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 Fakultas Sastra Universitas Ekasakti	JURNAL JIPS (Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Scholastic) Vol. 9 No. 3 ISSN : 2579-5449 (media cetak)	
		E-ISSN : 2597-6540 (media online)

Identity Crisis Of The Clown In Dazai Osamu's No Longer Human Using Erik Erikson Psychosocial Theory

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Abstrak

This research is titled "The Identity Crisis of the Clown in Dazai Osamu's No Longer Human Using Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory." This study aims to identify the causes of the identity crisis and alienation experienced by Oba Yozo in the novel No Longer Human, using the psychosocial development stage theory developed by Erik Erikson, with a focus on the fifth stage, "Identity vs. Role Confusion." The method used in this research is qualitative, with the novel No Longer Human as the data source. The research was conducted using data collection techniques such as reading and noting important parts of the novel, and by recording and quoting text from the novel. The research results show that Oba Yozo experienced alienation and confusion from a young age in determining his role in life, both for himself and for society. This led Oba Yozo to create a "mask" to defend himself from the outside world. The alienation, confusion, and the "mask" he created exacerbated Yozo's identity crisis, making him feel like he had failed to be human. This research shows that Yōzō's identity crisis was not only caused by internal factors, but was also influenced by a lack of family and social support. This highlights the importance of affection, support, and healthy social interaction in helping individuals build a complete sense of self and preventing them from feeling alienated from themselves and society.

Keywords: Identity Crisis, Erik Erikson, Psychosocial Development Stages

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I INTRODUCTION

Identity crisis is a psychological condition characterized by deep confusion about who a person is, what their life goals are, and their place in society. Someone experiencing an identity crisis often feels lost and uncertain about the

values and norms they hold, as well as experiencing internal conflicts in various aspects of themselves, such as personal expectations, social expectations, and the realities of daily life. In the context of developmental psychology, this

term was first introduced by Erikson, a psychologist known for his theory of psychosocial development stages. According to Erikson, the identity crisis is an important part of human development, especially during adolescence, when a person begins to question their self-identity and strives to form a stable and consistent sense of self-confidence. However, identity crises are not limited to adolescence. They can occur at any time in life, especially when someone is faced with major changes, such as the transition from education to the workforce, relationship failures, changes in social status, or even in existential situations that raise questions like who they really are and what their purpose in life is.

In general, an identity crisis reflects an individual's temporary failure to blend into various aspects of life into a harmonious identity. In this situation, individuals feel confused of choosing various options and roles in society, but still unable to make their choices that truly reflect their identity. This feeling of uncertainty can lead to anxiety, dissatisfaction with life, feelings of being unappreciated, and even depression if not handled and treated properly. In modern society which is filled with multiple social pressures, rapid information flow, and high standards of success, identity crises are becoming increasing frequently. Social media for example, which constantly increases this confusion by presenting a perfect self-image that is generally impossible for the other people to achieve, which is increasing feelings of unworthiness or insecurity about who they truly are. In some of more severe cases, identity crises can cause individuals to feel alienated from themselves and others, because they feel unable to become the 'version' that expected by their social community, but have not been able to find their true selves..

Therefore, understanding identity crises is not only important in a psychological context but also in a social and cultural context. This crisis is not merely a sign of mental weakness but a natural part of the human journey in seeking meaning and wholeness. Every human being fundamentally has the desire to understand who they are, what they believe in, and how they want to live in this world. When this need is not fulfilled, an identity crisis arises as a form of unfinished search for meaning. In this context, an identity crisis can be understood not as an end, but as a process of forming a deeper and more authentic self. In other words, an identity crisis is an important moment in a

person's life that opens up space for reflection, change, and growth toward a more honest understanding of oneself.

One notable example is *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai, a Japanese novel that has captivated scholars and readers alike with its profound psychological insights. The story follows the life of Oba Yozo, a young man who feels fundamentally disconnected from society and struggles to form a stable sense of identity. Despite coming from a respectable background and appearing charismatic on the outside, Yozo harbors deep insecurities and a constant sense of unworthiness. He hides his fear of social rejection behind a mask of humor and charm, but his life is marked by alienation, despair, failed relationships, and repeated suicide attempts.

This novel provides rich material for psychological analysis, particularly through the lens of Erikson's psychosocial development theory. Unlike Freud, who emphasized the drives of the unconscious, Erikson viewed the development of a person's identity as a lifelong process shaped by social interaction and cultural context. According to Erikson, every individual will always face eight stages of psychosocial development, each marked by a central conflict. Failure to resolve a conflict at a particular stage can cause a person to experience psychological difficulties in the future.

This research focuses on applying Erikson's theory to analyze Oba Yozo's psychological development throughout the novel. The aim is to reveal how unresolved psychosocial crises led to Yozo's gradual psychological breakdown. These stages are particularly critical during adolescence and young adulthood, aligning with the most significant periods of Yozo's life experience.

By applying Erikson's theoretical framework to analyze Oba Yozo's behavior, thoughts, and relationships, this study aims to uncover how unresolved psychosocial crises contribute to the gradual psychological breakdown of the character, as well as to describe the loss of self-identity and the struggle to maintain existence in the novel. This study also aims to deepen understanding of the portrayal of identity crises and existential struggles in the novel, while demonstrating how psychosocial theory can illuminate the inner life of literary characters as a reflection of broader human experience.

Literary works often reflect the inner turmoil and psychological realities of human life. Beyond mere narration, literature uses its characters to depict the complexities of the human mind, encompassing emotions such as fear, loneliness, anxiety, and the search for existential meaning. In the context of post-World War II Japan, the themes of alienation, identity crisis, and emptiness of meaning found in *No Longer Human* are closely related to the socio-cultural upheaval of that time. This novel follows the tragic journey

of Oba Yozo, a man who feels fundamentally disconnected from society. Although extraordinarily charismatic, Yozo harbors a deep sense of insecurity and helplessness. Unable to build a stable identity, he turned to a false persona built around excessive humor and performativity social interactions. His internal struggles, exacerbated by a lack of meaningful relationships, led him to profound alienation and ultimately to psychological collapse.

II RESEARCH METHODS

2.1 Method of Collecting the Data

This research was conducted using qualitative methods, defined as an approach based on a qualitative paradigm, which is a method involving an investigation process to understand social or human issues. This approach includes the development of a comprehensive and complex picture, using verbal descriptions, which deeply explain the perspectives of individuals who provide information. Additionally, this research is conducted in a natural environment. The data collection approach used in this research focuses on the main character, Oba Yozo, in the novel, with an emphasis on understanding his personality traits and identifying the elements that contribute to the effectiveness of the data collection process. This research uses literary criticism because the researcher seeks to describe the data in the form of literary works. The examination, analysis, characterization, or interpretation of literary works is known as literary criticism. Literary criticism aims to define the type of representation constructed in the novel's text about psychosocial aspects in Dazai Osamu's work, *No Longer Human*. This criticism is intended to address research difficulties and focus on intrinsic elements. The approach used is Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory.

2.2 Method of Analyzing the Data

In research, data is used to address documented problems. Data is defined by Hornby (2010) as information or facts used in decision-making and discussion processes. This definition is provided by Hornby (2010). The information collected for this study consists of sentences, particularly the words spoken by characters in

their dialogues and descriptions provided by the novel's author. Dazai Osamu's novel *No Longer Human* serves as the source of information collected for this study. This book can be considered the primary source.

2.3 Technique of Collecting the Data

The data collection techniques used in this research were reading and note-taking. Reading is the most important technique in data collection through reading. Note-taking is a data collection technique that involves quoting text from Osamu Dazai's novel *No Longer Human*. Initially, the novel was read in its entirety to gain a general understanding. After that, it was read carefully and Erik Erikson's theory was applied to the novel. According to Hornby (2010), note-taking is the act of paying attention to something and ensuring that it is remembered. In data collection, this study used the following steps: reading the novel *No Longer Human* repeatedly, understanding the content of the novel, finding data related to the research problem, taking important notes from the novel *No Longer Human*, and finally organizing the data into several sections based on its classification.

2.4 Technique of Analyzing the Data

This research utilises qualitative methods to analyse data, which is used to analyse psychology in novels during the data analysis process. First, this research begins data analysis by identifying the text of the novel. Second, this research categorises data based on the traumatic experiences of the main characters, along with the influence of the environment on the characters in the novel. The final step is to draw conclusions from the analysis results.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researcher focuses on the life of the main character, Oba Yozo, in the novel *No Longer Human*, by tracing the various events that shaped his personality. This research also focuses on how Yozo deals with his difficulties in interacting, both within his family and in society at large. Using Erikson's eight stages of human development theory, the researcher will analyze how Yozo experiences an identity crisis and social alienation, and how these conditions affect the way he responds to and deals with various issues in his life.

3.1 The childhood of the clown

3.1.1 Yozo's sense of uncertainty and ambiguity about his role as a human being

Yozo : I can't even guess myself what is must to be live the live of human being. I was born in a village in the Northeast, and it wasn't until I was quite big that I saw my first train. I climbed up and down the station bridge, quite unaware that its function was to permit people to cross from one track to another. I was convinced that the bridge had been provided to kend an exotic touch and to make the station premies a place of pleaseant diversity.

(*No Longer Human*, 2022 : 5)

The opening sentence of the first chapter above marks the beginning of the identity crisis experienced by the character Oba Yozo. He not only demonstrates ignorance about who he is, but also reveals his lack of understanding of his role and function as a human being in life. Yozo's inability to understand how he should live is an early sign that he is experiencing a deep identity crisis. He feels that he has no clear purpose in life and is unable to adapt to the human values that are commonly accepted in society. The statement from the main character above is in line with the fifth stage of Erikson's theory, which is *identity vs. role confusion*. At this stage, adolescents are in the process of searching for their true selves and identities, as well as their roles in society.

3.1.2 Yozo's understanding is different from that of most people.

Yozo : Again, I have never known what it means to be hungry. I don't mean by this statement that I was raised in a well-to-do family, I have no such banal intent. I meant that I have never been aware that my stomach was empty. When I was a boy I returned home from school the people at home would make a great fuss over me.

(*No Longer Human*, 2022 : 6)

Yozo revealed that he had never felt hungry because he lived in a well-off family and had no idea that there were people outside who could not enjoy food like he did. Yozo's statement above is in line with the first stage of Erikson's theory, which is *Trust vs. Mistrust*. At this stage, babies form trust in their surroundings, such as being given basic needs like food. Because his needs were always met, Yozo never felt hunger, which shows that he did not understand what was happening outside.

3.2 Oba Yozo's first experience without his family

In this second chapter, Yōzō has entered adolescence and moved to Tokyo. Although his life is more free because he is far from his family, his feelings of alienation from others continue to haunt him and are even worse. To cover up his social awkwardness, he continues to wear a 'mask' of silly behaviour, jokes, banter, and fake friendliness. Others see him as an entertaining and pleasant person, when in fact he feels empty inside. He meets Horiki, a friend who has a profound influence on the direction of his life. Horiki introduces Yōzō to the big city lifestyle: alcohol, cigarettes, prostitution, and a social circle full of falsehoods. At first, Yōzō simply went along because he wanted to be accepted and did not know how to refuse, but gradually he fell deeper and deeper into this lifestyle. This social circle reinforced his feelings of despair and made him even more confused about his identity. In this chapter, Yōzō also meets a waitress at a restaurant named Tsuneko. Both of them, equally desperate, attempt suicide together by taking sleeping pills and throwing themselves into the sea. However, simply Tsuneko dies, while Yōzō survives.

3.2.1 Yozo's first experience outside the household

Yozo : This was my first experience living in a strange town. I found it far more agreeable than my native place. One might attribute this, perhaps, to the fact that my clowning had by this time become so much a part of me that it was no longer suc a strain to trick others.

(*No Longer Human*, 2022 : 22)

This quote can be seen as the beginning of a deeper identity crisis, as Yozo is confronted with an outside world he does not understand, and

where he does not know how to behave. Living in a foreign city is symbolic of a transition in Yozo's life. He begins to search for a new role, explore a new environment, and indirectly test his identity outside the influence of his family.

In the fifth stage of Erikson's theory (*Identity vs Role confusion*), individuals should begin to construct their identity based on broader social experiences. However, for Yozo, moving to a foreign city only intensifies his sense of alienation and lack of belonging. Instead of using this experience as a means to self-discovery and the formation of a stable identity, Yozo becomes increasingly lost. He enters a new environment without a foundation, without self-confidence, and without an understanding of who he is.

3.2.2 Yozo's lack of understanding of women

Yozo: I have always found the female of the human species many times more difficult to understand than male. In my immediate family women outnumbered the men, and many of my cousins were girls. There was also the maid-servant of the "crime". I think it would be no exaggeration to say that my only playmates while I was growing up were girls.

(*No Longer Human*, 2022 : 27)

From the perspective of Erikson's theory of the eight stages of human development, this quote can be linked to the sixth stage: Intimacy vs. Isolation. At this stage, a person faces a crisis between forming intimate, trusting, and meaningful relationships with others or withdrawing and falling into emotional isolation. Oba Yozo, in this case, appears to have failed to form intimacy due to his inability to understand and trust others, causing him to constantly keep his distance from interpersonal relationships. It can be concluded that Yozo failed to navigate this stage successfully. He did not develop the ability to open up and trust others, particularly women, which is a crucial aspect of this developmental stage. Instead, he chose an emotionally withdrawn attitude, which ultimately reinforced his sense of alienation.

3.3 Events after Yozo's suicide attempt

Yozo was at a fragile point in his life. After his failed suicide attempt with a woman in the previous chapter, he never truly recovered. Feelings of guilt, shame, and inner turmoil haunted him every day. He became increasingly addicted to alcohol and morphine as an escape. His relationships with those around him grew increasingly distant, and the friends he once knew

began to drift away as they saw his life falling apart. In this state, Yozo began to feel that he truly had no 'place' in the world. The humour and pretence he once used to cover up his social awkwardness were no longer able to help him.

3.3.1 Yozo's low sense of self-esteem further exacerbated his identity crisis.

Yozo: The inglorious prophecy that women would fall for me turned out just as he said but the happy one, that I should certainly become great artist, failed to materialize. I never managed to become anything more impressive than an unknown, second-rate cartoonist employed by the cheapest magazines.

(*No Longer Human*, 2022 : 68)

The above quote clearly reflects Yozo's deep sense of inferiority and failure. By referring to himself as merely a 'second-rate cartoonist working for the cheapest magazine,' Yozo openly rejects his own value and achievements. This statement shows that he has not only failed to meet social and family expectations, but also failed to achieve his own personal standards. There is a cynical and bitter tone that suggests he views his entire career journey as meaningless, as if his presence in the workplace is merely a space filler with no real impact. This condition also reinforces Yozo's pattern of isolation, which has been evident from the beginning of the story. Instead of developing and finding a productive role in society, he is trapped in a cycle of unsatisfying work and a poor self-image. Thus, this quote emphasises that Yozo's failure is not only in the realm of personal relationships but also in the realm of social and professional achievement. This quote is directly related to Erikson's theory of development, particularly the seventh stage "*Generativity vs. Stagnation*". At this stage, individuals are expected to create something of value and contribute to society. Yozo, however, experiences stagnation, where his work does not provide him with a sense of purpose, meaning, or pride.

3.3.2 Yozo was expelled from his university and lived with his father's subordinate at their home.

Yozo: I was expelled from college on account of the incident at Kamakur, and I went to live in a tiny room on the second floor of Flatfish's house. I gathered that minutes sums of money were remitted from home every month from my support, never directly to me, but secretly, to Flatfish.

(*No Longer Human*, 2022 : 68)

This quote marks one of the significant turning points in the life of Oba Yozo, where he lost his direction in life after being expelled from college due to an incident in Kamakura. This event not only disrupted his formal education but also further distanced Yozo from family expectations and social norms. Moving to the small bathroom on the second floor of the Flattfish house became a symbol of Yozo's decline and loss of social status, indicating that he was becoming increasingly isolated, both physically and psychologically. Within the framework of Erikson's theory of development, this moment is closely related to the "*Identity vs. Role Confusion*" stage. At this stage, individuals should be able to find and establish a clear sense of self-identity, including social roles and life goals. However, Yozo's expulsion from college only worsened the identity confusion he had felt from the beginning. He failed to find a definite direction, lost his footing for building a future, and became increasingly trapped in a lifestyle that deviated from common social constructs.

3.4 Research Findings.

Oba Yozo, the main character in the novel *No Longer Human*, grew up in an emotionally distant family environment, where sincere affection and parental guidance were almost entirely absent. His parents are portrayed as figures of authority rather than caring individuals, enforcing expectations without providing the emotional support necessary for healthy development. As a result, Yozo becomes deeply confused about what it means to be human and how he should function in society. He fails to develop a stable sense of self because no one ever showed him how to form emotional bonds or express vulnerability. This lack of understanding extends to basic human experiences; he admits to not knowing what it feels like to be hungry or what he personally enjoys, demonstrating a separation not only from others but even from his own body and desires. This emotional emptiness and separation from himself became the core of his

identity crisis, leading him to take on a false role by wearing a 'mask' and adopting socially acceptable behaviour without ever feeling true emotion within himself. His use of the 'clown mask' was not merely a social strategy, but a profound manifestation of his ongoing identity crisis. From his earliest memories, Yōzō admits, 'I did not understand at all what it meant to be human' (Dazai, 1958/2018, p. 5). His inability to understand social norms forced him to adopt humour as a form of camouflage. By making others laugh, he diverts attention from his strangeness, protecting himself from scrutiny that he fears will reveal his alien nature. The clown mask functions as a deliberate performance designed to manipulate perception. Yōzō explains, 'If I make people laugh, they may not realise that I am actually the most unsociable man' (Dazai, 1958/2018, p. 7). This admission reveals that the mask is more about survival than happiness. Humour becomes a tool for controlling interactions, keeping others at a safe distance while maintaining the illusion of engagement. However, the security it provides is deceptive; the more Yōzō relies on this performance, the further he drifts from his authentic identity.

The mask also aligns with Yōzō's repeated statements that he is 'no longer human.' He describes himself as a creature that is 'neither human nor ghost' (Dazai, 1958/2018, p. 29), placing himself in a transitional space outside of conventional humanity. The clown mask allows him to imitate human behaviour without truly being part of it. It is a prosthetic identity, replacing what he perceives as deficiencies in his own humanity. Eventually, the mask becomes completely fused with his identity. "I am a man wearing a mask. Not simply have I never taken it off since birth, I have even forgotten what my real face looks like" (Dazai, 1958/2018, p. 45). This statement crystallises the tragedy: the tool intended for survival becomes the prison of his existence. The role is no longer a choice but a necessity, and the possibility of reclaiming his authentic self disappears.

IV CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusions

The identity crisis experienced by Oba Yōzō in *No Longer Human* stems from various interrelated factors from his childhood to

adulthood, and this is ultimately reflected in the inner conflict and social alienation he feels throughout his life. From the beginning, Yōzō grew up without adequate affection from his

family, especially from his busy and authoritarian father, who rarely gave him emotional attention. The lack of family warmth made him feel insecure and prevented him from finding a role model to understand how to behave as a human being. Furthermore, Yōzō was also never able to establish healthy social interactions; even simple things such as eating with his family or talking to other people became a source of anxiety for him. His inability to understand the behaviour of those around him fostered a sense of alienation that further strengthened his feelings of separation from his environment.

To cover up his alienation, Yōzō created a 'social mask' of humour and silly behaviour so that others would accept him. However, this strategy only deepened his identity crisis, as he lived a false life that distanced him from his true identity. An inner conflict arose from this division; on the one hand, he wanted to be accepted by society, but on the other, he felt alienated from his own existence. Entering adolescence, Yōzō's identity crisis became even more acute as he fell into negative company with his friend Horiki, who introduced him to alcohol, cigarettes, prostitution, and a free lifestyle. This destructive social circle exacerbated the identity confusion he had experienced since childhood, making it even more difficult for him to find himself and his purpose in life.

Yōzō's failure to find his identity in adolescence corresponds to the '*Identity vs. Role confusion*' stage in Erikson's theory, in which individuals should establish their identity and determine their role in society. Because he failed to pass this stage, he not only lost his direction,

but also carried this failure into the next stage of development. In young adulthood, which according to Erikson is characterised by a crisis of '*Intimacy vs. Isolation*', Yōzō was unable to build healthy intimate relationships. Although he married Yoshiko, the relationship was fraught with infidelity, betrayal, and emotional fragility. Instead of gaining intimacy, he fell deeper into social and emotional isolation. The escapes that he chose, including alcohol addiction, drugs, free sex, and even repeated suicide attempts, only deepened his destruction. All of this is a real form of social alienation, where Yōzō not only fails to connect with others but is also estranged from himself. Ultimately, failing to pass through the stages of psychosocial development led Yōzō to fall into despair, stagnation, and complete alienation. The tragic conclusion that he is "no longer human" indicates a total failure in building identity and social roles as described by Erikson, while also symbolising the existential suffering of modern humans who are unable to find meaning in life.

4.2 Suggestions

This research is expected to have a positive impact on readers, particularly in understanding identity crises and knowing the characteristics of identity crisis disorder. For future researchers, Erikson's theory is expected to be used as a method for studying fictional characters related to psychosocial or identity issues. Additionally, the novel "No Longer Human" can also be used as a reflection on the importance of the role of family and social environment in helping individuals form their identities and experience healthy psychological development.

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