

FORMS OF EXISTENTIAL CRISIS IN HARUKI MURAKAMI'S NORWEGIAN WOOD: TORU WATANABE ANALYSIS

Dyah Ayu Prameswari¹, Linusia Marsih²
Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya^{1,2}
e-mail address: aprameswari28@gmail.com
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ABSTRACT

This study will focus on Toru Watanabe's forms of existential crisis reflected in Haruki Murakami's *Norwegian Wood* (1987). To analyze the existential crisis experienced by Toru Watanabe, Jean-Paul Sartre's theory of existentialism is applied. Furthermore, Buténaité-Świtkiewicz's theory of components of existential crisis is also used to describe the components of existential crisis, namely emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components. This study applies the descriptive qualitative method. In addition, philosophical and psychological approaches are employed in this study due to the fact that this study is concerned with the existentialism in philosophy and existential crisis in psychology. The results of the study show that Toru Watanabe suffers from an existential crisis because of his inability to seek meaning for his existence. His existential crisis is indicated through the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components.

Keywords: *Existential Crisis, Existentialism, Philosophy, Psychology*

BACKGROUND

Existentialism is a philosophical theory that focuses on human existence, where all individuals have their way of life and have differences from one another (Inglis, 2022:31). Existence is a typical human way of making themselves exist. It assumes that every individual who lives has the awareness to do something and create value for themselves. The highest value of existentialist thought lies in authenticity or originality (Khan, 2007:5). However, in line with the concept of existentialism, the limitless freedom of choosing how to create a value can lead to anxiety and despairs. An individual can also experience a crisis state of existence and begin questioning his existence. French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre put forward the concept of 'existence precedes essence' to sum up human existence, which means there is no predetermined meaning to human existence (J. P. Sartre, 1946:3).

The concept of existentialism itself believes that life is tragically meaningless, so when it reaches to individual's logic, they can often have a feeling of disorientation or confusion in the world described as meaningless and disorganized (J. P. Sartre, 1946:13). Therefore, individuals are in charge of giving meaning to their life because. There lies absolute freedom in interpreting and choosing, but it also comes with a big responsibility that provides individuals with a reason to feel anxious and burdened in determining the steps in their lives (J. P. Sartre, 1946:3). Every individual must endure this kind of responsibility, but the shakiness and pressures that individual experiences in life cause him to despair in the performance of that responsibility. Kehr in (Andrews, 2016:105) stated that despair encourages an individual to share a much deeper existential crisis.

Numerous people struggle with their identity to determine who they are in some life periods (Andrews, 2016:104). That is called an existential crisis. Doubting the concept of life and its meaning, confusion about personal identity, and occasionally thinking about life and death can be strong signs of someone experiencing an existential crisis.

Existential crisis can be found in a literary work like a novel. One of the novels that tell about the existential crisis is a novel written by Japanese author, Haruki Murakami, entitled *Norwegian Wood*. The story tells about a young boy named Toru Watanabe who has to anguish the death of Kizuki, his best friend who committed suicide at the age of 17. Toru is forced to deal with a traumatic incident resulting in his feeling that he must depart from Kobe, his origin place, as soon as possible. Tokyo become his choice to reorganize his life as a student at a private university. However, fate brings him to meet again with Kizuki's ex-girlfriend, a beautiful girl named Naoko. As the story goes on, Toru feels a strong attraction to Naoko, but the girl's mentality is too fragile because of her grief to be able to continue living. Naoko ended her life, just like Kizuki. She hanged herself and added to the burden of grief for Toru. The poor boy has not been able to recover from Kizuki's death and now has to endure his loss to Naoko as well. The journey of Toru's story makes him unable to cope with reality and sink into a phase of existential crisis, finding himself in trouble creating meaning for his existence. Therefore, this research will analyze how Toru Watanabe questions his existence using existentialism theories developed by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.

Through a novel entitled *Norwegian Wood* written by a Japanese writer named Haruki Murakami in 1987 and finally translated by Jay Rubin in 2000, this study will focus on the main character Toru Watanabe, who is experiencing an existential crisis during his youth. Toru Watanabe's description of existential crisis is well illustrated in

Norwegian Wood through his emotional, cognitive, and behavioral conditions. Through this novel, Murakami tries to show the dark side of the social life of teenagers in Tokyo, which is integrated with Western culture in the 1960s by mentioning many songs that are mostly in the pop-rock genre, just like the title of his novel, which is adapted from the song of the legendary band The Beatles.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study conducts descriptive qualitative methods, approach from the perspective of philosophy and psychology. The data is in the form of novel quotations, and the source of the data will be taken from Murakami's *Norwegian Wood*. The collection of the data technique will use observation and classification. The data analysis will use analyzation, interpretation, and making conclusion.

DISCUSSION

Table 1. *Toru Watanabe's Forms of Existential Crisis Analysis*

Form	Analysis	Quotation
Emotional Component	The emotional component is an element that relates to a person's emotions. It takes concern in emotional matters and feelings. Toru Watanabe's emotional component of existential crisis can be overlooked from his emotional pain, despair and helplessness, anxiety, and loneliness. Emotional pain can affect a person's well-being because pain is intense.	"The melody never failed to send a shudder through me, but this time it hit me harder than ever. I bent forward, my face in my hands to keep my skull from splitting open. I straightened up and looked out of the window at the dark clouds hanging over the North Sea, thinking of all I had lost in the course of my life: times gone for ever, friends who had died or disappeared, feelings I would never know again." (Murakami, 2000:5)
Cognitive Component	The cognitive component is an element that relates to a person's intellectual activity. It takes concern in cognitive activity like thinking, reasoning, and remembering. Toru Watanabe's cognitive component of existential crisis can be overlooked from two aspects that are the loss of meaning and purpose of life as well as the loss of values.	"And so I went from 18 to 19. Each day the sun would rise and set, the flag would be raised and lowered. Every Sunday I would have a date with my dead friend's girl. I had no idea what I was doing or what I was going to do. For my courses I would read Claudel and Racine and Eisenstein, but they meant almost nothing to me." (Murakami, 2000:36)

Behavioral Component	The behavioral component is an element that relates to a person's behavior. It takes concern in communication, attitude, social interaction, and work (Buténaitė-Świtkiewicz et al., 2016). Toru Watanabe's behavioral component of existential crisis can be overlooked from three aspects i.e. restricted actions, relationship loss, and anti-social.	"All I managed to do was isolate myself more than ever from the other students. By remaining silent when my name was called, I made everyone uncomfortable for a few seconds. None of the other students spoke to me, and I spoke to none of them." (Murakami, 2000:59)
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Emotional component of existential crisis can be explained by analyzing Toru Watanabe's emotional component. Toru is a 37-year-old guy who sits on an airplane that has just arrived in Germany when he hears the melody of the *Norwegian Wood* song by The Beatles start playing. The song evokes Toru's painful memories of his youth, filled with the suicide tragedy of the people around him. It starts with his best friend, Kizuki, who commits suicide at 17. Then a few years later, Naoko followed Kizuki's way. He has a deep affection for Naoko. So when she died, it brought Toru great agony. Toru reveals that the melody of that song never failed to make him shudder, even when years had already passed, the pain still lingers on him. Naoko used to request that particular song meanwhile, the existence of Naoko is essential to him. Toru is still filled with painful memories and nostalgia trapped in his yearning for times and feelings of his youth because losing people because they commit suicide is different because the one who left behind is never ready for the loss. Toru implicitly reveals the pain he felt so much in the course of his life. He remembered his gloomy youth by referring to the times, friends, and feelings he would never know again just by listening to the melody of *Norwegian Wood* by The Beatles.

Cognitive component of existential crisis can be identified in Toru Watanabe's cognitive component. Toru is living his life as it is, following an everyday routine that he might copy from everyone else. He describes his life beyond his ordinary daily routine because he fails to imply meaning and purpose. He exists and blends with everyone else without knowing much about which direction he is on. The meaning and purpose are guidelines for him to live, but he does not have them with him. He claimed that he had no idea about his life and that nothing mattered to him. His view of the society around him is also hollow because nothing much sparks his interest to be concerned. Toru's second loss of meaning and purpose can be signified by his thought towards students' strikes at his university.

Behavioral component of existential crisis can be signified in Toru Watanabe's behavioral component. Toru shows no attempt to enhance his social skill by making friends with people in the lecture. He does not even want to speak when his name is called to register and it makes people in the class getting uncomfortable. However, Toru grows a close relationship with Naoko as time goes on, then her sudden disappearance affects him to have disorientation with life. He has trouble engaging in society. He is unable to carry on with his daily life and has no choice but to isolate himself from other people because he does not want to try to engage with anyone else. His broken relationship with Naoko causes him to isolate himself from society.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, the writer concludes that existential crisis is reflected in Toru Watanabe, the main character in the novel *Norwegian Wood* by Haruki Murakami. The existential crisis is an issue regarding to an existence. It refers to a phase of despair when individuals realize that there is no predetermined meaning for their existence, so they should be responsible for creating meaning for themselves. There are three components that can reflect his existential crisis. It is reflected through his emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components. By analyzing these components and their aspects, Toru Watanabe's existential crisis can be elaborated.

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