

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Humans often experience failures throughout their lives. It is an aspect that is always present in human life. Failures are indicators that there are no perfect human beings. Much of human life is based on failures that we have learned from and improved upon. There are many reasons that cause people to fail. The common ones are the absence of persistence and the lack of confidence or courage (Neirotti & Caneo, 2023). People tend to react more intensely through their bodily functions, mentally, and emotionally, to their negative events in contrast to their positive events. For instance, failures can be considered a negative event because it diminishes their willingness to make a commitment, which results in withdrawal from their goals (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2019).

According to Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach (2019), when a person experiences a failure, there could be a chance that the person's ego is threatened because the result of such failure made them feel not suitable for doing it, or it lowers their general expectations of success. Afterward, the person's motivation is undermined because of the failure and will "tune out". The act of tuning out refers to the act of withdrawal from doing a task that could relate to their failure. The subjects of such examples given by Eskreis-Winkler are common people who make mistakes in general; if the mistakes that they make are chronic, their psychological response could be different. A person who can withstand failures' aftermath are experts (Louro, Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2007 as cited in Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2019).

Despite the fact that failures are threatening a person's ego, it can also teach them to be stronger, manage emotions, realign the focus, and learn from the failure they experienced (Eskreis-Winkler & Fishbach, 2019; Neirotti & Caneo, 2023). This definition is best described with the example of the expert previously mentioned, because they have a sense of tolerance to failure and

know how to work around it. Such resilience in the face of failure reflects a broader human tendency, that is striving toward growth and self-improvement. But this natural tendency toward growth is not always straightforward, as certain life experiences can disrupt or obstruct the path toward it.

A person has the tendency to actualize his/her development or growth in their lives. However, because it occurs experiences that cause he/she to form a negative concept of themselves, this results in them viewing the world as such. In reality, they have the chance to prove their worth without adhering to any standards that any person could impose towards them. A psychological burden that stems from a stagnation in life and accumulating expectations across generations is difficult because the person must take various responsibilities while keeping their mental self intact. A person has their concept of self, which is formed from various experiences he/she go through, and also have an “ideal” version of themselves. The latter aspect could be imposed by their significant other; this could result in life experiences that are distorted or denied solely to seek such a version of themselves. This is a universal issue or struggle which is experienced by all people since their birth, but such a standard that is imposed on them by their significant other could come at a young age, and it could last for a long time, and their way of getting out of it is through self-acceptance, which is a process that takes time. The experience of failure and the need for self-acceptance are often represented and profoundly explored through the medium of film.

Film, motion picture, or movie are interchangeable terms that refer to the same subject. Film has many genres, such as action, comedy, crime, drama, horror, romance, thriller, and biopic, which are several genres that are known today (W. Azzahra & Washadi, 2023). Film is considered as part of literature because both—literary works and film—have the same elements that shape the whole piece as work. These elements are characters, plot, symbols, and genres (*Film as Literary Art*, n.d.). While literature and film’s purposes are similar in some aspects, in that they both tell stories from a wide range of perspectives, to

amaze the audience of how each work is built by the authors, the main distinction is in the medium.

Film brings itself through the combination of audio and visuals. This means film can have a greater impact on the audience because they can sense what they see and hear. It is an effective way to communicate the film's plot to the audience (Asri, 2020). Film can bring a unique way to showcase a character's psychological struggles because film lets the director to achieve realism by using a component of film technique that gives the setting of the story a high level of authenticity or letting the actors perform as much or as freely as they want (Bordwell et al., 2020, pp. 113), this component will be discussed in later paragraphs. Therefore, the director could use anything at his/her disposal to directly or indirectly show the character's inner turmoil, even in an absurd way. To fully understand what tools are available to a director in portraying a character's psychological condition, it is first necessary to examine the fundamental components that constitute a film as a whole.

Film has two components that build it as a whole: the narrative and cinematic components. Each of these components consists of several sub-components, and each of those consists of supporting aspects. The cinematic element lies more in the technical aspects, while the narrative element serves as the film's foundation. Therefore, the "foundation" will build alongside the "technical" to form a film (Himawan, 2020). Since film shares its narrative components with literary works, it can similarly be examined and interpreted through a wide range of academic approaches, each offering a different lens through which its deeper meanings can be examined.

Literature can be analyzed through several approaches; philosophy, psychology, anthropology, and religion are some of the commonly used approaches. An approach that examines the internal conflict of the characters of a literary work is through the psychological lens (Ahmadi, 2015). The reason this approach is suitable to be used in film or any kinds of literary work is because the conflict within it causes the characters to respond to it in various ways. Therefore, to better understand the author, the viewers, and to appreciate

a literary work in a thorough manner, psychology can be used to interpret it. Additionally, the main attraction of literary psychology is the portrayal of the struggle of human beings, in which at some point the writer may write their own struggles to the story (Setiyawan, 2023).

A film that can be interpreted within the psychological field is *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, a 2022 film that was created by Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan (known collectively as “The Daniels”). The film has garnered seven out of eleven awards at the 95th Academy Awards. The main character, Evelyn Wang is a Chinese Diaspora that lives in the United States and she runs a laundromat business with her husband Waymond Wang. She actually moved to the United States with Waymond Wang in their young adult years because she believed that they could achieve the “American Dream” with her husband. The term American Dream refers to an idea that a person must perform a hard work to achieve the perfect life that includes obtaining wealth (Khan et al., 2024, p. 1545; Ruiz, 2022, p. 183).

The film tells about a middle-aged Evelyn Wang who was imposed a standard by her father since she was a child, which makes her to follow whatever her father deems right for her. Gong Gong (Evelyn’s father) is Chinese, born and raised in China. Gong Gong has a tendency to persuade or push Evelyn to focus on the path that he sees as a success—in terms of an Asian father. This is common in Asian nations, where a father’s primary responsibility is to pay close attention to their children’s education and training and in general, the active role of a father in Asian nations is culturally seen as patriarchy (Pratiwi et al., 2026). Evelyn is married to Waymond Wang that she thought does not do enough for the family because he always does things that are not serious or being “weak” as a husband. Additionally, Waymond filed a divorce because the way Evelyn sees him made it uneasy for his feelings; Evelyn also has a daughter that rebels against her because she does not follow what she think is right for her daughter, even though the daughter wants her feelings to be heard. Therefore, Evelyn’s psychological struggle is layered: she must carry intergenerational trauma that comes from her father; she is disappointed that she

has a husband that is not right to her standard; and she often skips her daughter's feelings which caused a hard communication between the two. It is precisely within this state of accumulated psychological burden that the film's narrative begins to unfold, placing Evelyn in extraordinary circumstances that forced her to confront these deeply rooted struggles in an unexpected way.

Things begin to change when a visitor from another universe entered Evelyn's universe (which is called the Normal Universe in this *skripsi*) and asked for her help to rescue the universes from an immediate, dangerous living being. She accepted it, and thus her adventure began to rescue the universes. It turned out that her daughter was possessed by an evil version from the same universe by the man who asked for help. This person is the embodiment of nihilism and invited the wife to see the same perspective—to see the world as nothing that truly matters because no matter what they try is “a statistical inevitability.” Evelyn once entered the temptation because she saw her world as a failure and “nothing matters.” This is further emphasized with her experiencing her counterparts in the other universes that are more successful than her, consequently making her feel that her thoughts are true—that her life is not any better than her counterparts. But later in the film, she learned something that changed her perspective about her husband; changes how she accepted her daughter unconditionally; and how she stood up firmly to her father so that she does not want to live in accordance with her father's standards. By doing so, the wife reached a point where she accepts herself and gives the deserved respect to her family members.

In order to understand her inner struggles, a psychological approach must be conducted to analyze her. In literary analysis, to explore a character's internal struggles often demands thorough examination of his/her underlying psychological conflicts and impulses. As noted by Naibaho and Saragih (2023), taking a psychological approach allows researchers to uncover how deep-seated internal conflicts drive a character's behavior when faced with overwhelming life pressures. Similarly, Evelyn Wang's internal chaos in *Everything*

Everywhere All at Once can be understood as a manifestation of these intense psychological struggles from within her.

While the Freudian framework applied by Naibaho & Saragih (2023) effectively uncovers how internal conflicts drive destructive behavior, this *skripsi* employs a different yet equally insightful psychological lens, which is humanistic psychology to examine the main character's struggles in *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (2022). Carl Ransom Rogers was a psychologist who practiced therapy with his clients. During his profession, he proposed a humanistic psychology theory which focuses on the client's experiences and how it forms their personality. His published work (Rogers, 1959) contain four theories that can be used by a therapist to perform a therapy to a client in a humanistic way. The theory also proposed a way for a person to overcome his/her life problems when reaching a certain state. Similarly, Elizabeth T. Sheerer was also a person who had experiences in the world of individual therapy. While their theoretical frameworks will be elaborated further in the subsequent chapter, it is important to first observe how Evelyn's narrative journey throughout the film reflects the very psychological processes that these theories seek to explain.

In Evelyn's process to self-acceptance, she gradually learns about her husband's perspective towards life; she changed the way she accepted her daughter through an unconditional act of love; she stood to her own standards and left her father's imposed standards. Her narrative transformation proves that her challenge is not a physical enemy, but rather her own regrets and fragments of herself. The initial state of chronic psychological struggle over her life choices, which she had made to a state where she accepts herself, represents a big shift in her psyche. Despite the fact that the film expresses this through absurd and chaotic universe shifts, the core of the story is anchored in the struggle of human beings for internal peace. The film's deep engagement with these psychological themes has consequently attracted scholarly attention from various academic perspectives. However, existing studies have yet to fully explore the specific dimensions that this *skripsi* seeks to address.

Recent works have examined the film's semiotic elements of nihilism (Toabnani & Boyfala, 2023) and analyzed Evelyn's psychological struggles by implementing Freud's perspective (Kurnia & Santyaputri, 2024), there is a big gap to understand Evelyn within humanitic lens. These studies focus on her breakdown, rather than the specific moments where she accepts herself. Understanding the process of how she transforms from despising her life and self to complete self-acceptance is important to appreciate the film's depth.

To address the gap, this study applies Carl Ransom Rogers' theory of personality to explain the process of Evelyn's concept of self, linked with Elizabeth T. Sheerer's theory of self-acceptance to interpret how the process of Evelyn's psychological struggle is shown through both the narrative structure and specific cinematic techniques. By analyzing these two layers, this research aims to uncover the deeper literary-psychological structure of a modern cinematic piece. Therefore, to examine Evelyn's internal transformation, this study addresses the following statements of the problem:

1.2.Statements of the Problem

To analyze Evelyn's psychological struggle and her process of self-acceptance, the researcher has two research questions:

1. How does Evelyn's journey in the film describe the process of accepting herself?
2. How is Evelyn's portrayal of self-acceptance shown in the film?

1.3.Purpose of the Study

1. To describe and analyze Evelyn's psychological struggle throughout the film, including her gradual growth of internal and psychological conditions.
2. To analyze the process of Evelyn's self-acceptance and how the transformation is externally represented through visible behaviors and specific cinematic elements.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study helps readers, specifically literature students, to understand how to look at a complex movie and break down a character's emotional journey using a clear psychological framework. Instead of just watching *Everything Everywhere All At Once* as a chaotic sci-fi and absurd story, this research shows another way to look at how a character moves from feeling like a failure to completely accepting herself. Readers can use this paper as a rough guide to see how regular movie elements like camera shots and dialogue are actually used to show a character's inner thoughts and feelings. On a more personal level, because the movie deals with everyday struggles like family pressure and regrets, this *skripsi* helps readers see how stories on screen mirror our real-life battles with personal growth. Ultimately, it shows that complex, absurd, or confusing movies can provide us with something valuable about how real people learn to accept who they are.

1.5. Methodology of the Study

The writer of this research used a qualitative-descriptive method and close reading by watching the film and scenes multiple times to find the aspects that align with Rogers' theory of personality and Elizabeth T. Sheerer's theory of self-acceptance. Additionally, elements of film such as camera shots and lighting aspects were used to support the analysis in Sheerer's theory of self-acceptance.

1.6. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses strictly on the main character, Evelyn Wang, and it uses two psychological frameworks to analyze her internal struggle and journey toward self-acceptance in the film *Everything Everywhere All At Once* (2022), namely Carl Rogers' theory of personality and Elizabeth T. Sheerer's theory of self-acceptance. While major secondary characters such as her husband Waymond, her daughter Joy, and her father Gong Gong play critical roles in pushing the plot forward, this research does not analyze their individual psychological development or perspectives. Instead, their actions and relationships are only examined in terms of

how they directly impact and/or trigger Evelyn's own inner transformation to become a better person for her husband, daughter, and father. By limiting the scope to Evelyn's psychological struggles, this study ensures a clear and focused analysis of how a single protagonist overcomes her sense of personal failure and achieved emotional wholeness.

1.7. Status of the Study

Upon searching recent studies that use the theory of personality and the theory of self-acceptance in *Everything Everywhere All At Once* film, no results were found. However, there are multiple studies that have used the film as their object of study. The first study was conducted by Toabnani & Boyfala (2023), the study focuses on the film's nihilism and multiversal metaphors, which fall under literary semiotics. The result of this study is that nihilism is portrayed by the characters' journey to self-discovery with the absurdity of existence; the second study was conducted by Kurnia & Santyaputri (2024), the study focuses on Evelyn's psychological struggle by using Freud's psychoanalysis theory. The result of this study is to show Evelyn's psychological condition that affects her personality and its portrayal in the film.

This research is slightly similar to Kurnia & Santyaputri (2024) had conducted, but the difference is this research uses Carl Rogers' theory to analyze the process of Evelyn's self-acceptance, with Sheerer's theory of self-acceptance to analyze the portrayals.

1.8. Organization of the Study

There are four chapters within this research: Chapter 1 presents the background of the study, statements of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance of the study, methodology of the study, the scope and limitation of the study, status of the study, and the organization of the study; Chapter 2 presents relevant theories and the previous studies that are in line with the topic this *skripsi* is analyzing. Theories include self-acceptance, theory of personality, and theory of film. This chapter also

provides a theoretical framework which is used to analyze the film; Chapter 3 presents the result of the study; Chapter 4 presents the conclusion of the study and its suggestions for future research.

