

**THE STUDY OF TEENAGE REBELLIOUSNESS IN JAMES
PATTERSON & CHRIS TEBBETS' MIDDLE SCHOOL: THE WORST
YEAR OF MY LIFE**

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ABSTRACT: This thesis is conducted to raise an analysis about teenage rebellion in James Patterson & Chris Tebbets' *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*. The objective of the thesis is to solve two problem statements including the reason of Rafe's rebellion and the impacts of Rafe's rebellion. This study is limited by only discussing Rafe's rebellion. The aim of the study is to give an understanding about adolescence rebellion that has been a major problem in nowadays life. To conduct the present study, the writer applies some theories such as theory of adolescence, theory of teenage rebelliousness, theory of depression, and theory of school bullying as the basic theories of the analysis. The finding shows that the causes of Rafe's rebellion are the reflection his frustration, indignity, disappointment and rebu toward the family's issues, depression, and school bullying. Furthermore, the impacts of a rebellious behavior definitely influences both a rebellious teenager itself and his or her surrounding in which the negative impacts are often be found rather than the positive impacts.

Keywords: Adolescence, rebelliousness, teenage rebellion, authority.

ABSTRAK: Penelitian ini mengangkat analisis tentang pemberontakan remaja dalam novel karya James Patterson & Chris Tebbets yang berjudul *The Worst Years of My Life*. Penelitian ini dibuat untuk mengatasi rumusan masalah meliputi alasan dari pemberontakan Rafe. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memberi pemahaman tentang pemberontakan anak remaja yang telah menjadi masalah besar dalam kehidupan saat ini. Penulis menerapkan beberapa teori seperti teori adolescence (masa remaja), teori teenage rebelliousness (pemberontakan remaja), teori depression (depresi), dan teori school bullying untuk menyelesaikan penelitian ini. Hasil dari penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penyebab dari pemberontakan Rafe yaitu karena sebagai bentuk rasa frustrasi, hinaan, kekecewaannya dan kesedihannya terhadap keluarga, depresi, dan school bullying. Selain itu, dampak dari perilaku menentang sangat berpengaruh terhadap pelaku dan sekelilingnya yang mana dampak negatif lebih sering ditemukan dibandingkan dengan dampak positif

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INTRODUCTION

People pass through some stages of human development. Erik Erikson (1977: 222) reveals that human's development comprises eight stages from infancy to adulthood. During each stage, a person experiences a psychosocial crisis which can produce positive or negative outcomes for personality development. In Abraham Francis's *Social Work in Mental Health* (2014: 78), it is said that Stanley Hall was the first psychologist to advance the psychology of adolescence in its own right and using the methods of scientific to study them. He defined this period to begin at puberty at about 12 or 13 years, and end late, between 22 years to 25 years of age. In this phase, a person will face a difficult time in life. Many things they have to accept to survive. During this time, one of the psychosocial problems that often be found in adolescents over recent decades is rebelliousness — an obviously serious problem that parents often ignored.

Rebelliousness in adolescence is not a new theory for most of parents. Almost every teen experiences some kind of rebellious stages in their puberty. Some of them tend to fight for more freedom. Carl (2007: 55) divides adolescent growth into 4 stages: early adolescence and the change for the worse (ages 9–13), Mid-adolescence and the fight for more freedom (ages 13–15), late

adolescence and the desire to act more grown up (ages 15–18), trial independence and the challenge of living on one's own (ages 18–23). However, most parents become frightened about teen rebellion and they prefer to avoid that problem by paying less attention. Parents tend to be worried while facing a rebellious teen because they do not want to put their relationship in danger.

For the most teenagers in today's generation, as they are entering a new phase of life (adolescence), they may have some conflicts that runs into their heads. It is like an option they have to choose between two contradictive or very different things. Sometimes, they have to face a really great struggle for resisting what they think it is not good for them without any acceptance. Teenagers tend to refuse things that does not make them feel good, because the phase they are living makes them become very selective persons. In other words, if they do not want a thing rule or treat them, they will make some efforts to fight only to obtain what they really want.

The fact above also occur in Patterson & Tebbetts' *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*. The main character, Rafe Khatchadorian, twelve years old, has the same problem with his new phase of his life. As what has been declared by Francis (2014: 78) and Carl (2007: 55), Rafe belongs to early-

adolescence where most of kids like him tend to fight for freedom. In his adolescence, Rafe had to face a fact that he feels pressed his surroundings and is not capable to adapt them. Thus, Rafe has to come into a contact with psychological problems called rebellion to resist the authority.

Rafe feels that his new school does not fit him. While living with new people, it is hard for Rafe to make an The problem above attracts the writer's interest to conduct the study of rebelliousness in Patterson & Tebbetts' *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*. Despites the rebelliousness is a phenomenon that many of adolescents will ever pass through. The way the author present the story genuinely inspires the writer to conduct an analysis of rebelliousness in Patterson & Tebbetts' *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*.

Dealing with the background that has been mentioned above, the thesis writer would like to analyze why Rafe rebels in Patterson & Tebbetts' *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*, and also the impacts that follows.

There are many psychological aspects that can be analysed in James Patterson & Chris Tebbetts' *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*. This study, however, only deals with the discussion of one of the main characters — Rafe. In discussing the main character here, the study is

limited by only discussing Rafe's rebellion.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses qualitative research in which the procedure of research produced descriptive data. While, the psychological approach that is applied in the present study belongs to extrinsic approach which is suitable for this study due to its topic about psychology.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The finding shows that the reasons behind Rafe's rebellion are .family's issues, depression, and school bullying. While, the impact of his rebelliousness include the negative and positive impacts toward him and his surroundings.

Family, in fact, is the most influential thing which affects someone's life. It is where a person socialize very firstly. However, a family that Rafe has is different from the others. Based on Rafe's presumption, his family is kind of an awful family.

The Rafe's negative view about his family reflects a developmental transition which its context influences his cognition, emotion, behaviour and relationships. During puberty, Rafe tends to be more selective to his environment including his family as the closest

environment he lives every day. What he thinks about his family is written in the following quotation: “It feels as honest as the day is *crummy* that I begin this tale of total desperation, and woe with me, my *pukey* sister, Georgia, and Leonardo the Silent sitting like rotting sardines in the back of a Hills Village Police Department cruiser...” (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 1-2)

From the quoted scene above, it is implied that he is being frustrated with his current family. Rafe is portrayed as a teenager with such psychosocial problems around him. He hardly finds a person he can be comfortable with. Also, he cannot just befriend with other kids around. That is the proof that Rafe is a kid who has become an adolescent. In adolescence stage, every child will experience a particular condition called puberty. While, puberty always influences people perception on something. A kid who used to love something could just hate it immediately as he or she has changed the way of thinking. In the story, the feeling that describe an inconvenience and satisfaction of Rafe becomes the causes why Rafe turns to be a rebellious teenager.

On the case of family’s issues, the first issue that leads him into rebelliousness is his mother’s situation. Jules, his mother who has been a single parent in a long time, is dating a man named Carl. She thinks that she may need a man to be her

husband after Rafe’s dad passed away since Rafe was seven year old. Rafe’s dad passed away as he went to the war as a soldier after he enlisted in the army. This situation has led him to become a rebellious teenager.

The emotional feeling arises as Rafe realized that a man who is dating his mother is not a nice person. Rafe seems to be upset because of his mother decision of dating and planning to marry a guy named Carl. Both Rafe and Georgia do not like Carl, the future of step-father of them. They do not want him to be their step-father as he has never shown a nice manner. Therefore, both Rafe and his sister think that Carl does not deserve their mother. The statement that shows Rafe’s refusal against Carl is implied at this following quotation: “Meet my future stepfather, also known as the low point of my day. His name is Carl, but we call him Bear. Two years ago, he was just this customer at the dinner where my mom works. Now, somehow, Mom has a ring on her finger, and Bear lives here with us.” (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 38)

The loss that is caused by death is one of the reasons why a person suffers from depression. When someone or something is gone forever, grief may seem overpowering. For children, it can be more difficult to understand when there is no concrete or physical evidence to be shown. It is also

arduous for children to comprehend or accept the permanence of death.

This situation has the resemblance of what Rafe is experiencing in Patterson & Tebbetts' *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*. The situation where Rafe feels so sorry after the death of his brother indicates the respond of Rafe on the permanence of death. In fact, there is no person in the world who will resist on what Rafe feels toward Leo.

Leo is actually Rafe's twin brother who died of meningitis. Leo passed away when they were only three years old. Even though Rafe does not really know a lot of his twin brother that has passed away, Rafe seems difficult to admit the death of Leo. The saying that twins are aware of each other is portrayed in the whole story even one of them has died. Until Rafe becomes an adolescence, he cannot avoid that he still can feel the existence of Leo. In the story, Rafe who has become a teenager still thinks that Leo is still there as his imaginary friend. The refusal of the death of his twin brothers has indicated that Rafe is suffering from depression. In short, Leo is only Rafe's illusion. Leo is not there anymore. However, the statement below is the proof of the deceased Leo's existence as an imaginary friend of Rafe: "Do you remember that nursery rhyme about Jack Sprat and his wife? How neither of them ate the same thing, but between two of

them they got job done? Same deal with me and Leo except the fat and the lean are words and pictures ... Leo speaks to me sometimes, but that's about it. Conversation just isn't his thing. If Leo wanted to tell you your house was on fire, he'd probably draw you a picture to let you know. The boy is about talkative as giraffe..." (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 13)

The statement above tells that Leo is described by Rafe as a quiet person but Leo tries to show his presence through pictures which is actually only Rafe's imagination. That is why Rafe calls Leo as Leo "The Silent" in the story. Rafe's depression caused by the death of his twin brother appears to be the other reason of his rebellious behaviour. In the following statement, it is also describe that Leo is considered as an imaginary friend of Rafe: "Bottom Line, Leonardo the Silent is my best friend, at Hills Village or anywhere else. And before his head gets too big to fit through the door, I should say there's not a whole lot competition for that title." (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 15)

Rafe's assumption about his imaginary friend, Leo, has led him into rebelliousness by breaking school rules. Rafe who keeps thinking that Leo is still around considers Leo in whatever he is doing. Leo, who now is just an imaginary friend of Rafe, takes a big part of making decision in Rafe life. In the story Leo is illustrated to encourage Rafe on

breaking rules because both of Rafe and Leo think that breaking the rules is a fun.

Bullying in School environment happens because it is caused by some concerns. Occasionally, students get bullied because they are different and unlike an average student, or because they are categorized as a smart or popular student. Moreover, bullying occurs because of the dissimilarities in race, religion, abilities, weight, height or anything that makes a difference between one student and the others. At other times, bullying occurs because the victims are in the wrong place at the wrong time.

During the adaption life on his new environment, Rafe has to confront a very serious problem in front of him. At the beginning, Rafe, as a transfer student in Hills Village Middle School, feels difficult to fit himself onto a brand new society. He does not find himself comfortable in his current school. One of the reason why it happens is because a matter of bullying. School bullying describes how a society lives in its youth.

Bullies are characterized as typical persons who always tries to ruin the others' life. In Patterson & Tebbetts' *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*, bullies are illustrated as the ones who wants to be big and in charge. Then, bullies will make an attempt to achieve it by margining or cornering another person. Consequently, marginalized

person will feel small, weak, and helpless.

However, people who gets bullied will not always be victimized forever. Some of them even make some efforts to fight back against the bullies. The kind of effort to fight back against bullies is often called as rebellion. The type rebellion that occurs in this case seems to be a reactive rebelliousness. This type of rebellion is often described in a situation where there is an unfair issue which later causes a rebellion. This constant bullying is the reason why Rafe decides to rebel against Miller—the bully—, and the school rules. The following quotation shows how Rafe gets bullied and how he makes an effort to rebel:“Sitting in the back, huh?’ he said. ‘Yeah’, I told him. ‘Are you one of those troublemakers or something?’ he said. I just shrugged. ‘I don’t know. Not really.’ ‘Cause this is where all the juvies sit,’ he said, and took a step closer. ‘In fact, you’re in my seat.’ ‘I don’t see your name on it,’ I told him, and I was just starting to think maybe that was the wrong thing to say when Miller put one of his XXXL paws around my neck and started lifting me like a hundred -pound dumbbell.” (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 8-9)

At the beginning, it has been discussed that Rafe has some problem to have a good relationship with people around him. Miller, his new friend, is the first kid that has a situation with him in his new school

environment. As a new kid in a class like Rafe always attracts other students. So does Miller. As a mean student in Hills Village, Miller starts to feel disturbed of the presence of Rafe. In the statement above, it implies that Miller does not wish anyone to break his reputation as the meanest student in Hills Village Middle School. That is why Miller begins to bully Rafe.

The rebellion that Rafe shows as his retaliatory act occasionally proved by the words Rafe speaks to Miller. As the example, it is found in a sentence “I don’t see your name on it” as he responded when Miller asked him to leave the chair where Rafe is sitting, Rafe tries a little effort to at least resist what Miller asked. Instead of saying “Okay” or “I’m sorry” and then leave the chair, Rafe looks like he still wanted to sit down in that chair without paying attention of what Miller has said. The following statement, quoted from the story, proves that bullying is the cause of Rafe’s rebellion: “I understood, all right. I’d been in sixth grade for about four and a half minutes, and I already had a fluorescent orange target on my back. And don’t get me wrong. I’m not a total wimp. Give me a few more chapters, and I’ll show you what I’m capable of.” (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 10)

Students who bully the other students occasionally have some problems with them or they may be unhappy because of their presence. Besides,

they bully the others because they are possibly trying to get their attention, power or love back to them that has been taken by their victims. Through bullying, the bullies feel more powerful and look pleased to harm the others without feeling guilty toward the person they bully.

In the case of Rafe, as it is stated above in the quotation, Rafe tries to describe himself as a student who wants anyone to know that he is not a weak person. In other words, he resists to be pressed by the authority of Miller. The effort that he made is to rebel whatever Miller does to him. A vindictive feeling lead Rafe to revenge the superiority and domination of Miller by making some rebellious behaviours. Miller who is considered as a mean student feels worry about his power of dominating the other students that has been threatened by the presence of Rafe in Hills Village Middle School as a transfer student.

Bullying and Rebellion seem to be two concept that are linked each other even though they are very contradictory. In the story, the act of bullying causes an act of rebellion. Miller who bullies Rafe causes the rebellion of Rafe toward him. That is how bullying and rebellion work together in Patterson & Tebbetts’ *Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*. The refusal act of Rafe towards Miller reveals that a rebellious behaviour, as the reflection of the victim’s vengeful feeling, is

often found when someone is pressed or marginalized by an authority.

To rebel something means accepting all of the consequences of breaking One of Rafe's rebellion that he made by breaking school rules is the reflection of his willingness to get the attentions from the others. In other words, one of the intentions of Rafe's rebellion is to obtain fun or excitement through a rebellious behaviour. As a new student who has a particular behaviour, Rafe wants to show everyone his presence. The quotation below is the proof the positive impacts of Rafe's rebellion has helped him to get the other students' attentions: "I knew I was in trouble, but I'll tell you this much: it was totally worth it. Everyone besides Donatello was still laughing, including Jeannie Galleta. And the thing was, nobody was laughing at me anymore. Now they are laughing *with* me. That's like the difference between night and day. Or wet and dry. Or in this case, losing and winning." (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 62)

There is almost no evidence of the positive impact of Rafe's rebellion except his family's issue that is finally over. The conflict that involves Carl or "Bear" and all of the member of Rafe's family comes to an end as Carl left Rafe's house. The chaos that occur in the middle of Rafe's family happens when Jules, Rafe's mother, is involved in a quarrel between her and Carl. There is also a physical contact

that is made by Carl in that quarrel as what is stated in the following quotation: "As soon as I saw that Mom had fallen down the front step, I told Georgia to call 911." (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 253)

The cause of their quarrels is definitely Rafe's rebellion. A bad behaviour that Rafe shows in school creates detention by detention that makes Carl even angry. Carl wants Rafe to be punished as what he has done lately. However, Jules cannot accept it. She tries to defend his son that no one can harm his son, including Carl. That's what a mother should do. After that incident, Jules finally knew who Carl is and realized why Rafe always refuses Carl to be his future step-father. The following quotation proves the positive impact of Rafe's rebellion as his family's issue is finally over: "Still, I stayed right there until the police came, with two cruisers and an ambulance. They put Bear in the back of one car. Another policeman started asking me and Georgia questions about what'd seen, while the ambulance guy looked at Mom's wrist.... 'Come sit,' Mom told us. 'I want to have a talk.' So we all sat down at the kitchen table. With one empty chair. Where Bear usually ate. 'Things are going to change around here,' Mom said. 'Bear's not going to be living with us anymore, and hopefully that means I can afford to stop working double shifts at the diner too.'" (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 258)

What is stated above is the evident of a positive impact of Rafe's rebellion. As Carl has left his family and been arrested by the police, Rafe now can live without an oppression and domination of Carl which he considers as cruel man. This situation belongs to a situation where Rafe is excited to know the Carl is going to leave his house. At least, his contrariness against Carl has produced the positive impact of his rebellion. Shortly, rebellion is not always followed by its negative impact, but significant change can also happen.

To rebel something means accepting all of the consequences of breaking rules. As a Hill Village Middle School Student who breaks every school rule, Rafe has to face the fact that he must take the school punishment as the result of the risk behaviour. His willingness to get the attentions from the others and obtain fun or excitement has led him to do such a rebellious behaviour. In consequence, Rafe starts to do something out of his mind.

As an example, one of his rebellions is that Rafe is in the situation where he makes a horrible turmoil as he reads Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* by messing the meter and rhyme of it during English class to get the class attentions. Rafe's behaviour is considered by the other teacher as unacceptable behaviour. Consequently, Rafe has to take the punishment. The quotation below is the proof of the negative impacts of

Rafe's rebellion from trying to get the other students' attentions: "He gave me thirty push-ups, two extra laps, and ... ta-da! ... my very first detention. I mean, it's not like I wanted detention, but at least now I got something out of it." (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 76)

The first person that feels heavy-hearted because of Rafe's rebellion is certainly Jules, Rafe's mother. Jules becomes the one who surely feels the negative impacts of her son's rebellion. She definitely feels devastated knowing that his son shockingly has done a forbidden thing like breaking school's rules. As an example, when Rafe makes a terrible mistake in a school event of Halloween. Rafe was caught running almost naked. Being naked in school is not allowed and it is one of the rules that he should not have broken. The following statement proves that the negative impact of Rafe's rebellious behavior also happens toward his mother, Jules: "Then the worst thing of all happened. I looked up at mom again. She hadn't moved, but this one tear rolled down her cheek. Then she turned away and walked into the back room without saying anything at all." (Patterson & Tebbetts, 2011: 122-123)

Nevertheless, Rafe actually realized that his action will make his mother sad since Rafe really loves Jules as it is implied over the statement above. Since he has broken school rules, Rafe has to receive some punishments

as the result. In the other hand, Jules would think that she has failed to raise her children following all of the things that Rafe has done. That was all caused by Rafe's rebellion in school environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the result of data analysis, the reasons why a teenager like Rafe has become very rebellious are mostly caused by family's issue, depression, and school bullying. However, his rebellious behaviour caused some disadvantageous effects toward himself and his surroundings. The family's issue which occurs in Rafe's life is portrayed as Rafe's being not satisfied to be in his family. The family's issue that turns him into a rebellious teenager is his mother's situation. Carl, his mother's boyfriend, is described as a very influencing person in Rafe's rebellion. Rafe's feeling of not being loved properly by his parents has made him pressed. A frustration feeling arises as the occurrence of Carl's humiliation on Rafe is found. Therefore, being frustrated or humiliated by someone can lead a teenager to have a rebellious behaviour.

Depression, as another reason of Rafe's rebellion is also analysed. The feeling where Rafe is being pressed by his loss is mostly illustrated in the novel. The loss that is caused by the death of Leo, Rafe's

twin brother, is one of the reasons why he suffers from depression. Leo passed away when they were only three years old of meningitis. Although Rafe does not really know his twin brother well, but he looks difficult to admit the death of Leo. As becoming an adolescence, Rafe still can feel the existence of Leo. It is described in the story that Rafe thinks that Leo is still around as his imaginary friend. The refusal of the death of his twin brother has indicated that Rafe is suffering from depression. This situation has made Rafe unable to control himself.

The other reason of Rafe's rebellion is school bullying. During the adaption life on his new environment, Rafe has to face a very serious situation. As a new transfer student in Hills Village Middle School, Rafe feels difficult to make an adaptation into a new society. Moreover, one of the reasons why Rafe does not feel comfortable is because a matter of bullying. Miller, his new friend is the student who bullies him. Miller does not like the presence of Rafe in his class. Miller does want anyone to become as mean as him. So, Miller starts to bully and disturb Rafe. However, Rafe tries to show everyone that he is not a weak person. A vengeful feeling has lead Rafe to resist the authority of Miller. Rafe even tries to fight the superiority and domination of Miller by making some rebellious behaviours.

The rest of the discussion is about the impacts of Rafe's rebellion toward himself and his surroundings. One of the positive impacts of Rafe's rebellion by breaking school's rules is that he successfully make a good connection with his new friends through a rebellious way after making a turmoil during his class. In short, the rebellion that Rafe made by breaking school rules reflects his willingness to get the attentions from the others or to obtain fun and excitement. While, the negative impact of Rafe's rebellion is where Rafe has to take the school punishment as the result of the risk behaviour. His willingness to get the attentions from the others leads him to do such a rebellion.

While, toward his surrounding, the positive impact of Rafe's rebellion has almost no evidence except his family's issue that is finally over. The conflict among Carl or "Bear" and all of the member of Rafe's family comes to an end as Carl left them. Because of Rafe's rebellion, his mother finally realized that Carl is not a man who deserve to be the step-father of her children. While, there are negative impacts caused by Rafe's rebellion toward his surroundings. As it discussed in the previous chapter, Rafe's mother becomes the one who surely feels the negative impacts of her son's rebellion. She definitely feel sad knowing that his son shockingly has done a forbidden thing like breaking school's rules. Moreover, a good

reputation of Hills Village Middle School and all of the teacher in it is being questioned as the effect of Rafe's vandalism.

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