LUX LISBON'S IDENTITY CRISIS DURING HER ADOLESCENCE IN *THE VIRGIN SUICIDES* BY JEFFREY EUGENIDES

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Abstract

This research aims to describe the causes and effects of Lux Lisbon's identity crisis during her adolescence in *The Virgin Suicides* by Jeffrey Eugenides. To answer the objectives, this research uses the theory of psychosocial stages of development by Erik Erikson.

This is a qualitative research that employed the relational analysis method to analyze the data. The sources of the data of this research were taken from *The Virgin Suicide* by Jeffrey Eugenides. The form of the data is the expressions, narrations, and dialogues within the novel. The data were analyzed using Erikson's psychosocial theory concentrate on the fifth stage of the development and kinds of identity. To make sure about the data trustworthiness, the researcher used triangulation to check on the data relevance.

The findings of the study show that Lux Lisbon's parents become the main causes of her identity crisis. They are unsupportive and over-controlling parents. Furthermore, she experiences identity diffusion, identity foreclosure and negative identity as the effects of her identity crisis.

Key words: identity crisis, Lux Lisbon, psychosocial development, Erikson, *The Virgin Suicides*

BACKGROUND

Identity makes individuals different from one another. Identity is innate in people ever since they were born. It is also influenced by family and society around them. As they grow up, people realize the roles that they should have in life. It is important for people to describe who they are, i.e. as a human being, as a mother, as a son or daughter in a family, etc.

Parents are the influential factors in the process of forming identity. Parents teach basic things in life since people are born. They have to be involved in children's growth and development. However, the communication between parents and adolescents are not as smooth as it should be when adolescents are in childhood stage. Biological changes, unstable emotion, different views between family and society which cause logic reasoning are some factors causing conflicts between parents and adolescents.

There are so many aspects of life development that people have to go through in real life that are captured in literature. Literature presents many issues related to adolescents and their problems. One of the primary adolescents matter is identity crisis. The issues of adolescent matter of identity crisis can be found in *The Virgin Suicides* written by Jeffrey Eugenides. Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon have five daughters who are in adolescence. Lux Lisbon is the third child. She is fourteen years old. The difference between the parents' expectation and the

daughters' desire is the major problem of the story. The parents put one-way communication to their adolescence daughters, especially Lux Lisbon. They oppress Lux Lisbon extremely. She has to obey the given rules though she has many interests to do in society and relationship. The situation leads her to undergo an identity crisis. This research uses Erikson's psychosocial which emphasizes the fifth stage of the development and psychosocial problem related to identity.

A contemporary statement of literary criticism is well developed by Wellek and Warren in their *Theory of Literature*. They mark the writer's background, the work, and the audience that can be analyzed for the interpretations (Dobie, 2012:15). The writer perception is considered as a creation process. They can describe psychological types such as mental illness and subconscious mind using words as his medium (Wellek & Warren in Aras, 2015:253). Abrams (in Clarke, 2010:1) uses a term mimetic as 'attention on the object of representation'. It means that the work depicts the real life, the author uses the work as expressive medium, and context social and historical context of the author shapes the work. He (in Clarke, 2010:3) assumes that literature reflects reality. The fictional character, their actions and time depict an undistorted reflection of realistic people, action, times, and places.

Creating a secure identity is assumed as the major function of the ego. Uniqueness, life continuity, and completeness sense can be believed as the identity or inner sense of who people really are (Larsen and Buss, 2002:206). A good identity does not mean it is stable through time, but identity which has achieved and expanded is flexible in society, relationship, and career. People who have achieved their identity are open of reorganization of identity characteristics towards people's life (Santrock, 2006:399). The presence of connection, sense of self-advancement, and development of independence in babyhood establishes final stage of identity formation with life report and integration in old time (Santrock, 2006:398).

According to Erikson (via Oswalt, 2010:par 1) the term crisis is described as "a series of internal conflicts that are linked to developmental stages". Each developmental stage is marked by a particular conflict. Personal identity and future development are the ways people determine themselves as a result of solving the conflicts. Oswalt (2010:par 2) states that related to adolescents in the fifth stage of development, the struggle of this stage is how adolescents discover a balance of acceptance to form an identity and to fit in society.

In opposite with those who achieve an identity, identity crisis occurs for adolescents who have sense of confusion or "war within themselves" in rebellion and destructive mischievous action on society

(Erikson, 1968:17). According to Larsen and Buss (2002:206), identity crisis refers to "desperation and confusion a person feels when he or she has not developed a strong sense of identity." Identity crisis is a feeling of uncertain within self, including to view and value life. A course of identity crisis is natural in adolescence stage. For some people, identity crisis may happen later and for a longer period of time, but sustainable. Identity crisis occurs in what Erikson says as 'identity confusion'. The confusion is the individuals depart, isolating from society or lose the identity in mass (Santrock, 2015:179). Depression, alcohol usage, internal distress and social anxiety are the products of identity confusion (Rageliene, 2016:par 6).

There are three psychosocial problems that point the identity crisis in psychosocial moratorium. First, diffusion means adolescents are unable to commit to an identity. They are lack in any passion to create an identity because they are not interested to explore it (Fleming, 2004:9-11). Erikson (1980:97). According to Larsen and Buss (2002:206), identity crisis refers to "desperation and confusion a person feels when he or she has not developed a strong sense of identity." Identity crisis is a feeling of uncertain within self, including to view and value life. A course of identity crisis is natural in adolescence stage. For some people, identity crisis may happen later and for a longer period of time, but

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because adolescents are unable to achieve the expected identity.

RESEARCH METHOD

To conduct this research, the researcher used qualitative research. The source of data of this research was taken from Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* which was published in 2013 and first published in 1993. The data taken from the novel were in the form sentences, paragraphs and expression which reflected the causes of Lux Lisbon's identity crisis during her adolescence and the effects of Lux Lisbon's identity crisis during her adolescence. There were several steps in collecting the data: careful and comprehensive reading, note- taking, data interpreting, identifying and categorizing the data. To obtain trustworthiness, the researcher used peer-debriefer and consulted her study with her thesis supervisors to validate the data.

DISCUSSION

This chapter imparts the discussion of the finding of the study. The discussion of the findings will be focused on the objective of the study; the cause of Lux Lisbon's identity crisis during her adolescence and the effects of Lux Lisbon's identity crisis during her adolescence.

A. The Causes of Lux Lisbon's Identity Crisis during Her Adolescence

According to Erikson (via Oswalt, 2010:par 1) the term crisis is described as "a series of internal conflicts that are linked to developmental stages". It occurs to adolescents when they begin to question a sense of self and identify their roles, values, and beliefs in society. The crucial ages in the transition from childhood to adulthood make them explore many things in order to form an identity. The failure to form an identity means adolescents have obstacles when they explore the society. The obstacles influence adolescents' decision and behavior in their adolescence life. Later, it becomes the causes of adolescents' identity crisis that occurs to Lux Lisbon.

Lux Lisbon's identity crisis during her adolescence is mainly caused by her parents. They make and apply the rules to all their daughters who are all adolescents.

The rules that are applied are direct and strict. The rules limit the daughters to socialize and communicate to others, especially boys. Disobeying the rules mean they have to be punished. The limited socialization turns her to have identity crisis.

1. Unsupportive Parents

Puberty is adolescence's particular development. It is marked when physical and emotional change naturally (Whitbourne, 2012). Adolescents begin to have sexual interest and sexual exploration to shape an identity later. It also happens to Lux Lisbon, but Mrs. Lisbon hampers her. Mrs. Lisbon never explains the reason of the commands to her which can be seen below.

> We knew what it felt like to see a boy with his shirt off, and why it made Lux write the name Kevin in purple Magic Marker all over her three-ring binder and even on her bras and panties, and we understood her rage coming home one day to find thatMrs. Lisbon had soaked her things in Clorox, bleaching all the "Kevins" out (Eugenides, 2013:39).

Adolescents normally do the exploration, experimentation, fantasy and reality (Santrock, 2006:396). Lux Lisbon also does what commonly adolescents do. It occurs when she likes to see boys with his shirt off and puts the name in her binder and underwear. However, Mrs. Lisbon action clearly hampers Lux Lisbon from boys by bleaching the name "Kevin". It means that Mrs. Lisbon does not support Lux Lisbon to explore her curiosity by explaining the reason why she has to bleach it, but instantly ignore Lux Lisbon's argument without compromise.

2. Over-controlling Parents

Over-controlling parents marks strict and direct rules to the daughters. Disobeying the rules brings punishment to them. It is clear when Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon give rules to the daughters that they have to obey though it is opposing the adolescene exploration. The parents may have a high expectation that the daughters have to achieve. They make clear orders that can be seen below.

> It was well known that Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon didn't allow their daughters to date, and that Mrs. Lisbon in particular disapproved of dances, proms, and the general expectation that teenagers should be allowed to paw one another in back seats (Eugenides, 2013:64).

Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon ignore the exploration time of adolescents by shaping their own parenting style in directive situation. They reject any communication and socialization for the daughters as they want to separate them from boys. Though they can permit the daughters by chaperoning, they remain worried if the daughters get negative effects from boys.

B. The Effects of Lux Lisbon's Identity Crisis during Her Adolescence

Erikson (1968:157) creates a term psychosocial moratorium that means a period of delay in adult commitment. It is characterized by experiments with different roles and personalities to find out adolescents' confirmed commitment to society. This period is the most important process of seeking identity that forms an adult personality later.

However, Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon apply strict and directive rules to their daughters without compromise. The rules mark the inappropriate parenting in one way communication. Hampering exploration with the boys is the basic rule in order to prevent sexual attraction. It leads problem or conflict that becomes Lux Lisbon's identity crisis.

1. Identity Diffusion

Mrs. Lisbon applies the rules to their daughters including Lux Lisbon. However, the rules seem to be not comfortable to be

applied in Lux Lisbon's life. The rules influence Lux Lisbon's decision to go far away from home though she is uncertain whether she really needs to escape or not as depicted below.

> Woody Clabault saw Lux Lisbon talking to a motorcycle gang outside Hudson's. **One biker asked her to go for a ride, and after looking in the direction of her house more than ten miles away, she accepted.** She hugged his waist. He kicked the machine into life. Later, Lux was seen walking home alone, carrying her shoes (Eugenides, 2013:49).

Her desperation towards her parents at home causes her decision to go with a strange biker. Her difficulty to make a decision is shown by the uncertainty to herself when she accepts to go after she knows how far the direction is. There may be no place for her to live outside her house, so she decides to go back home alone.

2. Identity Foreclosure

Mr. and Mrs. Lisbon have full control on Lux Lisbon life, primarily the sexual attraction that commonly occurs in adolescence. They make rules and control her directly without any compromise which can be seen below.

> At ten o'clock, taking a cue from his wife, Mr. Lisbon slapped Trip on the back and said, "Well, son, we usually hit the hay about now." Trip shook his hand, then Mrs. Lisbon's colder one, and Lux stepped forward to escort him out. She must have seen the situation was futile, because she hardly looked at him during the short trip to the door. **She walked with her head down, digging in her ear for wax, and looked up as she opened the door to give him a sad smile that promised only frustration** (Eugenides, 2013:81).

Lux Lisbon does not have any choice to reject her parents' willingness that chases Trip away as seen in her behavior. Though she seems desperate and frustrate, she does not argue her feeling to their parents. She does not have inability to perform self exploration, but she simply accepts her parents' commitment. It is clear that she experiences identity foreclosure.

3. Negative Identity

Adolescence is the time to sexual exploration. It is needed to form sexual identity later. However, they remain instinctively to explore though the rules forbid them to. It is seen when Lux Lisbon comes afterward into Trip's car wearing a flannel nightgown. They kiss each other wildly and passionately. However when Trip's lack of love appears, Lux says, "gotta get back before the bed check," and leaves him with disappointment (Eugenides, 2013:82). Lux Lisbon as an adolescent who explore her sexuality tries to pursue Trip inside his car and kiss him wildly. Her action can be determined as a rebellion toward her parents' rules by satisfying herself when she has a time to escape and kiss Trip for a while. The rebellion means she does not care with the rules that recognized as the proper roles in her family. She later leaves Trip with

hopelessness and desperation because that is all that she can do.

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