

**FRANK'S FAILURE IN OVERCOMING IDENTITY CRISIS AND ITS
IMPACT TOWARD HER PERSONALITY: A PSYCHOSOCIAL
ANALYSIS TOWARD BANKS' *THE WASP FACTORY***

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Abstract

*This research aims to identify in which stage of psychosocial development the main character from *The Wasp Factory* fails to overcome, and also to explain the impact of the failure toward her personality. The theory of psychosocial development stages of identity by Erikson is applied to answer the objectives. The finding of this research shows that the main character is unable to overcome the problems in the fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development theory or the stage of Identity vs. Identity Diffusion. In this stage, the researcher finds out that the main character is faced with three major problems, identity foreclosure, identity diffusion and negative identity. Because the failures of the main character are not resolved, the problems continue in her young adult period or the stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation. The impact then can be seen from her intimacy crisis and the tendency of isolating herself from the society.*

Keywords: identity, identity crisis, Erikson's psychosocial development, *The Wasp Factory*

INTRODUCTION

Identity is the strongest trait in the process of shaping human personality. People tend to ask themselves a question of 'who they actually are' or 'who I am'. These questions are the essence of understanding their own identity. Identity is also important for every human beings; they are expected to know who they are and also how society perceives them so that they can stand apart from every individual.

Fearon (1999: 20) states that in order to explain the meaning of 'identity', one is tempted to begin with the understanding of how a person defines who he or she is; self-definition or self-understanding. The process of obtaining identity is important. If one fails to grasp the

understanding of self-identity the consequences will be dire. The individual is likely to suffer from identity crisis. Identity crisis is an internal conflict that happens when someone is uncertain about who or what he/she is. The example of identity crisis also appears within literary works. *The Wasp Factory* by Iain Banks, a novel published in 1984 is a story about a young girl named Frank who lives in a certain island in Scotland with her father, Angus. Despite being young, 16 years old Frank is really concerned about her true identity, her struggling in finding her true self is real. The crisis of identity usually occurs during early to middle stage of adolescence. The emergence of identity crisis represents the struggle in finding balance in being a unique individual identity while still being accepted and fitting in to the society. Thus, youth must determine who he wants to be and how he wants to be perceived by others. The character of Frank is an example of a young girl who is unable to secure her self-identity and suffer from identity crisis.

This research focuses on Frank's identity crisis and the impact of her identity crisis toward her personality seen in Bank's *The Wasp Factory*. Thus, the theory of Erikson's psychosocial development is applied to analyse the problem of Frank's identity crisis. The theory of Erikson's psychosocial development is taken from the books *Identity: Youth and Crisis* and *Identity and the Life Cycle* by Erikson.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses qualitative research design. The data are collected from Iain Banks' *The Wasp Factory* by comprehensive reading, note taking, and interpreting and categorizing the data. In analyzing the data, the data collected was described and analyzed based on its thematic and meaning. Then, the data were reanalyzed to check the suitability of the data with the objectives of the research

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Frank's Identity Crisis: The Failure in Handling the Stage of Identity vs. Identity Diffusion

There are three kinds which are discussed in this part. Those are related to the problems that signify the emergence of identity crisis, such as identity diffusion, identity foreclosure and negative identity.

1. Identity Diffusion

The problem of identity diffusion are signified with three aspects related to the theories. Those are a) acute upset, b) identity confusion and c) excessive self-awareness. It can be seen below:

a. Acute upset

An adolescent who suffers from identity diffusion usually encounters acute upset. The first aspect of Frank's identity crisis is shown by her acute upset. Her life is full of negativity as she strives in attempt to overcome her identity crisis. The example of Frank's acute upset can be seen below.

I can't remember my mother, because if I did I'd hate her. As it is, I hate her name, the idea of her. It was she who let the Stoves take Eric away to

Belfast, away from the island, away from what he knew. They thought that my father was a bad parent because he dressed Eric in girl's clothes and let him run wild, and my mother let them take him because she didn't like children in general and Eric in particular, she thought he was bad for her karma in some way. (Banks, 1987: 47)

For Frank, even remembering a tiniest bit memory of her mother gives her a sense of hatred. It is clearly states from the line "...I can't remember my mother, because if I did I'd hate her.." that Frank resents her mother very much. The reason of Frank's hatred is that her mother abandoned her family. But after all, family is the core of everyone's social life; it is the mark of the beginning in stepping toward society.

b. Identity Confusion

Another bad point from Frank's identity diffusion is the identity confusion. As a teenager, Frank is troubled by her gender identity; she is unable to define her own identity in the aspect of gender. Those with identity confusion usually

encounter a sense of indecisiveness. For Frank, her indecisiveness is about her gender confusion. Frank's problem can be seen from the following data.

I'm too fat. It isn't that bad, and isn't my fault – but, all the same, I don't look the way I'd like to look. Chubby, that's me. Strong and fit, but still too plump. I want to look dark and menacing; the way I ought to look, the way I might have looked if I hadn't my little accident. (Banks, 1987: 12)

Frank is not satisfied about the condition she has. Because of her gender confusion, she always wants to look more masculine. She is confused, whether she is truly a boy or a girl, she cannot make a decision about her own gender identity and as a result she is blinded by the sense of false masculinity. She always resents the fact that she loses her symbol of gender and she never finds out that the symbol is not lost.

c. Excessive Self-awareness

Excessive self-awareness is the feeling of inferiority that is suffered by adolescent with identity crisis. A teenager with excessive self-awareness usually compares himself with another person. Not in a sense of

comparing in competitive manner, the teenager usually think that he is not the same as others. The adolescent is likely to see what is missing from him, what he does not have and what others have. As a result, the adolescent will see himself as more inferior than others and will be likely to exclude himself from other people. This is what Frank suffers from, or the other part of Frank's identity diffusion.

Not that I know all that many people anyway, I suppose; Jamie is my only real friend, though through him I have met a few people of about my own age I regard as acquaintance. Not going to school, and having to pretend I didn't live on the island all the time, has meant that I didn't grow up with anybody of my own age (except Eric, of course, but even he was away for a long time) and about the time I was thinking of venturing further afield and getting to know more people Eric went crazy, and things got a bit uncomfortable in the town for a while. (Banks, 1987: 35)

In reality, a teenager in his/her adolescence period is supposed to have persons they call friends. As for Frank, her only friend is a dwarf named Jamie. The reason why Frank only considers Jamie is her only friend is likely because Jamie is a dwarf, a person with a disability. She

probably feels a sort of comfort because she thinks that Jamie shares the same trait as her. That is because Frank has a sense of excessive self-awareness, she is either afraid or unwillingly to live up a healthy social life as a teenager should.

2. Identity Foreclosure

Erikson (1968: 159) states that a proper identification depends on the satisfactory interaction with trustworthy representatives, as in living together in some form of family. Identity foreclosure is a condition where a certain adolescent adopted some roles that are given by other authoritative figures, such as parents or teachers. Those who have this identity foreclosure are indicated by (a) the excessive involvement of parents and (b) fluidity of defenses. The researcher finds out there are two aspects that indicate Frank's identity foreclosure, which can be seen below.

a. The Excessive Involvement of Parent

As stated by Erikson (1968: 121) a form of basic family is needed so that the children can look for a new

identification which seems to promise a field of initiative with less of the conflict and guilt. As in Frank's case, her family is messed up; she only lives with her father. Instead of giving a proper chance for Frank to explore her youth, her father blocks Frank's way in obtaining a proper sense of identity.

I was never registered. I have no birth certificate, no National Insurance number, nothing to say I'm alive or have ever existed. I know this is a crime, and so does my father, and I think that sometimes he regrets the decision he made seventeen years ago, in his hippy-anarchist days, or whatever they were.(Banks, 1987: 6)

Frank is a person whose existence is being questioned. The lines signify that Frank's identity is being controlled by her father. She does not exist in her society, the people who live around her only know that she is there, living with a man named Angus, but they never really know who is Frank really are. The police in the town also have no clue that a girl named Frank exist, she is not registered and her father never acknowledges her to be his own daughter.

b. Fluidity of Defenses

Fluidity of defenses is the other negativity that is coming from Frank's identity foreclosure. As a human being, it is important to understand and secure the feeling of safety. In some cases, especially for teenagers, they are likely to commit some misbehaviors or even crimes and justify them as a kind of self defense. The probability is higher when the teenager or adolescent is suffering from some sort of crisis.

Not that I want to kill anybody now, but it is all for defence rather than offence, and it does make me feel a lot more secure. Soon I'll have enough money for a really powerful crossbow, and that I'm certainly looking forward to; it'll help make up for the fact that I've never been able to persuade my father to buy a rifle or a shotgun that I could use sometimes. (Banks, 1987: 40)

From the lines, it can be concluded that Frank is somewhat used to have an urge of killing somebody. It also shows that her point of view in self-defense is to erase or kill those who are threatening her. This is the point where her fluidity of defenses comes up. For Frank, by owning a weapon such as

rifle or shotgun, it will give her a lot more secure feeling. This is also can be seen from the perspective of identity foreclosure. Because she is being strictly controlled by her father, she also wants some sort of authoritative power.

3. Negative Identity

Negative identity is the result of failing to handle the crisis in adolescence stage or the failure to develop a strong sense of identity. Those who are confused about their identity are likely ended up in having a negative identity. Erikson (1968: 172) states that negative identity is the loss of a sense in identity and often expressed in a scornful and snobbish hostility toward the appropriate roles of identity. Those who suffer from negative identity are likely to be negative in their manner of life.

My GREATEST ENEMIES are women and the Sea. These things I hate, women because they are weak and stupid and live in the shadow of men and are nothing compared to them, and the Sea because it has always frustrated me, destroying what I have built, washing away what I have left, wiping clean the marks I have made. And I'm not all that sure the Wind is blameless, either. (Banks, 1987: 29)

Frank's hate toward female comes from the consequence of her negative identity. She fails to grasp that she is a girl and as a result of that she curses her own disability as a girl. It is not only because of that aspect, in her family she only lives with her father and she knows that her mother leave her father with no reason, abandons the children in the process. So the hate of females that Frank has not only comes from her gender confusion but also from the fact that she is abandoned by her own mother.

B. The Stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation

Erikson (1980: 101) states that only a youth with a reasonable sense of identity can establish a real sense of intimacy. Intimacy itself is the ability to form a link or to be close with others, be it a family, friends, lover or as a participant in a certain society. Although Frank is still in her late adolescence stage, she has several traits that can be related to the problems in the stage of young adult. Therefore, it can be said that if those problems of Frank are not resolved, the problems are likely to continue in

the later stage. Those traits can be seen below.

1. Intimacy Crisis

The feeling of intimacy usually happens in the stage of late adolescence or young adult. In Frank's case, because she is suffering from the confusion of identity, her sense of intimacy is also affected. Rather than develops a normal sense of intimacy, Frank treats intimacy as something unnecessary.

I don't know; I never know how exactly how much he really feels for me. Come to think of it, I never know exactly how much I really feel for him.
(Banks, 1987: 35)

The lines above show how Frank's attitude toward her father. It shows the feeling of Frank's unnecessary intimacy as she is not aware about the relationship between herself and her father. She never grasps the understanding of love in the family. Frank is not aware about the feeling of intimacy and she treats that feeling as unnecessary thing in her life.

2. Isolation

If a certain person is unable to develop a strong sense of identity in his/her late adolescence or young adult, he/she will likely to settle for the crisis of intimacy and a deep sense of isolation. The individual who suffers from a deep sense of isolation will not grouped himself in the society; he tends to live alone and avoids people. It can be seen before that Frank is suffering from the intimacy crisis and the other consequence of that is the deep sense of isolation. Because Frank never finds a person that can build a good relationship with her, she tends to isolate herself.

The people in the town may say 'Oh, he's not all there, you know,' but that just their little joke (and sometimes, just to rub it in, they don't point to their heads as they say it); I don't mind. I've learned to live with my disability, and learned to live without other people, so it's no skin off my nose. (Banks, 1987: 6)

The lines above show that Frank is disregarding the fact that she is isolates herself from the society. She sees it as a normal thing and does not bother to even think about it. Even though it is clear that the society never

accepts Frank, it can be seen that it is Frank's job to be able to blend into the society. The reason why the society is afraid of Frank is likely because Frank feels that it is not important to get along with the society and she never take a real action about it. This shows that Frank has a tendency of isolating herself from other people and also the society.

CONCLUSIONS

There are two results of this research. The first is that the researcher finds out that Frank is unable to overcome the stage of Identity vs. Identity Diffusion and as a result, she suffers from identity crisis. There are three conflicting problems of identity crisis phenomenon in the theory of Erikson's psychosocial development which match the condition of Frank's identity crisis in the novel. Those conditions are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure and negative identity. The last result is about Frank's intimacy crisis and isolation. Frank's fails to overcome the crisis in her adolescence stage and as a consequence, the crisis continues as

Frank progress toward her adulthood stage. Her lack of relationship and intimacy is the signifying point that the problems continue in the stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation.

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