



IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY IN *THE NORMAL PEOPLE* BY SALLY ROONEY (2018)

Hanna Fauziyyah¹, Desvalini Anwar²

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Universitas Negeri Padang

email: fauziyyahanna12@gmail.com

Abstract

This study about the search of identity by the two main characters in the novel *Normal People* (2018) by Sally Rooney. This study focuses on the internal and external factors that become challenges in the process of searching the main character's identity, as well as the efforts used to overcome existing challenges. This analysis uses Erik H. Erikson's psychoanalysis theory which focuses on psychosocial. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative with close reading techniques. The results of this research are that psychological condition is an internal challenges in the process of searching the identity of the two main characters. Then, disharmonious family, unhappy relationship, and the different social and cultural are external challenges in the process of searching of identity. Furthermore, the efforts are made by the main characters to overcome both the challenges are by increasing self-awareness, controlling ego, and appreciate life.

Key words: *Identity, Family, Loved Ones, Society, Self-awareness, Controlling Ego, Appreciate Life.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Identity is a personal image of everyone, and a part that is characteristic of each person. Identity is also something that is able to direct each person to trust and able to direct themselves or their behavior to something that is right and also directed because of the identity they carry. Fearon (1999) argues that an identity attached to an individual is an inherent assessment of other people which is seen from the form of their personal characteristics. This means that identity becomes the main value for each person and the main sign or value for each person who interacts. In the search of identity, there are various things that will become

¹ English ELLSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on March 2024

² Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



challenges in it. This is because the process of searching for identity is not an easy thing because of the many conflicts that may occur at the age of searching for identity. Therefore, each individual will experience various experiences of conflict or shock during the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

In real life, there are many obstacles in the process of searching the identity. Rob Henry as stated by Bahar (2020), a surfer from Australia, has a unique process of searching his identity. In the midst of the life conflicts he faced in his country, he decided to go to the Mentawai Islands to carry out his hobby and then decided to stay in Mentawai because he was able to find comfort or meaning in life that could make him happy. In his documentary film "*As World Divide* (2017)", he shows that happiness in life is not about material things but relationships with fellow humans. Then, "*Laskar Pelangi*" by Andrea Hirata is also a story that contains the story of the journey of 10 teenagers in search of their identity. In this story, it is revealed that education, economics, facilities or infrastructure are obstacles or challenges in achieving their dreams. The challenges in achieving this dream provide them with lessons so that they are able to understand the meaning of life.

The process of searching for identity is based on awareness or desires that originate from within the individual himself. In the psychoanalytic theory put forward by Erikson (1968), he stated that every person experiences several stages of self-development, especially in searching for identity. Then, the main key to the process of finding one's identity is the growth of each person's ego. This is because the ego is the main thing as the human control center in acting and determining the direction in which life will go.

Normal People (2018) by Sally Rooney is a novel that tells about the challenges faced by young people in the process of searching their identity. Limited psychological conditions, disharmonious family and economic problems are the main things expressed as the main conditions faced by the characters in this story. Psychological issues are raised as the main issue in the story, as well as providing an overview and lesson to readers, especially young people, in facing the challenges that exist in the process of searching their identity. Therefore, *Normal People* by Sally Rooney can be analyzed using the theory of psychoanalysis by Erikson which focuses on psychosocial or ego growth in individuals.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted as a literary research type, and using qualitative descriptive methods. Sherman and Webb (1988) states that qualitative research has meaning as seen or explained, and achieved by each person in the social situation they are experiencing. In this case, the research data is collected directly from research subjects by conducting analysis using close reading techniques and then drawing conclusions from the analysis results obtained. A qualitative descriptive method was used with the aim of further explaining the factors that become challenges in the process of searching the identity.

The data analysis in this research uses Erik H. Erikson's psychoanalytic theory, with data collected using reading techniques in the novel *Normal People* (2018)

by Sally Rooney as the main research subject. This research was carried out by paying attention to ego growth and connecting it with the main conflict experienced by the main characters during the search for identity.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Result

1.1 Internal and External Challenges in The Process of The Search of Identity

1.1.1 Internal Challenges (Psychological Conditions)

Internal challenges are things that come from within the two main characters which are expressed as the main factors that are considered challenges in the process of searching their identity. The internal challenges expressed in the story are the psychological conditions of the two main characters.

The two main characters in *Normal People* are revealed to have poor psychological conditions. This condition is expressed as the main thing that influences the process of searching their identity which can be seen from their behavior. This is found in the quote:

“Marianne is grinning now. *She exercises an open contempt for people in school.* She has no friends and spends her lunchtimes alone reading novels. A lot of people really hate her. Her father died when she was thirteen and Connell has heard *she has a mental illness now or something.* It’s true she is the smartest person in school...” (p.2)

From this quote, it can be revealed that mental illness is a form of unfavorable psychological condition found in Marianne which becomes a challenge in the process of searching her identity. There is a feeling of fear that gives rise to a solitary attitude, making her afraid of the outside world and also feeling distrustful of the environment around her. Mental illness is expressed as something that is created from things or experiences that one has had in the past. The quote is supported by :

“....And it was a pretty attention-grabbing story Marianne had to him, *about her dad beating her up when she was a small child. Als the dad was dead now,* so he wasn't around to defend himself.”(p.39)

From this quote it can be revealed that the violence received in the past has become an ongoing trauma for Marianne. This makes her personality as someone who is afraid and grows with an ego that has no trust in other people. Erikson, in his theory regarding the period of child development, said that childhood is a period of character formation in children. Therefore, violence or all experiences received during childhood will be stored in memory and influence ego growth or self-formation.

Trauma or depression is expressed not only from events experienced by the character's self, but also from things that happen in the immediate environment or at the core of the character itself. This is in the quote:

“On nights out his friends sometimes raise the subject of his father, like it's something deep and meaningful they can only talk about when they're drunk. *Connell finds this depressing. He never thinks about the man who got Lorraine pregnant, why would he?* His friends seem so obsessed with their own fathers, obsessed with emulating them or being different from them in specific ways.” (p.35)

From this quote it can be revealed that Connell is experiencing mental disorders in the form of depression. This is expressed as a feeling of depression regarding the father figure. Based on the theory put forward by Erikson regarding the formation of character in children, guidance from family figures, especially father, is the main thing that must be included in it. The incompleteness of a figure who guides him from childhood to adulthood, makes Connell grow up with a personality or personality that is full of fear of anyone who hurts him or his mother.

From the quotes above, it can be revealed that the psychological conditions such as mental disorder suffered by the two characters are caused by different things. Maerianne suffers from a mental disorder due to her past experience of domestic violence. Meanwhile, Connell was caused by a lack of enthusiasm, attention and upbringing from his father. What these two characters experience can be a challenge in the process of finding their identity because psychological conditions are the basis for controlling self-control, both thoughts and the subconscious.

1.1.2 External Challenges

1.1.2.1 Disharmonious Family

The family is the first and main sphere that plays a very important role in the formation of an individual's character or personality. Having a family with disharmonious conditions has a bad influence on the formation of a child's identity. In *Normal People*, this is shown in the quote :

“*I don't think they care very much what I do.*

She covered her face using her flattened hands for a moment, and then she rubbed her nose briskly and sniffed. Connell knew *she had a strained relationship with her family*. He first came to realise this when they were still in school, and it didn't strike him as unusual, because Marianne had strained relationships with everyone then. Her brother Alan was a few years older, and had what Lorraine called a 'weak

personality'. Honestly it was hard to imagine him standing his ground in a conflict with Marianne. But now they're both grown up and still she almost never goes home, or she goes and then comes back like this, distracted and sullen, saying *she had a fight with her family again, and not wanting to talk about it.* You had another falling-out with them, did you? Connell said. *She nodded. They don't like me very much, she said.*"(p.77)

From this quote it can be revealed that disharmony in family relationships can have a bad effect on personality development. Marianne is revealed have a different personality from the others because she did not receive good support and guidance during her ego growth period. There is a feeling of being ignored and lack of attention from the family, causing the ego to emerge in the form of a feeling of loneliness with actions that show loneliness in life.

Then, problems in the family can also condemn a person to feelings of guilt which can cause discomfort or unease. This is expressed in the quote:

"His grandmother sighs, like his commentary on the weather is painful to her. It probably is, because everything he does is painful to her, because she hates him for being alive. She looks him up and down with a critical expression.

Well, you certainly don't take after your mother, do you? she says.

Yeah, he says. No.

Physically Lorraine and Connell are different types. Lorraine is blonde and has a soft face without edges. The guys in school think she's attractive, which they tell Connell often. She probably is attractive, so what, it doesn't offend him. Connell has darker hair and a hard-looking face, like an artist's impression of a criminal. *He knows, however, that his grandmother's point is unrelated to his physical appearance and is meant as a remark on his paternity.* So, kay, he has nothing to say on that." (p.34)

From this quote it can be revealed that Connell has a feeling of guilt that haunts his mind and himself. This comes from things in his family that give rise to a feeling of worthlessness. The feeling of being disliked by their presence and what they do makes Connell grow into a timid personality and always feels unworthy. Growing up in these circumstances can worsen the process of searching his identity because there is no perfect support coming from his family.

So disharmonious family such as domestic violence and lack of support from the family becomes a challenge in searching the character's identity because this results in disrupted ego growth and also indirectly affects the psychological state of the two characters. The loss of the family's role in searching for a character's identity results in the character experiencing an identity crisis from adolescence towards the age of identity maturity.

1.1.2.2 Unhappy Relationship

A loved one is someone who is truly trusted and is able to provide happiness and comfort. This is supported by the period of searching for identity at an age where the ego grows very significantly and controls the adolescent's self. Erikson (Dwijayanti, 2020 : 3) stated that love or romantic experiences in the process of searching for identity have an important role in it. Apart from having a positive impact, loved ones can also have a negative impact when the individuals have unhappy relationship, especially during the period of searching their identity. In *Normal People*, this is found in quotes :

“He had never tried to delude her into thinking she was socially acceptable; she'd deluded herself. *He had just been using her as a kind of private experiment, and her willingness to be used had probably shocked him. He pitied her in the end, but she also repulsed him. In a way she feels sorry for him now, because he has to live with the fact that he had sex with her, of his own free choice, and he liked it. That says more about him, the supposedly ordinary and healthy person, than it does about her. She never went back to school again except to sit the exams.* By then people were saying she had been in the mental hospital. None of that mattered now anyway.” (p.47)

From the quote above, it can be revealed that a bad ego can arise from disappointment in feeling love for someone. The emergence of feelings of depression, laziness, and not being interested or caring about more important things is a form of bad impact on Marianne. Living life with these things, make her as adolescence filled with bad things so that the formation of ego identity which at that time becomes volatile bad or having problems. This problem is considered to be a challenge that can hinder the process of searching Marianne's identity.

Providing an impact that can be a challenge in the process of searching the main character's identity does not only influence the characters in the story normally, but can also influence their subconscious. This is contained in the quote :

“*Afterwards he felt so bad he threw up, and he had to tell Sinead he was drunk even though he wasn't really.*

There was no one he could talk to about that He was excruciatingly lonely. He had recurring dreams about being with Marianne again, holding her peacefully the way he used to when they were tired, and speaking with her in low voices. Then he'd remember what had happened, and wake up feeling so depressed he couldn't move a single muscle in his body.” (p.55)

From this quote, it can be revealed that there is a feeling of stress experienced by Connell because of the person he loves. This proves that excessive feelings can even create feelings of loneliness and even severe depression that occur in the subconscious. The influence of the subconscious can also influence ego growth and psychological development. Poor ego and psychological development will ultimately worsen the process and results of the identity that is formed during adolescence and even adulthood.

So, having an unhappy relationship with a loved one can cause the process of searching the identity for both characters to be disrupted because of bad feelings within them such as disappointment or hurt, can create feelings of depression, trauma and stress. These bad feelings will affect ego growth or character behavior so that the maturity of identity in the maturation process becomes delayed or imperfect due to problems in ego growth.

1.1.2.3 Different Society and Culture

Society and culture are a form of sphere that cannot be separated from life. This is because interaction and relationships between people are a basic need for humans as social creatures. However, this scope can also be a challenge in the process of searching one's identity because there are many bad things that exist or may occur due to differences in personality, social status, culture, beliefs, and so on. In *Normal People* this is expressed in the quote :

“Instead everyone has to pretend not to notice that their social lives are arranged hierarchically, with certain people at the top, some jostling at mid-level, and others lower down. Marianne sometimes sees herself at the very bottom of the ladder, but at other times she pictures herself off the ladder completely, not affected by its mechanics, since she does not actually desire popularity or do anything to make it belong to her.” (p.22)

From this quote it can be revealed that social life is something that is certain to apply and something that is seen as the value or quality of a person's life. The level of social life is also a form that each person's social level is differentiated based on conditions which generally refer to position and economics. Marianne in the quote shows the difference in her point of view with other people regarding social life. The existence of these differences can be a challenge in searching her

identity because he has to adapt herself to the demands of existing social life and indirectly has to put aside her ego and personality or what her conscience desires. This then creates a sense of rebellion within herself, thus creating instability of ego and desires in the process of forming her identity. The quote is supported by:

“He complains to her, seemingly without reservation, about how hard it is to make friends in Trinity. The other day he lay on her couch and rolled the dregs of wine around in his glass and said: *People here are such snobs. Even if they liked me I honestly wouldn't want to be friends with them.* He put his glass down and looked at Marianne. *That's why it's easy for you, by the way, he said. Because you're from a rich family, that's why people like you.*” (p.65)

From this quote, it can be revealed that lives with different cultures, viewpoints and personalities make social status a reference in interacting. The social status of the quote is considered as holding an important position in life. Not having friends, being isolated or alienated can give rise to feelings of inferiority, worthlessness and low self-esteem. The existence of this ego is a challenge in itself in the process of searching for identity because Connell is required to be able to fight the bad ego that appears which will become an obstacle or something that makes it difficult for him in searching his identity.

Furthermore, the friendship is also considered as something that very easily provides influence or challenges in the process of searching one's identity. This is expressed in the quoted :

“At a party before Christmas, *Peggy cut Marianne a line of cocaine in their friend Declan's bathroom, and Marianne actually took it, or most of it anyway. It had no appreciable effect on her mood, except that for days afterwards she felt alternately amused at the idea that she had done it and guilty.*” (p.62)

From this quote it can be revealed that friendship can have a bad impact on Marianne. This can be seen from the change in her habits or personality. In *Normal People*, Marianne is revealed to have changed significantly from initially closing herself off from friendship to someone who accepts without exception those in her friendships to being very free. This change is revealed to affect the way Marianne evaluates and lives life so that she is able to change the identity that is starting to form in herself.

So disharmonious families, unhappy relationships, and social and cultural differences are forms of external challenges that can be expressed as obstacles or barriers to the search for identity in the two main characters of *Normal People*. Ego and psychological growth as the basic determinants of behavior and thinking are the things that are most disturbed or influenced by these three challenges.

1.2 The Efforts Made by The Two Main Characters to Face The Existing Internal and External Challenges

The efforts made by the two main characters in *Normal People* are a form of solution to overcome or face the challenges they experienced during their search for identity. The efforts made begin with themselves, which is a form of their maturation and success in controlling themselves.

1.2.1 Self-awareness

Awareness is the main key in searching for identity because awareness is the basis for moving individuals to carry out all forms of business. This is found in the quote:

“This surprised her, because she usually felt confined inside one single personality, which was always the same regardless of what she did or said. *She had tried to be different in the past, as a kind of experiment, but it had never worked.*” (p.10)

From this quote it can be revealed that self-awareness to make changes for the better is the main thing and is the basis for creating a business. When effort is made, this is a positive form of ego and is successfully controlled by the self. Marianne in the quote is expressed as having the awareness to make efforts to overcome the problems that occur within her. The failures she faced and her awareness of these failures have indirectly shaped her identity in a fundamental way. The quote is supported by :

“*Two and a half years he worked in the garage, after school to buy this car, and all he uses it for is driving his mother around because she doesn't have a licence.*” (p.42)

From the quote above, it can be seen that self-awareness can also encourage improving the quality of life in the form of achievements, both material and non-material. In the efforts made by Connell, he shows his success in controlling himself and fighting the bad ego that exists at the age known as the ego crisis period. The efforts undertaken by Connell in this case aim to overcome economic problems and improve social status which has been considered a challenge in the process of finding his identity.

1.2.2 Controlling Ego

Furthermore, the effort made is to have the courage to act and make decisions. In this case, the efforts made aim to free the character's self from things that are felt to be obstacles to self-development of identity. In *Normal People*, this is shown in the quote:

“She thinks a lot about how to extricate herself from 'the family situation'. In bed at night she imagines scenarios in which she is completely free of her mother and brother, on neither good nor bad terms with them, simply a neutral non-participant in their lives. She spent much of her childhood and adolescence planning elaborate schemes to remove herself from family conflict: staying completely silent, keeping her face and body expressionless and immobile, wordlessly leaving the room and making her way to her bedroom, closing the door quietly behind her.” (p.145)

From this quote it can be revealed that the change in personality from being timid and silent to someone who dares to act is a form of effort that is formed from the success of ego formation and the searching of identity. The desire to get out of a prolonged conflict which is considered capable of hampering personal development and disrupting psychological health is proof that awareness and will are the main things for the creation of an effort. With this effort, it is revealed that Marianne wants to make her life peaceful.

1.2.3 Appreciate Life

Then, the efforts made by the two main characters are also to understand and appreciate that happens in their lives. Thus, this creates success in reducing the problems or challenges that exist in the process of searching their identity. This is shown in the quote :

“Well, here I am on the floor, he thought. Is life so much worse here than it would be on the bed, or even in a totally different location? No, life is exactly the same. Life is the thing you bring with you inside your own head. I might as well be lying here, breathing the vile dust of the carpet into my lungs, gradually feeling my right arm go numb under the weight of my body, because it's essentially the same as every other possible experience.” (p.150)

From this quote it can be revealed that realizing the meaning of life is a form of appreciating it. Connell in the quote is said to have had a good process in making himself a calm person and experiencing personality changes in living well. His awareness that life will have its own problems and will be experienced by each person in different ways makes him successful in forming an identity that is able to appreciate life. The existence of a form of success for the efforts made is proven by the success of the two main characters in becoming the person they want to be. The quote is supported by :

“Marianne is neither admired nor reviled anymore. People have forgotten about her. *She's a normal person now.*” (p.189)

From this quote, it can be revealed that every problem in the process of searching one's identity will be resolved by the efforts are made. Efforts that are carried out with sincerity and supported by awareness and a strong desire are able to provide good results according to the effort. Marianne in the quote is revealed to have succeeded in realizing herself as a normal person. This is due to her success in controlling her ego and self in order to form the identity she desires.

So, the two characters in *Normal People* make efforts to increase awareness, control their egos, and appreciate life to be able to face challenges in the process of finding their identity. Efforts made with sincerity are a form of self-maturation process. The success of the efforts made is shown by the maturity of identity that is visible in both characters through their thought patterns and actions.

2. Discussion

Analysis of the process of searching for identity in *Normal People* was carried out using psychoanalysis by Erik H. Erikson. It focuses on the growth of the ego during identity development. Erik H. Erikson's psychological theory suggests that there are eight stages that humans go through in identity development with stages of ego growth within them. This is interesting because there is a connection between the formation of identity and ego growth in humans.

Marianne and Connell's process of searching for identity revealed that ego is something that greatly influences the form of actions taken in searching for identity. According to Erikson (1968), human age determines ego development which is identical to determining human behavior. In this case, the ages of the two main characters in *Normal People* indicate ages that are in the two periods of identity formation proposed by Erikson, namely the Adulthood and Adulthood. These two periods are expressed as periods of identity crisis in each individual caused by ego instability. This is in accordance with what Connell and Marianne experienced so that the challenges they experienced in the process of searching for identity had a serious impact on their psychological condition.

The maturation process as proposed by Erikson (1968) is also depicted in the search for identity in the characters Marianne and Connell. The process of ego instability leading to success in controlling the ego, which is described at the age of seeking identity, is a stage known as “maturity”. It is at the maturity stage that efforts are formed which are formed as a maturation of the identities of the two characters in *Normal People*.

On the other hand, the culture expressed by Erikson (1968), which is something that will also influence the search for identity, is not really shared by Marianne and Connell. This is because culture is something that is only generally expressed in *Normal People*. The more prominent and has a reflection on the theory put forward by Erikson is the psychological condition of the character which is related to the growth of ego and self-awareness.

In general, the behavior shown by Marianne and Connell in accepting and overcoming challenges in the process of searching their identity offers a slightly different reflection from the psychoanalytic theory by Erikson (1968). The existence of studies related to identity, which is the main study in Erikson's theory, illustrates that ego growth plays a major role in influencing every process in the search for identity. Through the characters of Marianne and Connell, Erikson's (1968) theory resonates with the relationship between ego, age, self-awareness and social environment on the process of finding one's identity.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Identity is a form of thing that is embedded in every person. It is revealed that identity begins to form from childhood, supported by ego growth. In the searching of identity, there is a process that involves the things that become challenges in the search identity process. This research uses psychoanalytic theory by Erik H. Erikson which focuses on ego growth in the process of searching for identity. By using this theory, this research focuses on examining the internal and external challenges in the process of searching of identity for the two main characters of *Normal People* (2018) by Sally Rooney, as well as the efforts made to face these challenges.

This study was conducted to explain the process of searching for identity at the age of ego growth. It is hoped that this research can increase the reader's insight and can also be useful as a reference for further research on the same issue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bahar. A (2020). Rob Henry. *Hai*. <https://hai.grid.id/read/072095619/rob-henry-peselancar-bule-yang-menemukan-jati-diri-di-suku-mentawai>
- Emiliza, T. (2019). Konsep Psikososial Menurut Teori Erik H.Erikson Terhadap Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Dalam Tinjauan Pendidikan Islam. Repository IAINBengkulu.
<http://repository.iainbengkulu.ac.id/3899/1/TIARA%20EMILIZA.pdf>
- Erikson, E.H (1968). *Identity Youth and Crisis*. New York : Norton and Company
- Fearon, D. (1999). What is Identity (as We Now Use the Word) ?. *Journal of Political Science*
- Hidayat. D.R (2011). *Psikologi Kepribadian dalam Konseling*. Indonesia : Ghalia Indonesia Publication
- Sherman, R. (1988). *Qualitative Research in Education: Focus and Method*. London and New York :Falmer Press
- Suyadjid. L.E (2010). Pencarian Jati Diri (Self-Discovery) Milkman Dalam Song of Solomon Karya Tony Morrison.. *Journal of Education*. Vol. 6 No.11
- Thahir. A (2018). *Psikologi Perkembangan*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Referensi