

Present: A Screenplay Exploring the Effects of the Absence of a Father to a Female Young-Adult

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ABSTRACT

A good dynamic of parental involvement is needed in the child's psychological development. Especially the father's involvement in the daughter's life which can have lasting effects on how the daughter feels about herself, future choices, preferences, and how she feels about herself. Using psychosocial theory, this creative thesis highlights the effects of disengaged or emotionally unavailable fathers to a female young-adult in her early childhood. An absent father will result in the child's psychological well-being as they feel insecure and not confident, as well as seeking for older partners later in life who can fulfill their emotional void they experienced during childhood. Through this screenplay, it is shown that a father's involvement in the child's life is crucial to shape who the child will become in the future.

Keywords: absent father, dramedy, father-daughter relationship, psychosocial, screenplay

INTRODUCTION

As the first environment for a child to grow, family plays a fundamental role in children's development and behavior which shows the parental roles in the nature of the family (American Psychological Association, 2023). Children mostly use observational learning, modeling their behavior and then copying it based, in part, on the reward those behaviors got (Rymanowicz, 2015). For instance, if a child overhears a swear word, it does not always mean that they will use it. However, they are still picking up new knowledge and memorizing it while waiting and/or observing how they are going to use it in their everyday context. If the person who swears gets a 'reward' such as laughter from other people, the children who overhear it will eventually learn that swearing has its own reward—laughter from other people (Rymanowicz, 2015) therefore they will use it anytime they are able to. The structure of swearing-reward is learned indirectly through children's learning phase that is still unfiltered which means they cannot differentiate whether an action or words they learn from other people is a bad or a good thing to take as a part of their lives. Research to date indicates that the critical period, which includes the first few years of life, is when children's cognitive, physical, and social development occurs the fastest (Akgök & Tekmen, 2023). It shows that children gain a lot of new knowledge and 'swallow' them all at once in their critical period.

In the child's formative years, the involvement of their parents is very important, especially a father's involvement in the child's life both physically and emotionally. Researchers show that children with a present—emotionally and physically—father are more likely to be secure in their abilities and explore what is around them (Risnawati, 2021). Whether it is positive or negative, father involvement has a significant and far-reaching effect on the child's psychological well-being in the future which can also influence how the child sees themselves and their future relationships (Henderson & Cornett, 2016).

Absent fathers, however, would rather impact in negative ways in terms of emotional development, since father-child attachment is closely related with emotion regulation (Zhang et al., 2020). The lack of father's emotional fulfillment may cause the child to have an emotional

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void that later will impact their adult life. Children raised with an absent father figure tend to grow unconfident when exploring their environment or building relationships with their friends since they experience levels of anxiety or fear of rejection, leading to a tendency to withdraw or avoid social interactions (Rosenberg & Wilcox, 2006). The National Fatherhood Initiative in 2021 highlighted the negative impact of father absence on children regarding issues during adolescence in contrast to children who grew up with present fathers. The absence of a father results in many different emotional and psychological well-being.

Our creative work focuses on the effects of the absence of a father to a young-adult woman. It shows how an absent father can impact the child in terms of their psychological well-being and their future relationship preference. The primary goal is to show the negative effects of an absent father on a young female, Asih, in a form of her attraction to older men as well as her feeling of insecurities and unconfident. Through this screenplay we hope to show the consequences of an absent father during early childhood and how it can impact their psychological well-being.

Theory and Methodology

Psychosocial development theory by Erik Erikson is used for creating this creative work. It explains how human personality develops as an individual that passes through eight stages of development that cover their lifespan (Teague & Jones, 2023). It also describes how an individual makes social contacts at various periods of life that affect a person's behavior and thought processes.

Stage	Age	Developmental Task	Maldevelopment (Orenstein & Lewis, 2022)
1	0-1 years old	Trust vs Mistrust	Withdrawal
2	1-3 years old	Autonomy vs Shame	Compulsion
3	3-6 years old	Initiative vs Guilt	Inhibition
4	6-12 years old	Industry vs Inferiority	Inertia (passivity)
5	12-18 years old	Identity vs Role Confusion	Repudiation, ego, confusion/diffusion
6	18-40 years old	Intimacy vs Isolation	Distantiation
7	40-65 years old	Generativity vs Stagnation	Rejectivity
8	65+ years old	Integrity vs Despair	Disdain

Kevin Grant (2024), a certified psychotherapist, explains that the first four stages serve as the fundamentals or the basis of an individual's psychological well-being that can later affect their adulthood in terms of intimacy, attachment, and how they shape their minds. A successful process in the first four stages will result in a feeling of confidence, sense of independence, self-expression, feeling competent and valuable which it acts as essential to their own psychological well-being. However, if the first four stages did not perform well, an individual will face some difficulties in their future choices. They may have maldevelopment and can lead

to insecurities of forming relationships, fear of intimacy, and struggle with self-worth that can also be carried into adulthood.

Parental involvement during early childhood plays a very important role on how an individual can form their overall identity, psychological well-being, and even future relationships, especially a father's involvement in the child's life. Studies have shown that the absence of a father in early childhood has a wide range of effects on personality, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral development (Xiang & Zhou, 2023). The developmental disruptions are not limited only to childhood life, they can also evolve into more complex psychological issues during an individual's adult life. Stimulus in early childhood becomes the basic foundation of a child because it affects the brain structure and development of behavior that forms the basis for future growth and development (Rohmalina et al., 2021). This shows a fathers' presence both physically and emotionally are important to the child's development. Although the child's material needs are fulfilled, the emotional absence may leave a huge emotional void in the child's development (Ansari & Fatima, 2023) and have far-reaching consequences later in life (Kurata et al., 2024).

Father-love absence in early childhood is proven to have negative effects on the child's adolescence well-being (Peng et al., 2024). A father's love experience is necessary for the child's positive development, especially in early childhood (age 0-12). A research conducted by Xiang and Zhou (2023) found that emotional absence and cognitive absence contribute more to the child's psychological development where the child experiences disruptions in the psychological well-being in their adolescence. The absence of a father may also contribute to maladaptive coping mechanisms, including an overdependence on older romantic partners in providing security and validation that was lacking in early years (Markowitz & Ryan, 2016).

A research conducted by Ramasetse and Ross (2022) explores the impact of a father's absence to adult women during their childhood. They found that father absence can impact their psychology in many different ways such as; low self-esteem and low self-perception, which shows the consequences of unresolved psychosocial conflicts due to father's absence. It shows that emotional unavailability from a father causes a child to have low self-esteem and low confidence, due to their father's lack of affirmation. An article written by Telloian (2022) and was medically reviewed by a psychologist mentioned that when a child who had disengaged or emotionally available fathers could lead to insecurities. Ramasetse and Ross (2022) further explained that the absence of a father during critical developmental periods can have long term effects, including dependency in romantic relationships and constant looking for emotional support that was lacking in early childhood.

In the context of my creative work, Asih has an absent father during her childhood that is shown through flashbacks and present interaction with her father which disrupts her psychological development. It leads to Asih feeling insecure and not confident as well as dating an older partner to fill in the emotional void that she has. Moreover, Asih dates Rudy who is twice as old as her because she experienced fatherly love from Rudy, such as protection, validation, and attention throughout their encounters.

We conducted a secondary research for this creative work which involves journals, articles, movies, and credible psychology websites from clear organizations and expert authors about psychoanalysis, psychosocial, children development, and absent fathers. After we decide the topic of the screenplay, we begin by selecting the genre, developing the storyline, and finally writing the screenplay.

CONCEPT OF CREATIVE WORK

Our creative work is in the form of a screenplay with dramedy (drama-comedy) as the genre that portrays everyday occurrences with real-life scenarios, grounded characters, and convincing situations while balancing the components of humor and drama (Abreu, 2022). This definition will be the base of our creative work on how Asih, the main character, dates her lecturer who is twice as old as her to replace the emotional void left by her absent father during early childhood. This genre allows a deep exploration on how Asih's childhood can affect her future life choices.

Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini (Sasongko, 2019) and *Jalan Yang Jauh Jangan Lupa Pulang* (Sasongko, 2023) can set a good example on how we want the dialogue to flow in the screenplay. It flows effortlessly between the characters although the storyline goes back and forth. Each character has their own reason to say certain things from what they have experienced in the past that shapes who they are in the present timeline. Just like in family life, dialogues between family members often continue from one topic to another.

In terms of genre codes and conventions, characters in dramedy screenplay often deal with real-life situations with real-life characteristics (Jule Selbo, 2014). The main character, Asih, is a young-adult woman who lacked a father figure at home, looking for formal connections. However, due to her absence of her father in early childhood, she takes interest in her lecturer. The screenplay is set in Indonesia at an unmentioned city in 2022 to 2024 where there are two types of areas; lower-middle class area and middle-high class. The setting of the place in the screenplay would correlate with Asih's life throughout her childhood (in the early 2000s) and her present life. This part will also contribute to how humor can be more realistic as well as relatable in today's situations where there are significant social gaps. The story will revolve around Asih in a back and forth plot between her younger self and present self where she experiences her disengaged father at home.

Plot

The plot revolves around Asih, a young-adult woman, who happened to have an absent father during early childhood. Not feeling like home, Asih aims to get out of the house after she graduates from university. She is not aware that the absence of her father may result in her feeling insecure and not confident, as well as dating an older partner to fill in the emotional void from her childhood. During her university days, Asih takes interest in Rudy, the new lecturer, who saved her from her crazy ex. As time goes by, Asih and Rudy draw closer with each other. One time, Rudy offers her a chance to experience things outside the country, but Asih denies saying that she is not confident she would do well. Ultimately, she gets into an argument with him and later finds out that Rudy dated her mother in the past. Asih also gets into a heated argument with her father at the end of the story which reveals her built up emotions towards her father and her own condition.

Premise and Creative Principle

A young woman desperate to escape her house becomes entangled in a wrongheaded relationship with her university lecturer, only to realize that the wounds of her absent father threaten to dictate her future subconsciously. We want to show the impact of an absence of a father in Asih's life through her journey in her character development.

Characters

Main character:

Asih, a 20 year old female. She is the only daughter, has long hair, wears glasses, and has tan skin. Beside her studies in fine arts, Asih spends most of her time working some

part-time jobs to help lighten up her mother's financial burden. Asih is an introvert who prefers staying at her room if there is no occasion other than her work. She dreamed of getting out of her house and exploring the world, but due to her financial condition, she could not.

Supporting characters:

Maia, a 20 year old female, Asih's best friend. She is an outgoing and brutally honest person that is into visual arts. She has short black hair with peek-a-boo hair-dye style, likes to dress-up and is an introvert. She has been best friends with Asih since early high school where they met in a student orientation. She is quite rich but keeping her lifestyle lowkey due to how her father raised her. Maia considered Asih more like a sibling.

Rudy, a 45 year old man. He is Asih's lecturer at a local university. He is a tall, well-organized person and knows how to present himself in front of people, although he is still considered as an introvert. He likes to watch popular movies and dramas while eating some sweets in his free time. He is straightforward and subtle. Rudy was a husband and a father, but due to a huge car accident, he lost his wife and only child.

Sugiarto, a 50 year old man, Asih's father, is an ex-military man that got fired. Since then, he has begun to be a heavy smoker. He continues his career as a technician at a local small company. Everyday, he would go to work and arrive at home without a word spoken and rather spend his free time with his phone, watching news or movies while smoking cigarettes. He does not care if his payment is enough for the family as long as everything is ready for him on the go.

Rani, a 45 old woman, Asih's mother, is used to her husband's behavior and routine for a long time and tends to normalize his activities to her children and herself. Got married early to support her own needs and to ease up. As a housewife, there is nothing much that she can do to support her family other than selling breakfast. Rani can be considered as a blunt and a push-over person.

Conflict

There are two conflicts that happen in our creative work; Man vs Man and internal conflict. Man vs Man occurs when there are arguments between characters, especially between Asih and other supporting characters. Asih feels disappointed and angry toward her father, Sugiarto, for not being able to be emotionally and physically available to her since she was a kid. Asih also has an argument with Rudy who offers her a chance to live abroad. She denies it, thinking that Rudy pushes her away. Internal conflicts are within Asih's actions whether she likes the way she looks or not. She sees herself as someone who is always feeling not enough about anything. We apply these two conflicts in my screenplay, however, Man vs Man may appear more than Asih's internal conflict.

CONCLUSION

This creative work explores the effects of a father's absence to a female young-adult in her psychosocial development which results in a feeling of insecurity, lack of confidence, and seeking for older partners in order to fulfill the emotional void left by the absent father during early childhood. The aim for this creative work is to show that a father's presence is more than just a financial provider, but also an emotional needs fulfiller to their children which have a lasting effect later in the children's life. This creative work is in the form of a screenplay in dramedy or drama-comedy genre to fit in the heavy topic. To make the creative work more relatable, a localized name for the main character is chosen with her own background and character.

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