the students. Therefore, this indirect characterization reveals that the educational authority perceives the troubled young students as objects of profit rather than as individuals capable of positive change.

[Hugh]: “And very soon, you’ll be getting a vote, provided you stay out of prison, and you’ll want to use that vote very wisely. You’ll want to think about who will protect your money, your possessions, your freedom.”
(Steve, 00:33:26-00:33:38)

In addition to Points West’s crew and representatives of educational authority, Hugh Montague, the local parliamentary representative for the students as part of the institutional structure, also visits the school to discuss their interests and rights. Although Hugh seems to carry his role appropriately, “you’ll be getting a vote, provided you stay out of prison” implies that such an opportunity is offered with an emphasis on the students’ criminal history. The vote shows that the students remain as individuals with rights over their own lives; however, the statement also reveals that the institution positions the students as potential criminals instead of young people who require special educational care for their growth, where the students’ deviant or dangerous behavior dominates their evaluation. Such a perception thus highlights how the students’ educational needs and development are overlooked. A supportive educational environment is important for young people who require sufficient guidance for their future orientation (Do et al., 2025). Hence, the quote underscores the lack of proper institutional support that fails to see the students holistically through their reductive perception, which in turn affects the opportunities that are supposed to be provided as a means of supporting the students’ development rather than being treated as conditional upon their capacity to prevent further delinquency.



Figure 6. Shy’s offensive remark against Hugh

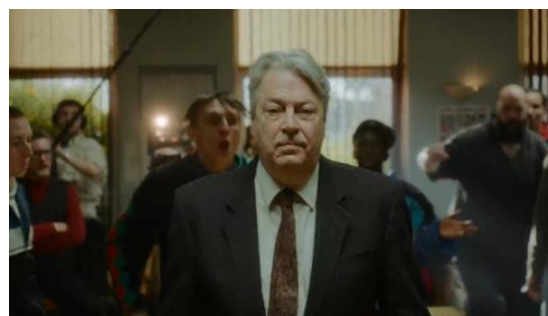


Figure 7. Hugh leaving the room where the students are in

After Hugh explains what he will do as the local parliamentary representative for the students, Shy makes a very offensive remark that expresses his distrust towards Hugh, as seen in Figure 6. Shy’s remark suggests that Hugh’s role serves as merely another way to control the students, and this causes Hugh to immediately leave the room. As seen in Figure 7, the focus stays on Hugh when he abruptly walks out, while the students who follow him in the background get blurred out. This depth of field accentuates Hugh’s discomfort or disbelief over the situation, making his feeling of being disrespected a significant moment of the scene. This shows that although Hugh attempts to be supportive of the students, one incident of a student’s misbehavior leads to a drastic change in his attitude. Such a change thus suggests that Hugh may begin to perceive the students as inherently delinquent. His reaction thus demonstrates how a single act of misbehavior can overshadow the students’ other traits. It can be seen as a reflection of institutional perception, as Hugh superficially judges the students based on their behavior without acknowledging their intricate needs and fully understanding their circumstances before making decisions to assist or support them.

[Shy’s mother]: “You ringing and screaming at me, insulting us, it is ruining our lives, Shy.

It's over."

[Shy]: "Ruining your lives? Mom, you're insane. What? I never threatened you. That's just what... That's what I get like sometimes, you know, and..."

[Shy's mother]: "Yeah, exactly. That's the point I'm making."

(Steve, 00:11:46-00:12:13)

One of the students depicted in the film who is shown interacting with their family is Shy. Shy's mother complains of his negative behavior towards his family during a call, saying that his aggression has adversely affected their life. Although Shy explains that his lack of control over his emotional instability is what causes him to behave in such a way, his mother's response suggests that she disregards his explanation and instead focuses on the consequences of his behavior for the family. Family serves as the fundamental source of affection, protection, and identity, with its support profoundly helping young people to cultivate their resilience in facing challenges (Mulyanti & Khasanah, 2025). However, the quote implies the contrary, as it indicates that instead of trying to understand and assist her son to be better, Shy's mother decides to withdraw her and the family's support as a whole. This demonstrates that his family perceives him as a liability that emotionally damages them. The way in which Shy's behavior influences his family's emotional responses shapes their perception of him and leads them to overlook the fact that he remains a family member who deserves adequate familial support regardless of his condition. Consequently, despite being the closest individuals to Shy, this indirect characterization emphasizes that there is still a tendency towards hopelessness within the familial circle and is reinforced through how they perceive Shy, which contributes to troubled young students being misunderstood and unsupported.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that troubled young students are portrayed as complex individuals whose positive and negative traits exist simultaneously, demonstrating that they remain to have a proper capacity for self-improvement despite their delinquent behavior. However, society and institutions within the film perceive the students reductively through a negative lens that constructs them as individuals with no significant

value and emotional liability solely based on their delinquency. This discrepancy thus indicates that external judgements do not objectively reflect the students' actual character and overlook their growth potential. The results of this study highlight that Steve portrays troubled young students without centring on a general depiction of them, which reduces the risk of reinforcing the more widespread negative perceptions of the students. This study thus contributes to broader discussions of juvenile delinquency depiction in cinema by underscoring the importance of nuanced and less reductive portrayals of troubled young students. It demonstrates how the portrayal of juvenile delinquency functions not only as a means of depicting behavioral problems of young people but also as a medium for moving beyond deleterious assumptions that these students are inherently and entirely delinquent. Additionally, this study contributes to media literacy by encouraging individuals to be more cautious and critical in understanding and engaging with how troubled young students are portrayed in films, as passively consuming negatively framed depictions of them may continuously create reductive perceptions that remain associated with troubled young students.

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