



Shadows Of Self: Gail Giles's *Right Behind You* Identity Formation And Moral Reckoning

¹M. Sasirekha, ²Dr. S. Shanthi., M.A., M.Ed., Ph.D.,

¹Ph.D Research Scholar, ²Assistant Professor,

¹Department of English,

¹PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore, India

Abstract:

Right Behind You, a novel by Gail Giles, a description of psychosocial development in a young delinquent who is traumatized by feelings of guilt and critique of society is given. This paper describes a sequence of stages in a protagonist from denial and a lack of responsibility to moral thinking and self-acceptance in regard to Identity versus Role Confusion, a stage of Erikson's Psychosocial Development. Kip McFarland, renamed Wade, he is the protagonist of the novel *Right Behind You* represents youths looking for an identity because of an inappropriate act in attempting to formulate an identity of himself through a violent life. The findings outline self-discovery as an integration of self-reflection and outside perspective from social views of self-discovery, based on a study of stages of psychosocial development through Erikson theory.

Keywords: Young Adult Fiction, Identity Formation, Psychosocial Theory, Moral Development, and Juvenile Offenders.

I. Introduction:

Gail Giles is an American author, particularly writing Young Adult Fiction, where she commonly deals with psychologically complex teenagers in certain problematic circumstances. Her writings, such as *Right Behind You*, are appreciated as she comes up with an insight into disturbed teenagers and problematic circumstances that might hamper teenager self-identity development in traumatic events.

Right Behind You, a novel by Gail Giles, 2014, begins where the story revolves around a character named Kip McFarland, a nine-year-old boy who accidentally set a child on fire, which made him burnt to the point where he admits to a psychiatric hospital due to the serious problems he faces. Kip and his family transfer from a psychiatric hospital after four years, where Kip decides to change his family name to Wade. This decision takes place since he has been through times where he will never forget the mistakes he has encountered while working with kids, adults, as well as with himself throughout his struggle to grasp his own identity.

The stage of the theory that this study pertains to is the stage of Identity vs Role Confusion, as Erik Erikson contends that during the teen stage of life, the person must erect a foundation for his feelings of identity so that he can be ready to generate loyalty and mental health in this stage of life. However, one also has to understand the struggle of identity confusion as he was unable to integrate his values with those of society, and as he was unable to generate an affinity between the past and the present. Kip's struggle of final regret and value is the positive struggle to generate an identity as Kip's rejection of his guilt and the newly generated identity is the stage mentioned above.

The importance of this paper is specifically aimed at studying the importance of young adult fiction with regards to the information's that can impact the psychological process of self-realization, accounting, and transformation of identity through the engagement of the analysis of the narrative or story and the conceptual understanding of the theory of Erikson. The importance of the research is based on its theme that focuses on the importance of social interaction with regards to ethics.

II. Methodology:

This paper employ text analysis methodology in analysing the theme of identity, guilt, and ethics within the protagonist Kip McFarland changed his name as Wade narratives. It is based on the formulation of psychosocial development described by Erik Erikson. This formulation of psychosocial development is used to identify the extent of guilt of externalization within the text.

The identity of youth in youth fiction has been constituted through personal want and various studies that have come from the field of expectations, it is obvious that characters find themselves in the role of the ultimate research subject, whom their authors proceed to involve in identity crises, either through social interactions or development-related discourses.

A. Externalization of Role confusion and Blame:

Kip McFarland begins by using the concept of externalization of guilt. Kip does not take the responsibilities for setting the fire but assigns the guilt to someone else or something else. This is evidence that Kip is unable to integrate his past actions effectively with his developing ego. This is also indicative that Kip is using Erikson's theory related to role confusion.

Acting passively, being secretive, and the need to keep a second life through Wade are all signs of avoiding social and sentimental accountability. By living a double life, Kip shields himself from judgments of criticism and guilty conscience. By employing such narrative techniques, Giles represents the struggle of having an ethical identity by individuals with traumatic experiences as well as those convicted of serious offenses. Kip's case explains this his condition is worsened because of the severity of his pre-prior crimes.

B. Moral Reckoning and Social Mirrors:

The story of Kip progresses, the social context in which he finds himself living becomes the mirror that reflects the traits of his personality that he himself can't discern. In fact, he finds himself caught up with the views and perceptions of people around him in the social setting that he is part of, and following the findings that one's identity actually develops out of the social identity negotiations that one performs, the social part plays an important role in generating self-awareness in him.

Kip reacts to various situations that entail confrontation, tentative acceptance, fear, and suspicion. Kip has to think as the various scenarios increasingly tear down the walls that he had put up initially. For example, Kip has to come to terms with the reality of the effect of his own actions as he sees the results of his doing when he finds the fire victim. Social mirrors promote moral development by forcing him to reconcile his image of himself with reality. Moral judgment, as Giles contends, is a progressive process and not an instantaneous one. The roles of reflection, empathy, and the ability to withstand criticisms identify the reconstruction of identity.

C. Acceptance, Decision Making and Identity Realization:

Kip develops from self-experience to identity achievement can be explained in his achievement of moral competency too. Kip starts to take control of his actions by relating to those in his moral experience in ways that involve empathy. Identity achievement in moral competency is achieved when he starts to act in ways that involve moral decision making, such as trying to mend relationships, being honest, among others.

This identity versus role-ambiguity, which stood on Erikson's theory on identity. Kip's reactivity and willingness to accept responsibility are shown in the formation of his articulate and well-developed identity Giles *Right Behind You* shows, one needs to accommodate both socializing and reflection in order to develop one's own personality. In delinquent narratives, the process of self-realization for the young protagonists occurs when ethical knowledge, empathy, and freedom of choice come together.

Young Adult fiction can sometimes address or even illustrate, complex processes of adolescence, such as the ones involved in emotions of guilt and stigma for instance, in the novel *Right Behind You*. Erickson's Theory of Development applies quite appropriately in describing how it can help the reader in further understanding how problem teenagers develop their sense of identity through social interaction.

One of them is that it involves only one tale and therefore cannot be generalized to a whole population. With the use of a reconciliation model in morality, identity negotiation, and decision-making among adolescents, however, it has been made clear from this study that a tale can form a psychological theory in relation to issues bordering on adolescence. These groups to be affected by the paper include those on the field of education with regards to teaching and groups related to psychology and English studies, both related to moral and psychological development in the context of adolescence.

D. Narrative Responsibility and Ethical Memory:

The function of ethical memory in shaping the process of forming youth identity is one of those issues in *Right Behind You* that has been least examined within literary studies. *Right Behind You*, Giles employs memory in terms of ethicality, where it seeks an everlasting transformation of Kip's effort of reinvention, rather than it just being an occurrence within the confines of recall in the past. This is seen within modern definitions of ethics because it is assumed that within modern definitions of ethics, it is not deletion within the confines of the past that is recommended but rather those of reclaiming within realms of recounting.

In the case of Kip, it is one that encompasses the theme of "Narrative Responsibility" as well as an answer in regards to rehabilitation as opposed to incarceration within an actual prison or rehabilitation facility. In the character of Giles, he exemplifies Kip as being locked away within his mind in the form of a limited narrative, which is simplified into emotions.

The moral seriousness of the novel is also supported by the avoidance of melodramatics, where one is forced to inattentive over the moral implications of aggressiveness during adolescence on a long-term basis. The moral philosophy of this novel that moral development is a gradual process of deep-seated and soul-draining individual transformation is supported by the avoidance of melodramatics in this case.

Right Behind You in the Identity Erikson's model moves from the developmental stage to the ethical stage of moral accountability within the framework of the concept of ethical memory. Within the realm of the topic of this concept of identity development, achievements in terms of identity achievements could also be viewed from the perspective of one's ability to assume their own responsibility for their own identity development. There is self-realization in terms of Giles novel within the framework of an ethical process and within the framework of fragile and full of memory identity development.

III. Conclusion:

Right Behind You, by Gail Giles, focusses with regard to the formation of identity as if the cycle shifts again with an "Adolescent Pattern" according to the social reinforcement pattern of trauma, feelings of guilt, etc. Yet it's clear that the instance of Kip McFarland and his new name as Wade very seriously focusses with regard to the application of ideology from the Erikson Theory with regard to the formation of identity that "identity vs. role confusion" stands for the denial and avoidance conceptualized upon "morality and integrity" itself. The identity realization amongst the delinquents depends on the self-analysis with regard to the realization of understanding the responsibility and the morality pertaining to the factors. This instance very seriously focusses that the novel *Right Behind You* very seriously focuses that there's "positive growth amongst the "damaging juveniles" with regard to "childhood" itself.

References:

[1] *Right behind you.* (2024, December 17). Hachette Book Group.

<https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/gail-giles/right-behind-you/9780316040716/?lens=little-brown-books-for-young-readers>

[2] Yui, D. (2018). Erik H. Erikson - Identity Youth and Crisis 1(1968, W. W. Norton & Company) (1). Pucp. [https://www.academia.edu/37327712/Erik_H_Erikson_Identity_Youth_and_Crisis_1_1968](https://www.academia.edu/37327712/Erik_H_Erikson_Identity_Youth_and_Crisis_1_1968_W_W_Norton_and_Company_1_)

[_W_W_Norton_and_Company_1_](https://www.academia.edu/37327712/Erik_H_Erikson_Identity_Youth_and_Crisis_1_1968_W_W_Norton_and_Company_1_)

[3] *Full text of "300656427 Erik H Erikson Identity Youth And Crisis 1 W W Norton Company 1968."* (n.d.). <https://archive.org/stream/300656427ErikHEriksonIdentityYouthAndCrisis1WWNortonCompany>

[1968/300656427-Erik-H-Erikson-Identity-Youth-and-Crisis-1-W-W-Norton-Company-1968_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/300656427ErikHEriksonIdentityYouthAndCrisis1WWNortonCompany)

