

## ***Golden*: Reworking the Psychosocial Maldevelopment of the Obedient Kid**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Well-behaved children might seem well, but may actually harbor self-doubt, a strong sense of guilt, and a weak ego identity which will bring them problems emotionally and socially in their later life. This creative work, *Golden*, was created to raise a discussion on this issue by trying to answer how children may end up developing these traits, what the effects are, and how to recover. To answer this, Erik Erikson's 8 stages of psychosocial development is used as the base for this coming-of-age drama musical screenplay. It follows the story of an obedient daughter, Annisa. Connected with the theory, Annisa ended with the dystonic "guilt" in the play age stage because of how her mother raised her. Thus, in adolescent stage she lacks emotional resilience in an initiative-based environment. However, since she is enduring the complications and growing a sense of trust, finally, she achieves balance and is healed.

**Keywords:** good child, Erik Erikson, psychosocial maldevelopment, recovery, coming-of-age drama, musical film

### **INTRODUCTION**

When a child behaves well, it is common for people to assume that they have no problem and that they will eventually grow into a healthy, resilient adult. However, this is apparently not always true. A researcher from America, Al Siebert, has written a book titled *The Survivor Personality* (2010), and in his book he stated, "A person raised to be a good child is emotionally handicapped outside the structured environment they were raised in. Such a person does not learn from experience, suppresses paradoxical traits, avoids empathy, and has a de-synergistic effect on others". It means that apparently raising a child to be completely good and obedient may eventually backfire to the child because they are too accustomed to their good way of behaving it becomes harder for the child to adapt in an environment that requires them to behave the opposite way, even if it will have a better outcome (Siebert, 2010). To spark a discussion among parents about this possibility, is one of the goals of the creative work. I want to raise awareness of this misconception in order to invite people to discuss whether their rearing methods will really bring the outcomes they are expecting.

Behind that, the biggest motivation on why I decided to create a story about the maturation of a good child, who people typically assume to already be mature, was because I was inspired by a YouTube video titled "The Dangers of the Good Child" created by the YouTube account "The School of Life". The part from the video that piqued my interest was when they said that:

*The good child isn't good because by a quirk of nature they simply have no inclination to be anything else. They are good because they have no other option. Their goodness is a necessity rather than a choice. Many good children are good out of love of a depressed harassed parent who makes it clear they just couldn't cope with any more complications or difficulties* (The School of Life, 2017).

Continuing this statement, the thing is that apparently raising the standard behavior for children brings everlasting baggage. That baggage, for example, includes repression of personal desire, feeling of guilt for trivial matters, and losing the privilege of making mistakes.

Even though it does not mention direct research data, I was moved by the incredible amount of people in the comment sections, reaching around five hundred one thousand comments by June 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, who are telling how they relate to the video and started to share about their own experiences and sufferings while living as a good child. For example, one of the highest-liked commenters, reaching around five thousand nine hundred likes, stated:

*This got me. All my life I've tried to please others. The authority. The teachers. The parents. And so, whenever I make a mistake, it's like the world has shattered. I feel like I no longer deserve love* (K B, 2019).

Some people claimed to have they are working on the problem to the point of close to resolving it, like in another comment by an account named Bruce Lomeli:

*Reviewing my life. They never really pushed me as much as I pushed myself. And it's all because I was pushed to be the good child. I was pushed to be "perfect" because that's what a good child was to me. I definitely suffered and missed a lot of experiences. I can see the effect this life of being a "good child" has brought. I never dated anyone my whole life. I have problems with authority. I have problems accepting failure. But what's important is that I'm able to acknowledge it. And slowly, hopefully, I can change myself and be the person I want to be. Not the person I became for the people around me* (Bruce Lomeli, 2020).

Yet, there are also others who said that the problem stays even when they reach adulthood, as stated by an account named Kraivin Chayangpath:

*I'm the oldest son of a conservative Chinese family. Never had many friends. Spent most of my time at home studying. Got good grades in high school. Went to college for engineering and graduate with highest honors. Now working for my dad at his firm. I wake up every morning with an empty feeling in my chest and suicidal thoughts in my head* (Kraivin Chayangpath, 2018).

The reliability of these comments are questionable, but they managed to move me. Moreover, outside the video itself, I found out that this is possible and rather universal as Vera Itabiliana Hadiwidjodjo, a child psychologist from Indonesia, stated in an interview that a child who are often directed by their parents may end up not knowing his or her dream or even the feeling of purpose in life (Santoso, 2019). It is also not uncommon in Indonesia to find children showing signs of depression as stated by Asaelia Azeela, the co-founder of Ubah Stigma in a webinar (Pasaribu, 2020). In fact, according to her, the most common reasons behind their depression are academic pressure and parents' expectations. As a result, added with the parents' lack of emotional presence, it becomes harder for these children to regulate their emotions, which may lead to self-harm and difficulty in social interactions (Pasaribu, 2020). Similar to the stated experience of the commenters in the YouTube comment section, Annelia Sani Sari, an Indonesian child psychologist, said that if this problem is not addressed as early as possible, the problem will not stay only in academic performance. It will eventually affect the children when they grow older, leading to psychological problems which slows down their overall development, reduces their quality of life, and productivity (Pasaribu, 2020).

With all of the above in mind, not only to spark discussions among parents, through this creative work, I want to invite people, especially adolescents, to evaluate themselves and see whether they are experiencing this type of handicap and suppression, and if they are, what they could do about it. If the child could identify with this, that means he or she is living an unhealthy life and is in need of help for a way out.

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Additionally, through my creative work, I want to show them that, even if at times the feeling of hurting and unresolvedness are inevitable, they still have a chance of healing. In 2017, Zelda Gillian Knight, a professor of psychology in University of Johannesburg, South Africa, has proposed a therapy, or psychodynamic psychotherapy, model linked specifically to Erik Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Knight, 2017). Basically, in each stage, what should be pursued is balance, and to do this, one needs to revisit the stages in which "maldevelopment" occurs. Recovery might not be easy, but succeeding in the process of healing and prevention will make the child grow into a healthy adult. Using this balancing concept, I wish to present my work as one possibility of a child's journey to recovery.

The form that this story is taking is a musical screenplay. Musical film is "an internationally popular film genre, featuring music, song, and dance in varying combinations, often intertwined with a romance plot with a happy ending" (Kuhn & Westwell, 2012). For me, this form compliments the story I am trying to tell, which is a story of progress about the type of person who avoids talking about her thoughts. This medium gives me the liberty to use other methods that do not involve talking in expressing my character's emotion, thus, staying true to her struggle as a character. Furthermore, the screenplay allows time and place flexibility. This will benefit my story's character development which is supposed to happen in a long period of time and in different places. Additionally, musicals are specifically chosen because, unlike normal film, it allows readers or, if it is produced, an audience a chance to witness others' emotions that are usually hidden and unexplained. As normal screenplay enables presenting emotion wordless through visual, when an emotion is too complicated, in a musical, the song can grant direct access to the characters' thoughts, which may also be too awkward to be conveyed verbally like in normal conversation. Therefore, I was certain that musical screenplay is the best format to express my story.

The genre that I choose for my creative work is drama, with a more specific focus on the sub-genre coming-of-age. The reason why I choose this genre is because this genre could help me create a story that moves people and builds relatable characters. I believe so because drama is a genre that "relies on the emotional and relational developments of realistic characters" (Buffam, 2011) while coming-of-age narrows the focus of the drama to the maturation story of a young person. This genre will help me create a character that is relatable to the audience, especially to adolescents, through the age, struggles, and developments of the main character. Meanwhile, since this is a musical screenplay, it will include musical numbers. In terms of music genre, my screenplay will not just use one specific genre. This creative work will, instead, use different kinds of genres in different kinds of situations because the priority is the mood of the scene and the conveyed feelings.

With all of these taken into consideration, through this creative work, I wish to understand how a person, or in the context of the work, Annisa, ends up having self-doubt, guilt, and weak ego identity, and also how these characteristics affect the person. Other than that, I wish to know how a person can recover from this and develop a healthier personality.

Most of the research for my creative work was done by doing secondary research, a method that involves using the already existing data. I collected data online from e-journals, articles and ebooks. In order to find the answer, I used Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development. There are two out of eight stages which are used in this work—the play age and adolescence. The glimpse of the application will be explained below:

1. Play age

This stage plays a major part in my creative work as this stage is used to build my main character's background, attitudes, and views. Play age is the age where the focus of the person is to decide whether it is okay for them to do, move, and act. The syntonic and dystonic of this stage are initiative and guilt (Erikson, 1993). If a person is leaning

toward the dystonic part, the person will end up full of self-doubt while also developing guilt for what they desire (Cherry, 2021).

## 2. Adolescence

This stage serves as the moment where Annisa's malignant tendency from the play age stage is being addressed. The reason why it is chosen is because it is the moment when adolescents are undergoing rapid physiological changes while at the same time they are expected to mind the upcoming adult tasks (Erikson, 1993). It is, then, common for adolescents to value how other people perceive them more compared to how they feel about themselves (Erikson, 1993). Implementing this in my creative work, the main character, Annisa, will be put in an environment where she is exposed to such expectations which may or may not be explicit. Another point from Erikson's theory about this stage is that adolescents, in pursuit of identity, "...are ever ready to install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity (Erikson 1993)". In this creative work's case, this "idol" will come in the form of another character who is the embodiment of "initiative" named David. He will serve as one of the triggers of Annisa's identity crisis and as a goal to pursue.

Additionally, since the main idea of the creative work is about reworking these maldevelopments, I will be borrowing the ideas from Zelda Gillian Knight's (2017) proposed psychotherapy model that is based on Erik Erikson's stages. The idea of the recovery is to balance out the stage that has a malignant tendency and in order to truly recover, one must start with a search and harbour trust in the process. Thus, in the creative work, since Annisa's ended with extreme "guilt", the creative work will focus on the development of her "initiative". Her searches begin when she realizes she struggles in the debate club, an initiative-based environment. Also, since she lost trust in her mother in play age and lost trust in herself after entering the debate club, the focus of the story will follow on how she regains her trust in herself, the process, and in others, and at last develops "initiative". Once the trust is restored and the "initiative" is achieved, her recovery is complete.

## CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

### Premise & Design Principle

My creative work follows the story of a good daughter who had been following the standards and expectations being put on her, but when her high school life went out of control, her problem-solving ability, ability to cope, and her relationships were being tested. The premise of this creative work is – when kids are obliged to be good, they will grow up lacking emotional resilience and eagerness to take initiative.

### Pitch

- a. Annisa is a well-behaved girl who tries to make her mother happy by fulfilling her mother's expectations.
- b. She decides to run away from home after struggling in the debate club, learning about freedom from an ex-bully, parting with her best friend, and not getting her mother's affection when she needs her the most.
- c. She remembers that it is not what she truly wants, so she decides to come back, be honest with her mother, and lead an authentic life, choosing to be good rather than forced to be good.

### Characters

Main character:

- Annisa Prayogo

Age: 5 → 15 years old

Annisa lives with Clarice, her mother, and Aldi, her brother. She does not have a lot of memories with her father but all she could remember was how both her parents were sometimes distant to one another, except when they were approaching her. After her father's death, she noticed how Clarice was always looking tired, especially when handling Aldi. From that experience, she learned of some behaviour that Clarice will disapprove of, making her very scared of making mistakes but also wanting to lessen Clarice's burden. In the process, she becomes someone who is very considerate, polite, and reserved. A lot of parents who know Annisa would openly tell Clarice that they wish their children were as good as Annisa. Her overall scores in all her classes are above average, which is considered commendable because of the school's prestigious reputation. She's never fond of competition, and instead strives for a win-win solution, or just goes with the flow. She also does not really have any particular passion and dream to pursue other than to be "successful". If she has to choose a favourite activity, she would choose daydreaming, but would say "reading novel", while in reality, she spends most her time reviewing the class' materials.

Supporting characters:

- Clarice Prayogo

Age: 34 → 44 years old

Clarice works as an administrative assistant of a company. She is famous for behaving quite strictly and rather detached in her workplace even though she performs and communicates well with people. She was married right after university graduation and they had Aldi around the same year. Her marriage used to be full of happiness, until both she and her husband were pressured from work while also having difficulty to find a stable income. They end up overworked and emotionally distant. They occasionally fought but they always pretended to be good in front of their children, which they did not do very well. After her husband passed away, she feels guilty and responsible for it while contemplating both their ideals of a perfect family. Her problematic son, Aldi, stresses her all the time because he keeps disrespecting her and blaming her but she tries her best to be patient in hope to make him change. All the efforts she put on Aldi makes her subconsciously dependent on her daughter and her achievements.

- David Laksmono

Age: 16 years old

David is a very daring and carefree person who longs for freedom and detaches himself from his dysfunctional family. In middle school, he was in a group of cool students who committed various acts of bullying. Even with peer pressures, he quite enjoyed the group as a form of escapism. However, during one of the group's bullying, someone recorded and posted it on social media for several minutes before taking it down. Still, they were shamed by plenty and were expelled from school. His family then moved to a neighbouring city. With his mother's connections and David's good scores, he entered Vergoldet High School, but his label as an ex-bully still sticks with him because of rumours. He is not liked by many because of his bad attitude and reputation. People think he is really problematic because they perceive him as lacking empathy and able to engage in immoral acts. While it is true, his current temper and attitude is much calmer than how he used to be. He is not fond of his mother and hates his alcoholic father with passion especially because both parents often guilt-trip him, making him more and more numb to feeling guilt. He is accustomed to having arguments with his father when the father is drunk, strengthening his ability in standing up for himself.

- Jessica Wangsadinata

Age: 5 → 15 years old

Jessica has been Annisa's best friend since elementary school. Jessica was the one approaching Annisa when they first met because Annisa seemed to be kind.

Academically she does not perform as well as Annisa, making her feeling pressured at times, but in terms of socializing, she is more approachable because of her cheerful demeanour. She has a really vast knowledge on various kinds of topics because she gets curious easily. It is also why people find her fun to talk to. She spends quite a big chunk of her time on social media, looking at people and keeping herself updated even though she rarely posts about herself. Her parents are rich and they have no problem providing all her needs, but her parents are emotionally quite distant from her. She has a little brother that she is often jealous of because her parents seem to care for him more.

- Ms. Grace

Age: 27 years old

Ms. Grace is famous for being friendly and reliable, but also famous for having high standards for the students. She is a passionate language teacher who sometimes gets carried away in the heat of the moment, forgetting other people's feelings. She likes literature and exploring different kinds of concepts.

- Aldi Prayogo

Age: 13 → 23 years old

Aldi is perceived as a douchebag in the neighbourhood. He used to be a good kid and an overachiever. He lost his passion when his parents stopped showing affection. In this case, he blamed his mother for stressing his father. He started to enter a bad environment in school and, when he was 13, he ran away from his house to his friends' many times to avoid being shouted at all the time by Clarice. Eventually, he was involved in shabby businesses, sometimes gambling, and sometimes clubbing. He survived by selling different kinds of things, even illegal items, which made him end up in jail. He still does not like Clarice, but her sentiment makes him want to take advantage of her to get out of jail. Meanwhile, he is jealous of Annisa because he feels Annisa is spoiled.

## Conflict

There are two types of conflicts in this screenplay, which are Character vs. Self, in which the obstacle comes from within the protagonist's mental state, and Character vs. Character, in which the protagonist's obstacle comes from the clashes of needs with other characters (MasterClass, 2020). Character vs. Self will be more dominant in the screenplay because the emotional development and maturation of my protagonist is the core of the story. Meanwhile, Character vs. Character will enforce the protagonist's inner conflict.

## Synopsis

When ANNISA was a kid, looking at the fights between her single mother, CLARICE, and her problematic brother, ALDI, she decided to behave well to lessen the burden. She keeps that in her mind until she reaches high school, where she becomes quite an exemplary student, something she plans to maintain.

When a new school term is starting. Annisa's best friend, JESSICA, happens to be in a different class, but they decided to join the same extracurricular activity to keep contact. Out of an invitation by their language teacher, MS. GRACE and a little push from Clarice, they joined the debate club. After joining the first debate club meeting, Annisa has just realized how menacing debate can be. She was struggling, which made her left stressed out and ashamed. After a while, Ms. Grace recommends her to ask DAVID, an annoying but outstanding student, to teach her.

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Even though at first it does not go well, eventually both learn about each other and inspire each other until David trusts her enough to tell her that he planned to escape from home. At the same time, Jessica was already close with a new friend group that seems to be more mischievous. Annisa's and Jessica's friendship shattered. Annisa also failed to join the debate competition, even after David sacrificed his position, making her even more frustrated. Eventually, Annisa heard that Jessica had moved because of being slut-shamed. Both part ways without even a word and clarification, which made Annisa even more heartbroken and bitter.

When Annisa spotted Aldi at home after a very long time, she mocked him aggressively until Aldi decided to leave again, which made Clarice perplexed because she has been trying to get him home, but now her effort is wasted. Annisa decided to run away with David because she felt she didn't belong in her house. When both almost started to embark on a new journey, Annisa was reminded of Clarice and she realized that running away is not what she actually wanted. She decided to go back. After reaching home, Annisa hugged Clarice and told her everything that happened. In the end, Annisa stayed behaving well out of her own will instead of expectation, making her feel calmer and more liberated.

## CONCLUSION

Since I always connected it back to the statement of the problem and the purpose of the creative work, I believe that this screenplay has already provided the answer to both. In this section, I would like to further discuss which parts answer which statement and which purpose.

The first purpose of the screenplay is to show that a person, in this case, Annisa, can develop self-doubt, guilt, and weak ego identity due to how the person is raised by the caretaker. In Annisa's case, when she was 5 years old, she witnessed her mother's wrath for her older brother, and right after that, she eavesdropped on Clarice crying in her room. Even when she was not the main target, she developed an understanding that naughtiness will result in anger and perhaps punishment. Right after that, when young Annisa displayed a sign of initiative like, for example, asking Clarice questions or playing stacking books, Clarice trivialized the weight of her question and displayed an expression of dismay to the unfavourable action even though that action might sprout from a child's simple curiosity. At the same time, when Annisa performed well academically, Clarice rewarded her by showing proudness. This has formed an image in Annisa's mind about what kind of person she should strive to be – smart and obedient. All these interactions between Annisa as a kid and the caretaker combined have heightened Annisa's standard of behaviour. Thus, she becomes prone to guilt when her action does not reach the standard, doubtful and hesitant when she wishes to display some form of initiative, and also submissive to others and dismissive of her own thoughts in order to please people.

The second purpose of this creative work is to show the effect of having self-doubt, guilt, and weak ego identity, and that is the lack of emotional resilience especially in confronting others. Annisa is capable of being a top scorer. However, the nature of debate club is full of confrontations and standing for one's belief – very contradicting Annisa's behaviour up until that point. That is why Annisa struggled very much to the point she did worse than her academically-average friend Jessica. Not only in the club, across the story, in almost all her confrontations, she backed off. For example, when she was pushed to smoke by David, she got convinced to follow him. When Clarice recommended a dress, even though she had a preference, she chose to follow Clarice. When Jessica left her, she did not argue against Jessica at all. All of her poor responses to conflicts are the result of her character.

The previous points lead to this last point, which is how Annisa recovers. The way in which she recovers and starts to develop a healthier personality is by developing a sense of trust and enduring confrontations. Initially, when Annisa heard Clarice crying, her level of trust was

reduced. The result of this lack of trust, combined with her high standard of behavior, is that whenever Annisa had problems, she avoided talking about it to Clarice. She also lacked trust in herself and her own capability, which is why initially it seemed like her performance did not get significantly better. Although, at the same time, she still chose to keep enduring it even without trust. When David became her idol-like figure, and when she gained David's validation, Annisa's trust in herself rises, as well as her bravery in taking initiative. Annisa's recovery was marked by how she finally was able to speak up to both of them even though she ended up hurting them. Still, it does not stop there. She almost ran away from home, which means running away from her problem but she eventually realized her own emotion. From that short moment, she wanted to believe in Clarice's change if she chose to stay and endure. Then her peak of recovery was when she was finally able to confront David, achieving balance between "guilt" and "initiative". After all that, Annisa finally seemed to look more comfortable.

In conclusion, this creative work has conveyed the journey of recovery from maldevelopment as intended. Caretaker's attitude in rearing a kid may turn a kid to grow self-doubt, guilt, and weak ego identity. As a result, when in need to confront others and stand up for oneself, the kid might struggle emotionally. However, there is still a chance to recover. As long as the kid decides to endure and also has enough trust to the surrounding and in his or her own change, then eventually the maldevelopment will be healed.

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