

As youth, we struggle with the concept of change; the ultimate change being the transition from child to adult. This is spent during our teenage years and is called 'coming of age'. Through the four texts I will be analysing, we see the battle between teenagers and the concept of growing up, specifically their relationships with their parents and their search for an identity. Within the texts 'The Breakfast Club' and 'The Edge of Seventeen', we see the parent/child relationships that affect the main protagonists and their ability to cope with the pressures of coming of age. In the texts 'Love, Simon' and 'Sierra Burgess is a loser', we learn the challenges of finding one's identity and self acceptance. The characters in the texts explore the difficulty in having a sense of belonging in the environment of high school. The protagonists in the films represent the hard times of teenage years in an engaging and relatable way, especially when it comes to: parents, friends, finding yourself, finding acceptance and high school overall.

In the film '**The Breakfast Club**', set in 1984, at Shermer high school, Illinois, and directed by John Hughes, we are introduced to a cast of senior high school students who are each facing conflict and pressures, mostly with their parents. During the film, the students are identified as their high school stereotype. e.g. The princess, athlete, criminal and brain. Over their detention time, each learn to admit their problems and confide in one another, showing who they really are.

We meet the character Andrew, who is labeled the 'athlete', and are soon introduced to his hardships with his relationship with his father. Andrew believes his father is controlling and puts huge stress on his shoulders. In a close up shot, we see Andrew yelling his father's words and crying because of how overwhelmed and upset he is. *"It's all because of me and my old man. God, I fucking hate him. He's like this mindless machine that I can't even relate to anymore. **"Andrew, you've got to be number one! I won't tolerate any losers in this family! You're intention is for shit! WIN! WIN! WIN!"** You son of a bitch. You know, sometimes I wish my knee would give, then I wouldn't be able to wrestle anymore. And he could forget all about me."* Because of his father's overarching influence, Andrew is lead to believe that bullying and violence is okay. Andrew was put in detention and the time he spent with his peers made him question the kind of person he is when, he asks the group, *"My God, are we gonna be our parents?"* Andrew is so consumed by the pressures of his father, it affects his choices and the choices that make him an individual. Andrew wants to be a good person, but with a role model like his father, he does not like who he is turning into. Like Andrew, his peers struggle to find healthy relationships with their parents. The 'princess' is stuck between her parents divorce, the 'brain' has to have the perfect grades and the 'criminal' is only ever surrounded by violence; it is scary to know what children go through alone. This shows the audience how scared Andrew is; outside of his role of the popular jock, he does not know who he is, but hopes to not turn into the kind of adult his dad is. This links to the film 'The Edge of Seventeen' and the character Nadine, who is lost after the death of her father and clashes with her unsupportive mother, Mona.

In the film '**The Edge of Seventeen**', set in 2016, in the suburbs of Portland, and directed by Kelly Fremon Craig, we are introduced to the main protagonist, Nadine. Nadine is a junior in high school and believes the whole world is out to get her because everything seems to go right

for her brother but never for her, *"There are two types of people in the world: The people who naturally excel at life. And the people who hope all those people die in a big explosion"*. This feeling continues and grows after the death of her father. Since, Nadine has struggled to have a positive relationship with her mother, Mona. This is similar to Andrew in 'The Breakfast Club', and his struggle to have a positive relationship with his father. *"You could say that my mother and I weren't exactly peas in a pod. And the only one who could handle either of us, was dad."* During Nadine's hardships in the film: losing her father, her best friend and failing to make any friends; whenever she tries to confide in her mother, Mona makes the situation about herself. This also links with 'The Breakfast Club' and the pressure Andrew's father puts on him because of his own agenda to be the best, not because it is best for Andrew. After Mona asks Nadine how her night was, she replies *"It was probably one of the worst nights of my life"* but was interrupted by Mona saying, *"Oh, you wouldn't believe the night I've had."* Mona is portrayed to be a selfish, single mother. We see this when Mona leaves the kids to have a weekend with her new boyfriend and complains about her looks rather than asking Nadine how she is. When she does speak of Nadine's father, she labels him as 'my husband', not 'your father' because of her selfish feelings, which upsets Nadine a lot. *"You can run off and get you a new husband, what he is is my dad. Can't you say that occasionally?"* Nadine is grieving, and like all teenagers, she feels as though no one understands her. This is also seen in 'The Breakfast Club' when the students come together to talk about their true feelings, revealing themselves and building understanding. But when it comes to everyday teen pressures, it is hard to cope without a positive parental figure, just like Andrew in 'The Breakfast Club'. Andrew's father puts too much pressure on Andrew, while Mona is showing no care toward Nadine. Both teenagers react negatively towards their parents behaviour, reflecting real life teen/parent relationships and the constant battle youth face to find understanding and kindness. This is further explored through the theme of identity and acceptance, in the next film called 'Love, Simon.'

In the text '**Love, Simon**', set in 2018, Atlanta, Georgia, and directed by Greg Berlanti, we meet the main protagonist Simon, a senior in high school with a secret. *"I'm just like you, I have a totally, perfectly, normal life. Except I have one huge ass secret. I'm gay."* Simon struggles to 'out' himself and creates multiple reasons why he is not ready, until he is blackmailed by a classmate and has to choose whether to out himself or to lose the trust of his best friend. *"I'm just not ready for my whole world to change."* Along Simon's journey, he begins to realise how much his secret has affected his life and the relationships he has with his friends, family and his relationship with himself. And when he falls in love with a boy behind an email, he begins to question himself and who he is. *"When you were little, you were so carefree. But these last few years, more and more, it's almost like I could feel you holding your breath."* Simon's realises his struggle was not coming out to his parents, but the rest of the world. *"I am gay. For a long time I was killing myself to hide that fact. I had all these reasons: it was unfair that only gay people had to come out, I was sick of change, but the truth is I was just scared. At first I thought it was just a gay thing but then I realised that no matter what, announcing who you are to the world is pretty terrifying. Cos what if the world doesn't like you?"* Simon became scared of the person he is and lost himself in the need to keep his secret; terrified at the idea of anyone knowing. This links with 'The Breakfast Club' and Andrew's realisation that he is becoming like his father; he knows

he needs to break the pattern and decide who he wants to be. Now that Simon's secret is out, Simon shows the world his true self and grows self acceptance. This also links to the next film, 'Sierra Burgess is a loser' and Sierra's battle to find herself and learning to love what she sees, while her true identity is exposed to the person she loves.

In the text '**Sierra Burgess is a loser**', directed by Ian Samuels, we are introduced to the main protagonist, Sierra Burgess. Sierra is a senior in high school and is known for being the 'biggest loser' in school because she does not fit the traditional standard of physical beauty. But one night, she receives a random message from a cute boy named Jamie. She soon develops feelings for him, only to find out that he believes she is someone else: Veronica, the most popular girl in school. Although Sierra knows she should not continue talking to Jamie, she knows he will not accept her for herself, so she continues to deceive him. This links to 'Love, Simon' and Simon's online relationship with the guy he likes and how it affects his relationship with his friends and his ability to decide what's right and what's wrong, by choosing to keep his secret instead of being kind to his friends. This shows me that the 2 characters are willing to do whatever it takes to keep the people they love, just as any teenager does during their first love.

When we first meet Sierra, she is coming out of the shower and non diegetic music, 'Kid wonder' by Allie x, is playing in the background. While Sierra is standing before the mirror, posing and looking at her body, the lyrics of the background music sings: "It feels like I'm a walking tragedy, walking tragedy, walking tragedy." The lyrics are negative and are being played while Sierra is staring at herself, making the audience believe that is how Sierra feels about herself. But it's not until she begins talking to Jamie and comparing herself to Veronica, that she starts to question her looks and how she feels about herself.

When Sierra and her best friend Dan are cutting out magazines, she picks up a photo of a slim, beautiful model and asks him *"Is this really what guys want?"* When Dan replies *"Are you just figuring that out?"* Sierra says she *"never really had to think about it before."* Sierra also begins to see the person she is on the inside, which is a clever and funny girl who is also sad and insecure. If she is not beautiful like Veronica or her mother, or a genius like her father, then who is she? This is similar to Simon in 'Love, Simon', who knows who he is, but is insecure about the world's response. This underlines how most teens are insecure about themselves, which makes finding acceptance difficult, especially in the environment of high school, as it is for Simon and his sexuality and Sierra and her body stereotype. This also links to the theme of identity and how it is a teenage issue, specifically because it affects adolescents and how they can make bad choices while struggling to find themselves. We see this in 'The Breakfast Club' and 'The edge of Seventeen', when Andrew and Nadine act badly in response to their parents' behaviour toward them.

Sierra struggles to find herself, especially in the environment of high school, where she's just labeled as a loser by the popular kids. Once Jamie finds out Sierra was faking her persona, he asks her to stay away from him. Sierra then takes it out on her mother and says *"Do you have any idea what it's like to be a teenage girl and look like this? Of course not, because you're tiny!"*

*You're tiny and you're beautiful and you've always been beautiful! **And this is what you stuck me with.***" Sierra has been influenced to believe that the 'ideal' woman is tiny and beautiful, like Veronica and her mother. This is a traditional point of view, encouraged in the environment of high school because of external influences, such as: media, cultures, history and society. This point of view is shown by the 'popular' kids that students compare themselves to. These expectations lead to insecurities and depression and problems like the ones Sierra faces. Sierra's mother, Jules, is shocked and concerned at Sierra's sudden outburst and her overwhelming negative portrayal of herself. Jules previously believed she'd been positive about Sierra's image and choices and knows now to give her space and to understand Sierra is learning to become the person she wants to be. This is also shown in 'Love, Simon', when Simon's parents respond to his secret positively and it encourages him to be himself and accept what comes his way. This also links to the parent/teen relationships in 'The Breakfast Club' and 'The Edge of Seventeen', and the struggle teenagers go through without supportive or understanding parents, emphasising that negative teen/parent relationships need to change; it is the most constant and affected one, because while parents are trying their best to tell a teenager who they are, the teenagers themselves are trying to establish a sense of identity.

In conclusion, these four texts have effectively shown the troubles of coming of age and the difficulties of high school. This is shown through parent/teen relationships and the search for an identity and acceptance in high school. Through the films, I have noticed themes and patterns between the parent/teen relationships and the effects on the film's audience. Between 'The Breakfast Club' and 'The Edge of Seventeen', we notice the need for teenagers to have support to navigate through adolescence. Without the help of a role model or positive example, the characters go through hardships alone and follow bad pathways. This is shown in the behavioural problems of the cast in 'The Breakfast Club', where the students face detention for their crimes in school and later admit the problem to be their parents and their need for understanding and support, instead of pressure and criticism. In the films 'Love, Simon' and 'Sierra Burgess is a loser', the main protagonists face the fear of finding themselves and not being accepted. This reflects the pressures of high school and the expectations of peers and society to fit these limited roles or be unpopular. Teenagers need more support in all aspects of their lives: in friendships, family, schools and society. I believe the reason why 'coming of age' films continue to be so popular, is because the same problems of the transition from child to adult remain. Films like these are important, as they are on a high platform that might reach and help teenagers to feel less isolated and realise others are facing similar situations and are relatable to themselves.