

Questioning morality through absurdity in Hinton's *The Outsider*

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Abstract

In this study, the writer has two main aims. They are (1) to explain how morality is portrayed in the novel and (2) to explain how morality is questioned through absurdity. This study is a qualitative analysis. The data were collected by reading, identifying, and classifying excerpts from the novel and analyzed by interpreting process of elucidating the binary opposition which later was reversed (the hierarchy) by applying Derrida's deconstruction theory. After conducting this study, the writer came at two conclusions. First, the morality in *The Outsiders* was portrayed by appearances and judgments, neglecting various factors such as reasons, conditions, and motives behind particular actions. Second, considering other factors mentioned before, the writer implied that most of those moral-immoral things portrayed in the novel were merely bias. In oversimplified words, morality is an idea comes from one's perspective (subjective), yet many people thought they could differ the right from the wrong. Thinking those entire possibilities, raised fundamental question, is not morality so absurd? Does morality even exist in the first place?

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INTRODUCTION

Talking about morality, it may become a topic most people think so common and comes by nature worth nothing to discuss. In the era where the world becomes more materialistic day by day, it makes more sense something conceptual like morality has no space in the thought of the majority. Meanwhile, the writer thinks that morality still a good topic to discuss, not to mention the fact that many experts still have some hard times in solidify the definition not only due to the vast varied way of thinking but also morality itself is a very broad subject.

To have the same ground and make it easier to follow this research, first, the writer will give the

most common definition of morality as stated by Hornby (2011), morality is the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, for instance giving money to the poor is right whereas murdering people is wrong. Is morality really that simple?

To make a clearer depiction of how absurd morality might be, the writer will give some examples from real life. A news entitled *Teacher Gets Six Months in Jail for Pinching Student* taken from *The Jakarta Post* Posted on August 5th, 2016, talked about Samhudi, a vocational high school teacher, pinched a student as a punishment after the student failed to participate in afternoon prayers on Feb 3rd. The student's parent who was a member of The Indonesian Army (TNI) could not

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accept the punishment and reported the teacher to the police. In this case, it is pretty hard to decide which side is considered as wrong as both parties have reasons to justify themselves. Some people may believe that the teacher was right since the primary duty of a teacher is to teach the student not only academically but also morally. Pinching is considered as a punishment also a lesson for the naughty student in order to teach him some discipline and behave good, as others may argue that the father of the student who got pinched also has a justified reason. It is the parent's nature to protect their child and when there is something violating their child the parents will be angry. Departed from there, the father of the pinched children feels he has the right to report what has been done by the teacher to the police.

Not only appears in real life, a similar issue also can be found in some literary works. *Beauty is A Wound* (2002) by Eka Kurniawan, is one of those examples. This novel mainly talking about the life of Dewi Ayu who was forced by the situation to become a whore. Although she was a whore, she never regretted her decision. She was proud of herself and considered as the most successful whore in Halimunda. For most people, being a whore is a nasty and disrespectful job, but for Dewi Ayu being a whore is fine, moreover, she argued by being a whore she did not harm anyone. As the story progressed, she felt that every woman basically was a whore; even a good wife was a whore for her husband.

Another example is *The Outsiders* (1967) by S.E Hinton which also becomes the writer's object of the studies. This novel talked about the life of Ponyboy Curtis, a 14-year-old boy, a member of a gang called greaser. Ponyboy and his gang members lived their life day by day as what people might call 'trash'. They were smoking, shop-lifting, and once a while fighting with their rival gang. One day Pony and his friend named Johnny conducted murder towards their rivals. After this incident, they decided to escape to the village. There, they accidentally burned the church where there are some kids trapped in that building. In a second, Pony and Johnny bravely jumped to the burning church to save the kids and finally they were able

to save them all. After that tragedy, they soon became famous throughout the town and became a hero.

From some examples above, it is clear that determining right and wrong is not that easy. If morality is something that naturally does not have certain guidelines and if every people have a different point of view in determining right and wrong, who has the responsibility to decide one's actions as right or wrong? If the one who responsible for is one's very self, do others have that privilege to judge one's action as right or wrong? Does morality really exist or perhaps is it just human creation in the form of justifying themselves?

METHODS

This is a descriptive qualitative study. According to Poedjawjayatna in Faruk (2012), there are two objects of the study, the material object is a novel entitled *The Outsiders* by S.E Hinton and the formal object is the concept of morality itself later being challenge through absurdity seen from the issues depicted in the novel (Surajiyo, 2009) which analyzed by Derrida's deconstruction theory (Bressler, 1999).

The data in this study is separated into two main forms (Walliman, 2011). The primary data which will be the analysis and interpretation of the novel entitled *The Outsiders* based on the research problem. The secondary data which will be included such as scientific journals, books, article and theories related to the topic.

In collecting the data, the writer will follow some steps, namely (1) read the novel entitled *The Outsiders* carefully and thoroughly, (2) identify which one is considered as data that can be used to support and help the writer in conducting this research, (3) classifying quotations relevant to the topic given, and (4) inventorying which means answer all the research problems by filling the tables or schemes.

After collecting the data, the writer will analyze the data using several steps (Bressler, 1999; Widada, 2009). There are; (1) reading the novel thoroughly, (2) classifying the binary oppositions

according to the similarity of the episode or events, (3) explaining the meaning of those binary oppositions into descriptive interpretations, (4) reversing the hierarchy to challenge the interpretations relating to the morality, and the last (5) providing the possibility of various perspectives or levels of meaning in a text-based on the new binary inversions which allowed the meaning of the text to be undecidable (Bressler, 1999, p.131).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the writer presents the analysis of data found in *The Outsiders* to answer the research questions that have been formulated in chapter I. This chapter is divided into two subchapters. The first subchapter focuses on explaining the morality portrayed in Hinton's *The Outsiders* using structuralism theory while in the second subchapter, the writer starts to challenge those hierarchies by questioning the morality found before using deconstruction theory.

Morality portrayed in Hinton's *The Outsiders*

In order to dismantle morality portrayed in Hinton's *The Outsiders*, the writer uses sets of binary oppositions which split into episodes. Within those episodes, the structure of morality in the novel is described. There are several binary oppositions which split into several episodes as follow:

Dominancy

What the writer means by dominancy here covering the whole aspect, starting from financial power until mindset (the way Greasers see The Socs). *The Greasers* was portrayed poorly while *The Socs* was presented as jet-set, a bunch of rich kids from the west side of the town. *The Outsiders* is a novel mainly talking about the rivalry between the two gangs, but because of the difference between them, sometimes it is imbalance rivalry, one of the examples is from social class. The main character in this story, Ponyboy, said that *The Socs* always be the upper side of the coin when it came to the material things.

I really couldn't see what Socs would have to sweat about, good grades, good cars, good girls,

madras and Mustangs and Corvairs, Man, I thought, if I had worries like that I'd consider myself lucky. (Hinton, 1967, p.32)

Pony gave the readers some depiction of what *The Socs* possessed. Red Corvair (car) back in the 1960s when this novel took time, Chevrolet Corvair was considered as the most sophisticated car with a lot of advanced features which could cost until \$5000.

Not only possessed luxury cars, there was time when Pony was nailed down as stated: "I could smell English Leather shaving lotion and stale tobacco, and I wondered foolishly if I would suffocate before they did anything." (Hinton, 1967, p.6) which represented the lifestyle *The Socs* had. Stale tobacco and English Leather shaving lotion were only used by certain people in certain classes back in the 1960's. From the data above, it can be already shown what kind of class in society *The Socs* at. On the other hand, the chip was always down when it came to *The Greasers* as they were born not as rich as their rival gang.

The main character, Ponyboy directly stated: "We're poorer than *The Socs* and the middle class." (Hinton, 1967, p. 4) which also gave the readers a clear depiction of how poor *The Greasers* were compared to *The Socs* and middle class. According to Banerjee and Duflo (2008) which were using absolute approach, described the middle class as people with per capita expenditure worth \$2 until \$4 or \$6 until \$10 per day. It is really obvious that *The Greasers* have a hard time dealing with their economy. To fulfill their needs *The Greasers* should work hard every day, moreover, most of them were still at a young age.

Darry didn't deserve to work like an old man when he was only twenty. He had been a real popular guy in school; he was captain of the football team and he had been voted Boy of the Year. But we just didn't have the money for him to go to college, even with the athletic scholarship he won. (Hinton, 1967, p. 15)

Sodapop... a dropout so he could get a job and keep me in school, and Darry, getting old before his time trying to run a family and hold on to two jobs and never having any fun. (Hinton, 1967, p. 38)

Not only because of some of them who should work at a young age but also according to

Pony, their family were broken or already incomplete (broken), as shown in citations below:

Darry would kill me if I got into trouble with the police. Since Mom and Dad were killed in an auto wreck, the three of us get to stay together only as long as we behave. (Hinton, 1967, p. 4)

I didn't know exactly what I meant, but I was thinking about Johnny's father being a drunk and his mother a selfish slob, and Two-Bit's mother being a barmaid to support him and his kid sister after their father ran out on them, and Dally wild, cunning Dally turning into a hoodlum because he'd die if he didn't, and Steve his hatred for his father coming out in his soft, bitter voice and the violence of his temper. (Hinton, 1967, p. 38)

On the other hand, their rival, *The Socs*, did not have to spend their time to work. Through the entire novel, the writer did not find any data showing *The Socs* should work to get all the luxury things they possessed, instead, Hinton showed to the readers that *The Socs* had so much spare time as shown in the citation below:

While *The Socs* had so much spare time and money that they jumped us and each other for kicks, had beer blasts and river bottom parties because they didn't know what else to do. Things were rough all over, all right. (Hinton, 1967, p. 38)

It becomes interesting how Hinton started the story by confronting two different sides, *The Greasers* with all their limitations which represented the poor being directly compared with *The Socs* which represented the rich. The oppositions shown by the two sides where *The Greasers* represented poor and *The Socs* represented the rich are what the writer implies as *The Socs* dominancy in terms of financial. As the story progressed, *The Socs* continued to show their dominancy toward *The Greasers*. Below are several data the writer provided in terms of self-confidences.

"And tonight... people get hurt in rumbles, maybe killed. I'm sick of it because it doesn't do any good. You can't win, you know that, don't you?" And when I remained silent he went on: "You can't win, even if you whip us. You'll still be where you were before at the bottom. And we'll still be the lucky ones with all the breaks. So it doesn't do any good, the fighting and the killing. It doesn't prove a thing. We'll forget it if you win, or if you don't. Greasers will still be greasers and Soes will still be Socs. (Hinton,

1967, p. 98)

Not like in New York where gangs were well-organized and whoever won the fight gained the power, fame, and territory, here, in the town where the story took place, Hinton told the reader that no matter how hard *The Greasers* tried, it would not change the fact that due to the huge social class gap between the two gangs, *The Socs* would still get territory and respect from society which represented their dominancy towards *The Greasers*.

"I wouldn't have felt so embarrassed if they had been greasy girls I might even have helped old Dallas. But those two girls weren't our kind." (Hinton, 1967, p. 18).

That data showed how actually Pony did not have any issue in teasing the girls as long as they were from the same background as him (*Greasers*) but it was a different story when it came to *The Socy* girls. Pony felt embarrassed and so hesitated to join Dallas in teasing them. Pony realized how he and Chery (*Socs*) were miles apart in term of social class just by looking at their appearances as Pony realized that he did not even possess a decent shirt to get along with them as shown in the citation below:

They were Socs all right. One had on a white shirt and a madras ski jacket, and the other a light yellow shirt and a wine-colored sweater. I looked at their clothes and realized for the first time that evening that all I had was a pair of jeans and Soda's old navy sweatshirt with the sleeves cut short. I swallowed. (Hinton, 1967, p. 38)

Hinton somehow started to bring the comparison closer to the condition that might happen in the real world wherein the earlier stages she gave the depiction of how *The Socs* were so rich by bringing luxurious things. Here she gave a simpler comparison by comparing the different clothes they wear.

In society, clothes are the easiest way to distinguish people's social class. People are more comfortable to be in the circle with people from the same class. They tend to avoid the situation where they should gather with people from different class. The lower class usually gets insecure whereas the upper class tends to feel irritated and embarrassed. Hinton brings this issue to the story by the character named Cherry.

"I know," she said quietly, "but we'd better go with them. Ponyboy... I mean... if I see you in the hall at school or someplace and don't say hi, well, it's not personal or anything, but..." "I know," I said. "We couldn't let our parents see us with you all. You're a nice boy and everything..." (Hinton, 1967, p. 40)

It clearly shown that although Cherry had gone along well with Ponyboy that night, she could not stand if at day anyone knew that *The Socs* went along with Greaser. She warned Pony not to even say hello if they ever met in school or other places. From the writer's perspective, it was due to that *The Socs* are very caring with their image and social class. The previous citation also found information that it was not only *The Socs* themselves who feel over-confidence but their parents also responsible for nailing such mindset down to their kids.

In the writer's opinion someone has the right to be proud to them because of the good deeds they have done, not like *The Socs* who through the story, Hinton depicted felt over-confidence because of their wealth.

The other Socs, a tall guy with a semi Beatle haircut, turned to Marcia. "Baby, you know we don't get drunk very often..." When she only gave him a cold stare he got angry. "And even if you are mad at us, that's no reason to go walking the streets with these bums." (Hinton, 1967, p. 39)

A guy, who considered as Marcia's boyfriend in the data shown, told her that even though he knew that drunk was bad and Marcia hated it, it did not mean that she could walk along with *Greasers*. He believed that going out with drunken Socs was better than hanging out with sober *Greasers*. After that event, *The Socs* felt had the right to take revenge as *The Greasers* somehow taking their girlfriends out. The confidence was top notch as they did not hesitate to chase *The Greasers* to their territory and blatantly mocked them as a trash as they were far below their social class shown in the citation below:

Randy swore at us and they stepped in closes. Bob was eyeing Johnny. "Nup, pal, yer the ones who'd better watch it. Next time you want a broad, pick up yer own kind dirt." I was getting mad. I was hating them enough to lose my head. "You know what a greaser is?" Bob asked. "White trash with long hair." (Hinton, 1967, p. 48)

Generally, someone is being judged to be better than others is not from their financial but from their behavior. Instead of doing good deeds, *The Socs* used their wealth to show off, have fun, and drunk which later causing trouble. In addition, *The Socs* who already had the mindset they were better than *The Greasers* often delivered their confidence in forms of physical contact (attacks).

I remembered Johnny his face all cut up and bruised, and I remembered how he had cried when we found him, half-conscious, in the comer lot. Johnny had it awful rough at home it took a lot to make him cry. (Hinton, 1967, p. 5)

They had my arms and legs pinned down and one of them was sitting on my chest with his knees on my elbows, and if you don't think that hurts, you're crazy. (Hinton, 1967, p. 5-6)

He had been hunting our football to practice a few kicks when a blue Mustang had pulled up beside the lot. There were four Socs in it. They had caught him and one of them had a lot of rings on his hand that's what had cut Johnny up so badly. (Hinton, 1967, p. 30)

From the three last citations above, it clearly shown that *The Socs* were the ones who always took the initiation to attack. According to the story he got from Johnny, at that time, Johnny was in the field to practice his skills in football when suddenly a few *Socs* driving a Mustang appeared and beat him to death.

In contradiction, through the novel, the writer could not find any data which showed *The Greasers* tried to initiate attacks towards *The Socs*. Most of the data the writer found related to the fight between them are just *The Greasers* who tried to fight back as a form of self-defense. For example, on page five, Steve Randle, Soda's best buddy, had once held off four guys with a busted pop-bottle and when Pony bit *The Socs* in the hand in order to escape from them found in page six. Here was another data the writer found to support the argument:

I fought to get loose, and almost did for a second; then they tightened up on me and the one on my chest slugged me a couple of times. So I lay still, swearing at them between gasps. A blade was held against my throat. (Hinton, 1967, p. 6)

To conclude the first episode of this binary opposition, according to the novel, *The Socs* were in the upper hand of the opposition hierarchy. *The*

Socs had so much wealth which made them felt superior to their rival. On the other hand, *The Greasers* felt inferior due to the disadvantages in terms of economy. Departed from that issue, the writer thinks that it is so absurd when people think they are better than others due to their wealth. In general, people should be seen as better than others from the perspective of what they have done and what impact they bring towards society.

From this episode also known that despite their inferiority, *The Greasers* were felt annoyed by *The Socs* and others who always hunt them if given any chance. *The Socs* with all their wealth and superiority through the novel depicted as the attacker of their poor and inferior rival, *The Greasers*. "Why did *The Socs* hate us so much? We left them alone. I nearly went to sleep over my homework trying to figure it out" (Hinton, 1967, p. 15). From that point, it was somehow building the concept which makes *The Socs* are the "bad guy" for *The Greasers* which somehow felt suffered and abused.

Stereotype

According to Cardwell (1999) in his book entitled *Dictionary of Psychology*, stereotype is an over-generalized belief about a particular category of people. It is an opinion that people might have about every person of a particular group which often very dependent on ones' beliefs. In this episode, the writer provided the data related to the opposition between *The Greasers* and *The Socs*. In this episode also, the writer found a similarity between them which were both parties causing trouble and doing messed stuff. Although in the beginning both were causing trouble, but in the end, they received different treatment from the society due to the different stereotypes they had.

He was famous for shoplifting and his black-handled switchblade (which he couldn't have acquired without his first talent), and he was always smarting off to the cops. (Hinton, 1967, p. 9-10)

He had quite a reputation. They have a file on him down at the police station. He had been arrested, he got drunk, he rode in rodeos, lied, cheated, stole, rolled drunks, jumped small kids he did everything. (Hinton, 1967, p. 10-11)

We bought Cokes and blew the straws at the

waitress, and walked around eyeing things that were lying out in the open until the manager got wise to us and suggested we leave. He was too late, though; Dally walked out with two packages of Kools under his jacket. (Hinton, 1967, p. 18)

We all had the money to get in it only costs a quarter if you're not in a car but Dally hated to do things the legal way. He liked to show that he didn't care whether there was a law or not. He went around trying to break laws. (Hinton, 1967, p. 18)

Those above were several data the writer presented about *The Greasers* doing bad stuff and causing troubles. From the data above, the writer implied that not only doing ordinary messed stuff but what *The Greasers* did were more specifically headed towards criminal stuff. The data presented above also implied that where they did trouble, often they did it without any specific reasons. According to Pony, it was just a matter of transferring their abandon energy and fun, as shown in the citation below:

We deserve a lot of our trouble, I thought. Dallas deserves everything he gets and should get worse if you want the truth. And Two-Bit he doesn't really want or need half the things he swipes from stores. He just thinks it's fun to swipe everything that isn't nailed down. I can understand why Sodapop and Steve get into drag races and fights so much, though both of them have too much energy, too much feeling, with no way to blow it off. (Hinton, 1967, p. 14)

When the writer took a closer look at this matter, the writer found a pattern which indicates that the messed stuff have been done were often affected people (society) around them directly. In other word, what had been done by *The Greasers* were harming people around them which of course pissed them of such as stealing and teasing the waitress and bypassing ticket entrance. Meanwhile, just because *The Socs* were their rival and in the previous episode seems to be on the other side of the coin, did not mean that they do different things from *The Greasers*, on the other hand, they did the exact same thing, just in the different style.

They'd come with their boyfriends but walked out on them when they found out the boys had brought some booze along. The boys had gotten angry and left. "I don't care if they did." Cherry sounded annoyed. "It's not my idea of a good

time to sit in a drive-in and watch people get drunk." (Hinton, 1967, p. 25)

Cherry looked mad. "A little? You call reeling and passing out in the streets 'a little'? Bob, I told you, I'm never going out with you while you're drinking, and I mean it. Too many things could happen while you're drunk. It's me or the booze." (Hinton, 1967, p. 39)

Not like *The Greasers* who often their actions were abusing others, *The Socs* usually doing messed stuff for themselves as shown in several data above such as drunk and kicking *The Greasers*. Although their action barely related directly to the society, their motives somehow were not far apart from their rival which was no particular reasons.

While *The Socs* had so much spare time and money that they jumped us and each other for kicks, had beer blasts and river bottom parties because they didn't know what else to do. Things were rough all over, all right. (Hinton, 1967, p. 38)

In the previous episode, the writer talked about clothes which were the easiest way to distinguish people's social class and somehow gave *The Socs* the superiority against their rival. In this episode, the writer would again, talk about how the two parties differed from how their appearance since, according to the writer, would play an important role in this episode. Due to the difference the appearances two sides had, the stereotype they received from the society also differed.

The Socs which are considered as rich kids with all their wealth can choose whatever outfit they want. Just like in real life where rich people are easier to afford decent clothes to support their appearances. as Pony stated, "They were tuff looking girls dressed sharp and really good looking." (Hinton, 1967, p. 19)

They looked like they were all cut from the same piece of cloth: clean-shaven with semi Beatle haircuts, wearing striped or checkered shirts with light red or tan colored jackets or madras ski jackets. They could just as easily have been going to the movies as to a rumble. (Hinton, 1967, p. 120)

It was much contradicted with *The Greasers*. Born with no financial support, they often had difficulties to choose their clothes. Ponyboy stated that he usually wore his brother's jacket and he even had a hole in his old tennis shoes as seen on page 12. Instead of dressing decent they were more

likely dressed hood-like. Below were some supporting data the writer found:

I only mean that most greasers do things like that, just like we wear our hair long and dress in blue jeans and T-shirts, or leave our shirttails out and wear leather jackets and tennis shoes or boots. (Hinton, 1967, p. 4)

They were the only kind of girls that would look at us, I thought. Tough, loud girls who wore too much eye makeup and giggled and swore too much. (Hinton, 1967, p. 13-14)

We both need a haircut and some decent clothes. I looked down at my worn, faded blue jeans, my too-big shirt, and Dally's worn-out jacket. They'll know we're hoods the minute they see us, I thought. (Hinton, 1967, p. 55-56)

People often relied on stereotypes based on outer appearances to make initial assumptions about others. According to Ruesch and Kees (1982), clothing was a social marker and can convey where a person ranks in their culture, revealing clues about their income, class, power, and social ranking. Another research that talked about stereotyping related to appearance was conducted by Richmond and Payne in 1991 which showed that physical appearance played a prominent role in the formation of initial judgments and is significant in shaping a person's overall impression on others. Those researches were turned out to be true when reflected in the story of the novel. *The Socs* who dressed more decent than their rival, who was like a hood often received more appreciation and got defended from society.

I reckon we're wilder, too. Not like *The Socs*, who jump greasers and wreck houses and throw beer blasts for kicks, and get editorials in the paper for being a public disgrace one day and an asset to society the next. (Hinton, 1967, p. 4)

They could just as easily have been going to the movies as to a rumble. That's why people don't ever think to blame *The Socs* and are always ready to jump on us. We look hoody and they look decent. (Hinton, 1967, p. 120)

The writer tried to compared treatment which *The Socs* received with rival, *The Greasers*. Although they seemed to do the same thing which was causing trouble, but as the implication, the writer gave before, *The Greasers* got treated by society unequally. Due to their appearances which more represented hoods rather than normal kids

they often took the blame and became a scapegoat for any trouble happened. Since the previous episode, *The Greasers* already labeled as trash by their rival and society. In this particular episode, they became the main suspect for murder cases. In fact, Johnny just tried to protect his friend because *The Socs* who attack him tried to drown Pony to death in a fountain at the park. Moreover, the police who tried to catch them did not have any strong evidence stated that it was a pure murder, instead, they chased *The Greasers* by *The Socs'* witnesses. In short, because of that notion, Johnny and Pony became positive suspects and should spend the rest of their day as fugitives, as shown in several citations below.

Johnny looked around, slapping his pockets nervously. "We gotta get outa here. Get somewhere. Runaway. The police will be here soon." I was trembling, and it wasn't all from cold. But Johnny, except for the fact that his hands were twitching, looked as cool as Darry ever had. "We'll need money. And maybe a gun. And a plan." (Hinton, 1967, p. 50)

"Hop the three-fifteen freight to Windrixville," Dally instructed. "There's an old abandoned church on top of Jay Mountain. There's a pump in the back so don't worry about water. Buy a week's supply of food as soon as you get there this morning before the story gets out, and then don't so much as stick your noses out the door. I'll be up there as soon as I think it's clear. Man, I thought New York was the only place I could get mixed up in a murder rap." (Hinton, 1967, p. 54)

I figured I couldn't get into any worse trouble than murder. Johnny and I would be hiding for the rest of our lives. Nobody but Dally would know where we were, and he couldn't tell anyone because he'd get jailed again for giving us that gun. If Johnny got caught, they'd give him the electric chair, and if they caught me, I'd be sent to a reformatory. (Hinton, 1967, p. 56-57)

To conclude the second episode of this binary opposition, according to the novel, *The Socs* were still in the upper hand of the opposition hierarchy. Although basically *The Socs* and *The Greasers* had caused much trouble but the treatment and stereotype the society gave to them were different. According to several data mentioned before, the writer argued that one of the causes is due to their different appearances. *The Socs* who

possessed more wealth could afford better clothes compared to their rival. On the other hand, *The Greasers* who had a problem with their economy tent to dress like a hood in which society was less accepted that kind of appearance. Departed from that point, whatever had done by *The Socs*, the society still believed that if they were treated well someday they could become the asset of society. "And she was trying to hide a smile, "that's probably why we take turns getting our names in the paper." (Hinton, 1967, p. 34) Meanwhile, *The Greasers* with less acceptance from society appeared to be labeled as trash and troublemakers due to their lower position in the hierarchy.

After taking a closer look at the data, the writer found an argument about why *The Greasers* not only labeled as hood but also became a fugitive in society's perspective. As discussed before, not like *The Socs* who did that for the sake of pleasure and escapism, *The Greasers* did that in an abusive manner towards others. For instance when Dally bypassing the ticket entrance which caused loss to the event organizer. Another example was not only when they took the piss out of the waitress but also stealing some cokes from that shop. From those cases, it was understandable when the society was angry and labeled them straightly as hood due to their trouble which directly impact the society. Thus, when the case of Johnny murdered *The Socs* spread out, society without any evidence and hesitation blaming *The Greasers* which used to do that kind of criminal stuff.

The society labeled the two parties differently when they actually did a similar thing which was causing trouble. It seemed like they did it because of the different attribute the two parties had. That kind of stereotyping based on appearances was according to the writer was absurd. Again, as the writer mention before, someone should only judge by their action and impact on others. Even if that was the parameter which in this particular episode both side doing messed stuff, the society should fairly labeled them as hood or at least someone who brought bad impact on society. Yet, the one who takes that labeled was only *The Greasers* meanwhile *The Socs*

somehow manage to place themselves as “could be” society’s asset.

From those two episodes provided above, showed how morality was portrayed in the novel. People merely looked at the cover (appearances) and judged directly through the action conducted without further consideration, neglecting various factors such as reasons, conditions, and motives behind a particular action.

Questioning morality through absurdity in Hinton’s *The Outsiders*

In the previous subchapter, the writer had discussed the concept of morality. The morality in *The Outsiders* portrayed by the conflicts happened among its characters. In the first subchapter, *The Greasers* placed in the lower hierarchy due to their difficulties in the economy while their rival has abundant resources. Later *The Greasers* felt inferior and became their rival’s target of attacks.

Anyway, I went on walking home, thinking about the movie, and then suddenly wishing I had some company. Greasers can't walk alone too much or they'll get jumped, or someone will come by and scream "Greaser!" at them, which do not make you feel too hot, if you know what I mean. We get jumped by The Socs. I'm not sure how you spell it, but it's the abbreviation for the Socials, the jet set, the West-side rich kids. It's like the term "greaser," which is used to class all us boys on the East Side. (Hinton, 1967, p. 3-4)

From that opposition, it seems that *The Greasers* appeared to be a victim and had the right to be pitied. In the novel also found data that indicated the tone of blaming coming from Pony who thought what *The Socs* did to them were reasonable which did not make any sense at all.

I remembered how awful Johnny had looked when he got beaten up. I had just as much right to use the streets as *The Socs* did, and Johnny had never hurt them. Why did *The Socs* hate us so much? We left them alone. I nearly went to sleep over my homework trying to figure it out. (Hinton, 1967, p. 15)

From the arguments above, *The Greasers* implied that *The Socs* were “the bad guy”. In other words, Pony thought that *The Greasers* somehow slightly better than their rivals (morally) because they never looked for trouble with them. Here, the writer tried to question that issue, was it really the

case? Based on the novel, *The Greasers* in fact never tried to attack *The Socs* in the first place, but was that make them more moral than their rival?

“We crossed Sutton and cut around behind Spencer's Special, the discount house, and chased two junior high kids across a field for a few minutes; by then it was dark enough to sneak in over the back fence of the Nightly Double drive-in movie. It was the biggest in town and showed two movies every night and on weekends four. You could say you were going to the Nightly Double and have time to go all over town. (Hinton, 1967, p. 18)

"He'll probably find the fight," Two-Bit stated cheerfully. "That's why I came over. Mr. Timothy Shepard and Co. are looking for whoever so kindly slashed their car's tires, and since Mr. Curly Shepard spotted Dallas doing it... well... Does Dally have a blade?" (Hinton, 1967, p. 26)

From the data above, it showed that *The Greasers* actually did the exact same thing with *The Socs* (making trouble). It clearly showed where *The Greasers* tent to bully those junior high school kids because they were younger than them. *The Greasers* also were looking for trouble with those who had similar tier as shown when Dallas sliced Tim Sephard car’s tires and many others as shown in the data provided in the previous subchapters.

Based on those facts, the writer discovered a new perspective where the one whom *The Greasers* hesitated to mess with was only *The Socs*. Thus, the idea of *The Greasers* was innocent, victim of bullying should be re-questioned. The idea from Pony’s perspective also re-questioned, was it really the case? or maybe it was just *The Greasers* being envy by all the resources that *The Socs* had. If in any circumstances, *The Greasers* became the superior gang, would not they do the same thing as what *The Socs* did to them?

The next thing the writer wanted to discuss came from the second subchapter about stereotype. Again, *The Greasers* placed below *The Socs*. One of the reasons was due to their appearances. Although both of them did the same action, yet they received different treatment from the society. The society still believed that someday *The Socs* would turn into society’s asset whereas *The Greasers* already and forever became thrash.

There was a crowd at the front of the church,

mostly little kids, and I wondered how they'd gotten there so quickly. I tapped the nearest grownup. "What's going on?" "Well, we don't know for sure," the man said with a good-natured grin. "We were having a school picnic up here and the first thing we knew, the place is burning up. Thank goodness this is a wet season and the old thing is worthless anyway." Then, to the kids, he shouted, "Stand back, children. The firemen will be coming soon." (Hinton, 1967, p. 78)

Citation above showed the event which became the turning point for *The Greasers* and challenged the stereotype that had been given to them. After the incident of the burning church, *The Greasers* took the initiative to save the kids. Would trash take that kind of action? Was *The Greasers* really trash?

"Why, he had to get a haircut to get his picture in the paper. They'd never believe a greasy lookin' mug could be a hero. How do you like bein' a hero, big shot?" "How do I like what?" "Being a hero. You know" he shoved the morning paper at me impatiently "like a big shot, even." I stared at the newspaper. On the front page of the second section was the headline: JUVENILE DELINQUENTS TURN HEROES. (Hinton, 1967, p. 90)

"I read about you in the paper," Randy said finally. "How come?" I don't know. Maybe I felt like playing hero." "I wouldn't have. I would have let those kids burn to death." "You might not have. You might have done the same thing." Randy pulled out a cigarette and pressed in the car lighter. "I don't know. I don't know anything anymore. I would never have believed a greaser could pull something like that." (Hinton, 1967, p. 97)

Those data above somehow already challenged the *logos* presented in previous discussion (stereotype). *The Greasers* (trash) suddenly turned into heroes after saving those kids from the burning church. Not only the stereotype changed for *The Greasers* but as shown on page 97, it also applied to *The Socs*. When Randy talked to Pony about the incident, Randy said that he probably would not save those kids. If *The Socs*, indeed an asset to society, why Randy hesitated to do such action? even when they would turn "someday", in what particular event they would fulfill their potential? On the other hand, *The Greasers*, society's reject, could react and do what

the best to do in a given situation. It seemed that *The Greasers* was socially more functional than their rival despite the stereotype they had got.

From the discussion above, it showed how flawed the morality standard the society had in *The Outsiders* because they judged people by their status and wealth which had proven wrong. Those challenges somehow drew a new hierarchy where *The Greasers* dwelled in higher positions as they were the hero, whereas people became "the bad guy" due to their morality flaw. Below, the writer provided some supporting data showed that people not only morally absurd but also morally wrong which led to bad consequences.

A nurse appeared in the doorway. "Johnny," she said quietly, "your mother's here to see you." Johnny opened his eyes. At first they were wide with surprise, then they darkened. "I don't want to see her," he said firmly. "She's your mother." (Hinton, 1967, p. 103)

The response of the nurse seemed confused when she heard that Johnny refused to meet his mother. It would bear a question from the nurse and other people what kind of son who in his critical condition refused to meet his mother? Later Johnny revealed his reason refusing his mother as shown in the citation below:

"I said I don't want to see her." His voice was rising. "She's probably come to tell me about all the trouble I'm causing her and about how glad her and the old man'll be when I'm dead. Well, tell her to leave me alone. For once" his voice broke "for once just to leave me alone." He was struggling to sit up, but he suddenly gasped, went whiter than the pillowcase, and passed out cold. (Hinton, 1967, p. 104)

Most people when being told the situation without knowing the reason behind Johnny's decision may label Johnny as a bad guy as for no matter what, a mother was someone who gave birth and nurtured him with so much love (normal people). That was probably why the nurse kept insisting Johnny to let her mother in, which made Johnny comma and later led him to his death. Another supporting data made the writer questioning people (adults) morality was related to responsibility.

About that time a lady came running up. "Jerry, some of the kids are missing." "They're probably around here somewhere. You can't tell

with all this excitement where they might be." "No." She shook her head. "They've been missing for at least a half an hour. I thought they were climbing the hill..." Then we all froze. Faintly, just faintly, you could hear someone yelling. And it sounded like it was coming from inside the church. The woman went white. "I told them not to play in the church... I told them..." She looked like she was going to start screaming, so Jerry shook her. (Hinton, 1967, p. 78)

Jerry and the woman were the adults who supposed to be responsible for the kids they invite to do a picnic, yet because of their recklessness; the kids were out of their sight when finally they end up trapped in the burning church. All in all, despite whatever reasons might come, neglecting responsibility moreover caused others into nearly death situations cannot categorize as morally correct.

"He's dead, his mother has had a nervous breakdown. They spoiled him rotten. I mean, most parents would be proud of a kid like that good lookin' and smart and everything, but they gave in to him all the time. He kept trying to make someone say 'No' and they never did. They never did. That was what he wanted. For somebody to tell him 'No.' To have somebody lay down the law, set the limits, give him something solid to stand on. (Hinton, 1967, p. 97)

Carrying responsibility is one value that can determine someone has good morality, which from data presented above the adults have failed to fulfill. Not only related to responsibility, as the story progressed the writer also found particular moments when the adults' morality being questioned. From several data provided above, there were similarities in which the writer could draw the line that actually those entire incidents arguably led to someone's death. If the nurse did not urge Johnny and just did what Johnny said, would Johnny collapse and death? If Johnny's death was due to him remembering how bad his mother threatened him, could it be said that the nurse indirectly killed Johnny? If Bob's parents could handle and nurtured him in a way supposed to be, would Bob become such a rascal? Would Bob had that over-confidence which later also led him to his last breath?

Moving on, from all the data above, *The Greaser* somehow appeared to be more moral than the adults which had proven doing the mistakes led to bigger mess and consequences. Was that really the final conclusion? The turning point of this was when *The Greasers* saved the kids from the burning church. Was *The Greasers*, society's trash really had that angelic heart and sincerely sacrificing their lives for others? The writer doubts that.

"I bet we started it," I said to Johnny. "We must have dropped a lighted cigarette or something." I jerked loose and ran on. All I could think was: We started it. We started it. We started it! I wasn't about to go through that flaming door, so I slammed a big rock through a window and pulled myself in. It was a wonder I didn't cut myself to death, now that I think about it. (Hinton, 1967, p. 77-78)

Yes, that was true despite their stupidity (dropping a lighted-cigarettes), they still managed to do heroic action by saving those kids from the burning church. From this point alone, *The Greasers* which probably driven by guilt and responsibility was far better than people who from the previous discussion tend to neglecting theirs. Yet, if it was true that things which drove *The Greasers* were they felt responsible for the accident, and if they did not any relation with that incident, would *The Greasers* still willing to sacrifice their lives to save those unknown kids? would they turn their fortune and deserve to be called heroes?

CONCLUSION

After conducting this research and presenting the results, the writer finally comes with two conclusions answering the research questions. The first conclusion comes from the structural analysis applied to *The Outsiders*. Based on data from the novel, the society and *The Socs* believed that they were better than *The Greasers*, even though *The Greasers* (Pony) felt that his gang, had no different with *The Socs* in terms of their actions. From the society's perspective, *The Greasers* indeed became the troublemaker and easily scapegoated for whatever incidents in their neighborhood due to their appearances and annoying also unsettling action. In contradiction, *The Socs*, although several

data mentioned they also doing messed stuff but rarely cross paths with the society directly. That shows how is morality portrayed in the novel, by looking at the cover (appearances) and judging directly through the action conducted without further consideration, neglecting various factors such as reasons, conditions, and motives behind a particular action. The second conclusion comes after the writer applied the theory of deconstruction and challenged the established hierarchy presented before. Looking for other factors such as reasons, conditions, and motives behind characters' actions based on data presented in *The Outsiders*, the writer found several questionable things. Was *the Greasers* really more moral than *The Socs*? Did the society have more moral sense than *The Greasers* which they labeled as trash? Did *the Greasers* deserved to be called as heroes when they saved the kids from the burning church? Or there might be hidden motives behind their actions? All of those things, from the writer's perspective, most of those moral-immoral things portrayed in the novel were merely bias. No surprise, because that was the nature of morality. Morality is in fact just a matter of how ones placed themselves in order to gain some benefits and avoiding harms (Wong, 2006). In over-simplified words, morality is an idea comes from one's perspective (subjective), yet many people thought they could differ the right from the wrong. Thinking all of those possibilities, is not morality so absurd? does morality even exist in the first place?

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