



Expressive Writing as a Tool to Face Quarter-Life Crisis On College Students in Time of Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to discuss expressive writing as a tool that can be practiced for students in facing the quarter life crisis during the Covid-19 pandemic. The method used in this study is literature study by analysing and studying scientific literature on the topic of the quarter life crisis, expressive writing, and the period of emerging adulthood. Expressive writing is done by writing down emotions and feelings honestly in a span of about 15 minutes and is done consistently to understand what is going on in the individual. The results of this literature study show that expressive writing can be such therapeutic activity and can help students deal with quarter life crises in this pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

In its development, humans experience several phases or stages of age throughout their life. Starting from the stages of infants, children, adolescents, to adults. Several studies have shown that humans will always experience crises in every transition from one phase to the next. One of the most important transition periods in human life is the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The transition period from the late teens to the early adults in their 20s (18-29 years old) is known as the emerging adulthood phase (Arnett, 2007). At this time, humans usually begin to experience a lot of confusion about their identity (either against themselves or their environment) and about their future lives. Things like what abilities they have, what they want to work on for the rest of their life, what kind of job they want, and about their life partner, they start to think about. Of course this can make those who are mostly still in high school (SMA), in college, or have just entered the work life will experience great confusion because they have never been faced with a situation like this before.

The confusion situation that occurs in individuals who are in the emerging adulthood phase as mentioned above is commonly referred to as a quarter-life crisis. This quarter-life crisis has become a scourge that is feared by young adults. As the name of crisis, of course, causes instability and provides a danger alarm for individuals who experience it. This is of course very risky and causing an individual to experience stress and even suffering emotionally and mentally when they cannot handle it with effective tools to become a solution to face this crisis.

The existence of support from friends and family will make individuals who experience this quarter-life crisis a little bit lightened and helped. As in this phase there is a lot of confusion and demands and a desire to immediately understand and overcome many vital questions for life in adulthood which unfortunately come together so that it is very difficult to face this phase alone.

However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been going on since early 2020, direct social interactions are of course very risky for the spread of the virus. And because the research or study in this article will narrow the

discussion to those who are students in college, of course it is very difficult for these students to have direct social interaction with their friends because lectures also have to be held online. Although communication and social connectivity can still be established by means of telephone or message services on cellphones or social media, of course this is a new adaptation that is increasingly making the challenges of this pandemic even harder for each individual college student, especially in facing the quarter-life crisis phase which is very draining mental and emotional energy.

Communication with peers for college students who experience a quarter-life crisis is very important considering the problems in this crisis phase are not simple and often difficult to explain clearly so that it is not uncommon for these individuals to feel more uncomfortable when communicating with parents or siblings who may have before or have never been through this crisis phase. So, these individual students often feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings in this crisis phase with their peers who are also mostly feeling the same way. (Health, 2010)

Returning to the fact that the problems in the quarter-life crisis phase are very complex and require the courage to look vulnerable enough that not all individuals in the student phase have this ability, again, the problem of this quarter-life crisis is getting worse. Especially difficult to face in addition to the burdens of lectures or organizations or communities being attended. Therefore, research based on this literature study aims to examine expressive writing as an effort that is expected to help individual students who experience a quarter-life crisis to be able to deal with (coping) with distress, confusions, and feeling tired or overwhelmed in this phase.

Previous research (Pennebaker, 1997) has found that expressive writing to vent perceived difficult emotions can have a therapeutic effect and is good for mental states because writing like this is cathartic. So research on expressive writing to deal with the problem of quarter life crises in college students during this pandemic is very important to do considering that at this time the burden of problems related to mental conditions is increasing due to this pandemic condition. With the output of this study, it can be a solution for students who experience a quarter life crisis during this pandemic

to practice expressive writing as an effort to overcome the problems they face.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study is literature study by analysing and studying scientific literature on the topic of the quarter life crisis, expressive writing, and the period of emerging adulthood. The library data used comes from articles in scientific journals both from within and outside the country which are obtained from trusted sources on the internet. The study is carried out by reading material from journals and scientific articles then analyzing each subject matter in this study and determining the conclusions of the studies that have been carried out.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood is a period of human development that was first coined by a Professor in the field of psychology, Jeffrey Arnett (2000) which is defined as the phase of individuals who are in their late teens to 20s with a focus on the age range 18-29 years (Arnett, 2004).

At this time, individuals are in a period between having passed dependent childhood and adolescence (Robinson, 2015), but have not fully entered into settle in adulthood where at this time, individuals are in a period of exploration of possibilities in the future includes career, love, and outlook on life or the world (Arnett, 2000). There are many developmental tasks that an individual must go through in this period, including responsibility and demands for academics and careers, creating intimate and deep interpersonal relationships, and making big decisions in life independently (Miller, 2011). Because they want to get and try as many experiences as possible, in this emerging adulthood period, individuals often do risky behaviors (Arnett, 2000).

At this time, individuals who have not completely separated from dependence on their parents begin to explore the possibilities and opportunities to prepare for financial independence as soon as possible. At this time also, an individual begins to develop a sense of responsibility and trust in his own abilities.

In addition, in this phase, Levinson (1986, in Sciaba 2006) also states that at the age of 20-30 years, individuals have been satisfied in terms of love or sexuality, career, family life, and the realization of the main goals in his life. At this time an individual will independently make decisions regarding marriage, work, lifestyle, and other significant matters. With a life process that is full of search or exploration in this period, individuals will simultaneously begin to carry one by one the values that are believed and held by them in facing life.

According to Arnett (2000), even in the field of education, emerging adults try various possibilities that can prepare the best jobs for them in the future. Not a few, individuals in this phase change majors during their undergraduate studies, especially in the first one or two years. Not a few also have explored up to the graduate program by changing directions with the aim of getting the best possible future for them.

According to Arnett (2004), there are 5 stages that an individual will experience in this emerging adulthood phase, namely identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in between (feeling at a crossroads). between not wanting to be seen as a teenager but not ready to become an adult), and the age of possibilities (starting to grow hopes that are getting bigger and bigger about the possibility of his progress in the future) (Arnett, 2007).

B. Quarter-Life Crisis

The term quarter-life crisis was first coined by Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner in 2001 based on research they conducted on youth in America in the early 20th century. Quarter-life crisis is a form of emotional crisis that occurs in individuals in their 20s which includes feelings of helplessness, isolation, doubts about one's own abilities and fear of failure (Atwood and Scholtz, 2008). Robbins and Wilner (2001, in Black 2004) generally describe the term quarter-life crisis as an intense reaction experienced by an individual in his 20s after leaving a 'comfortable' period after graduating from college and having to face the real reality that is contained in it. Instability, constant extreme change, too many alternatives to choose from, and a feeling of helplessness in between because of too many changes in these conditions.

Quarter-life crises are also experienced by individuals in the emerging adulthood period (18-29 years old) who not only after graduating from college, even when they were still in college, which is mainly marked by tremendous confusion, frustration, fear, worry, and even difficulty finding purpose in his life at that time (Freund & Ritter, 2009). The source of confusion and anxiety experienced by individuals who experience a quarter-life crisis comes from problems with academics, work, interpersonal relationships or love, spirituality, finances, and other personal characteristics.

According to Robinson (2011) there are 5 episodes that mark an individual experiencing a quarter-life crisis, namely:

1. The first phase, which is marked by a feeling of being trapped in various choices and then followed by a feeling of fear of being unable to decide what to live with.
2. The second phase, when there is a strong urge to change the situation being experienced.
3. The third phase, which is when individuals begin to take crucial actions, for example leaving work or breaking up a relationship that has been undertaken to start a new one.
4. The fourth phase, which is when the individual builds a new foundation in which he can fully control the direction of his life goals.
5. The fifth phase, which is when individuals begin to build a new life that focuses more on things that are in accordance with the interests and values held by the individual.

According to Nash and Murray (2010), there are several problem areas in the quarter-life crisis, which are as follows:

1. Dreams and hopes

Here the individual begins to question what he wants to achieve in the future so that it is often followed by concerns about the individual's ability or not to realize what he wants. At this time, individuals who are indeed exploring many sides of their lives experience confusion about the many dreams and hopes they want to achieve. Individuals may also feel anxious about what if their dreams are no longer in line with what they are interested in and how to change or rearrange their dreams and hopes.

2. Academic challenges

Individuals question why they feel they have to finish their education, whether what they learn matches their interests in life. Then, when they have graduated, individuals get new responsibilities to get decent jobs in order to be financially independent. And new pressures will arise when they feel that what they have learned in college does not match their interests when they enter the work life.

3. Religion and spirituality

Individuals begin to question whether the religion they believe is true and also question whether there is a desire to change religions and what will happen if they do change religions. Here, individuals question all the values and beliefs they have believed so far. If they can find the right answers to his questions, then his belief will be stronger and the possibility of the opposite is undeniable.

4. Work life and career

Individuals are usually trapped in doubt to pursue a well-paying job that is not in accordance with their interests or a job that matches their interest but is less salaried. At this stage, individuals also often feel uncertain about whether to leave their old job because of the high workload and stress in the office which is followed by a fear of instability that might be experienced if they move jobs. The individual also questions the value and what he can contribute through his work.

5. Romance, relationships with family and friends

Individuals begin to question who will be their soul mate and even question whether anyone will be their soul partner. At this stage, it is also questioned how individuals can feel confident with someone who will be their partner, how individuals can maintain commitment in the relationship when they are together. For those who are single, usually confused between desire and fear to build deeper interpersonal relationships at this stage. Meanwhile, in relationships with family, individuals try to be independent and independent from dependence on their parents. Then with friends, individuals will begin to look for friends who can accept themselves as they are and become friends in difficult or happy times — looking for friendships that are more authentic and sincere.

6. Self-identity

In terms of self-identity, adulthood makes an individual ask about the essence of life and what

he can do to be able to contribute to bring benefits to his surroundings. At this stage, the individual begins to think about what he can and what path he wants to be the path of struggle. In addition, at this stage, individuals also begin to pay attention to themselves, from the perspective of clothing and how to care for themselves to how they express and manage their emotional side. At this stage, individuals also begin to determine their identity in terms of politics and sexuality.

C. Expressive Writing

For more than 20 years, many studies have shown that writing about traumatic and stressful events is beneficial for both physical and emotional health. The first study on expressive writing followed by participants who were students doing expressive writing activities about the most traumatic and sad events in their lives within 4 consecutive days and 4 months later showed better emotional and physical conditions than those who wrote. (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986 in Wilhelm, 2014). This expressive writing can be done in a span of 15 to 30 minutes.

Holding onto emotions by covering them up for yourself and reluctant to talk about them to others when changes occur that require a lot of mental energy is not the best solution to dealing with such conditions (Izzati & Takwin, 2018). Writing helps individuals digest complex or traumatic emotions, thoughts, and feelings. By writing, individuals will get clarity of what is experienced.

Writing down the mess and confusion that is in our head is one means of clarifying what we do not clearly understand in ourselves and in our lives. Although writing down the confusion and frustration of a situation that we feel does not guarantee that the situation will spontaneously find a way out, by applying expressive writing and doing it in our daily routine, it is highly likely that someone can accept a situation that is difficult for him to accept and understand more fully fast.

D. The COVID-19 Pandemic

Since being detected entering Indonesia in early March 2020 until now, this virus has really changed many orders of human life. Almost all parts of the universe are affected by the spread of these invisible microscopic organisms, especially

the continuity of human daily activities. Starting from schools, offices, markets, everything is affected by the corona virus. Education does not allow to be carried out face-to-face as before. Meetings with friends and relatives must also be limited. Of course, this situation forces humans to adapt quickly to these unexpected changes.

As social beings, humans need time to be able to interact and connect with other people. Of course, with this pandemic, humans are again required to adapt quickly, including in terms of socializing (Luchetti et al., 2020). As good as today's technology, of course (Pratama & Sari, 2020), this abnormal condition still causes people to feel something is lacking and unfamiliar. Life like pre-pandemic is expected to be encountered soon. However, the reality is that in Indonesia, the COVID-19 case is still soaring. The imbalance between expectations and reality of the world faced today often causes anxiety, anxiety, and even depression (Qonitatin et al., 2011). This is no exception for students who are actually in the transition phase towards adulthood who are faced with developmental challenges that drain mental energy

Facing a quarter-life crisis is not an easy condition. In the emerging adulthood era (18-29 years), if an individual is said to be an adult is not yet fully mature, confusion over many important things in life at this time will indeed be very challenging.

Emerging adults (Arnett, 2001) in which students are included at this time are really faced with conditions that are far from what they previously lived in adolescence. Confusion over many questions in life requires these emerging adults to continue exploring the world around them, to continue to understand themselves and their environment.

The quarter-life crisis, which presents a lot of confusion at the same time, makes individuals in the emerging adulthood period (Habibie et al., 2019), including students, sometimes feel overwhelmed by all forms of emotions displayed by conditions at this time. Starting from dreams, academics, career, romance, friendship, financial, spiritual, it is also experiencing shocks at this time.

Students who are included in the emerging adulthood category, the tough challenges of this period can be seen from the many academic

demands, demands to actualize themselves through activities other than lectures, not about love and relationships; All of this made the emerging Adulthood period with a quarter-life crisis difficult to deal with. Especially when there is no support from the people around him.

Academic burdens and personal problems (Hermann et al., 2002) related to confusion during the transition period, especially in the already heavy pandemic, sometimes make students overwhelmed with what they are doing. The amount of confusion (Spiering et al., 2016) makes students feel helpless and sometimes want to give up. However, it turns out that even though not all emerging adults, including students, feel hopeless (Robson et al., 2020) with all the fatigue of living this transitional life, there are also some who are able to pass it well.

Given that the quarter-life crisis is indeed not easy and has a short duration, it should be noted that individuals who feel they are in this phase, if it is not possible to go to a professional expert, can try to tell friends or family who feel comfortable telling stories (Rohde et al., 2013).

With this pandemic (Schleicher, 2020), of course, the situation is getting tougher for students (Sundarasan et al., 2020) who experience a quarter-life crisis because a pandemic can also cause loneliness because they rarely interact directly with their peers. So, this article is compiled to examine one of the activities, namely expressive writing which is expected to be a medium for coping with all the confusion during the quarter-life crisis.

Expressive writing (Pennebaker, 1997) can be done daily with a duration according to your heart's desire (at least 15 minutes as described in the first study on writing to express traumatic emotions) spills all forms of thoughts, emotions, and feelings that are difficult to digest if just think in the head. By writing, thoughts that were previously abstract in the head become something that can be seen by the five senses so that they are expected to provide clarity about what kind of situation is actually being faced by an individual. (Afnan, 2020)

By applying this expressive writing habit also makes an individual, including students, will learn to understand and be aware of his own condition so that it is hoped that with clarity and awareness of the condition that is felt it can help

individuals decide decisions for their future lives (Kholidah & Alsa, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Based on the author's analysis, expressive writing can be used as an alternative for students to face a quarter-life crisis during a pandemic. This research states that writing from day to day can help individual students to understand the crisis with all the complexities of mental and emotional processes they face.

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