

**Identity Crisis: Main Character's Low Self-esteem in Kiko Draws a Feeling by  
Bob Raczka**

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***Abstract***

*This study, titled "Identity Crisis: Main Character's Low Self-Esteem in Kiko Draws a Feeling by Bob Raczka" (2017), examines the theme of identity crisis in the picture book and delves into the portrayal of this crisis and the protagonist's coping mechanisms. The picture book follows the journey of a boy named Niko, who finds solace in drawing his surroundings: the jingle of the ice cream truck, the warmth of the sun on his face, and the diligent work of Mother Robin. Through his drawings, Niko expresses his emotions, sharing them with friends, family, and his teacher, only to encounter confusion in response. This rejection saddens him until he meets Iris, a new neighbor, who appreciates his artwork, bringing joy to Niko and fostering a newfound friendship. Employing a qualitative approach, this study utilizes Erikson's psychosocial theory (1963) to explore the impact of low self-esteem on the protagonist's identity crisis. Findings reveal that a deficiency in love, belonging, and appreciation can precipitate an identity crisis, resulting in internal turmoil and prompting self-transformation in the main character. Niko's journey illustrates that through supportive relationships—be it with friends, teachers, or parents—he gains validation and a sense of unity, aiding him in navigating his identity crisis. Thus, the study underscores the significance of interpersonal connections in aiding protagonists in overcoming identity struggles.*

***Keywords:*** *identity crisis, isolated, picture book, psychosocial developed.*

**A. Introduction**

Identity crisis is a condition where individuals frequently question various aspects of their identity, such as beliefs, values, goals, experiences, and emotions. Erickson (1968) argues that the ego's function is to integrate psychosexual and psychosocial aspects at a given developmental level, while also bridging newly acquired identity elements with existing ones, thus bridging discontinuities between different levels of personality development. Although identity crisis can affect anyone, it is more common in adolescents who are still exploring their identities. It involves awareness of personal unity and continuity, a unique cohesion that sustains the meaningfulness of one's past to oneself and others, integrating self-perceptions received from others and self-imagined ones regarding who they are and what they

can achieve in relationships with themselves and others. Identity pertains to a sense of self and one's contribution to society (Hoare, 2002).

Moreover, the issue of identity crisis is prevalent in various literary works, including novels, prose, short stories, films, and picture books. "Niko Draws a Feeling" by Bob Raczka (2017) is an example that addresses these issues. The story follows Niko, a boy who finds inspiration in drawing. Despite his efforts to share his drawings with others, they often misunderstand or fail to appreciate them. Feeling dejected, Niko hides his drawings until he meets Iris, a new neighbor, who appreciates his artwork and becomes his friend. Through Iris's understanding, Niko finds validation and friendship.

The author selects the theme of identity crisis to explore the issues depicted in "Niko Draws a Feeling" and bring them to light. Utilizing narrative and illustrative elements, the author examines situations and symbols in the picture book related to the protagonist's identity crisis. Hence, based on this premise, the author chooses to study the topic titled "Identity Crisis: Main Character's Low Self-Esteem in Niko Draws a Feeling by Bob Raczka."

## **B. Method**

The data were gathered from both the textual content and illustrations within the story. Therefore, a qualitative approach was employed to analyze the subject matter. Qualitative methods, as defined by Hammarberg, Kirkman, and de Lacey (2016), are utilized to explore experiences, meanings, and perspectives, often from the viewpoint of the participant. Qualitative research methods are focused on understanding the context and circumstances from various perspectives, including journals, media articles, and websites. This approach is chosen to uncover and gather additional insights about the object of study. The data for this research were sourced from a children's picture book titled *Niko Draws a Feeling*, which revolves around a character named Niko who expresses his emotions through drawings. However, Niko encounters confusion from those around him, leading to an identity crisis. Data collection through a qualitative lens involved the following steps:

- Reading and re-reading *Niko Draws a Feeling* to comprehend the entirety of the story.
- Analyzing the narrative and illustrative elements of the book.
- Identifying dialogues and illustrations pertinent to the issue at hand.
- Noting down supporting evidence.

This study employed qualitative methods to analyze data extracted from *Niko Draws a Feeling* (2017), alongside other relevant sources. The researcher focused on specific plot points and illustrations that illustrate the problem. Erik Erikson's theory (1963) on identity crisis was applied to elucidate the protagonist's struggles, supported by an examination of narrative and illustrative elements to reinforce the analysis.

### C. Findings and Discussion

The picture book titled *Niko Draws a Feeling* was written by Bob Raczka in 2017. The story begins with Niko a boy who loves to draw everything that inspired him. Niko always brings his coloured pencil and pad of paper. When he gets inspired, the idea will flit through like a butterfly. Once, he shows his friends the draw of the ring a ling of an ice cream truck but unfortunately, his friends get confused about his draws. Sometimes he showed his drawings, a picture of the warmth of the sun on his face to his parents, but unfortunately, they also get confused.

In the following situation, he shows his drawing to Miss Reed the hard work of a mother Robin building her nest, but all she gets is confused. No one could see what is Niko's drawing, then one night he lay down on his bed and thought about all the pictures taped on his walls and he gets inspired, at this time he taped the drawing behind his door so no one could see it. The next day he noticed his new neighbour a girl about his age named Iris. Niko invite Iris to come over and looked over all his drawers and finally, Iris discovered the draw behind the door. Iris thought Niko must feel sad when he drew the picture and suddenly Niko get inspired to draw Iris.

In the end, when Niko finished drawing about Iris he showed Iris the picture, an abstract picture that makes Iris feel like made a new friend. Iris could see what Niko express in his draws like a butterfly landing on her finger. Even she feels weird but not to Niko.

### Depiction of Obsession

Niko likes to draw. Niko is a boy who becomes the main character and tries to express his feelings to other people. Niko, the protagonist, is very fanatical about the drawings he makes and is obsessed with showing them to impress his friends with the drawings he makes. The protagonist describes his feelings in the form of scratches on his drawing book, he tries to show how he feels to a group of friends, but he gets confused responses from the group of friends. It can be implied that he is having an identity crisis and obsessed with the attention of the people around him.

#### Datum 1



Figure 4.1 Niko shows his draw to some friends

*Note.* Niko explain his draw about ring-a-ling of the ice cream truck. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 6 – 7), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

The picture shows one of his friends' responses "it doesn't look like the ice cream truck" (Raczka, 2017, p. 6). The body gesture of one of his friends raising one of his hands and scratching his head shows the confusion with the image made by the protagonist, this situation made the protagonist the centre of attention of his friends, this is shown with all the eyes of his friends and even a dog that focuses its eyes on the protagonist's sketchbook. The white colour background creates an atmosphere of optimism for acceptance and affection. The draw forms like a whirlwind with a spiral curve which Niko represents a ring-a-ling of the ice cream truck, which defines Niko as needing freedom and self-exploration.

In the picture of the whirlwind, some sentences curve to follow the shape of the picture and red strokes add excitement to the picture, this implies his desire to be liked by everyone and to be the centre of attention, like when children hear the sound of an ice cream truck passing by then everyone stares at it. According to Maslow (1943) feeling the need for friends can make you more vulnerable to loneliness and social anxiety. This is one of the sources of low self-esteem for Niko's character, who begins to experience social anxiety. This happened due to the response of his friends who did not understand the meaning of Niko's feelings that he wanted to convey through pictures. In the next situation, the protagonist shows the drawing he made.

## Datum 2



Figure 4.2 Niko shows his draws to his parents

*Note.* Niko shows the warm of the sun on his face to his parents. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 8 – 9), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

It can be seen that the protagonist tried to show his picture to his parents "It's the warm of the sun on my face." (Raczka, 2017, p. 8), protagonist reiterated to his parents "It's not the sun. It's the warm." (Raczka, 2017, p. 9). Protagonist got another question this time from his mother "Where's your face?" (Raczka, 2017, p. 9) then the protagonist reiterated "It's not my face. It's the warm." (Raczka, 2017, p. 9). In this situation the background colour is still white which represents hope for acceptance and optimism. The expression of the father and mother who raised one of their eyebrows and the father raised one of his hands to his head indicated that he did not understand the image that the protagonist made. In the quotation "It's the warm of the sun on my face." (Raczka, 2017, p. 8), found a curved curve like a smile which implies his feelings are happy, but unfortunately, the joy that should be shared and felt by Niko's parents raises questions that make him again the centre of attention.

In this situation, the protagonist became the centre of attention again with the protagonist's position in the middle of his parents with his eyes fixed on the picture book. In the next situation, the protagonist again shows the drawings he made to his teacher and friends which leads to an obsession with getting attention and understanding.

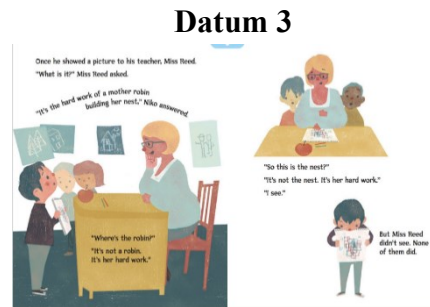


Figure 4.3 Niko shows his draw to his teacher

*Note.* Niko draw the hard work of a mother Robin to his teacher. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 10 – 11), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

This picture shows the overlapping square shapes of a teacher at his school. "It's the hard work of a mother robin building her nest," (Raczka, 2017, p. 10) when the teacher didn't see him and asked where Robin was while raising one of his hands to his head indicating confusion. In this situation there is a combination of blue and white colours which shows the emotion of hope and the appearance of sadness towards the protagonist's wish. The curved arcs like a frown also imply Niko's disappointment and worry over people's incomprehension about the feelings he conveys through pictures. Robin is a representation of a bird that symbolizes Niko's hope and concern for the people around him. Then protagonist replied, "It's not a robin. It's her hard work." (Raczka, 2017, p. 10). Confirms with his teacher about the stacked square shape he is drawing. All eyes are back on the picture he made, the protagonist becomes the centre of everyone's attention at his school, and everyone wants to know why the picture that the protagonist draws not shows what they see. Implied in this quote, "But Miss Reed didn't see. None of them did." (Raczka, 2017, p. 11). It shows a lack of understanding of friends and teachers.

Besides that, the protagonist's head position is looking down and looking at his drawing book shows feelings of sadness. Confirming what makes people not understand the drawing he is making. Instead of getting appreciation and satisfaction, it is precisely the feeling of not being understood that he gets. This shows that he is in a state of mind where he wants his feelings to be understood by the people around him.

### Depiction of Self-Isolation

The protagonist in the story *Niko Drawing Feelings* experiences self-closure towards other people including his parents. Erikson (1963) considers social interaction to have a basis and unavoidable influence on personality development. in this situation

Niko has tried to present the image he made in symbols of sounds, animals and feelings. Interaction that fails to express his feelings in the images he creates leads to the development of a sense of isolation that makes him alienated from the outside world.

#### Datum 4



Figure 4.4 Niko thinking about all the pictures

*Note.* Niko thinking about all pictures taped on the walls and got inspired by another picture. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 12 – 13), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

In the picture, protagonist's position is on his bed thinking about all the pictures he has drawn and pasted on his bedroom wall "Niko sat on his bed thinking about all the pictures taped to his walls." (Raczka, 2017, p. 12). The visual use of blue creates a feeling of sadness and solitude which suggests a depiction of self-isolation. The pictures that are pinned on every corner of the wall represent him who is obstructed by the pictures of his creation which makes him alienated from the people around him because no one understands the meaning of the pictures he draws. Because of that, he does not get appreciation from friends, teachers and parents. It can also be implied in this quotation, "Then he looked at himself in the mirror." (Raczka, 2017, p. 13). This implied the main character is contemplating himself by looking at his reflection.

In this case, he tends to be in a situation where he is desperate about what he is doing. Moreover, his position behind the mirror and depicting his sadness behind his bedroom door show how sad and helpless he is in showing his pictures. It indicates that protagonist is in a state of mind where he wants to be understood and cared for, but he always describes something in an abstract or visual form that most people understand. The background colour of the visual changes to white indicating the rising mood of the protagonist's inspired feelings about him. It can also be implied in this quote, "He was inspired to make another picture, only this one he taped to the back of his door, where no one else could see it." (Raczka, 2017, p. 13). This implied the main character is hiding his feelings where no one can see, such as people who don't understand him although he opens the door no one sees inside his room, people will still not be able to understand the main character's hidden feelings.

#### Depiction of Self-Confidence

The other causes of identity crisis are lack of self-confidence, in this case protagonists are found to think about themselves negatively, according to Erikson

(1963) children are focused on developing a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence.

### Datum 5



Figure 4.5 Niko taped his draw behind the door

*Note.* Niko got inspired to draw another picture and taped on the back of his door where no one could see it. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 12 – 13), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

It can be seen that he wants to be acknowledged and understood by his friends, teachers and parents. His strong desire to be acknowledged can be seen in the drawings he makes; with the enthusiasm the protagonist draws to express his feelings. "He was inspired to make another picture, only this one he taped to the back of his door, where no one else could see it." (Raczka, 2017, p. 13). The draws object reflected in the mirror depicts the protagonist's sadness which makes him unable to reach the level of needing attention and also recognition from others. The horizontal stripes on the clothing worn by the main character signify his wish to be more confident and want to be noticed.

It means that protagonist has difficulty achieving identity against social pressure to conform. The quotation also found that the position of the sentence is like a decreasing wave, this implies that Niko's confidence in himself is decreasing. The circular drawing that is on the floor of Niko's room symbolizes his chaotic feelings thinking about his problem of being alone and looking for security in himself. This adds to the identity crisis experienced by Niko. The protagonist's desire to achieve his desire for attention and understanding makes him wary of showing his drawings.

### Datum 6

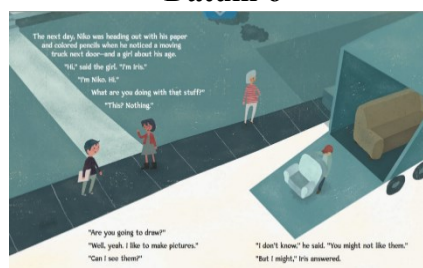


Figure 4.6 New neighbour

*Note.* Niko meet new neighbour and got afraid to shows his picture that he carried. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 14 – 15), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

The picture shows the protagonist carrying his drawing book and meeting a new neighbour, a girl who is interested and offers to see the drawing made by the main character. The protagonist is wary of the antagonist character, this is shown in "what are you doing with that stuff?" "This? Nothing." (Raczka, 2017, p. 14). The protagonist's vigilance creates a distraction that is shown to hide what he is going to do, which is to draw everything that can inspire him. The diversion made by the protagonist does not make the antagonist complete her interest in the picture book held by the protagonist. This can be found in "Are you going to draw?" ... "Can I see them?" (Raczka, 2017, p. 14). The protagonist experiences suspicion and feels pessimistic about what he is drawing. This can be found in "I don't know," he said. "You might not like them." (Raczka, 2017, p. 15). This shows the protagonist feeling pessimistic of the results of the drawing. Conditions like this also describe how a person behaves or views that he does not have good hopes or gives up hope. This form of behaviour problem is caused by the presence of psychosocial obstacles experienced by the protagonist.

Even though the protagonist was reluctant to show the picture he had made, in the end, he invited the antagonist to see the draws he had made. Iris the antagonist, his new neighbour, still wanted to see the draws he had made because she was interested in what draws the protagonist had made. This causes protagonist to experience an identity crisis because he does not trust and respect himself. Therefore, it makes the protagonist close himself without daring to ask questions and say a single word when the antagonist looks at the pictures he made.

#### Datum 7



Figure 4.7 Iris invited over

*Note.* Niko invite Iris to show his draws to avoid being rude. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 16 – 17), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

In the picture, it can be seen that the protagonist does not issue a single question or explain the picture he is drawing while still paying attention to the antagonist and waiting for questions from him. In a situation where the background colour changes between white and blue in one frame situation, this creates an emotion of hope for the protagonist's hope. In this case, it can be seen that the antagonist is very interested in the drawings made by the protagonist, this can be seen from antagonist's smiling



expression while looking at the pictures until he is facing backwards looking at the drawing behind the door. This can also be seen that the protagonist is silent while waiting for a response from the antagonist. Implied in this quote, “When they got to his room, Niko waited for her questions. But she just looked and looked.” (Raczka, 2017, p. 16).

### The Protagonist’s Efforts to Deal with Identity Crisis

After experiencing several conditions that can be interpreted as an identity crisis, the protagonist realizes his true need in terms of belonging and self-esteem and decides to accept himself as he is to feel accepted by others and escape from role confusion where he has to find out his flaws by self-acceptance. Several actions cause the protagonist to accept himself as he is and feel accepted by other people in society such as friends as follows:

#### Attempts of Obsession

Niko, the protagonist, realizes that he needs to gain freedom and dignity in expressing himself to find friends who fully accept him for who he is to get out of his identity crisis. To gain freedom and self-respect, he invites the antagonist, Iris to his house and shows the pictures the protagonist drew.

#### Datum 8



Figure 4.8 Iris found the picture behind the door

*Note.* Iris felt sad when she saw the drawing made by Niko that she had hidden. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 18 – 19), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

In the picture, it can be seen that the protagonist lets the antagonist look at the pictures he drew until she found an image that the protagonist had hidden behind his bedroom door. By accepting himself as he is, finally, the protagonist feels freedom because Iris can understand the protagonist's feelings in the image he hides. Implied in this quote, when Iris saw what the protagonist was hiding, she said, “you must have been sad when you made this picture.” (Raczka, 2017, p. 18). The form of blue grains as a form of the protagonist's sadness, this shows that the protagonist feels sad when everyone doesn't appreciate and pay attention to the pictures he makes.

### Datum 9

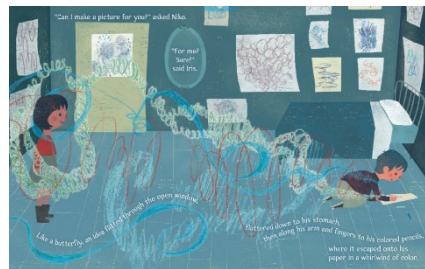


Figure 4.9 Niko make a picture of Iris

*Note.* Niko suddenly got the inspiration to draw Iris. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 20 – 21), by Bob Raczkka, 2017, Bob Raczkka.

In the picture above, blue as the background colour indicates healing from his obsession, his courage in expressing his feelings being the beginning of his freedom to face an identity crisis. The protagonist asking permission from Iris "Can I make a picture of you?" he asked. "For me? sure!" (Raczka, 2017, p. 20). It shows he wants to make good relations with Iris, and the whirlwind that surrounds Iris and the protagonist shows the freedom built up between the two which implies acceptance furthermore confidence for stable self-esteem in the protagonist's identity. According to Erikson (1963, p. 97) we must try to reach them with the specific intent of convincing them that they can trust us to trust them and that they can trust themselves. Erikson believed that early patterns of trust influence a child's social and emotional development. In the quotation "Like a butterfly, an idea flitted through the open window." (Raczka, 2017, p. 20). The position of the sentence surges like waves which imply a change in Niko in overcoming his identity crisis. Thus, an acceptance which is driven by a sense of adjustment to other people's opinions helps Niko in getting attention and appreciation from others. The symbolism of the butterfly, implying the initial expression of his freedom determines Niko's wishes as the fulfilment of self-esteem needs. After drawing, the protagonist showed the drawing he made to Iris, this time he asked her about the drawing he made.

### Datum 10



Figure 4.10 Niko shows his picture to Iris

*Note.* Niko show his draw to Iris to know what she was thinking. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 22 – 23), by Bob Raczkka, 2017, Bob Raczkka.

It shows that the protagonist is willing to accept and show his feelings for Iris. Reopening the feelings, he had hidden as a result of the protagonist's lack of self-esteem. The position of one of the hands holding the head indicates the protagonist is thinking about what response he will get by asking "what is it?" (Raczka, 2017, p. 23). The protagonist's determination this time convinced him to re-open friendships around him. The shape of the whirlwind in the image shows the desire of the characters to unite which indicates the protagonist needs friends and attention. The white background in this situation expresses the serenity of the protagonist's obsession.

### Attempts of Self-Isolation

Once the protagonist notices Iris' acceptance and concern, he begins to show her drawn images and builds a friendship with Iris to get out of the identity crisis.

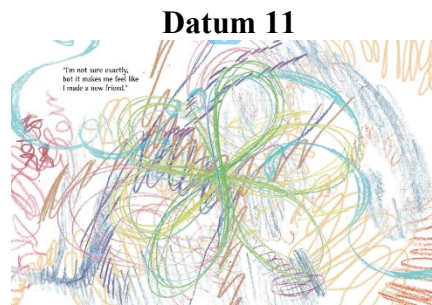


Figure 4.11 Niko's draw

*Note.* Niko draws a flower that signifies his friendship with Iris. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 24 – 25), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

The protagonist finally admits and fully accepts friendship with Iris as a commitment to his identity and pride after daring to show the pictures he hides, and Iris accepts it and appreciates the pictures he made in the form of friendship. This is implied in the quote "I'm not sure exactly, but it makes me feel like I made a new friend." (Raczka, 2017, p. 24). The shape of the flower in the centre surrounded by doodles and swirls shows that the protagonist is satisfied with the current state of affairs, and imagines many good things await in the future even though the protagonist is going through an identity crisis and is worried about understanding from those close to him. He seems to be conveying his feelings for his identity as opposed to isolating himself to achieve a level of intimacy. According to Erikson, intimacy is the ability to be close to other people, as lovers, friends, and as participants in society (Boeree, 2009). Thus, an intimacy event like this would result in a happy and caring relationship for the protagonist.

### Datum 12



Figure 4.12 Iris looked at the picture

*Note.* Iris looked at the drawing that Niko made. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 26 – 27), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

In the picture above, the protagonist is surrounded by a swirl of wind in his body which shows the freedom that flows through him. The dotted line patterns like bee trails imply peace and the protagonist wants to settle down in this friendship. Other than that Iris in her words "like a butterfly landing on my finger." (Raczka, 2017, p. 26). It symbolizes the butterfly as a sensitivity to the protagonist's condition. The blue butterfly that appears in the picture means the serenity that occurs after the protagonist accepts himself and the appreciation he gets through Iris. The protagonist's journey is full of struggles to achieve a beautiful shape and be able to fly freely along with self-acceptance.

### Datum 13



Figure 4.13 Niko draws more

*Note.* Niko draws more pictures than before. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 28 – 29), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

The picture above shows the closeness between Niko and Iris. The two of them draw together and express their feelings for each other through the pictures they draw. Scribble after scribble, line after line, dot after dot, and the waves they made that were rich in colours surrounded them both. In this quotation "Niko smiled. "Not to me." (Raczka, 2017, p. 28). This implies that Niko understands how Iris feels about him, thus, a friendly relationship of mutual respect and mutual acceptance is established between the two of them.

### Attempts of Self-Confidence

His meeting with Iris makes Niko have positive thoughts about him. The positive thinking built by Niko makes it a way for him to build up his self-confidence. According to Erikson (1963) self-confidence is a crucial aspect of our personality development. It is the belief in oneself and one's abilities to achieve success and overcome challenges.

#### Datum 14



Figure 4.14 Niko draws more

*Note.* Niko is drawing more and also expressing his inspiration. From *Niko Draws a Feeling* (p. 28 – 29), by Bob Raczka, 2017, Bob Raczka.

In the picture above, Niko can be seen giving space to express himself. The illustrations from the sheets of paper dominate the room around. This implied how much his confidence grows with the positive thoughts that arise in him. The expression smiling of the character on his belief in his uniqueness builds positive thoughts for others that cause feelings of happiness. In the quotation, "Not to me." (Raczka, 2017, p. 28). It shows her trying to accept Iris' role which realizes the acceptance behaviour that gives her self-confidence. Therefore, it is essential to build a strong foundation of self-confidence during this critical period of development. The white background in this situation presents a new beginning for the protagonist towards his self-confidence. Thus, his efforts to be himself and get his shortcomings make him believe and grow convinced that each person is unique and valuable.

#### D. Conclusion

After the discussion in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that identity crisis is described through several conditions where the protagonist is confused and difficult to accept and understand the meaning of his true feelings. Niko as the protagonist in *Niko Draws a Feeling* by Bob Raczka experiences an identity crisis due to a lack of self-esteem, the need for love and a sense of belonging as well as respect for the images he draws and his obsession with recognition from others. This caused him to experience an identity crisis through several conditions such as being estranged from his friends, teachers, and parents. Lack of appreciation and understanding because the images he makes do not have the same meaning as what other people see about his drawings which makes him feel rejected and disappointed with himself so he closes himself to a lack of confidence. Therefore, the protagonist faces an identity crisis by accepting thoughts and building a trusting relationship with Iris as the

beginning of determining himself and feeling accepted by others or self-acceptance. The protagonist carries himself by again daring to show pictures and show his true self as well as his feelings without forcing others to see it. Iris' role here is also important for him in understanding other people's feelings, thus, Niko gains respect and a sense of togetherness as a friend in facing an identity crisis. Therefore, it indicates that the role of relationships with others like friends, teachers, and parents in his surroundings can be helpful for the protagonists in dealing with an identity crisis.

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