

Self-acceptance in the extraordinary life of Sam Hell novel by Robert Dugoni

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Abstract

*The aim of this study is to analyze the self-acceptance experienced by the main character in the novel *The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell* (2018) by Robert Dugoni. This study applies qualitative research methods as the analysis is presented in the form of text. To guide this study, the writer uses Elizabeth Hurlock's (1974) theory of self-acceptance. This analysis results in the process and representation of self-acceptance. Experiencing rejection in life due to different conditions does not necessarily make individuals give up on their lives and reject themselves. The way main character portrays self-acceptance is by understanding and appreciating himself. There are several factors of self-acceptance that set the background of an individual's life journey and make him learn what aspects can be developed to achieve goals in his life. After successfully understanding and accepting himself, he successfully lives the happy life he wants, he is free from negative feelings and forgives past events.*

Keywords: *Self-Acceptance, Rejection, Self-Understanding*

A. Introduction

The background of the study revolves around the intricate journey of self-recognition and self-acceptance undergone by the main character, Sam Hill, in the novel "The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell." Sam, afflicted with ocular albinism, endures the challenge of having distinctively red eyes, setting him apart from societal norms. This physical condition renders him vulnerable to struggles in social acceptance, plunging him into a realm of discomfort and isolation. From a tender age, Sam grapples with the harsh realities of discrimination and bullying, leaving indelible scars on his psyche. Throughout his tumultuous upbringing, Sam encounters derogatory monikers like "devil boy" or "Sam hell" from his peers, exacerbating his sense of alienation. However, amidst the adversity, Sam finds solace in the unwavering love and support of his devoted parents, who continuously reassure him that his condition is a manifestation of divine will. Moreover, he discovers steadfast companionship in his two loyal friends, who serve as pillars of strength in his darkest moments.

Over time, Sam embarks on a transformative journey of self-discovery, gradually recognizing the inherent strengths and abilities latent within him. Through introspection and

resilience, he begins to reconcile with his identity, embracing his uniqueness and overcoming the shackles of societal judgment. The process of self-acceptance becomes a pivotal theme in Sam's life, encapsulating a profound struggle against external prejudices and internalized insecurities.

This study seeks to delve into the nuanced exploration of self-acceptance portrayed in "The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell," employing Hurlock's (1974) theory as an analytical framework. By unraveling the intricacies of Sam's journey, the research aims to elucidate the representations of self-acceptance and identify the multifaceted factors that influence this transformative process within the novel's narrative landscape. Ultimately, this endeavor promises to shed light on the profound significance of embracing one's identity amidst societal pressures and personal adversities, resonating with readers on a deeply empathetic level.

B. Method

In this study, the writer employed a qualitative method to analyze the self-acceptance of the main character in "The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell" by Robert Dugoni (2018) novel. Qualitative research serves as a strategy for delineating the meaning, understanding, concepts, symptoms, and descriptions of a natural phenomenon, prioritizing quality in various ways, and presenting them in narrative forms, such as novels due to their nature as written texts. Qualitative research serves as a means to explore and comprehend the meanings attributed by individuals or groups to social or human issues. The research process entails posing questions and procedures that arise, collecting data typically in the participants' settings, analyzing data inductively, building from details to general themes, and interpreting the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, qualitative research can interpret social issues based on different methodologies. In this case, the writer constructs a multifaceted picture, analyzing it word by word, and arranges the study results moderately or based on facts. Moreover, the data generated from this study are subsequently presented in the form of essays or narrative texts. The data source of this study was a novel entitled "The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell" published by Lake Union Publishing, printed in Seattle, and consisting of 448 pages. The writer utilizes data from the novel, including words, phrases, and sentences.

The process involved several steps:

- Reading the novel multiple times to grasp the entire story.
- Identifying the issue of self-acceptance in the novel.
- Marking and collecting each text that could serve as evidence of the issue in the novel and identifying the data.

There are several steps to analyze the problem. In the first step, the collected data is classified into two parts of the discussion in this study, namely representations of self-acceptance and factors influencing self-acceptance. In the second step, the data in the form of words, sentences, quotes, and phrases are elucidated using narrative text to demonstrate the relevance of the data to the theory used, as proposed by Hurlock.

C. Findings and Discussion

1. The Representation of Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance is one of the ways how an individual can grow and develop with a healthy and positive personality by accepting parts of himself that are different both physically and mentally. In detail Jersild (in Hurlock, 1974, p.434), mentions the features of self-acceptance are; The person who accepts himself has realistic expectations of his circumstances and values himself. This means that the person has expectations that are in accordance with their abilities. The reflection of self-acceptance in the novel *The Extraordinary Life of Sam hell* arises when main character has an understanding of himself and do not generalize that he is useless because he values himself well. This appears in the following dialog:

“Now you know that you are not alone. Now you know there is someone like you. And I am going to make you a deal, Fernando. I am never again going to hide the color of my eyes or be ashamed of them. And I want you to promise me that you will also never be ashamed.” I put out my hand. “Is it a deal?” (Dugoni, 2018, p.384)

The quotation above is a form of self-esteem and is able to provide positive images and motivation to others. Having an extraordinary life experience makes Sam realize that he is no less extraordinary. His life experience made him learn that he is not alone. He has many things he can do to achieve his dreams and goals. He believes that the life God has given him is not without reason. The sentence "*I want you to promise me that you will also never be ashamed*" proves that he is convinced that being different is nothing to be ashamed of. With his belief he can convince others who have the same condition. The quote is in line with Hurlock's theory that the characteristics of self-acceptance are seen when an individual has calculations and limitations and does not view himself irrationally.

2. Dealing with Self-Acceptance

Hurlock (1974) argues that there are several conditions that favor individual self-acceptance, including self-understanding, realistic expectations, absence of environmental obstacles, favorable social attitudes, absence of emotional stress, preponderance of success, self-perspective, good childhood training, and stable self-concept.

2.1 Self-Understanding

According to Hurlock (1974, p.435), “self-understanding is a perception of self-marked by genuineness, not pretense, realism not illusion, truth not falsehood, forth-rightness, not deviousness. It is not merely recognizing facts but realizing the significance of facts.” This understanding arises from a person's opportunity to recognize his abilities and inadequacies. Not only that, an individual who understands himself also tries to show his abilities. The more the individual understands himself, the greater his acceptance of himself. This appears in the following dialog:

“Why am I different?” I asked. She sat on the edge of my bed. “You’re not different.” “No one else has red eyes. No one.” “And who gave you those eyes?” I swallowed hard. “God,” I said. “God gave you extraordinary eyes, Samuel, because he intends for you to lead an extraordinary life.” “What if I

don't want to? What if I just want to be like other kids?". (Dugoni, 2018, p.53)

In the quotation above, individuals still have a limit to try to accept the fact that they are different. Sam is within that boundary, where he questions why he has a different life compared to other normal children. He cannot control his feelings and rejects the conditions he experiences. Hurlock argues that an environment that does not provide opportunities and prevents an individual from living a normal life without causing harm, would make the individual have a negative response to himself.

2.2 Realistic Expectation

According to Hurlock (1974, p.435), "When a person's expectations for achievement are realistic, chances are that his performance will come up to his expectations. This would contribute to the self-satisfaction that is essential to self-acceptance." Realistic, actual, or realizable expectations emerge when individuals establish their expectations, aligning them with their self-perceived capabilities rather than being influenced by external sources. The chances of attaining one's goals and experiencing self-satisfaction increase when such expectations are grounded in reality. This appears in the following dialog:

"To my mother, of course, this was solid evidence to support her conviction that God had a divine plan for me and my red eyes." (Dugoni, 2018, p.34). The condition experienced by Sam is something that cannot be controlled, the God's will be not something that can be arranged by humans. Realizing that people feel strange about a condition that is different from most normal people, certainly makes people have different perceptions. According to Hurlock, realistic expectations are one of the components of self-acceptance theory, Sam tries to accept the fact that he is different and that he cannot hide it. With the knowledge that it is beyond his control and accepting these conditions well can foster self-confidence to grow to achieve the goals he desires.

"I knew how badly my mother and father wanted me to fit in, and the smiles that lit up their faces while sitting at that table were worth the daily pain of my isolation. I thought it the perfect plan." (Dugoni, 2018, p.60)

2.3 Favorable Social Attitudes

According to Hurlock (1974, p.435), "since the attitudes of members of the social group toward person mold his self-attitudes, the person who experiences favorable social attitudes can be expected to be self-acceptant." This appears in the following dialog:

"Don't listen to a word that woman uttered," my mother said as she shuffled me back across the courtyard, this time without an audience; the students were already in their classrooms. "A woman like that shames the habit she is wearing." (Dugoni, 2018, p. 44)

2.4 Preponderance of Success

According to Hurlock (1974, p.436), "A preponderance of failures leads to self-rejection, and a preponderance of successes leads to self-acceptance." This appears in the following dialog:

"Give him Hell! Give him Hell!" The nickname stuck. For the remainder of my four years at Saint Joe's I was "Hell." My mother didn't like it, but unlike "Devil Boy," I did not perceive the name as derogatory or negative. At an all-boys' school, it seemed everyone had a nickname, and mine was rather benign compared with others." (Dugoni, 2018, p.192)

2.5 Self-Perspective

According to Hurlock (1974, p.436), "A person who can see himself as others see him has greater self-understanding than one whose self-perspective tends to be narrow and distorted. An enlightened self-perspective facilitates self-acceptance." A broad perspective of self means paying attention to other people's views of self. This broad perspective of self is acquired through experience and learning. This appears in the following dialog:

"I'm the kid with the red eyes. I wear brown contact lenses." I began wearing brown contact lenses not long after my father's stroke. That was also the day I vowed to never again set foot in a church or to pray. I no longer believed in God's will." (Dugoni, 2018, p.137).

2.6 Good Childhood Training

According to Hurlock (1974, p.436), "Democratic training leads to healthier personality patterns than authoritarian or over permissive training." This appears in the following dialog:

"I won't have him discriminated against." (Dugoni, 2018, p. 51). The quotation above is how Sam's mother still supports Sam's worthiness and ability to follow education like other normal children. There is nothing different about Sam other than the color of his eyes is red. His mother always supports and protects her son, so that he can be confident in his condition. Sam's mother provides opportunities for Sam so that he can pass his days gratefully and confidently like other people in general without feeling worried. Hurlock argues that by being given the opportunity to be themselves without being hindered, there is a great chance that individuals can accept themselves as well.

"Let's go, Samuel," my mother said, opening her car door. "Punctuality is a sign of respect for your teacher." (Dugoni, 2018, p.57). From the quotation above, Sam's mother never treated Sam differently just because her son needed special attention from the surrounding environment. Sam's mother still trusts that her son is able to adjust to normal attitudes and learn which attitudes are allowed and not. Hurlock argues that having good childhood training can help individuals recognize and appreciate themselves.

"Samuel tested off the charts in every subject," my mother said. "Sam is not slow, Max. He's gifted." (Dugoni, 2018, p.77). In the quotation above is a form of pride experienced by a mother when she finds her son successful in his education. Sam's mother is an individual who fully supports her son by providing positive encouragement so that Sam can continue to progress and be proud of his abilities and potential. Individuals who receive positive encouragement would be able to develop into positive individuals as well. Hurlock argues that individuals who get opportunities from their surrounding environment in a positive way, make individuals feel more valued and can value themselves.

"Hey, Sam, you forgot to get your Tootsie Pop." He shouted over his shoulder. "Hey, Gary, get Sam a Tootsie Pop." "Forget it," I said. "I don't want one." "Samuel!" my mother snapped. "That's not polite. How about, 'No, thank you.'" (Dugoni, 2018, p.99)

D. Conclusion

This study aims to identify the reflection of self-acceptance and the process of self-acceptance faced by the main character, Sam, in the novel *The extraordinary life of Sam Hell*

by Robert Dugoni (2019). Based on the findings and analysis in the previous chapter, it is found that the main character faces self-acceptance based on Elizabeth Hurlock's theory. The description of the self-acceptance process experienced by Sam is motivated by the unpleasant treatment he experienced. Sam was born with a rare condition that causes his eyes to be red. Being different is not pleasant for him because he gets bad treatment in his social life. He started from rejection, bullying, and sexual harassment, to trauma. That background is part of Sam's self-acceptance process. Getting unpleasant treatment made him realize and understand that not all people can accept the different conditions that a person experiences. Having a good attitude, behavior, and morals does not guarantee that society will reciprocate with positive actions. But having a life experience with rejection did not necessarily make Sam despair of his life. He has goals and aspirations that he wants to realize. Instead of giving up, Sam continues to get closer to his loved ones, continuing to share moments of life together so he doesn't regret it. He also honed his potential as a future provision to achieve his dreams. Although difficult, with the positive support from his parents and friends, he is able to reach the stage of appreciating himself. He can even provide help from people who need help. The process of learning to accept his condition succeeded in making him escape from the past and be able to believe in himself. Sam no longer feels disappointed and rejects his condition. He has forgiven himself for letting himself be hurt in the past and is willing to learn to love himself unconditionally. The main objective of this study centers on self-acceptance, as described in Robert Dugoni's (2018) literary work *The Extraordinary Life of Sam Hell*. However, the discussion shows that this study still has many shortcomings. This study focused on the factors and the representation of self-acceptance by the main character using Hurlock's (1974) theory. Therefore, there are several recommendations for future students in the form of studying the same topic using different theories or literary works, or studying the same literary works and issues with different theories. In order to improve the findings of this study, further elaboration can be done on the issue of self-acceptance experienced by the characters, focusing on various aspects, underlying motives, and solutions.

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