

GREG GAINE'S ADOLESCENCE IN *ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL* NOVEL BY JESSE ANDREWS

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to find out the form of Greg Gaine's self-identity and the struggles that he faced during the self-identity finding process of adolescence. Erikson's psychosocial development theory in the fifth stage about identity versus identity confusion was used to find out Greg Gaine's self-identity and his struggles. This study used qualitative method during the process of data analysis regarding the matter that this study used words as its data taken from *Me and Earl and The Dying Girl* novel by Jesse Andrews. As the result, Greg Gaine's self-identity was as a filmmaker. Greg experienced the identity confusion phase which caused him to keep refusing his identity as a filmmaker due to his childhood unpleasant experience, yet because of his massive failure to make a proper film for his friend, Rachel, it brought him to be able to develop the two virtues: fidelity and devotion. After Greg was able to develop the two virtues, he was certain to admit and devoted a filmmaker as his self-identity. During his adolescence period, Greg faced two struggles of finding his self-identity, the struggles towards his close friends, Earl Jackson and Rachel Kushner. His relationship with Earl and Rachel turned out as his struggles in finding out his self-identity as a filmmaker was because their existence (Earl and Rachel) determined the most influence on Greg's decision in admitting his self-identity as a filmmaker and helped him in getting through the adolescence period.

Keywords: *adolescence, psychosocial development, self-identity, identity confusion, fidelity*

ABSTRAK

Studi ini bertujuan untuk menemukan bentuk identitas diri karakter Greg Gaine dan rintangan-rintangannya selama proses menemukan identitas diri tersebut dimasa remaja. Teori perkembangan psikososial milik Erikson terutama pada tahap kelima mengenai identitas dan keraguan identitas dipakai dalam menemukan bentuk identitas diri karakter Greg Gaine beserta rintangan-rintangannya. Studi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif selama proses analisis data mengingat data yang dipakai oleh studi ini sendiri merupakan kata-kata dari novel *Me and Earl and The Dying Girl* karangan Jesse Andrews. Hasil dari studi ini menunjukkan identitas diri karakter Greg Gaine yaitu sebagai seorang pembuat film. Greg mengalami fase keraguan identitas yang membuatnya selalu menolak identitasnya sebagai pembuat film. Hal ini berhubungan dengan pengalaman pahitnya saat masa kanak-kanak. Akan tetapi, Greg berhasil menumbuhkan perasaan untuk mengakui dan mewujudkan identitas dirinya sebagai pembuat film setelah kegagalannya dalam membuatkan film yang "pantas" bagi teman dekatnya, Rachel. Setelah Greg memiliki kedua perasaan tersebut (mengakui dan mewujudkan identitas dirinya), ia pun tak ragu untuk benar-benar serius mewujudkan identitas dirinya sebagai pembuat film. Selama masa remajanya, Greg harus berhadapan

dengan dua rintangan untuk menemukan identitas dirinya, kedua rintangan tersebut berasal dari dua orang teman terdekatnya, yaitu Earl Jackson dan Rachel Kushner. Hubungannya dengan Earl dan Rachel lah yang menjadi rintangan dalam pencarian identitas dirinya sebagai seorang pembuat film. Hal ini dikarenakan keberadaan mereka (Earl dan Rachel) memiliki pengaruh yang paling besar dalam menentukan keputusan Greg saat mengakui identitas dirinya sebagai pembuat film sekaligus membantu melewati masa remajanya.

Kata kunci: masa remaja, perkembangan psikososial, identitas diri, keraguan identitas, kebenaran

A. INTRODUCTION

During someone's life, there are several periods that a person has to get through. Those periods include childhood, adulthood, golden period and one that happens to be in between childhood and adulthood is the adolescence (Crone and Dahl 636). It is the time when someone starts to define themselves as a person they want to be (Erikson in "The Relationship of Erikson's" 51). They will try to find the self-identity, the ones that truly fit for them and then admit it, embrace it with pride and get through the adulthood along with it. Some people will go through this stage with excitement: exploring the world around them, trying new things, starting things they have the willing to (positively) and make the most out of it as the result of finding the real identity.

On the other hand, there are also some adolescents who do not feel the same way. They do not feel excited of finding their self-identities in any way. They tend to go with the current almost like giving up of whatever happen, then let be. They just want to get through the adolescence peacefully. This is what exactly happening on Greg Gaine character in *Me and Earl and The Dying Girl* novel by Jesse Andrews. This novel told about a seventeen-year-old boy, Greg Gaine who tried to live his high school life anonymously. Thus, the researcher focused in finding out Greg Gaine's self-identity and his struggles in adolescence period through the adolescence focus on the fifth stage (identity vs. identity confusion) in Erikson's theory.

B. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Definition of Adolescence

Erikson defines adolescence as a period in life for the adolescents to cope with the issue of finding their self-identities by struggling within society (qtd. in "The Relationship of Erikson's" 51). There are two points in this view of adolescence; self-identity achievement and the struggling within society (51). During adolescence, the adolescents are looking for their own identity, the ones that separate from what they have achieved in childhood. Ones that truly represent who they are and will last through the life-time. While working on the self-identity, the adolescents are also preoccupied with the struggling in the society. It makes them to find its place belong to the society: try to fit in. The struggles are usually in the forms of problems, difficulties, or things that somehow make the self-identity finding is difficult or impossible.

2. Intrinsic Elements of Novel

Intrinsic elements are the elements that build the novel from inside (Azizah in Ningrum 19). Those elements are plot, point of view, setting, and character. **Plot** is the order of events and ideas that happening to make sense of the story (19). **Point of view** is about the perspective of which the story being told from (Stevens 2) that consists of two kinds

such as the first person narrator which being known by the use of “I” in the story and the third person narrator. **Setting** is about the environment within the story which can be in forms like buildings, smell, mood, atmosphere, season, year and etc (2). Last, the **character** is the one who does and exists within the story (2). Character can be in forms of human, plants, animals, or any other objects that have given the human traits by its author.

This study used the intrinsic element of novel which was the character in order to analyze this study. This study analyzed Greg Gaine character as the focus of this study to find out his self-identity and the struggles he faced during the finding process in adolescence period from *Me and Earl and The Dying Girl* novel by Jesse Andrews. Regarding this matter, it was clear that this study was a literature thesis and not a psychology one. Although this study indeed used a theory from the psychology field to find the answer of the questions, yet this study was still on the literature field following these reasons: first, this study's object was from a fictional character from *Me and Earl and The Dying Girl* novel by Jesse Andrews which clearly showed that Greg Gaine character was not an actual person. Second, analyzing a character meant that this study analyzing an intrinsic element from a novel which was one of the literature concerns. Therefore, it was clear that this study was not a psychology thesis, but a literature thesis.

3. Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

This theory focuses on the human development through the life-time which consists of eight stages as follow:

- a. **Trust vs. Mistrust:** During the interaction of breast-feeding, the infant develops the sense of trust. It is because during the process, they achieve love and care from the caregiver. The developing of mistrust happens when the infant receives unhealthy environment during this stage. It can be the transferring of negative emotions around the infants (Erikson in “The Relationship of Erikson's” 47).
- b. **Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt:** It begins at the age of eighteen months until three years. Children will develop the sense of autonomy that makes them to do things on their own will. This will lead the children to have emotions like self-pride, self-control, self-assurance (Erikson in “The Relationship of Erikson's” 49). Shame and doubt will develop when children feel that they are not able to do things (children suppose they should be) such as using the bathrooms, tie the shoelace.
- c. **Initiative vs. Guilt:** This stage begins at the age of three to six years that makes the children to develop the sense of initiative and sense of guilt. Initiative develops when the children start asking an endless number of “what” questions (Erikson in “The Relationship of Erikson's” 49). This behavior is triggered by the children curiosity. When they achieve the answer in the meaning that shows to stop asking or even the answers given along with negative response, children will develop the guilt.
- d. **Industry vs Inferiority:** Children at this stage (between five until twelve years old) will seek for others recognition of the activities they do. They will learn to produce things on their own and by that will receive a positive recognition by others (Erikson in Karcher and Benne 209). This is the sign of the developing industry. The feeling of satisfaction after being praised or admitted by the others (the adults mostly) will lead them to produce things even more. Meanwhile, if the satisfaction only comes from the external recognition and less form the self, it will lead to the inferiority (210).

- e. Identity vs. Identity Confusion:** This stage begins at the age of nine to eighteen years. During the process of finding the self-identity, adolescents will develop two basic virtues: fidelity and devotion (Erikson in “Erikson’s Psychosocial” 21). Fidelity works as the feeling to stay true as who you are, admit it, and embrace it as the identity while devotion is when adolescents are able to bring it (the self-identity) into the society. Moreover, Erikson also states that adolescents are often preoccupied with how the society will look at them. The way they will appear in the eyes of the others, about what would they say to them instead of inventing who they really are (qtd. in “The Relationship of Erikson’s” 52). This is a part of the struggling in the society Erikson has mentioned before. Most of the adolescents are more concerned to the roles they will play in the society (Erikson in Libda 14) rather than finding the ones that truly fit for them. In this phase, some of adolescents will experience the identity confusion. It is because adolescence is the transition phase between childhood to the adulthood (Crone and Dahl 636) that automatically changes the views from childhood to the world of society.
- f. Intimacy vs. Isolation:** This is the stage in early adulthood around the nineteen until forty years of age. Erikson explains the intimacy here is about the closeness of married couple. This demands for maturity where each person has their own identity, but capable of working things together without being blurred into one of (qtd. “The Relationship of Erikson’s” 55).
- g. Generativity vs. Stagnation:** This stage begins at the age of forty until sixty-five years. People at this age should be able to be productive for the sake of the next generations lives. Generativity shows that people are possessing a strong feeling to be productive again while stagnation shows the selfishness within the self by do nothing (Erikson in “The Relationship of Erikson’s” 56).
- h. Integrity vs. Despair:** This stage is in the late adulthood around sixty-five until eighty of years. People at this age tend to recall about what they have done in their life (Erikson in “The Relationship of Erikson’s” 56-57). When things they do in the past give them the feeling of satisfaction, it leads to the sense of integrity. They feel useful as a person. On the other hand, despair leads to the feeling when they do not feel satisfied with what they have done or probably have not in the past life.

Previous Studies

The first previous study was written by Siritwong Luasuk (2011) from Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok entitled *Adolescent Development of the Main Character in J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series*. Luasuk’s study focused on how Harry Potter character developed cognitively, emotionally, and socially from the age of eleven to seventeen years. The study used several psychological theories during analysis: Sigmund Freud’s, Abraham Maslow’s, Jean Piaget’s, Lawrence Kohlberg’s, and Erik Erikson’s. The finding showed that even though Harry Potter was raised in a hostile environment and abusive childhood, but he was able to develop as a young good man because of several positive influences such as the supportive teachers and friends in Hogwarts. The similarities between Luasuk’s and the current study were the use of Erikson’s psychosocial theory and the focus on the main character’s adolescence aspect. Although Luasuk’s study focused on the adolescence aspect of the character, but it was about the cognitive, emotion, and social development. The differences were, within Luasuk’s, there were several psychological theories used besides Erikson’s (Freud’s, Piaget’s, and Kohlberg’s).

Furthermore, the second previous study was written by I Made Bayu Kusumawardana (2012) from University of Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta with the title *A Study on Relationships Between Batman and Hush in Batman Hush A Psychosocial Approach*. This study focused on the relationships development between Batman and Hush characters based on the characters' environment, social life, and the choice to adapt to it. The analysis used Erikson's psychosocial development theory. Kusumawardana showed that Bruce Wayne turned to be a proper adult while Thomas Elliot was still a kid (inside). It was due to his wanting-to-revenge about what he had experienced during childhood. Kusumawardana's study also used the similar theory by Erikson. The focus on Kusumawardana's study was about the relationships development between the two main characters. Meanwhile, this study focused on the character's stage of psychosocial development (Erikson's psychosocial development) and the kinds of struggles that the character faced in getting through the adolescence period.

C. RESEARCH METHOD

This study research design was qualitative research regarding the use of words as the data in this study and the process of interpreting the novel during the analysis of the character. The words itself were taken from Andrews' *Me And Earl And The Dying Girl* novel. The researcher of this study played role as the instrument for herself did all of the phases such as formulating the questions, collecting-analysing data, answering the questions, and taking conclusion in completing this study. In order to collect the data needed, there were two steps the researcher did: close reading the novel and gathering the data related to Greg Gaine's self-identity and his struggles during the process of finding it.

In the first question about the form of Greg Gaine's self-identity, the researcher found the answer by analyzing Greg Gaine into a phase (identity confusion) and two basic virtues (fidelity and devotion) in Erikson's the fifth stage. Based on these three phases that Greg experienced during his adolescence period, the researcher was able to find the form of Greg Gaine's self-identity. While for the second question about the struggles Greg Gaine faced, the researcher also used Erikson's the fifth stage, identity vs. identity confusion. The researcher looked for the answer by analyzing the kinds of struggles Greg Gained experienced that posing as his obstacle in finding his self-identity. The struggles were based on Erikson's explanation of struggles experienced by the youths during their adolescence period in finding the self-identity. This study used data triangulation because of the data source was from an officially published novel from Amulet Books in 2015, *Me and Earl and The Dying Girl* novel by Jesse Andrews. This novel was a valid data source due to the fact that it had been published officially by a publisher.

D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Greg Gaine's Self-Identity as a Filmmaker

Greg was described as someone who had issues with socializing and planning to spend the rest of his high school life by being in the periphery at most times. His reason was simple: Greg did not want to be judged or misunderstood of whatever things he did.

a. Identity confusion as a filmmaker

Before Greg Gaine was able to develop his virtue of fidelity, admitting that he was a filmmaker, several times he experienced the identity confusion due to his trauma when he was eleven years old.

We didn't want anyone watching the films but us. No one. Not Mom and Dad; we knew we couldn't trust their opinions. Not our classmates; we

didn't care about their opinions, not after the *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* fiasco (Andrews 130).

Greg fell in love with a movie entitled *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* that he watched with Earl. Due to his feeling of sublime after watching the movie, he then with Earl decided to re-make it and named his re-made movie as *Earl, the Wrath of God II*. When the *Earl, the Wrath of God II* was being watched by his parents and they told them that was awesome, while in fact, Greg realized how much of a failure the film was. Starting from that day, he was somehow not being able to trust his parents views about him and unconsciously more concerned on what other people might say about him.

Another moment of Greg showed his confusion as a filmmaker was when he and Earl decided to (at first) make the film for their close friend, Rachel by interviewing several students at Benson high school about their thoughts of Rachel as the film footage.

First problem: We had to get the footage ourselves, meaning we had to reveal ourselves as filmmakers to a hostile world (Andrews 221).

Greg's thought of getting the footage on his own meaning that it revealed of who he was, showed that Greg put way too much concern of others opinions about him. This was the source of his identity confusion. His statement about *the hostile world* showed that the society he lived in could not accept his chosen of self-identity that scared him the most.

b. Fidelity as a filmmaker

To be truth, Greg had no issue of finding his self-identity as a filmmaker. He had already found it when he was eleven years old after watched one of his dad films entitled *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*.

It made us conscious of what we had really known all along: **We were different from the other kids. We had different interests, a different kind of focus** (Andrews 84).

Greg, consciously stated that he was different because he knew what he wanted to do and his interest might not get everyone understood, but that was what he wanted. At this time, he was so sure about it. He then with Earl, remade the film.

Finally, Greg decided to film both himself and Earl, even though they just hanging out with Rachel recently due to her disease. As what he had expected, *Rachel the film* was terrible.

I wanted to explain to her why things had gone so horribly wrong, but obviously I didn't know why. **I mean, Earl and I are not expert filmmakers, but at this point in our careers we should be creating something better than the sickening depressing chaos that is *Rachel the Film*** (Andrews 261).

Greg felt *Rachel the film* was terrible. It was depressing and the worst: intended to a dying girl. Yet, the impact to his fidelity virtue was that Greg finally admitted his self-identity as a filmmaker. This was shown when he stated that he and Earl should be making a better film rather than what he had done with *Rachel the Film*, comparing to the films he had done since he was young. He realized at that time, he should be able to do so.

c. Devotion as a filmmaker

After admitting his self-identity as a filmmaker, in this phase Greg had to devote to it. It meant that he had to make things related to his identity as a filmmaker seriously. He had to be able to bring it into the society he lived in and came up as a filmmaker without feeling any hesitations.

"I was thinking," I said. **"maybe I don't want to go to college. Maybe I want to go to film school."** (Andrews 287)

After the chaos of *Rachel the Film*, Greg finally realized what he wanted to do with his life. He, then considered about applying to film school rather than went to college.

With Greg deciding to apply to film school meant that he was being serious about filmmaker thing, he also found self-confident at the moment. Long before the thing with *Rachel the Film* happened, Greg always complained about how he hated the socializing stuff with other people.

I mostly just hate every person I've ever been. I'm actually fine with myself right now. I feel like there's a good chance I might make a really good film. One day (Andrews 293).

Before realizing his self-identity as a filmmaker, Greg always kept a word about it from other people. He was afraid if anyone, excluding the closest people around him, one day found out about this, might labelled him as the worse filmmaker. He was so afraid of being judged. Yet, after he finally admitting his self-identity and devoted to it, he made peace with himself.

2. The Struggles Greg Gaine Faced in Finding His Self-Identity as a Filmmaker

The researcher decided to use the struggles Greg faced during his self-identity finding process based on his relationship with Earl Jackson and Rachel Kushner was because their existence (Earl and Rachel) gave a massive impact for Greg to accept his self-identity as a filmmaker. Moreover, throughout the story, Greg mostly interacted and spent his time with Earl and Rachel which made it more valid to use the struggles he faced based on his relationship with Earl and Rachel.

a. The struggles Greg Gaine faced towards Earl Jackson

Earl Jackson was the closest friend to Greg Gaine because both were friends since in the kindergarten. So practically, Earl had known Greg since then until high school and considered being the closest other people excluded from Greg's family. This also meant that Earl had known all along precisely Greg's habit of overthinking other people thoughts towards him.

Earl told Rachel about *Rachel the Film* project, which was supposed to be a surprise for her and also, for Greg himself, he was not sure about how good the film would be.

"It's just," I said, babbling, "you know, I mean, you told Rachel about the films in the first place, and then you brought them over to her, without asking me, and it's just like, you'll tell her anything, like, it doesn't even matter what I want, I'm not saying she shouldn't, she shouldn't know, or get to see them, I'm just saying, I wished you had asked me, first, I wish—" (Andrews 248)

Greg's problem with Earl was he could not agree of what Earl had done. He hated the fact that Earl, the closest person he might trust, betraying him by telling Rachel about their most crucial secret. It was supposed to be their secret.

b. The struggles Greg Gaine faced towards Rachel Kushner

Rachel Kushner was actually Greg's friend since in middle school, but because of some weird rumors and misunderstandings happened back then, suddenly they stopped being friends. After Greg's mother asked him or rather ordered him to spend his time with Rachel due to her leukaemia, she and Greg being friends again.

After Rachel watched *Rachel the Film*, she told Greg about her opinion about the film. She enjoyed it in fact, yet because Greg realized how much of a failure the film was, he could not bring himself to bear with it. As usual, he kept denying if the film was good and asked Rachel for not lying about that.

"It was really nice of you to do that film."

“Well, it sucked, but we had to do it. There’s no good reason why it’s not better.”

“You didn’t have to do it!” Rachel was sort of wide-eyed.

“Yeah, we did.”

“No.”

“You’re literally our only fan. We had to make something for you.”

(Andrews 262)

Due to his guilty feeling for not being able to give Rachel a proper and good film, Greg blurted out things he did not mean to. Actually, he only wanted to say that the film was literally terrible and Rachel should not be thankful for that.

3. Discussion

Greg Gaine character was never had issue of finding his-self identity. He was able to picture what he wanted to do since childhood. This fact should not be a problem for Greg. Yet, the thing that actually turned out as a problem in Greg’s self-identity was because his overthinking habit about other people thoughts. He was always afraid of knowing others thought about him whether it was a compliment or critic. He just could not bring himself into it. This habit of him that led Greg into his state of identity confusion before finally able to develop the two virtues of gaining self-identity: fidelity and devotion.

In the state of identity confusion, Greg’s only problem was he was afraid of admitting a filmmaker as his self-identity, because if that happened, everyone would know of who he was and started to label him with hateful and weird names. This experience of Greg was actually a normal thing to happen due to Erikson’s explanation about adolescence that most of adolescents will put more concern on what their society will look at them instead of being who they really are (Erikson in Libda 14).

After getting through the identity confusion phase, Greg was able to develop the virtue of fidelity which meant he had admitted his self-identity as a filmmaker. At the beginning, he was vaguely admitted to it by saying that he was just a bit different with other people for having a bit different interest in something. Yet, along the time and the massive impact of *Rachel the Film* project, he was able to admit it, clearly. He stated that he wanted to do a proper film about Rachel and as a filmmaker, he should be able to. Even though the outcome of *Rachel the Film* project tore him apart, but still, by his intention of making that film as a proper one had already showed that Greg admitted and accepted his self-identity as a filmmaker.

Devotion phase as the last virtue made Greg Gaine to start taking things, especially related to filmmaker things, seriously. Greg decided to take things seriously by applying to film school and continued his beginner career as a filmmaker. He finally devoted to his self-identity by having a plan to graduate from film school as a filmmaker which was his self-identity and came up to his society by producing some successful films in the future.

Greg’s struggles during his finding self-identity as a filmmaker related with his relationship with Earl Jackson and Rachel Kushner. With Earl, he had issue of the way Earl treated their secret as a filmmaker as a trivial thing. This happened due to Greg’s feeling of insecurity about himself. He did not feel confident of being himself as a filmmaker, yet he kept wanting to make films. This was the source of his fight with Earl. As his friend, Earl had known all along about Greg’s overthinking of other people thoughts habit and he realized this was the issue that prevented Greg to get his self-identity. Therefore Earl chose to let Rachel knew about their films in order to give Greg some confidence that if the thing he was interested in and loved to do was not a wrong thing. Everyone had their own thing and for Greg, it was a film-making.

The struggle Greg had with Rachel happened due to his tendency of avoiding what he was actually capable of. It was not enough with Earl who snapped out everything of him, Rachel on the other hand also told him the similar thing: that his films were not as bad as he thought. Rachel tried to convince Greg that he was truly in love with making films and he had the capability to do so. The thing was just Greg did not want to admit it, not if it meant other people would find out about it and starting to label him with hateful names.

E. CONCLUSION

The most influencing event for him to be able defining and accepting himself as a filmmaker was *Rachel the Film* project. His intention to make a proper film for his friend, Rachel, yet turned out as a disaster film for him getting Greg to the realization of what kind of thing he wanted to do. Greg wanted to make a film that had a connection to his audience and so that *Rachel the Film* was not repeated again. Therefore, Greg decided to apply to film school to make it real of him as a filmmaker.

As his friend, Earl told the issue Greg had for overthinking of what other would say about him as a filmmaker. Meanwhile, Rachel tried to convince Greg that he should just accept his self-identity as a filmmaker and be serious about it. The good intentions of Earl and Rachel, unfortunately, being understood by Greg mistakenly. Greg turned out blaming them for not being able to understand his situation. This happened due to Greg's state when he was still in his identity confusion phase where he was not able to admit and devoted to his self-identity as a filmmaker, yet.

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