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Devastating Consequences Due to Impulsive Decisions

           As stated in goodchoicesgoodlife.org, impulsive decisions can, as a result of unexpected obstacles, result in the loss and misery of surrounding people. Many people base their decisions on anger, jealousy, or other strong emotions that can lead to unforeseen consequences. Shakespeare centers his tragedies on this idea as characters in his plays frequently make impulsive decisions that ultimately lead to death; his teenage tragedyis no different.  As a result, *Romeo and Juliet* suggests that decisions based on emotional impulses ultimately result in tragedy.

           Romeo makes many decisions based on emotional impulses that ultimately contribute to the play’s tragic ending. He allows his emotions to lead to impulsive decisions. This can be seen when he immediately resolves to buy poison and kill himself next to Juliet’s body:

Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night

Let’s see for means. O mischief, thou art swift

To enter in the thoughts of desperate men!

I do remember an apothecary,

And hereabouts he dwells, which late I noted

[...]

“An if a man did need poison now,

Whose sale is present death in Mantua,

Here lives a caitiff wretch that would sell it to him.” (5.1. 34-38, 50-51)

Only moments ago, Romeo was thinking,

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,

My dreams presage some joyful news at hand.

My bosom’s lord sits lightly in his throne,

And all this day an unaccustom’d spirit

Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts. (5.1. 1-5)

At this point Romeo is thinking good luck is going to come his way, as he has had joyful dreams. Ironically, this is when Balthasar unintentionally misinforms him of Juliet’s death. His joy turns to anger and confusion and, in the heat of the moment, decides he is going to kill himself; an impulsive decision that will ultimately lead to the tragic ending of the play. Another example of Romeo’s impulsiveness is when he fights Paris because Paris tries to warn him to stay away from Juliet’s tomb. Romeo refuses and in his anger fights Paris while being unaware of who he is fighting. Romeo ends up killing Paris, after which he realizes who his opponent was; the ‘noble County Paris’ who was soon to be married to Juliet (5.3 54-78). Romeo allows his emotions to cloud his judgment, which explains his rash decisions. Due to his death, Juliet kills herself thus resulting in the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet.*

Juliet, like Romeo, makes numerous important decisions throughout the play, many of which are based on emotional impulses, leading to the tragic ending of the play. Her impulsiveness is shown when she agrees to marry Romeo, someone she has only met that day: “If that thy bent of love be honourable, / Thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow” (2.2. 143-144). Juliet tells Romeo that if he truly loves her, they should get married the next day, and that she will follow him anywhere. She bases her decision on her newfound love for Romeo she thinks is reciprocated so strongly that they should get married, regardless of the fact she barely knows anything about Romeo.  Additionally, when Capulet decides to marry Juliet to Paris, she again shows her impulsiveness by threatening to kill herself unless Friar Lawrence helps her evade the marriage:

Give me some present counsel, or, behold,

‘Twixt my extremes and me this bloody knife

Shall play the umpire, arbitrating that

Which the commission of thy years and art

Could to no issue of true honor bring.

Be so long not to speak; I long to die

If what thou speak’st speak not of remedy. (4.1. 61-67)

This quotation takes place when Juliet goes to the church to visit Friar Lawrence to see whether he can help her avoid this marriage. She is hysterical, and threatens to kill herself with the knife she has, as she ‘longs to die’. Juliet is feeling unnerved, confused, and is starting to become slightly frantic because she cannot marry Paris as she is already married to Romeo. However, if she tells her parents she cannot get married to Paris because she is married to Romeo, she would have to explain how and when they got married and who helped them. All of these thoughts are most likely coursing through her brain, thus making her more agitated. This explains the impulsive decision she makes when she fakes her death, which ultimately leads to the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet*.

           Lastly, Friar Lawrence makes various impulsive decisions throughout *Romeo and Juliet,* many of which are based on his hope of ending the feud between the two families and his fear of being disgraced for helping Romeo and Juliet. His impulsiveness puts the play in motion, as he agrees to conduct the marriage ceremony between them, which can be seen when he says “In one aspect I’ll thy assistant be; / For this alliance may so happy prove, / To turn your households’ rancour to pure love” (2.3. 90-92). The Friar hopes that the marriage might end their families’ blood feud. However, he is so blinded by his hope that he does not realize that rather than ending their feud, it would only aggravate the two families more. In this, he makes a crucial decision that shapes the end of the play, as the marriage ultimately leads to the deaths of the two star-crossed lovers. The Friar also makes an impulsive decision when Juliet comes to him for help to escape her marriage to Paris; he conceives a rash plan on the spot in which he tells her to drink a potion that will make her seem dead the next night (4.1. 91-94, 98-99, 102-106). He continues by telling her:

Thou shalt be borne to that same ancient vault

Where all the kindred of the Capulets lie.

In the mean time, against thou shalt wake,

Shall Romeo by my letters know our drift,

And hither shall he come; and he and I

Will watch thy waking; and that very night

Shall Romeo bear thee hence to Mantua. (4.1. 111-117)

This other part of the Friar’s plan details that once Juliet wakes in the Capulet vault, Romeo will be waiting to take her away to Mantua. This shows his impulsiveness as even now, rather than confessing to the authorities, he wants to make Romeo and Juliet’s relationship succeed. Another factor that is clouding his judgment is his fear of being dishonored and ridiculed for trying to help two teenagers from feuding families be together. This is shown when Juliet wakes up in her tomb and realizes that Romeo is dead; the Friar urges her to quickly come with him as he hears the watchman, and details how he will place Juliet in a convent where no one will question her (5.3. 151, 155-159). He fears discovery as his reputation may be ruined if it was discovered that Juliet is still alive and that he, a holy man who should have known better, helped a thirteen year old fake her death. The moment the Friar makes his first impulsive decision of agreeing to help Romeo and Juliet get married, he dooms both of them.

           Romeo, Juliet, and the Friar Lawrence are but three of the characters within Shakespeare’s teenage tragedythat make significant but impulsive decisions that shape the devastating ending of the play. Thus, *Romeo and Juliet* suggests that decisions based on emotional impulses ultimately result in tragedy. Not only fictional characters, but people in real life also make these decisions; consequences such as being jailed for a long period of time for a decision impulsively made to shoplift an expensive good are not uncommon. Such choices hurt not only the decision-makers but also those surrounding them; as said by the Prince, “All are punished.”(5.3. 312)

Works Cited

"THE DANGERS OF IMPULSIVE DECISION MAKING." *Good Choices Good Life*. Web. 21 Apr. 2017.