

THE STUDY OF QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS EXPERIENCED BY MARI IN NOVEL *AM I THERE YET?* BY MARI ANDREW

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Abstract

The purpose of this research and analysis is to find out the phases of the quarter-life crisis faced by the main character, Mari Andrew, and how she conquered them in her novel *Am I There Yet?* To get the answers related to the quarter-life crisis experienced by Mari Andrew, the writer tries to formulate these problems into two questions, which are: (1). Which phase of quarter-life crisis experienced by the character Mari in the novel? (2). How does Mari conquer the quarter-life crisis in the novel *Am I There Yet?* In analysing and conducting the research on the quarter-life crisis of the main character in the novel *Am I There Yet?* the writer uses sociological and psychological approaches. The sociological approach is used to analyze the social phenomenon of the quarter-life crisis experienced by the main character Mari in the novel and the psychological approach is used to analyze the psychology of Mari as she conquers the quarter-life crisis period. The writer also conducts library research in completing this study. Several theories regarding the phases of the quarter-life crisis and the ways to conquer the quarter-life crisis are used by the writer as references and supporting material to support the research and analysis that is conducted by the writer. The writer applies the theory of phases of the quarter-life crisis that is developed by Robinson, Wright, and Smith to analyze Mari Andrew's phases of the quarter-life crisis. The benefit of this research is to understand how people in their twenty's express developmental crises. And the writer also applies the theory of conquering the quarter-life crisis that is developed by Mary Traina to analyze Mari Andrew's ways to conquer the quarter-life crisis. By analyzing this, the writer expects the results of the research will not only applicable for literature character but also a real human. At the end, the writer discovers that Mari Andrew had a crisis when she was in her 20s. From that crisis, she was able to go through in several phases and came to a phase where she could better understand herself and what she wanted. And she began to make peace with herself. Because she experienced a quarter-life crisis, she was also able to find ways to conquer the crisis in several ways and lead her to a life that was more focused and more self-aware.

Keywords: *Quarter life, crisis, character, approach*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an art that is full of passion, feeling and heart hit on many different levels. Literature commonly refers to works of the creative imagination, including poetry, drama script, novel, song, movie, and short story. Besides that, literature also expresses someone's idea, motivation, suggestion, review, and comparison in the written text as the response of people's feelings, society, and era at that time. Literature can call as written works, especially those considered superior or lasting artistic merit, which implies that it is historical since only time can tell which artistic merits will last. Many people seem to believe that studying literature can make someone aware of his or her value.

Literature is like a form of human expression. It is a journey that is written in pages and powered by the imagination of the writer or even the reader. Both the writer and the reader can learn to consider multiple perspectives and understand the complexity of human nature through literature. Other than that, literature can also confirm the real complexity of human conflict over time. It makes people see through the lenses of others and sometimes becomes a mirror into the world as others view it.

Literature has been surrounding people's life. It can develop people's emotional intelligence and creativity, nurture growth as well as their personality and social skill. Literature is not just creative work. But also, an interesting delivery creation. Literature is a piece of writing which expresses and communicates through feeling and human attitude in literary works. People believe that it is not only gain the attention of a few people, but also many people into that. As someone who dedicates herself to study literature, the writer is attracted not only by the hype but also professional interest, as this will likely be the field that the writer will learn about in the future. That is the reason why the writer decides to choose literature.

The object of this study is a novel. The reason is that a novel is very popular and the fact that novels present a variety of styles and a wide choice of types or genres, so it can be adapted to the mood of the reader. A novel can be memory itself. And novel can leave an impression in the form of a book, which one day can still be re-read. People will easily get the novels, compared to other literary works like drama scripts or poems. Even when compared to movies, novels are more accessible and diverse.

Other than that, novels also spread all over the world. Because novels can be accessed easily, the writer determines that a novel is the most suitable object to be analyzed. As one of the more accessible, novels take their time and last longer. The writer can customize her experience to suit her reading style and find virtually any novels that the writer needs for analysis. Novels are more satisfying to enjoy, so people can read them anytime.

Mari Andrew novels are one of the popular books recently. The writer has been a fan of Mari Andrew's illustrations on Instagram for a while. And finally, the book is coming out. Mari's first book is cool and catchy. The book, which tells the story of her personal experience on growing up, leaving home, personal struggles, heartbreak, uncertainty, mixed feelings that will relate with many people. It is not only a simple non-fiction story but can count as 'relatable'. This novel is a valuable source for female young readers because it can be the guide on the journey to adulthood, as it is stated by Fradkin (2019).

Review of literature

Pickering and Hoepfer in their book, *Concise Companion to Literature*, they give the definition of literature. According to Pickering and Hoepfer (1981), "literature is a uniquely human activity, born of man's timeless desire to understand, express, and finally share experiences" (p.307).

Based on the definition of literature from Pickering and Hoepfer, literature is a kind of human exclusive activity, which stems from people's eternal desire to understand, express, and ultimately share an experience.

Meanwhile, David Lodge in his book titled *Consciousness and the Novel*, he explains the meaning of literature. According to Lodge (2002), "...literature is a record of human consciousness, the richest and most comprehensive we have" (p.51). Sartre (1988, p.46) writes that when the inner contradiction between life and work becomes useless, when information tells us these basic truths in the ubiquitous depth, a person is neither a good person nor a bad person and there is a lot of suffering in life. This dark invention will reach its ultimate goal, and readers who put the book aside will be able to shout with a calm soul that everything is literature. Aras (2015, p.256) stated that literature is a rich source of human mind and soul and is the main material in the field of psychology and psychiatry. That is to say, literature is a collection of personal experience and reality, mainly human psychology, particularity, emotion, and feeling.

Novel is a story about a real search of authentic values that organize the whole words of novel implicitly, not explicitly. A novel can arouse our feelings and emotions since what exists in a novel portrayal of human's real experiences.

The description figure related in the story is character. According to Beaty et al (2002), "character is someone who acts, appears, or is referred to as playing a part in a literary work" (p.102). Meanwhile, Blair (1948, p.52-54) writes that Character is a description of figure in the story. The description includes the description of professions, statements, dialogues, and thoughts. The purpose is to describe to the readers what the character is like such as his behavior and how he lives.

The writer also takes some theories about the definition of quarter life crisis, the phrases of quarter-life crisis, and few ways to overcome the issue that relate to some expert's opinion. A quarter-life crisis describes the feelings of helplessness, confusion, anxiety, and even depression that can lead to a 20-year-old, especially after leaving school and entering a working area or experiencing a dramatic life change. Capturing the complexity of the problem, the transition from adolescence to adulthood craving a comfortable understanding about life during their young adulthood, this also attract the writer's interest. The quarter-life crisis happens when many young adults have feelings about how their future would be and feel like they are confusing to pick which one the best choice for them. Young adults who are in the phase of quarter-life crisis will feel like they do not fit into society and they will feel pressure to meet parents' expectations of their children. Other than those reasons, a quarter-life crisis is a period characterized by changes and possibilities.

METHOD

To conduct the research for the undergraduate thesis, the writer uses qualitative research method, which according to Creswell (2003), "qualitative method is a study approach in which the researcher tends to explore the unknown variables, asks the broad and general questions to the participant, collect data of words, and reports all the study in subjective way" (p.12). This is a type of research method which relies on generally nonnumerical data which are in the form of words, phrases, and sentences. The analysis will also avoid numerical calculation as what is typical of quantitative research method.

According to George, in *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know*, he explains about library research. "Library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/ expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point" (George, 2008, p.6).

Therefore, since all the sources and the data that the writer will use in the research are factual information acquired from written texts, the type of research that the writer will conduct can be categorized into library research. Therefore, the method used in the undergraduate thesis is a qualitative research method.

Using standard steps to do the research is what the writer does in this thesis. At the beginning of the research, the writer reads and re-reads the novel used as the object of study several times. Later, when the writer feels that understands the novel enough, the writer starts to find the problems in the novel. After that, the writer reads the novel carefully in attempt to understand and find out the problems that relate to the quarter-life crisis in *Am I There Yet* novel. The writer tries to make a list of character's problems relate to the quarter-life crisis. After that, the writer tries to formulate the problems, and then designing the research method. The next step that the writer does after that is finding suitable theories that relate to the phases of quarter-life crisis and how to conquer the quarter-life crisis.

The steps for the analysis themselves are started by taking relevant quotes from the novel, writing brief notes in the highlight textual evidences to simply identify the textual evidences that are related to the phases of quarter-life crisis and how the character conquer the quarter-life crisis. The writer then analyzing the textual evidences and presenting the data of analysis framed by the related theories that have been elaborated in the Chapter II to answer the problem formulation. And then the writer attempts to explain the quote's context one by one and use the theory to analyze that context. The writer will keep doing those steps until all chosen quotes are analyzed. And then, the writer will finally conclude the research findings after looking in general at the result of the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The writer will discuss the two problems that have been formulated based on the research that the writer did. Firstly, the writer will discuss the phases of quarter-life crisis experienced by the character Mari. Secondly, the writer will discuss the ways Mari conquer the quarter-life crisis.

1.1 The Phases of Quarter-life Crisis

The term quarter-life crisis was first proposed by Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner in 2001 in their book entitled *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties*. Based on the results of interviewed a number of individuals who are entering the age of 20s, Robbins and Wilner named those young people as 'twentysomething' which means that they are transitioning from the academic world to the real world.

The Quarter-life Crisis episodes may help to make sense of symptoms of distress. For the first time the term quarter-life crisis is discussed in a book, the aim is the more people use the term of quarter-life crisis the more twentysomethings would hear it, relate to it, and know their own experiences are common. With the term quarter life crisis, it is also intended that twentysomething can support each other and to allow twentysomethings to share their experiences with others, relate, and feel better.

The writer would like to apply Robinson, Wright, and Smith's theory in analysing the phases of quarter-life crisis of Mari Andrew in *Am I There Yet?*

1.1.1 Locked-in

When Mari entered her twenties, she tried many jobs such as barista, bartender, English teacher abroad, retail for commission, first job in dream industry, and entry-level administrative person. Of the many jobs she tried, there was one job she tried that made her feel pressured to do it. This condition drove her to force herself to spend her time to this job.

When I was twenty-four, I was working at an oppressive law firm in Chicago. I had many jobs around that city in my early twenties, but this one in all its seriousness seemed more finite. After I had worked there only a few weeks, the days felt meaningless and unending – like I had signed my life away to this job. (p.14)

This statement really indicates that Mari has career path that is highly pressured or dissatisfying. She did not feel like a season at that time. Moreover, she felt like the rest of her life. She tried something that did not work, and now she knows.

The writer also finds another finding of the locked-in phase which makes Mari feel powerless and being trapped.

Mari lived in Washington, D.C. One summer, Mari went to San Francisco to visit a love interest. In San Francisco she tried to do some activities that out of the ordinary for her in just about every way. She ended up discovering the activity's benefits and she realized that the view of San Francisco had been worth it. This situation made her think about the life she could have been living in San Francisco but at the same time, she goes back to her true life in Washington, D.C., which she had lived because of the things she prioritized.

I had originally planned to move to San Francisco. I thought about moving there again and again, but I never did...My choice of D.C. over San Francisco come down to financial logistics, but I suspect that some fear crept into the pro/con list as well. (p.24)

The statement above illustrates that Mari feels constrained and trapped between two choices. On the one hand she wants the comfort of being in San Francisco, on the other hand she does not want to sacrifice her career. However, this condition brought Mari to a state where she felt an uncomfortable walking journey. The writer also finds another finding of the locked-in phase which makes Mari feel stressful.

Most seasons in Washington, D.C., are pretty standard, but summer is an exotic beast that she will never domesticate. On this condition, Mari thinks about herself if she stays in San Francisco summer, that almost she chose. She imagined herself were doing in San Francisco. This condition drove her to force herself to live her choice.

The frustrating thing about making a choice is that you never know what the alternative would have been like; I can only squint to imagine what Other Me in San Francisco is doing while Real Me wilts in humid Washington, D.C. (p. 25)

The sentence above describes the condition where Mari feels frustrated with the choice. Because she was stuck with a situation that required her to choose what she did not know what the situation would be. It means that Mari being bound by a sense of duty to the choice.

1.1.2 Time Out

In this phase of quarter-life crisis, Robinson et al. explain that a person takes time away to reflect on their transitional situation, to resolve painful emotions, and to develop a new foundation for their adult identity. And in this phase, a person often travels or moves to a different physical location in order to gain some perspective on the troubles.

Mari went to see the apartment in Mount Pleasant for the first time. Mount Pleasant is a small-town neighbourhood in northwest Washington, D.C., The apartment became her favourite place to be. But in one day, that apartment disappeared in smoke. When she came back to the apartment to get something, she remembered the memories and she reflected on the situation.

In my early twenties, I sought extremes of pain and ecstasy that gave me fuel for journal entries and a reason to revel in drama and sad music. I thought that meaning only existed in these intense, forceful places. But the fire showed me the beauty of the middle, everyday place. (p.39)

The statement above shows that Mari reflected on the situation and how she got to the point she is now. She has experienced pain and happiness that can show her the beauty of her life. This proved that he was in a phase where she was contemplating a transitional situation.

Mari saved money to go to Berlin, she stayed in apartment in Kreuzberg. Spending time alone in a new place, she skipped most tourist attractions. But she was set on seeing the Holocaust memorial. She thought about the victims of the Holocaust and the things they must have experienced before. Imagining it also made her reflect on what she had been through and experienced.

Throughout my early twenties, I had been so anxious about finding my purpose, as though it were buried treasure that would be waiting for me if I followed the clues and happened upon the right place to start digging...I thought that once my career clicked into place, my life would start making sense. I'd have a purpose. (p.54)

The sentence above illustrates that in her 20s, Mari experienced anxiety in finding her purpose in life and comparing herself to the lives of others. She started to think about it. This is the phase where she reflects on the situation and tried to develop a new foundation for her adult identity.

Mari Andrew had isolated herself in Washington, D.C., before she went to Lisbon, Portugal, for a trip. She was also in this time-out phase when she travelled to that place. It happened when she went there not according to plan.

The vacation was supposed to be romantic, but become a solo trip when my boyfriend, Alejandro, and I had broken up a month before. The morning I arrived in Lisbon, I began to crave the opposite of isolation; I was ready to join the liveliest of life and I was most certainly ready to embrace my singleness. (p.70)

The sentences above describe the condition where Mari faced heartache. She planned to trip with her boyfriend but ended up to go alone because of broken up. She said that she was ready to embrace the singleness. This is the phase where she travels or moves to a different physical location in order to gain some perspective on the troubles.

1.1.3 Exploration

In this phase of the quarter-life crisis, Robinson et al. explain that new commitments and goals are tried out and explored. People whose crisis revolved around the relationship did experimentation with relationships, sexuality, and new partners. In this phase, a person becomes more comfortable with exploring their identity, allowing them to develop and change rather than being stuck in a certain role.

Mari's father had a heart attack when she was twenty-eight. She still living in Washington, D.C., and her father in San Francisco. She decided to fly out to see her father in the hospital. But Mari's father died the morning before her flight. There have been many moments since her father's death and she decided to do somethings new and explored.

The day after my father's death, "mourner" become my identity. It manifested itself in a variety of surprising and life-changing ways. I began drawing a daily illustration. Completely out of character, I actually finished books and made progress on my language app and put the final touches on my apartment decor. (p.96)

The statements above describe the condition where Mari faced the situation of the loss of her father. She began to try some new activities. This is the phase where she tried and explored new commitments and goals. The writer also finds another finding about the exploration phase which Mari experienced.

After Mari's father died, she tried to find out where her father was buried. She spent some time wandering around the grounds looking for the coordinates that led to his grave. During her father's absence, she always tried to save herself from grief. She did several things to lessen her suffering.

In the meantime, I tried to bring him back to life by looking for love to rescue me from grief. For a while, this meant going on as many dates as I could fit in a week. By compulsively going on dates, I was trying to skip the stages of grief and find a solution for the constant ache of loneliness in my sternum. (p.106-107)

The statements above explain that Mari tried to find other ways to cope with the sadness of leaving her father. She is trying to find a replacement for her father. This is the phase where Mari faced the demise of a relationship with involved experimentation with relationships, sexuality, and new partners. The writer also finds another finding about the exploration phase which Mari experienced.

During the time of loss, she tried to date some new people. But she realized that it did not seem like a solution. She finally returned his old love, namely Digo. She had imagined Digo as a salvation from her isolation.

The night my dad's death really hit me, I called Digo. I was desperate to get out of the monster-infested zone and needed him to save me. I needed him and only him to come into the dark, terrible place of true empathy for me, with the intention that we could come out together, holding hands, walking down a street in the East Village. (p.107-108)

The sentences above explain that Mari did something to rescue her sadness. According to Mari, the way that has been done can replace the loss of her father. She hopes that by calling Digo back, he can save herself from loneliness. This is the phase where she faced the demise of a relationship with involved experimentation with relationships, sexuality, and new partners.

When Mari and Digo together, it felt like they had known each other forever. But he said to Mari the words that hurt her. Even though she wanted the empathy from him more than Mari wanted it from anyone else.

After “This too shall pass,” Digo become the last to leave me in a series of men I used to try and resurrect my dad. There wasn’t a certain day...I no longer had nightmares and laughed a lot more. I figured I was in the final stage of grief. (p.108-109)

The statements above explain that Digo became the last of her experimentation with relationship. She started to realize that she can be happy without it. This is the phase where she became more comfortable with exploring her identity, allowing it to develop and change rather than being stuck in a certain role.

1.1.4 Rebuilding

In this phase of quarter-life crisis, Robinson et al. explain that in this phase a person involves a clearer and longer-term commitment. This phase is also determined by strong intrinsic motivation, described by a life that is more fulfilling, enjoyable, and reflects personal interests and desires. Usually, this intrinsic motivation is associated with increasing purpose and meaning based on a dream that is worthwhile and rewarding. Identity in this phase is more coherent, inner values, preferences, feelings and goals are now expressed in outward behaviour, leading to a stronger sense of authenticity.

Mari had just gone through the trials of seeking a career, the pain of failed relationships, and the profound grief of losing a parent. She wonders if there is anything that makes it all worth it. A worrisome thought slipped into her inner monologue: What if her life is meaningless? What if there is no happy ending?

...I would see that life had a treasure trove in store for me, if only I could pass a certain number of tests. I didn’t articulate this thought, but I believed it was inevitable. The cosmos had received the large sum I deposited the year before, and this was the year I’d get a hefty return. With interest. (p.119)

People are so uncomfortable with the lack of a point to life. But Mari started to understand herself and went through her problems with confidence. This is the phase where Mari tried to renew engagement with long-term commitments and clear plans.

Mari spent a couple of months in Granada, she was going to draw, and learn to paint murals, and be the person that she has always wanted to be. But in there she collapsed and end up in the emergency waiting room. It revealed that there is an extreme nerve damage caused by a mystery virus. Mari never wanted herself to be what she is today. She put so much effort into finding her style, her hobbies, and her career.

One year, my word was thanksgiving. My late twenties provided me with a series of growth opportunities, and I’d harvested that growth by drawing and writing them out. This year would be to enjoy the harvest. I planned to appreciate, to share, and to delight in the abundant season of my life I’d found at last. (p.126)

Mari quickly learned that choice is a luxury, and the decision to do so is largely responsible for pleasure. After weeks of cursing the unfairness of life and all that had been taken from her, she resolved to reclaim what was hers. This is the phase where Mari has a stronger sense of intrinsic motivation which is described as contentment and pleasure and reflects more personal interests and desires.

Mari’s apartment was the perfect place to plop down and sleep after a long night, but it was not a place to begin making her new life. She thought of things to do that would bring her joy. She has always liked drawing, so she wanted to do more of that. She thought about learn how to play guitar and learn how to cook. Then she thought about creating her ideal environment for her new hobbies.

With every change, I took a step toward my own happiness, and I strengthened the muscles that would fit me out of the place where I thought myself to be stuck. The decision that bulked me up the most was the one to draw one illustration a day and post them on Instagram to keep myself accountable. (p. 140)

After she had fallen through the flimsy net of stability and she did not have the muscle strength necessary to get back up, she tried a lot of things to create her own home. This is the phase where Mari's identity is more coherent, inner values, preferences, feelings, and goals are now expressed in outward behaviour, leading to a stronger sense of authenticity.

CONCLUSION

Mari Andrew's novel, *Am I There Yet?* explains about Mari's life that faces a lot of things such as tried many jobs and ended up dissatisfied, confused about choosing a place to live but ended up choosing a place that promised a career rather than comfort, broken up with her boyfriend the week before her dad died and many efforts and ways were made to restore her broken heart, also she collapses while in another city and faced it alone. Those kinds of things are part of Mari Andrew's journey in her quarter-life crisis.

Based on Robinson et al.'s theory, which is the writer's reference in analysing Mari Andrew's character, she experiences phases of the quarter-life crisis. That is starting from the first phase or called the locked-in phase, in this phase Mari Andrew is faced with high pressure and unpleasant job, then the second phase or called time out which she reflects on what things she has experienced during her 20s, and the third is the exploration phase where Mari begins to explore new goals and commitments, and the last phase is the rebuilding phase where Mari begins to express her goals and her motivation gets stronger. From the five phases of the quarter-life crisis in Robinson et al.'s theory, four of them were experienced by Mari, there was one phase that she did not experience, namely the separation phase. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that Mari experiencing phases of the quarter-life crisis.

Based on Mary Traina's theory, which explains seven ways to conquer the quarter-life crisis, Mari Andrew uses six of the seven methods, including examining the rut: what happened? and what now? where Mari Andrew realized where she had gone wrong all this time when going through the quarter-life crisis, then the second method was strategy: making space in the life to get it together in which Mari started to make space for herself to do good habits, and the third is make the career work it for you where Mari starts to decide to do the work she likes, the fourth is all you need is love which is Mari makes sure that whatever happens she stays happy and excited, then the fifth way is keeping some friendship afloat, letting some sink, and other puns where Mari starts to make friends, and the last one is the dept – how you got in and how you are getting out which Mari starts managing and calculating her expenses. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that Mari can uses methods taken from Mary Traina's theory to conquer the quarter-life crisis.

Mari Andrew had a crisis when she was in her 20s. From that crisis, she was able to go through in several phases and came to a phase where she could better understand herself and what she wanted. And she began to make peace with herself. Because she experienced a quarter-life crisis, she was also able to find ways to conquer the crisis in several ways and lead her to a life that was more focused and more self-aware.

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