Coping Behavior in Tarkington’s *The Magnificent Ambersons*: An Individual Psychological Approach

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**ABSTRACT**
The object of this research was *The Magnificent Ambersons* novel written by Newton Booth Tarkington. It aimed at describing how George Amberson Minafer, the major character in the story, copes with his problems. The analysis was based on psychological approach by employing qualitative method. The primary data source of this research was the novel itself whereas the secondary data sources were the books on psychology and other relevant sources. In collecting the data, documentation technique was applied along with descriptive technique for analysis. The findings show that: [1] Minafer copes his problem through changing his behavior, from the negative to the positive one as he becomes more optimistic, independent, and caring for his family; [2] Minafer copes his problems through his action. He has the courage to admit his mistake and ask forgiveness to the man that he hurt most.

**Keywords:** cope, behavior, psychology

**INTRODUCTION**
Every human being cannot avoid the changes that happen in their surroundings. The changes will become a problem in the real world and in daily life, if someone is not ready to face the condition. Moreover, the response of each person is different when something comes up in their life. They will react positively when they can adapt to something new which is appropriate to their life. On the other hand, they may react negatively if they feel fear of something new. They feel that the new changes will only destroy their life system.

We can see the changes that happen in our lives, for example the culture. Culture itself can be divided into several categories, such as: new invention, life style, music, etc. The culture brought some effects, either positively or negatively. Besides, this thing also has various ways to attract people attention, such as through advertisements or movies to which the societies respond. They can predict the product can be useful in a long or short term, for example, a car. A car can be useful both in a long term and short term. If the car is cared properly and the engine is checked regularly, it can be used for a long time. On the contrary, when the engine is rarely checked, the car will be broken and can be used only in a short period.

In the following discussion, the writers try to describe how new invention can make a difference in a society. The new invention that brought in the society in 19th century is automobile. The industry of automobile has gained positive responses from the consumers. It also influences the economic growth, such as bank loans, housewive purgatory, etc. When many people are so interested in automobiles, there are few people who are in contradiction with them. They think that the new invention is only a nuisance. This perception makes some of them left behind and the worst is the downfall of the family because of their inability to keep up with the progress.
Nowadays, people live in a modern and, moreover, a post-modern era when different products of science and technology give people easiness and comfort in doing their activities. Therefore, they can enjoy longer spare time, and do not need to sacrifice too much power which is considered as a prosperity indicator.

Related to science and technology, which become the need of people nowadays and with a honor to literary works as a form of philosophy, it is very interesting to explore such a topic and find out the philosophical value contained in it. From the facts above, there are some authors telling about science and technology and the effects in their works. One of them is Newton Booth Tarkington. One of his novel entitled *The Magnificent Ambersons* tells about a new invention which is introduced to the society and gives simplicity to people in doing their activities.

*The Magnificent Ambersons* is a novel which won the 1919 Pulitzer Prize for fiction category. It is the second novel in Tarkington’s *Growth* trilogy, amid *The Turmoil* (1915) and *The Midlander* (1923) which was retitled *National Avenue* in (1927). In 1925, the novel was first adapted for film under the title *Pampered Youth*.

Newton Booth Tarkington was born on July 29, 1869 and educated at Shortridge High School, Phillips Exeter Academy, Purdue University and Princeton University. He was one of the most prolific and successful of all American writers and the authors of more than 40 novels and over 20 plays. He won Pulitzer Prize for *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1918) and *Alice Adam* (1921). *The Magnificent Ambersons* was published by Doubleday & Co., Inc. 1918. Tarkington died at his home in Indianapolis in May 19, 1946. *(Booth Tarkington 2020)*.

*The Magnificent Ambersons* tells the story of two interwoven romances amid the changing landscape of the American dream. Using the automobile as an essential icon for change, Tarkington reveals a tragic vision of the downfall of a great American family as they fail to keep pace in the new world of technological changes. In the midland town, the Ambersons are the wealthiest, revered, and envied family in the entire country. George Amberson Minafer, the main character of *The Magnificent Amberson*, is the only son of Wilbur Minafer and Isabel Amberson and consequently the only grandson of Major Amberson. George, being the only heir of the Amberson fortune, is given all the liberties to do whatever he desires without any discipline. Because he is an Ambersons, George feels that it is his right to do whatever takes his fancy. Foolish in his youth, George succumbs to the blind arrogance of wealth. He prevents his mother from being with her true love after his father died and he sabotages his own relationship. In the end, George finds redemption through work, humility, and the forgiveness of his one true love.

Based on the above phenomena, the researchers believed that behind the story of *The Magnificent Ambersons*, there was a particular event that made the author wrote the story. Therefore, the researchers were interested in the novel *The Magnificent Ambersons* because it presents the fate, the failure, and possibility for happiness of the main character. Beside, it gives an educational aspect to the readers if they are able to understand the content of the novel. In analyzing the novel, the researchers used individual psychology theory because the theory presents the style of life and social interest. So, there is a relation between the story of the novel and the theory of individual psychology. Both the story and the theory talk about humans as
Individual psychology, a theory of personality, was found by Alfred Adler. According to Adler (in Hjelle 1981, 71), individual psychology expresses his holistic conception of the human being as a single, indivisible, self-consistent and unified identity. He believes that no person can be viewed in isolation, but must always be seen as embedded in a larger context, the social-ecological system of which she or he is an integral part. Schultz (1990,120) also stated that individual psychology focuses on the uniqueness of each person, denying the universality of biological motives and goals. Each person, in Adler’s opinion, is primarily social and not biological being.

According to Adler there are six basic concepts of individual psychology, namely inferiority feeling and compensation, striving for superiority, fictional finalism, style of life, social interest, and creative power.

1. Inferiority feeling and compensation

Every person has an inferiority feeling whether he will or can admit it. It is not surprising that we often receive a negative reply when we ask person whether they have a feeling of inferiority. Adler (in Hjelle, 1981:78) views inferiority feeling as the motivational basic for essentially all human striving. All individual progress, growth, and development are resulted from the attempts to overcome one’s inferiority whether they are imagined or real.

Compensation is a motivation to overcome inferiority and to strive for higher levels of development (Schultz 1990, 123). The negative responses to these feelings of inferiority become inferiority complex or the superiority complex. Individuals with this symptom are more concerned with attaining selfish goal than with social interest. They may express this selfishness in a need to dominate, refusal to cooperate, or they want to take and not to give.

Of course, inferiority feeling may be exaggerated by special conditions such as pampering or rejecting the child, in which case certain abnormal manifestations may ensue, such as the development of an inferiority complex or a compensatory superiority complex (Hall 1970, 124).

Adler identifies three childhood handicaps as contributing to an inferiority complex: inferior organs, overindulgence, and neglect. First, children born with inferior physical organs may develop feeling of psychological inferiority. Overindulged children grow up lacking confidence in their abilities because others have always done things for them. Finally, parental neglect can cause an inferiority complex because neglected children basically feel unwanted (Hall 1981, 142).

2. Striving for superiority

From birth to death, the striving for superiority carries the person from one stage of development to the next higher stage. Adler acknowledges that the striving for superiority may manifest itself in a thousand different ways, and that a person has his own concrete mode of achieving or trying to achieve perfection (Hall 1970, 123). In sum, striving for superiority is the urge toward perfection or completion, the ultimate goal that motivates the individual.

3. Fictional finalism

entitled *The Philosophy of ‘As If’* (1911). He theorizes that our ultimate goals (those goals which give our lives a direction and purpose are fictional goal). Adler concepts of fictional finalism reveals the extent to which he emphasized a goal directed, view of human motivation. Personality is influenced by subjective expectations about what might happen in the future than by experiences of the past. Our behavior is guided by our perception of our fictional goals in life. In sum, we see man as a unity and as goal oriented; all his spiritual powers are in the service of the guiding idea, the perception of the goal. Just to maintain his existence, a man has to establish goals.

4. Style of life
Hjelle (1981, 81) states that style of life refers to the unique pattern of trait, behavior, and habit when taken together, they will define the particular route we have charted for ourselves in order to reach our life goal. According to Adler (in Feist 1985, 74), style of life refers to the flavor of a person's life. It includes not only the person's goal, but also self-concept, feeling toward others, and attitude toward the world. It is the product of the interaction of heredity, environment, and goal of success, social interest, and creative power. Some individuals react to their inferiority by developing a faulty style of living, while others distinguish themselves by superior achievements. The pampered child may find that he can rule his parents by making demands conspicuously felt (DiCaprio 1974, 262).

5. Social interest
Social interest or social feeling (originally called *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* or 'community feeling') is a caring and concern for the welfare of others that continues throughout life to guide a person's behavior (Hall 1985, 148). In sum, social interest is caring for family, for community, for society, for humanity, even for all life. Adler felt that social interest was not simply inborn, nor just learned, but a combination of both. It is based on an innate disposition, but it has to be nurtured to survive.

6. Creative power
Hjelle (1981, 87) states that each person is empowered with the freedom to create his or her own life style. Ultimately, people are solely responsible for who they are and how they behave. This creative power is responsible for the person's life goal, determines the method of striving for the goal, and contributes to the development of social interest. This same creative force also influences perception, memory, imagination, fantasy, and dreams. It makes each person a free (self-determined) individual.

Hall (1970, 127) states that the creative power of the self is hard to describe. We can see its effects, but we cannot see it. In essence, the doctrine of a creative self asserts that man makes his own personality. He constructs it out of the raw material of heredity and experience.

The researcher developed this research paper by applying the individual psychological theory proposed by Alfred Adler. By understanding the individual psychology of the character, the researchers tried to explain how George Amberson Minafer, the main character of *The Magnificent Ambersons* novel, copes his problems. There were some steps in analyzing the novel. Firstly, the researchers began from the intrinsic elements of literature work. Secondly, the researchers made a study about the theory of
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individual psychology, particularly Alfred Adler’s theory. Thirdly, the researchers made research about the relationship between the individual psychology theory and the novel itself. It could be done toward the actions, the dialogues, and the thoughts of the character. From those three steps, the researchers were able to answer the problem statement of the research.

The researchers took Booth Tarkington’s novel, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, as the object of this study, particularly to analyze George Amberson Minafer as one of the major character in the novel.

The data employed in this research were classified into two groups. The primary data sources were *The Magnificent Ambersons* novel written by Booth Tarkington which was published in 1918. The data involved the dialogues between the characters, ideas, ways of thinking, attitudes and the whole narration of the novel which were relevant to the subject matter of this research. The secondary data sources were any materials containing information related to the novel as well as reference books on psychology and literary theories. The data from secondary sources were not obtained from the novel but taken from others sources, in the form of criticisms, essays, the author biography, theories of literature, and other kinds of information which are relevant to the subject matters in the research problem. The technique the researchers used to collect the data was documentation. It is by collecting and recording data from the primary and secondary sources. In collecting the data, the researchers took some steps as follows: (1) reading the novel repeatedly after for material of criticism; (2) taking notes of the important part of primary and secondary data; (3) classifying the data into some categories; (4) selecting the data by rejecting the irrelevant information which does not support the topic of the study.

In analyzing the data, the writer employs descriptive-qualitative method by content analysis. The analysis was started from the structural analysis of the work and gradually moved to the individual psychology analysis of the literary work.

The followings are the findings and discussions related to the individual psychology of George Amberson Minafer, the main character of *The Magnificent Ambersons* novel based on Adler’s theory.

**Inferiority Feeling and Compensation**

Isabel Amberson only has one child named George Amberson Minafer who has the nature of inferiority. Inferiority feeling may develop in children who are very spoiled, if they get too much attention and affection without doing anything useful. It becomes an inability to overcome inferiority feelings, heightens and intensifies this feeling, and leads to the development of an inferiority complex.

George treats his mother with too much kindness, attention, and comfort. So, he does not learn to do for himself and discover later that he is truly inferior. Secondly, he does not learn any other way to deal with other than insulting other people.

While George is seen as a ‘devil’, Isabel only sees the angel in him. This is seen in an accident when George uses abusive language toward Reverend Malloch Smith. Smith writes a letter to George’s mother urging her to correct George’s behavior, but Isabel refuses to punish George and, instead, sends him off with a mere warning (19-22).
Knowing that his mother always cares him in a loving way, George never tries to grow up. Whenever he makes a mistake other people will help him solve it. Here the inferiority complex of George begins. The result is George compensate it with being rude with other. He often uses words ‘riffraff’ to mock other people.

“He's just riffraff, “ said George.
“You mustn’t say so,” his mother gently agreed (22).

..., he unconsciously put his emotion into a muttered word: “Riffraff” (220).

Other people with physical disabilities often strive to compensate for their weaknesses or defects. Again, some compensation by becoming good at what they feel inferior about. More compensation by becoming good at something else, but otherwise retaining their sense of inferiority. And some just never develop any self-esteem at all. In here, George compensates his inferiority complex with a poor way. He never develops any self-esteem at all nor with other people.

Striving for superiority is the urge toward perfection or completion, the ultimate goal that motivates the individual. In this case, striving for superiority happens when George Amberson Minafee hears Aunt Amelia said that there is a less ‘talk’ if Isabel meets Eugene accompanied by his brother and Fanny. George assumes there is a talk between his mother and Eugene Morgan, so he asks his uncle about it. George’s uncle said that Eugene always attracts Fanny. So, she always keeps Isabel’s friendship with Eugene. Fanny hopes that if Isabel meets Eugene, she will be asked to accompany her. So, there is a change for Fanny to be closer to Eugene. With that explanation George is still doubtful whether there is a talk or not (100-101).

Secondly, it also happens when Aunt Fanny says everybody in town is gossiping that Isabel and Eugene will be married very soon. Hearing all about this, George asks his aunt the name of the gossipers. He assumes that the person who spreads the rumors is the intimate friend of his aunt that is Mrs. Johnson (154-155). So, without thinking clearly, George goes to Mrs. Johnson’s house to ask for her explanation about the rumor.

... George's shoulders suddenly heaved uncontrollably; but he went fiercel on: “You were discussing a scandal that involved my mother’s name (158).

Mrs. Johnson utters his answer in a diplomatic way. She and Fanny have discussed a topic of comment about the town. If she talks about Isabel, she will be speaking in the most charitable spirit and without sharing with other people (159). George is not satisfied with the answer so he goes to his uncle’s house and asks for an opinion about it. His uncle says that there is nothing to be done about it (160). Hearing the answer of his uncle, George feels that there is something happens between his mother and Eugene. So, he asks Eugene not to see his mother again (168). To make his plan successful, he also makes a planning to go abroad with his mother to stop the rumor. But he does not realize that his mother is in a bad condition.

“I don’t know when I’m coming back. Mother and I are starting tomorrow night for a trip around the world(189).

Here, ‘superior’ means George only wants to preserve his mother’s good name. He won’t let Amberson’s name go trailing in the dust like that.
However, it is difficult to stop gossiping so he brought his mother abroad.

**Fictional Finalism**
Fictional finalism applies clearer direction to decisions that are to be making concerning one self. The fictional final goal functions as the organizing principle in the personality. Finalism deals with individual goal of life. Here, the life goal of George is merely to protect his mother’s good name. When Eugene wants to see Isabel, George says that Eugene is not wanted in his house (168). It also happens when Eugene wants to see Isabel for the last time, George still does not allow him to see her until the end of her day (203). Although falling in love with Lucy, Eugene’s daughter, George does not have a willing to precede his relationship.

“I have already given up all idea of Lucy,” he said. “Naturally, I couldn’t have treated her father as I deliberately did treat him... (179).

It is clear that George’s goal of life is to care for his mother good name, until the end of her life. He also does not have a will to continue his relationship with Lucy. He chooses those things to show everybody that Amberson’s name is the proudest name in the city. He will do anything to preserve his family’s name whatever it takes.

**Style of Life**
Style of life is the movement towards the goal. Some individuals react to their inferiority by developing a faulty style of living, while others distinguish themselves by superior achievements. The pampered child may find that he can rule his parents by making demands conspicuously felt (DiCaprio, 1974, 262).

In the frame of George’s style of life, it can be viewed from his effort to overcome his inferiority and establish a sense of superiority by asking his mother not to see Eugene anymore.

“How could you?” George cried. “Mother, it seems to me that if he ever set foot in this house again – oh! I can’t speak of it! Could you see him, knowing what talk it makes every time he turns into this street ...(182).

George's style of life is clear that it is to overcome his feeling of inferiority complex of frightening losing his mother love and achieve some measure of inner superiority in conduct his life by expanding his influence toward his mother. The consequences of his action also influence his relationship with Lucy. He thinks that it is the perfect worth to pay.

**Social Interest**
Social interest is caring for family, for community, for society, for humanity, even for all life. There is a time for George to act like a man. It happens when the city has changed and the Ambersons as well. When Eugene Morgan brings new invention to the city, it develops very fast. He makes some changes in that city, for example; establishing new factory districts, making good credit at the bank, and welcoming housewife purgatory to the city. But for the Ambersons, it is a bad time. They sell their house or rent them to the apartment keeper and the tenants of the multitude of small houses move into apartment houses (196). Realizing this, George has to look for a job.

Meanwhile, George’s uncle and Aunt Fanny also have financial problem. They spend their money into electric headlight investment and do not work well. Uncle has to borrow George money to go to Washington to start his new life and probably he never goes back to the Midland City (216).

George earns big money from his work as a nitro-glycerin expert (241). Although now he has much money, it does not mean that he does not care...
about his aunt. Aunt Fanny thinks that George never cares about her because George always teases her in every situation. But she is wrong, Isabel and George always make her feel comfortable and want her to live with them in their house. This affection can be seen clearly through their action. When Wilbur Minafer, aunt Fanny’s brother, passes away, George thinks that’s a good idea if his aunt still stays with him and his mother.

*I’m afraid poor Aunt Fanny might think now father’s gone we won’t want her to live with us any longer and because I always teased her so much. She might think I’d be for turning her out …* (108).

Secondly, when George has to sell their house, he asks Aunt Fanny to choose an apartment to live in. He gives a big attention to his aunt. He realizes that Aunt Fanny is the last of the family and the only one who can really understand him. He does not want Aunt Fanny too feel lonely and not to be wanted anymore.

*... Let’s see where we stand,” he said feebly. “Let’s see if we can afford this place you’ve selected.”* (228).

From the explanation above, it can be seen that George has a high social interest as he cares and concerns for the others.

Creative Power

Creative power of George Amberson Minafer occurs when he tries to overcome his inferiority feeling by establishing his arrogance toward others. He comes from a wealthy family and is a spoiled son, so he can do anything whatever he likes without takes responsibility. His creative power drives him to show to everybody that he can be regarded because of his family name, Amberson. He knows how to conduct his style of life by behaving like a king.

*They were really his henchmen: George was a lord among boys. In fact, he was a personage among certain sorts of grown people …* (23).

*Did I tell you the nickname they gave me – ‘King’? That was what they called me at that school, ‘King Minafer.’* (29).

In the ends he fails to learn how to be a good son and citizen. If he learns something, he will learn it in a hard way. It happens when the Amberson loses his fortune and George must work for the first time. He gets an accident after he takes a walk on Sunday morning (243). When he is in hospital, Eugene comes and George feels that it is the right moment for him to say sorry to him.

*“You must have thought my mother wanted you to come, “he said, “so that I could ask you—to forgive me.”* (256).

Based on the explanation above, a general point can be made that George Amberson Minafer’s inferiority feeling influences the change of his personality development. George is lofty and arrogant, expecting much out of life just by virtual of being an Amberson. The inferiority feeling of George becomes inferiority complex because of love surrounding him. Everybody love him too well, especially his mother. As the only son of Isabel Amberson, he is an educated young man. It is because his family sends him to a private school in the town.

George’s inferiority complex occurs just by wondering what happens to him if his mother does not love him anymore and the important thing is he carries the name of Amberson. He then, tries to compensate his inferiority
complex by bad attitudes to others. By doing these actions, he believes that his mother and the family will love him more, because they cannot do anything about it. The family name also influences the way of his thinking. He feels inferior about it and covers up his sense of inferiority by focusing on his status, wealth, and power.

When Eugene Morgan comes to town after twenty years break, he pursues Isabel after her husband dies. George knows from Aunt Fanny that people in town are gossiping his mother as being engaged to Eugene. George tries to stop the rumor by doing the action that no one can stop him. He comes to the Mrs. Johnson house, which he considers spread the rumor. He demands the other names who also do the same. He knows that he has done right with his decision.

George does not care what his family may think of his action; his final goal is to keep his mother’s good name. To convince the society, he organizes a trip around the world for his mother and himself.

After he comes home from his trip with the dying mother, he does not make any changes in his behavior. It can be seen from his style of life. Even though his mother is dying and wants to see Eugene for the last time, George does not do what his mother asks. He does such terrible thing to overcome his inferiority of losing his mother affection.

Even though George has several bad attitudes, it does not mean that he does not have a good heart. It can be viewed from his behavior toward Aunt Fanny. Aunt Fanny has no one to love her except George. After her father dies, George asks Aunt Fanny to stay with him and his mother. It also happens when the Amberson family loses their fortune. Still, George has a willing to take care of her. Although it is not easy for George, he chooses to take a risky job to make a big salary. One day he gets a car accident when he takes a walk on Sunday morning. When he is hospitalized, he meets Lucy and her father. In that occasion he feels that he makes a terrible thing and he wants Eugene to forgive him.

Based on the analysis in the previous section and the single problem formulation of the research on How George Amberson Minafer, the major character in the novel, copes with his problem, the researchers could draw two conclusions.

First, George Amberson Minafer copes his problem through changing his behavior, from negative behavior to positive one. He becomes more optimistic, independent, and caring for his family. When George Amberson stills a young man, he was spoiled and loved by his entire family. He has been trained to take rather than to give and has not learned how to face and overcome problems by himself. As a result, he has become very dependent on others. He demands attention from others and expresses it through commands. From those facts, the inferiority feeling of George Amberson Minafer occurs just by wondering what happen to him if his family does not love him, especially his mother. So, he covers up his sense of inferiority by focusing on his status, wealth, and power. After his father passed away, he hears a gossip that his mother is proposed by Eugene Morgan. George feels inferior about it. He does not like if the Ambersons name becomes the talk of the town. He thinks that the Ambersons name is the proudest name in the city. So, to stop the gossip, he asks his mother to go abroad with him. The ultimate and his final goal are to protect his mother’s good name. When he comes back with his dying mother, still the style of life of George does not
make any changes. He does not allow his mother to see Eugene Morgan. Unfortunately, the economic situation has changed. George Amberson loses his superiority in town. However, after that incident, he becomes an optimistic, independent, and caring person in his family. Optimistic means expecting the best and confident. Although his financial need is no longer supported by his family, he is confident that he will get a better new life. Then, the statement of independent and caring his family means that George looks for and takes a job for the first time although it is a risky job. The social interest occurs when his uncle leaves him and his mother while his grandfather passes away. George only have his Aunt. He lived with her in the apartment and takes the responsibility to take care of her.

Second, George copes his problem through his action. He has a courage to admit his mistake. He asks forgiveness to the man that he hurt most. When Wilbur dies, Eugene and Isabel begin planning a marriage. George does not accept it, so he organizes a trip around the world. A few months later, he comes back with his dying mother who then passes away before having seen Eugene again. In the end, George lies in the hospital bed after a car hit him. When Eugene comes to the hospital, the creative powers of George Amberson arise. It is the right moment for him to ask for forgiveness. He realizes that he has hurt other peoples, that is his mother and Eugene Morgan.

In *The Magnificent Ambersons*, there are many aspects of life, which need to be analyzed in more details. The writer accordingly wishes that, there are other researchers who analyzes this novel by using different approaches, such as behaviorist approach or structural analysis. Behaviorist approach can be used because the novel talks about family influences toward the psychological development of children. Meanwhile, structural analysis can be used to compare between the novel and the movie version focusing on either similarities or differences.

The writer realizes that, this study is far from being perfect because of his limited knowledge. Finally, the writer hopes that this study can be useful to the readers and other researcher in widening the knowledge of literary study.

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