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Interpersonal Communication
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The Breakfast Club and Brockriede

The Breakfast Club is the quintessential 80s coming-of-age movie, but what would it be without the typical authority figure that does not understand the generation he reins over? This villain lies in Vice President Richard Vernon, and his character serves as a perfect example of Brockriede's concept of argumentative rape throughout the film.

Power is key for arguers who function as rapists. Their mindset is to structure a situation to give them the upper hand. Brockriede writes, "[rapists] function through power, an ability to apply psychic and physical sanctions, through rewards and especially punishments, through commands and threats (2). Through constant shouts and threats, Vice Principal Vernon plays the mental and physical game with the students to empower himself. Vernon addresses Bender after the student disrespects him and says "when you're outta here and you've forgotten all about this place and they've forgotten all about you, and you're wrapped up in your own pathetic life, I'm gonna be there. That's right. And I'm gonna kick the living shit out of you. I'm gonna knock your dick in the dirt." Not only does he mentally abuse Bender, but he also physically threatens the student to gain power. No matter whom he speaks to in *The Breakfast Club*, Vernon makes sure the students are aware of his position of power. He says, "I'm a man of respect around here. They love me around here. I'm a swell guy. You're a lying sack of shit and everybody knows it."

Again, Vernon functions by placing himself in a position of power and everyone else beneath him. The argumentative rapist relies on power to control and to manipulate their victims into submission as co-arguers.

Domination is another characteristic of Brockriede's rapist, which Vernon embodies perfectly. The argumentative rapist comes in with the intent to rape, to dominate, and to take control over the co-arguer (Brockriede 2). When Vernon walks into detention, he makes it clear that this will not be an enjoyable Saturday and that the students will listen, respect, and obey him. Brockriede writes, "the rapist wants to gain or to maintain a position of superiority" (3); Vernon says, "I make \$31,000 a year and I have a home and I'm not about to throw it all away on some punk like you." Not only does he establish dominance by talking down to the students, but he also does so by taking advantage of situations even when he has established control. Brockriede writes, "the rapist's intent in a transaction with people is to manipulate the objects or to violate the victims" (3). Bender and Vernon argue leading to a back-and-forth resulting in two months worth of detention; it is clear Vernon is the dominant figure, but he continues to press Bender so as to assert himself more. Consistently throughout the day, Vernon makes physically threatening remarks to the students to show his dominance from "next time I have to come in here I'm cracking skulls" to "don't mess with the bull or you'll get the horns." Even with his powerful title, Vernon feels the need to show his complete authority over the students that furthers his position as an argumentative rapist.

Rapist Vernon asserts himself through power and dominance, but he also uses manipulation to achieve his status and control. Brockriede describes it as

“coercing through argument” (2). While the rapist may have established power, they continue to manipulate situations to gain the upper hand or to get under the skin of their co-arguer. Vernon purposely selects the two students, the jock and the basket case, to get drinks for the students because he knows they would rather go with anyone else; Vernon thrives off of seeing students suffer at his hands. Vernon symbolizes the argumentative rapist because he “structures the situation so he has more power than others” (Brockriede 3). In a storage room closet, Bender and Vernon are face-to-face arguing. After being sentenced to another two months detention, Bender knows that Vernon is in control of the situation and is submitting. Vernon chooses to push the situation and puts Bender in a position where he seemingly is given choice but can only fail. Vernon says, “Just take the first shot. I’m begging you, take a shot. Just one hit. Come on, that’s all I need, just one swing.” Vernon knows that Bender will not hit him, but he gives him the chance in order to see Bender surrender to Vernon. The situation was never intended to give Bender a choice but to make him feel lesser. Vernon openly criticizes Bender in front of all the students to demean him; he says, “Look at him—he’s a bum. You want to see something funny? You go visit John Bender in five years. You’ll see how goddamned funny he is.” Vernon and the argumentative rapists set up these situations to validate their superiority while hurting their co-arguers.

There is no two-sidedness in relationships with rapists, and this is clear in all of Vernon’s dialogue because it is controlled and dominated solely by him. By shouting and talking down, Vernon prevents any meaningful dialogue that leads to unilateral relationships with the students. Brockriede writes, “the ultimate instance

of rape is censorship, either overt or subtle” (3). Arguments with Vernon cannot truly occur in *The Breakfast Club* with Vernon because there is no opportunity for the students to speak. If Vernon had only listened to Bender, he would have found the pot in Brian’s underwear, but he is so focused on his own speech that he ignores it. In argumentative rape, the victim may or may not be willing, but Vernon rapes the students through their inability to communicate to him (3). Vernon’s attitude with the students is “my way or die” which is how a rapist functions; they are not willing to subject themselves to the other and learn from dialogue (2). The inequality in Vernon’s relationships with the students serves as a huge factor in his classification as an argumentative rapist.

The Breakfast Club demonstrates all of Brockriede’s argumentative types, but Vice Principal Vernon clearly portrays the rapist. He functions through power, dominance, and control over dialogue. It is possible that this is what is expected of an authority figure when students misbehave. The students in detention clearly violated rules, so Vernon could be acting as a rapist because of the position he holds rather than the person he is. Brockriede writes, “the arguer’s response may be influenced by who he is, who the arguer is, and what their relationship is” (1). Every student knows that a teacher is an authority figure, so therefore it could be said that Vernon functions as he is meant and required to. No matter if he chooses to or is forced to, it is clear that Vice Principal Vernon is an example of Brockriede’s argumentative rapist in *The Breakfast Club*.