“The Breakfast Club” Group Formation

A group is defined as “two or more people having common interests, objectives, and continuing interaction” by Nelson and Quick in ORGB (133). In writer and director John Hughes’s movie, “The Breakfast Club,” five high school students - John Bender, Andrew Clark, Claire Standish, Brian Johnson, and Allison Reynolds (respectively known as the criminal, the athlete, the princess, the brain, and the basket case) - from five different high school cliques are joined together on a Saturday morning for detention (Wikipedia). The common interest of the students is that they all want detention to be over so they can have the Saturday to themselves. The common objective is to have the hours of detention go by faster. And they have continuing interaction throughout the whole movie because they are all stuck in the library in the same room. The students start off as complete strangers and not getting along very well. With the hours of detention slowly passing, multiple tasks occur for the students in between. As the hours of detention begin to end, the students begin to put their differences aside. Eventually, they each slowly learn about their commonalities. Knowing the similar things they had, the students progressively open up and begin to develop a group. According to Nelson and Quick in ORGB, a group is developed following the Five-Stage Model by Bruce Tuckman. The Five-Stage Model of group development starts with forming and it leads to storming, norming, performing, and ends with adjourning (138). The process of group development is illustrated very well in “The Breakfast Club.”

Before there is even a group to develop, there is the initial formation of a group. A group is formed being either formal or informal in an organization. A formal group is the “official or assigned group,” whereas and informal group is “the unofficial or emergent group” (137). The group formation of The Breakfast Club is an informal one. They were not assigned to be in a group. The students of The Breakfast Club met in detention and their group emerged upon their commonalities and interests. Once there is a formed group, the stages of the Five-Stage Model begin.

The first stage of the Five-Stage Model is the forming stage. According to Gina Abudi, the forming stage starts when the group members are introduced to each other and their background information is shared as well as their first impressions. In “The Breakfast Club,” the forming stage can be seen when John Bender, the criminal, starts asking about everyone and who they are. And they start asking about each other’s names. As time progresses, their personal parent issues are being told. The forming stage is the stage when the ice breaks and members of the group begin to learn about the other members.

As the forming stage passes, the storming stage follows. In the storming stage, group members are competing for their position. A great example of the storming stage is when the students are led by John Bender, the criminal, outside of the library. Bender seems to be the leader of the group. Walking around the empty halls, the students notice that Principle Vernon was heading back to the library. They rush back. Bender was telling them to follow him, but Andrew Clark argues back saying, “We're through listening to you. We're going this way.” In this scene, Andrew Clark fights for the leading
role of the group. The storming stage is also the stage where other members of the group "assess one another with regard to trustworthiness, emotional comfort, and evaluative acceptance" (138). When Andrew Clark runs in the opposite direction, Brian and Claire follow him without reluctance. Allison, on the other hand, was a little unwilling. It is possible that Brian and Claire had already put their trust in Andrew more than Bender and that is why they did not have to think twice before agreeing with him. Once members of the group find their position in the storming stage, the norming stage comes next.

The norming stage is when the roles of the group members are clear and agreement and consensus are now a part of the team. Nelson and Quick states that “in the norming stage, roles and responsibilities become clear and accepted, with big decisions being made by group agreement”(138). In “The Breakfast Club,” the best scene to depict this stage is when Bender sneaks back to the library from the closet and the group spends the rest of detention smoking marijuana. Bender can now be seen as the real leader of the group and the rest of the group members respect him. Smoking marijuana is the social activity that the group engages in. The group members no longer fight and decisions are made by the group now.

As the norming stage progresses, it leads to the performing stage. The performing stage is when the group is more mature and they are more aware of what they are supposed to be doing. Here the group does not require the leader to provide all of the instructions but may still ask for help. In the performing stage, group members are also evaluated based on their behaviors. This stage is depicted very well when all five members of the group join together after their activity and discusses the reasons why they are in detention. Bender is still the leader. He urges Claire to admit that she is still a virgin when Allison asks. Bender “assists” Allison in making Claire admit. Allison admits that she is a compulsive liar, Andrew admits that he cannot think for himself and “taped Larry’s buns,” and Brian admits that he failed a course and brought a flare gun to school. As each of them told their stories, Bender comments back to each of them. The performing stage allows each of the group members to realize they are still individuals but working in a group. Their disagreements from the forming and storming stages are now settled and there are now very few disagreements.

The final stage of the Five-Stage model is the adjourning stage. The adjourning stage is when the task is “completed [and] everyone on the team can move on to new and different things” (Nelson and Quick, 138). The adjourning stage in “The Breakfast Club” is when detention, the task, is finally over. Once detention is over, each of the five students made their way out to their parent’s cars and are able to move on to something new. When the task of the adjourning stage is completed, there is “a sense of accomplishment and feel good knowing that [the] purpose is fulfilled” (Nelson and Quick, 138).

“The Breakfast Club” is a great film that provides the opportunity to follow the development of a group through the various stages. A group slowly develops following the Five-Stage Model by Bruce Tuckman. The stages of the Five-Stage Model are
forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. In the forming stage the group members are introduced to each other and the roles of the individuals are determined. The storming stage is when members of the group have disagreements and compete for different positions in the group. In the norming stage, the group members have now come to agreements to the different responsibilities and tasks. The next stage is the performing stage where the main purpose or task of the group is now clear and the leader is no longer needed for all of the instructions but to assist. The last and final stage of the Five-Stage Model is the adjourning stage where the main task is completed and the group is now filled with a sense of accomplishment. Once all five stages are completed, a group has developed well and the common interest, objectives, and interaction of each group member should have been met. Developing a well and mature group may seem like a thoughtless process that requires little or no effort, but in reality, there is more work needed than just having a few people with shared aims together.
Works Cited


http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Breakfast_Club
