



Investigating Erin Gruwell's Ambition in Richard Lagravenese's *Freedom Writers* Movie (2007) from Murray's Personology

Prima Indah Suryo Kinanti¹Syahara Dina Amalia²

primaindah16@gmail.com, Syahara.Amalia@ums.ac.id

Department of English Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

Received: 09 November 2021 Accepted: 14 December 2021

DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v9i12.2279

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the ambition of Erin Gruwell, the main figure in the film *Freedom Writers* (2007). Personology theory by Henry Murray was used to investigate the ambition values of Erin Gruwell's character. The researchers used a qualitative descriptive research, from which the primary data sources were selected from the script of the movie and the secondary data sources were selected from other sources related to previous research, websites, ebooks, and other articles. The researchers used document analysis to collect and analyze the data qualitatively. The objectives of the study were to identify how Erin's character is depicted through Murray's Personology, to classify the kinds of ambition needs faced by Erin, and to find out the impacts of Erin Gruwell's ambition reflected in the movie. The results of this study can be classified into three. Firstly, dissected from Murray's theory of personology, Erin's idis shown when she had a motivation to become a teacher, Erin's ego brought her to do something to realize her ambition, and Erin's superego continued to struggle for her goals. Secondly, the type of ambition needs depicted in the main character is psychogenic or secondary needs that contains achievement, recognition and exhibition. Thirdly, ambition led the main character to a positive direction and created impacts not only to herself but also to her surroundings.

Keywords: Ambition, *Freedom Writers*, Henry Murray, Personology

Introduction

Ambition is what is most important in life, what we want to become or achieve, an eagerness, and sometimes a common desire for preferment, honor, superiority, power, or attaining something (Wiji, 2008). Ambition is a strong desire to get something; without realizing it, ambition brings us to achievement. With the achievement of something, making other people feel proud and getting their respect or appreciation. These things are the positive effects of the nature of one's ambition. According to Setyabudi (2020), ambition is a strong desire to get

something, whether in ideas, thoughts, desires, images, or emotions that come from the result of the mind. A strong ambition makes a person determined to make her thoughts, ideas, and images come true, and all the wishes come true. This statement portrays the character of Erin Gruwell in the movie. Her missions are to eliminate racism in her classroom and then combine it with her ideas in choosing appropriate learning methods.

In this research, a movie entitled *Freedom Writers* is investigated in Personology perspective by Henry Alexander Murray. *Freedom Writers* was based on the true story and was adapted from a novel entitled *Freedom Writer Diary* (1999). The movie was directed by Richard LaGravenese and was released on January 5, 2007.

This study is to investigate the ambition of Erin Gruwell as the main character. The current researchers adopted Murray's theory of Personology to study Erin's ambition. Henry Murray's personology is more of a theory of motivation than a personality theory (Gabdulchakov, Kusainov, & Kalimullin, 2016). Murray developed a theory of personality based on an individual's innate needs related to the physical and social environment. From a personology theory, Murray divided the divisions of personality into three scopes, namely id, ego, and superego. Furthermore, Murray also divided the kinds of ambition needs into three scopes, namely, achievement, exhibition, and recognition.

This story is an inspirational story of a very popular English teacher, and her name is Erin Gruwell. She teaches at Woodrow Wilson Classical High School in Long Beach, California. Erin Gruwell finds her classroom filled with intolerant students, gang members, and racial conflicts. Because of this condition, Erin has a strong desire to change the mindset of her students by doing everything possible to change the views of her students. She wants to instill values of tolerance so that there is no longer a problem of racism between Latinos, blacks, and Asians. This story ends with the success of Erin's efforts and ambitions in changing the bad traits in the work environment as well as students. Based on the explanation and summary above, it can be seen that Erin has a dominant character in the film. Therefore, the researchers wanted to investigate Erin's ambition.

Many researchers have conducted various research on *Freedom Writers*. Those studies ranged from studying the same movie by analyzing it from different topics and approaches. Patmawati (2009) used a theory of Individual Psychological by Alfred Adler to observe the struggle for existence of Erin as the major character. Next, Marsudihono (2010) used an existentialist perspective to present the search for the meaning of existence in the *Freedom Writers* movie. Another study was written by Pamungkas (2011) who used a sociological approach to analyze a social discrimination in the movie. The next study is written by Astuti (2012) who discussed cultural relativism in American societies, she used a theory of psychoanalytic literary criticism. After that, Puspasari (2015) used a social identity theory and the psychology of literature approach to analyze the primary character's social identity.

From those previous studies, there are similarities and differences. The similarity can be seen from the subject of the study, because all of the past

researchers used the same title in both novels or movies, namely *Freedom Writers*. Meanwhile, there were some differences between the topic or the object of the study and the theory used. Overall, the past researchers used different topics, many of them used individual psychological and psychoanalytic approaches to analyze their topics. To fill the gap, the current researchers choose ambition as the topic or object of the study and the Personology theory by Henry Alexander Murray to investigated the topic further.

What were investigated in this study are classified into three. Firstly, how Murray's Personology revealed Erin's character in the movie. Secondly, what kinds of ambition were experienced by Erin Gruwell. Thirdly, what were the impacts of Erin Gruwell's ambition reflected in the movie.

For those aforementioned reasons, the researchers conducted this study with the title: *Investigating Erin Gruwell's Ambition In Richard Lagravenese's Freedom Writers Movie (2007) From Murray's Personology*.

Method

The researchers used descriptive qualitative method to analyze the issue of the study. The subject of the study used by the researchers is a movie entitled *Freedom Writers* and the object is the issue being investigated from the movie, namely the ambition of Erin Gruwell. The types of data used were texts and images, while there are two data sources. The primary data source was the *Freedom Writers* movie and the secondary data sources were the author's biography of the movie, articles from websites, eBooks, journals, and previous studies related to the subject and object of the movie. This is inline with the concept of a qualitative research which requires a data collection and documentation of research procedure which involves recorded texts or pictures (Bawen, 2009). The researchers used document analysis to collect and analyze the data in a qualitative way. Qualitative document analysis involves skimming, reading, and interpretation of the data to obtain more meaningful results. The researchers watched the movie repeatedly, captured images of particular scenes in the movie, read other research that were related to the topic of the current research, took notes on important information obtained from the movie, and classified the data in several categories and then developed them into a good unit. To analyze the data, the researchers used the method from Huberman and Miles. Huberman and Miles (1994) state there are three ways to analyze the data in qualitative research, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In this research, data reduction was done by selecting, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data then documenting them in notes. Data display was done by organizing and arranging the data to get a thorough and meaningful conclusion. Conclusion drawing was finally done as the final result of the study.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the researchers want to discuss the results of the analysis that can answer the problem statements of the study. Firstly, the depiction of Erin's character through Murray's Personology. Secondly, the kinds of ambition needs experienced by Erin Gruwell. Lastly, the impacts of Erin Gruwell's ambition in the

movie.

A. The Depiction of Erin's Character Through Murray's Personology

There are three divisions of personology as id, ego, and superego that are illustrated in the dialogues of Erin Gruwell as the major character.

1. Id

The id controls energy and directs behavior to become the basis of the motivational power of personality. The id contains the tendencies to empathy, imitation, and identification. It also includes another desirable impulse, such as empathy and love (Tipu, 2008).

Table 1. Murray's Personology: id

FINDING		MEANING
DATA	SOURCE	
<i>Dialogue 1:</i> <i>I brought my lesson plans. I'd love it if you'd look them over.</i>	(00:04:05)	Erin's lesson plan means that Erin had the intention, passion and motivation to become a teacher. So, learning activities in the classroom are well structured.
<i>Dialogue 2:</i> <i>Well, I chose Wilson. Because of the integration program. I think what's happening here is exciting, don't you?.</i>	(00:05:15)	Her decision to choose to teach at Wilson is one of her wishes because of the integration program.

Erin meets her first id when she showed her love for her new job as an English teacher. The statements in the data below support it. Another id showed Erin's motivation to taught h at the Woodrow Wilson Classical High School. The dialogue above explains that what every human being does must be motivated by something because motivation is part of one's personality.

2. Ego

The ego is the logical administrator of personality, modifying or delaying the id's objectionable impulses. The ego is the rational governor of the personality, it tries to modify or delay their unacceptable impulses (Tipu, 2008).

Table 2. Murray's Personology: Ego

FINDING	MEANING
---------	---------

DATA	SOURCE	
<i>Dialogue 1:</i>		
<i>Erin: What about this? We were discussing the Holocaust.</i>	(00:37:30 – 00:37:48)	Erin's plans to give reading books about the Holocaust and Romeo and Juliet to her class so that they are aware of gang violence.
<i>Ms. Campbell: No, they won't be able to read that.</i>		
<i>Erin: We can try. The books are just sitting here... If I do, they'll be damaged. What about these? Romeo and Juliet. That's a great gang story.</i>		
<hr/>		
<i>Dialogue 2:</i>		
<i>I'm thinking of trips. Most of them have never been outside of Long Beach. They haven't been allowed to expand their thinking about what's out there for them. And they hunger for it. I know it. And it's purely a reward system.</i>	(00:57:41 – 00:57:50)	Erin felt the learning system in her class is too monotonous. She wanted to took her students on a trip to Long Beach, so they can pay attention to the environment about tolerance.

The scene above happens when she asked Ms. Campbell's approval to give reading books about the holocaust related to her class's issue. Unfortunately, Erin's plan was refused and rejected by Ms. Campbell. However, Erin persisted in persuading Ms.Campbell to give the reading books instead of just keeping the books in the library cupboard. Another Erin's ego is shown when she took her student to go on trips.

Generally, ego comes after id. Erin's ego is clearly seen in the actions that have been carried out. Starting with her lesson plan, her suggestions that she has proposed regarding reading books for her students until her action to go on trip with her students.

3. Superego

Superego is the internalization of culture's values and norms (Fabellon, Hernandez, & Lanic, 2011). While the superego is developing, an ego-ideal provides us with long-range goals for which to strive. The ego-ideal represents what we could become at our best, and it is the sum

of our ambitions and aspirations.

Table 3. Murray's Personology: Superego

FINDING		MEANING
DATA	SOURCE	
<p><i>Mr. Steve : You're going to waste your talents on people who don't give a damn about education. It breaks my heart. I tell you the truth.</i></p> <p><i>Erin : Well, I'm sorry. I can't help that</i></p>	<p>(00:17:58 - 00:18:12)</p>	<p>The dialogue between Erin and her father shows that her father disagree with Erin being a teacher but Erin can not obey her father.</p>

The first superego comes to Erin when she gets dinner with her husband and her father. Erin comes to her superego when she still strives for her goals. The culmination is the ego-ideal, where all of Erin's ambitions and aspirations can be realized in the long term.

The movie was dominated by id rather than *ego* and *superego*. Based on the movie, Erin has always had a strong and conscious impulse within her. She is a teacher who has excellent motivation in doing something. The ego becomes the central regulator of all behavior to obtain a positive id (Nurung, Masiyyah, Munaza, & Manitis, 2016). Erin get her desire to get satisfaction from that ego as her profession as a teacher into action. Erin works part-time to earn extra income to invite her students on trips and buy them reading books. The superego expresses acceptable needs appropriately (Butt, 2016). According to Erin, students need something more than studying in class and following the available curriculum. From that superego, Erin persuades Dr. Chon as someone who has high authority to support her programs. The ego-ideal is the total of all ambitions and aspirations, making it possible to be the best self according to existing potential (Suryani, 2020). Her actions showed her desperation to get what she wants, a movement for change where there are no gang members or racism anymore.

B. The Kinds of Ambition Needs Experienced by Erin Gruwell



Ambition needs are the type of psychogenic needs. There are three kinds of ambition needs, namely need for achievement, need for exhibition, and need for recognition.

1. Achievement

Achievement is part of the need for ambition. The function of

achievement is to complete difficult tasks and attain goals. The need for achievement is to finish difficult tasks and achieve expertise (Baqir et al., 2015).

Table 4. Kinds of Ambition: Achievement

FINDING		MEANING
DATA	SOURCE	
<p>Figure 1:</p> 	(01:08:05)	After Erin's trip to the Museum of Tolerance, some of her students threw away the weapons they had used for violence.
<p>Figure 2:</p> 	(01:09:54)	The picture showed the tolerance between Erin's students, after they visited the Museum of Tolerance.

The first achievement that is found in the movie is after Erin's trip to the Museum of Tolerance. The scene above described one of Erin's students throwing away their weapon. Based on Erin's ambition, the action of her students describes an achievement. She succeeded in changing her students with various efforts of teaching methods that she previously took trips to the museum of tolerance.

In another picture showed Erin's achievement of her action too. Her student is willing to say hello and no longer discriminate against skin color and there are no more gang members in the class.

In all her actions, she has obtained several achievements. Her motivation, ambition, and actions paid off. Erin manages to eliminate the gang members in her class so that there was no longer any distinction between skin color and race.

2. Exhibition

Need for the exhibition is a need to make an impact through words or action to show a desire for the exhibition.

Table 5. Kinds of Ambition: Exhibition

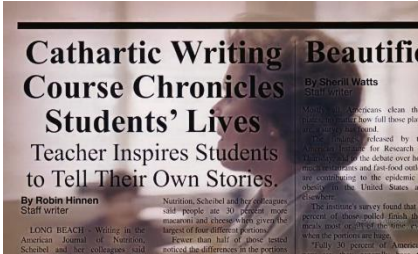
FINDING		MEANING
DATA	SOURCE	
Dialogue 1: <i>Do you know what's gonna happen when you die? You're gonna rot in the ground. And people are gonna live and they're gonna forget all about you. And when you rot, do you think it's gonna matter whether you were an original gangster? You're dead. And nobody, nobody is gonna wanna remember you, because all you left behind in this world is this.</i>	(00:34:58 – 00:35:37)	Erin showed her anger at the crackdown on her students with her words.


The exhibition comes from Erin’s words. When her class was terrible about racism, she got an overwhelming emotion from all of her students. The exhibition is to make an impression (Nurung et al, 2016). The exhibition makes students listen to Erin’s words carefully and surprise them at the same time.

3. Recognition

The first recognition that is found from the movie, after the main character successfully executes her ambition.

Table 6. Kinds of Ambition: Recognition

FINDING		MEANING
DATA	SOURCE	
Figure 1: 	(01:23:34)	An article reported Erin about her action to her students in her class. She made her students wanted to tell their life stories, because they were always act violent and racist.
Figure 2:	(01:25:03)	Erin had successfully invited Miep Gies, a woman who hid Anne Frank to Wilson High School, for that she was reported in the

		newspapers.
<p><i>Dialogue 1:</i> <i>But one thing's for sure, you are an amazing teacher. Special.</i></p>	<p>(01:46:08 - 01:46:12) .</p>	<p>Erin also received an acknowledgment from her father, that everything she has done for her work is amazing.</p>

The scenes captured above describe that the main character gets recognition and is published in the newspaper. Firstly, the recognition of Erin Gruwell as the teacher who inspires her students to tell their stories in a dairy book. Another recognition is when Erin succeeds in inviting Ms.Gies, who hid Anne Frank. Anne (a victim of Holocaust) to get a little conference with her students in the class.

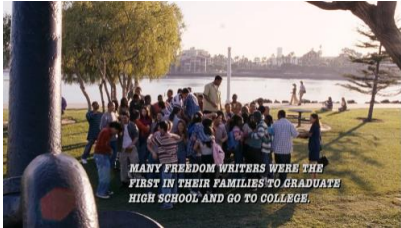

The dialogue above is the recognition from Erin's father. Erin becomes an English teacher at Woodrow Wilson Classical High School who had problematic students, but she turned out that she could do her job very well.

All the scenes above describe that humans can recognize their success—both verbal and non-verbal acknowledgments. Recognition is a form of appreciation for all actualizations or efforts that have been made. The recognition shows achievements to others and gains recognition for these (Baqir, et al., 2015). Recognition makes someone more excited to carry out future missions. Recognition is needed to appreciate the effort made to complete the task well.

C. The Impacts of Erin Gruwell's Ambition in the Movie

Ambition is part of a great company that is traversed by great effort and action. Erin Gruwell has great concern for her students, so she is willing to open up and understand the problems experienced by her students. An ambition causes disaster for oneself or others (Apriliandi, 2018). The ambition of Erin Gruwell had a positive impact.

Table 7. The Impacts of Erin’s Ambition

FINDING		MEANING
DATA	SOURCE	
<p>Figure 1:</p> 	(01:56:18)	<p>Because of her ambitions and efforts, her students get good academic grades and take them to college (Azizah, 2020). In addition, she also influenced and changed at least 150 students at Woodrow Wilson Classical High School to become tolerant individuals.</p>
<p>Figure 2:</p> 	(00:39:39)	<p>Erin tried to talk with her lead of education to get permission on her learning method.</p>

The impacts of Erin’s ambition is positive, both for herself and her surroundings. She has succeeded in carrying out her vision to turn her students into tolerant human beings. Moreover, she has become someone that is not easy to give up and is full of optimism.

Conclusion

After analyzing and investigating the first research question, it can be concluded that the personology manifesting in Erin Gruwell is divided into three types. They are id, ego, and superego. The id arises when Erin’s desire and motivation grow in herself. She wants to continue teaching at Wilson even though she knows all of her students are gangsters. All of these motivations are part of the id, while the ego arises when all the actions are attempted so that her desires can be fulfilled. Erin did many things for that, such as doing part-time jobs to buy books about gang members and raising money to go on trips with her students. Superego worked when Erin decided to do that action, even though many school parties did not agree with her action. She felt that her actions were correct because it was proven that her actions were successful.

There are three kinds of ambition needs that are experienced by Erin

Gruwell, namely need for ambition, need for exhibition, and need for recognition. Need for achievement describes when Erin succeeded to make a tolerance in her class. The need for the exhibition comes from Erin's word that gangster is useless. And the need for recognition comes when Erin gets some recognition for her achievements. From the findings above, Erin's ambition had a great positive impact on society.

Meanwhile, there are some positive impacts from Erin's ambition, for herself and for her surroundings. She has succeeded to become someone that is not easy to give up and is full of optimism. Apart from that, her ambition makes Erin a critical thinker.

Future researchers who are interested to study Freedom Writers movie discuss the independent women depicted by the main character in the movie, Erin Gruwell. Besides her ambition, she is an independent woman too. The main character describes independence in society, education, and the workplace. So, the future researchers can investigate the spirit of the independent woman portrayed by Erin Gruwell in the Freedom Writers movie using feminism approach or other relevant approaches.

References

- Apriliandi, R. (2018). Cercei's Strategies for Power in George Raymond Richard Martin a Feast for Crows: A New Criticism Study.
- Azizah, S. A. (2020). *Review Film Freedom Writers*.
- Butt, S. (2016, April 4). *slideshare*. Diambil kembali dari <https://www.slideshare.net/Shaaistabutt/henry-murray-60451279>
- Fabellon, Hernandez, & Lanic. (2011, September). *Theory of Personology*. Diambil kembali dari The Word of Psychology.
- Gabdulchakov, V. F., Kusainov, A. K., & Kalimullin, A. M. (2016). Education Reform at the Science University and the New Strategy for Training Science Teachers. *International Kournal of Environment & Science Education*.
- Marsudihono, Y. (t.thn.). The Research For Meaning of Existence in Freedom Writers Movie by Richard LaGravenese (2020). Existentialist Approach .
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*.
- Muthia, D., Hidayat, D., & Alek, A. (2021). Conversational Strategies Used by Women Speakers in Same-Sex Communication: A Research on Noor Tagouri Podcast. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 9(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v9i1.1735>
- Nasriandi, N., & Masruddin, M. (2021). The Use of British Parliamentary Debate Style in Teaching Speaking Skill. *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 9(1). doi: <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v9i1.2073>
- P.M, A. A., Maziyyah, F., Munaza, N. A., & Manitis, W. (2016). *Just a little science*. Diambil kembali dari [wordpress](https://wordpress.com):

- <https://justalittle-science.wordpress.com/2016/06/23/teori-kepribadian-menurut-henry-murray/>
- Pamungkas, D. T. (2011). The Effects of Racial Discrimination for Families in the Freedom Writers Movie Directed by Richard LaGravenese (2007): A Sociological Approach.
- Patmawati, D. e. (2009). Struggle for Existence in Erin Gruwell Freedom Writers Directed by Richard LaGravenese: An Individual Psychological Approach.
- Rahmandhika, U. S. (2020). The Ambition of the Characters on Agatha Christie's Novel Why They Didn't Ask Evans? (1989): A Sociological Approach .
- Shawn. (2020, May). *Blog Post*. Diambil kembali dari digitalconnect: <https://www.digitalconnectmag.com/object-and-subject-of-research-what-is-the-difference/>
- Suryani. (2020, January 10). Diambil kembali dari Blog: <https://lynesuryani.id/index.php/2020/01/10/struktur-kepribadian-menurut-henry-murray/>
- Tipu, S. (2008, January 30). Diambil kembali dari Academia edu: https://www.academia.edu/7700951/Murry_needs
- Wiji, S. (2008). Katsumoto's Ambition In Edward Zwick's The Last Samurai: A Psychoanalytic Approach.