

# THE CONFLICTS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN THE NOVEL ENTITLED "*STILL ALICE*" BY LISA GENOVA

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## ABSTRACT

This study about the conflicts of the main character in the novel *Still Alice*. The main character in the novel *Still Alice* is Alice Howland. Alice Howland faces many conflicts with herself, her family and friends in the novel *Still Alice*. The Objectives of the research are to find out the types of conflict that occur on the main character in the novel *Still Alice* and to find out the type of conflict occurs dominantly in the novel *Still Alice*. The writer uses psychological approach for analyzing types of conflict in main character, Alice Howland in the novel *Still Alice*. The writer uses qualitative descriptive method to find out types of conflicts in main character in the novel *Still Alice*. The results of this study shows that Alice Howland has four types of conflict according to the of Kurt Lewin's theory, As follows: Approach - Approach Conflict, Avoidance - Avoidance Conflict, Approach - Avoidance conflict, Double Approach - Avoidance Conflict and the type of conflict occurs dominantly in the novel *Still Alice* is the approach - avoidance conflict. Everyone always experience a lot of problems in their lives. Therefore, everyone should be able to resolve their problems by taking the best decision for them and other people in their problems.

**Keywords:** Literature, Conflicts, Psychology

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of The Study

Literature is a form of written or verbal made by the human who has developed at this time. According to (Hudson, 2006: 10) in his book, *An Introduction to The Study of Literature*, He explained that Literature is a vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and felt about those aspect of it which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us.

*Still Alice* is a novel was first published in 2007. This novel written by an American neuroscientist and writer that named Lisa Genova. *Still Alice* is a novel that tells story about Dr. Alice

Howland. She is a professor of linguistics at Harvard University, mother of three children and wife to John Howland, learns that she is suffering from early onset Alzheimer's disease.

After discovering it was genetically inherited from her father. She immediately told her children to do their medical tests to know whether Alzheimer's disease has infected them. After her children do medical tests finally they know that her eldest daughter named Anna positive for Alzheimer's disease gene. Anna had twins, but they proved that they have not the mutated gene. Only medical tests to her boy named Tom who was negative and her youngest daughter named Lydia decided not to do medical tests. Alice's

disease progresses while relations with her family is strained from many separate directions, including the loss of her academic position, her husband's work demands, and her continually increasing needs.

Over the course of several months, her disease begins to take its toll, and Alice begins to have difficulty answering her questions or spelling word correctly. It gets to the point when, after watching one of Lydia's plays, she initially fails to recognize her daughter. Further stress is added when John announces that he must move to New York City to work as Chairman of the Cancer Biology and Genetics Program at Sloan-Kettering. He will take his wife named Alice to go with him to New York City but Alice does not want to go and their children does not want their mother to go to New York City with their father.

Human life in this world will not always stable because every person will face many conflicts in their life. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010:315), Conflict is a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes. According to (Wandberg, 2001:5-8), in his book, Conflict Resolution: Communication, Cooperation, Compromise, He explained that Conflicts are disagreements or struggles and there are two main kinds of conflict are internal and external conflict. Internal conflicts are a person's struggles with himself or herself.

External conflict occurs between people. Conflict occurs in most relationships because people have their own values, skills, personalities and opinions, people rarely agree on all aspect of their relationship. According to the social psychologist Kurt Lewin, there are four basic ways to categorize conflict situation: (1) the approach-approach conflict, (2) the avoidance-avoidance conflict, (3) the approach-avoidance conflict, and (4) the double approach-avoidance conflict (Bruno, 2002, p.114-115).

The writer choses topic about the conflicts of the main character in the novel Still Alice. The main character in the novel Still Alice is Alice Howland. Alice Howland faces many conflicts with

herself, her family and friends in the novel Still Alice.

Based on the above elaborations, the writer is interested for undertaking a research on Alice Howland. The writer wants to analyze the conflicts of the main character in novel Still Alice through psychological approach. The writer uses the theory of conflict in psychological approach, so the writer or the readers can find out about to find out the types of conflict that occur on the main character in the novel Still Alice and to find out the type of conflict occurs dominantly in the novel Still Alice.

## **1.2 Problem Formulation**

The problem formulation in this study are:

1. What are types of conflict that occur on the main character in the novel Still Alice?
2. Which type of conflict does occur dominantly in the novel Still Alice?

## **1.3 Objective of the Research**

The objective in this study are:

1. To find out the types of conflict that occur on the main character in the novel Still Alice.
2. To find out the type of conflict occurs dominantly in the novel Still Alice.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Definition of Conflict**

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010:315), Conflict is a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes. According to (Wandberg, 2001:5-8), in his book, Conflict Resolution: Communication, Cooperation, Compromise. He explained that Conflicts are disagreements or struggles and there are two main kinds of conflict are internal and external conflict. Internal conflicts are a person's struggles with himself or herself. External conflict occurs between people. Conflict occurs in most relationships. This because all people have their own values, skills, personalities and opinions, people

rarely agree on all aspect of their relationship.

According to (Marcus, 2000, p.366), in his book, *The Handbook of conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, he explained that conflict is incompatibility of ideas, beliefs, behavior, roles, needs, desire, values and so on. According to (Cahn, 1992, p.9), in his book, *Conflict in Intimate Relationships*, He explained that Conflict is an emotionally charged event pattern that typically involves anger and hostility. According to (Rea and Irving, 2010,p.10), They explained that Conflict is realized through characters. Someone wants something or is unhappy or unfulfilled in some way, take action, and meets with conflict.

From the definition above, it can be concluded that conflict is a condition when an individual or group who have differences in ideas, beliefs, customs, habits, etc. within themselves or in interaction with others.

## **2.2 Types of Conflict in Psychology**

According to the social psychologist Kurt Lewin in (Bruno, 2002, p.114-116), there are four basic ways to categorize conflict situations:

- The approach-approach conflict.
- The avoidance-avoidance conflict.
- The approach-avoidance conflict.
- The double approach-avoidance conflict.

The approach-approach conflict exists when an individual is presented with two desirable alternatives, but only one alternative can be obtained. Desirable alternatives are termed positive goals. Example of an approach-approach conflict is selecting birthday card for a friend or relative. She is having a hard time making a final selection. She's in an approach-approach conflict. An approach-approach conflict might seem to induce relatively low stress. After all, the individual has at least two good choices. But such a conflict can in some cases induce quite a bit of stress.

An avoidance-avoidance conflict exists when the individual wants to either escape from or avoid two undesirable alternatives. Undesirable alternatives are termed negative goals.

The central problem with this kind of conflict is that moving away from one negative goal takes one in the direction of the other negative goal. Example for avoidance-avoidance conflict is Nancy is a girl. She is nineteen years old. She is in her first year of college. She doesn't like academic work, is barely passing, and is thinking of dropping out. On the other hand, if she drop out, her parents have indicated they will not support her. She'll have to take a low-paying, unskilled job. If she stays in school, she'll be unhappy. If she takes a low-paying job, she'll be unhappy. She tells her best friend, "I'm between a rock and a hard place."

An approach-avoidance conflict exists when an individual perceives the same goal in both positive and negative terms. Example for approach-avoidance conflict is Glen is in love with Margaret and is thinking about marrying her. He sees her as beautiful, warm, and sexually desirable. On the other hand, Glen's parents are opposed to Margaret. They point out to him that she has a different religious affiliation that that of Glen and his parents. Margaret takes her religion seriously. So do Glen and his parents. The two religions are based on different assumptions. Glen's parents tell him that they don't see how he can ever have a happy marriage with Margaret. If Glen and Margaret have children, Margaret will want to raise them in her religious tradition. Glen will want to raise them in his. When Glen is away from Margaret, he thinks about her constantly. He misses her, and often decides that he'll propose marriage no matter what the consequences. When he's actually with her, the words associated with the marriage proposal won't leave his mouth. He gets cold feet at the last minute. An individual caught in an approach-avoidance conflict often experience a sustained period of emotional conflict before a final decision is made.

Double approach-avoidance conflict exists when an individual simultaneously perceives two goals in both positive and negative terms. This conflict is a more complex version of the singular approach-avoidance conflict. Example of this conflict is Pamela is on a diet. She is having lunch in a restaurant. She

is thinking about ordering either a burger with fries or a salad with broiled chicken. Goal 1, the burger and fries, is the more appealing choice to Pamela from the point of view of taste and general appeal. On the other hand, the negative aspect is that the combination will have too many calories and she will be cheating on her diet. Goal 2. The salad with broiled chicken, is the more appealing choice to Pamela from the point of view of caloric content. On the other hand, the negative aspect is that she is weary of salad and wants to have a treat. Pamela dilemma present a fairly mild version of the double approach-avoidance conflict. However, such conflict can be quite intense.

### **2.3 Conflict Resolution**

Conflict resolution is about relationships and ways of approaching methods for problem solving. According to Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Kilmann in 1974 in (Pennington, 2002: 107), They identified five different modes of addressing conflict as follows:

#### **1. Collaboration**

Collaboration occurs when each of the parties in conflict really desire to satisfy fully the concerns of all parties, to cooperate and to search for a mutually beneficial outcome. People tending towards a collaborative style try to meet the needs of all people involved. These people can be highly assertive but unlike the competitor, they cooperate effectively and acknowledge that everyone is important. This style is useful when you need to bring together a variety of viewpoints to get the best solution. Collaboration means both people work together to achieve agreement.

Collaboration : You and I work together to find the right solution to the problem.

As a result, "I win - you win," because we were willing to work together.

#### **2. Compromise**

Compromise seeks to achieve outcomes which everybody has some agreement with. Compromise means each person gives up something in return for reaching agreement. There is no clear winner or loser. Compromise involves each party

giving in to the other to find an acceptable solution.

Compromise : You and I both give up part of what we wanted or needed to settle the problem.

As a result, "I win some- you win some," because we were both will to give a little.

#### **3. Accommodation**

Accommodation occurs when the goals are compatible but the interactions are not considered important to overall goal attainment. Accommodation is a resolution of conflict in which the opposing participant's request is granted. Accommodation allows others to get what they want. Accommodation is to provide opportunities for others to set up problem solving strategies, especially if the problem is important for others. This allows the emergence of cooperation by giving them opportunities to make decisions.

Accommodation: I do what you want in order to satisfy your needs or wants.

As a result, "I lose - you win" because I had to give up what I wanted or needed.

#### **4. Competition**

Competition tries to achieve the outcomes that reflect an individual's own interests. Competition occurs when the goals are incompatible and the interactions are important to each party's meeting its goals. When one party seeks to achieve certain goals, regardless of the impact on the parties to the conflict, he or she competes to dominate. These win-lose struggles often utilize the formal authority of a mutual superior as the dominant force, and the conflicting parties will each use his or her own power base to resolve a victory in his or her favor. One disputant tries to overpower another disputant by forcing his or her own solution on the other person. This style is considered a "win-lose" approach.

Competition: Either you or I will win, but not both of us. This is a form of fighting.

As a result, "I win - you lose" because only one can win.

#### **5. Avoidance**

Avoidance occurs when an interaction is relatively unimportant to either party's goals, and the goals are



incompatible. Where people withdraw to avoid conflict. They believe it is hopeless to try to resolve conflict, and usually step away from a conflict situation. This style leads to a "lose-lose" situation.

Avoidance: I ignore or refuse to acknowledge the existence of conflict.

As a result, "I lose - you lose" because nothing can be done about it.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

According to (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975:5), They stated that qualitative research is a research procedure which produce descriptive data such as written words or verbal expression comes from people and their behavior that have been observed. Qualitative research served the data in the form of word, not in the form if number, graphic, statistic or other quantitative forms.

In this study, the writer used a qualitative descriptive method to find out the types of conflict that occur on the main character in the novel Still Alice and to find out the type of conflict occurs dominantly in the novel Still Alice. It is categories qualitative method which employs descriptive analytical method because there is a description of data from novel Still Alice. The writer analyzed types of conflict that occur on the main character in the novel Still Alice and type of conflict occurs dominantly in the novel Still Alice. The writer used statements and events in the novel that related the problems. This study is classified into qualitative research.

#### 3.2 Source of Data

The data for this research is novel Still Alice by Lisa Genova which consists of 336 pages. It was published by Simon & Schuster in 2009. To complete the data and theories, the writer used some books and internet which are related to the topic.

### 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 The Approach - Approach Conflict

Alice has approach - approach conflict. In this kind of conflict, the causes of

this conflict are Alice has two desirable alternatives, but only one alternative can be obtained. Desirable alternatives are termed positive goals. The first desirable alternative is Alice wants to Lydia return to their home in Cambridge to accompany her at home when John should go to work to Harvard University every day. The second desirable alternative is Alice likes to see Lydia work hard to become an actress in a drama performance in Los Angeles. She also likes to see Lydia acting in a drama.

*"How are you, Mom?"*

*"Not so good. This semester was hard, without my work, without Harvard, and this disease progressing, and your dad hardly ever home. It's been almost too hard."*

*"I'm sorry. I wish I could be here more. Next fall, I'll be closer. I thought about moving back now, but I just got cast in this great play. It's a small part, but----"*

*"It's okay. I wish I could see you more, too, but I'd never let you stop living your life for me."*

*(Still Alice. P. 267)*

From this sentences and quotations above, it can be concluded that she must choose two options that she likes. Alice choses that Lydia does not need return to their home in Cambridge for a while. Alice wants Lydia to continue her life in Los Angeles until she receives announcements about she accepted as a student at the college she wants. Alice wants Lydia fill her spare time with useful activities until she receives the happy announcements to herself and family.

Conflict resolution to this conflict is accommodation. Accommodation is to provide opportunities for others to set up problem solving strategies, especially if the problem is important for others. This allows the emergence of cooperation by giving them opportunities to make decisions. Alice gives an opportunity to Lydia to participate in drama in Los Angeles. Alice knows that Lydia really wants to participate in the drama performance therefore she gives up

on her desire for Lydia returning to her home in Cambridge to accompany her at home when John goes to work. Alice cooperates with Lydia to make decisions about conflicts they are facing.

#### 4.2 The Avoidance - Avoidance Conflict

Alice has avoidance - avoidance conflict. In this kind of conflict, the causes of this conflict are Alice wants to either escape from or avoid two undesirable alternatives. Undesirable alternatives are termed negative goals. The central problem with this kind of conflict is that moving away from one negative goal takes one in the direction of the other negative goal. The first undesirable alternative is Alice does not want Anna come to her house. The second undesirable alternative is Alice does not want to see Anna in her house.

*"Leave me alone! Get out of my house! I hate you! I don't want to see you here!"*

*Her words hit Anna's face harder than if she'd slapped her. Through the tears that streamed down it, Anna's expression clenched into calm resolve.*

*(Still Alice, p. 244)*

From this sentences and quotations above, it can be concluded that Alice does not want Anna to come to her house and she does not want to see Anna in her house because Alice wants Anna get out from her house. She just wants to be alone in her house without anyone else bothering her again. Conflict resolution to this conflict is avoidance. Alice does not want Anna in her house and she does not want to see Anna at her house. Finally, Anna leaves Alice alone in the house. Alice and Anna avoid each other to prevent they will be angry with each other. Anna does not want to fight with Alice because she is very love with her mother, Alice.

#### 4.3 The Approach - Avoidance Conflict

Alice has approach - avoidance conflict. In this kind of conflict, the causes of this conflict are Alice faces aversive and attractive situations. It is situations of indecision and vacillation

when an individual is confronted with an event or an object that has desirable and undesirable qualities. Approach - avoidance conflict occurs because she perceives the same goals in both positive and negative terms. In positive term, Alice wants to meet with her husband at home on Saturday.

*"Will you be here when I get home on Saturday?" she asked his back as she followed him down the hallway.*

*(Still Alice, P.5)*

In negative term, she cannot spend time with John at home on Saturday.

*"I don't know, I've got a huge day in lab on Saturday."*  
*He collected his briefcase, phone, and keys from the hall table.*

*(Still Alice. P.5)*

John is always too busy with his research in a lab at Harvard University everyday so he cannot meet with Alice at home on Saturday. Alice feels that John is not romantic anymore like in the past when they had just become a newlywed. She wants to spend time together with John on Saturday because she feels if they are too busy with their own work. She always busy to be a guest speaker at other universities, while John is very busy with his research in lab at Harvard University.

*"We haven't seen each other in a while. Please try to be home?" she asked.*

*"I know, I'll try."*

*(Still Alice. p.7-8)*

Conflict resolution to this conflict is avoidance. Alice wants to meet John at home on Saturday so she asked John if he has free times to be with her to spend time with her on Saturday. John tells Alice that he is very busy because he is doing research in his lab at Harvard University. Then, John leaves Alice to go to work to his lab at Harvard University. John immediately leaves Alice because he does not want to fight with her because he cannot give certainty to Alice that he can be at

home with her or he should work in lab at Harvard University on Saturday.

Alice has approach - avoidance conflict. In this kind of conflict, the causes of this conflict are Alice faces aversive and attractive situations. It is situations of indecision and vacillation when an individual is confronted with an event or an object that has desirable and undesirable qualities. Approach - avoidance conflict occurs because she perceives the same goals in both positive and negative terms. In positive term, she wants to run with John.

"Are we going for a run today?" she asked.

"I don't know, maybe, I'm in a meeting. I'll call you later," said John.

"I really need to go for a run."

"I'll call you later."

"When?"

"When I can."

"Fine."

(Still Alice. p.228)

In negative term, she does not want John meeting at his office. She does not want John meeting at his office because she feels lonely and bored when John goes to work. She wants John to accompany her for jogging because she does not has works to do when she stay at home. Conflict resolution to this conflict is avoidance. Alice is bored at home and she does not do anything. Then, she called John and she asked John for jogging with her. John is very busy at his office when Alice called him. He is in a meeting at his office so he could not accompany Alice for jogging. So, he immediately hangs up the phone so he and Alice do not fight on the phone. John does not want to quarrel with Alice because he is very busy right now. Therefore, he avoids Alice and hangs up the phone.

#### **4.4 The Double Approach - Avoidance Conflict**

Alice has double approach - avoidance conflict. In this kind of conflict, the causes of this conflict are Alice is simultaneously attracted to and repelled by each of several alternatives. Several alternatives each have positive and

negative features. Alice must choose between two options. Each option has positive and negative impacts. If she chooses to she remained as a lecturer at Harvard University or she should stop being a lecturer at Harvard University. If she chooses to remain a professor at Harvard University, in positive features, she will happy because she can still be a lecturer and teaching her students. In negative features, she would be a bad lecturer because she cannot teach her students with good. She cannot teach her students with good because she has Alzheimer's disease. Her Alzheimer's disease can come at any time and her disease will make she does not remember everything when she was doing something at the time.

"I'd hoped to stay on for the year and then take my sabbatical, but I hadn't appreciated the extent to which my symptoms were showing and disrupting my lectures. I don't want to be a bad teacher, Eric. That's not who I am."

(Still Alice, p. 211)

If she chooses to stop being a lecturer at Harvard University, in positive features, she has much free time to rest and she can together with her family at home. In negative features, She will stop teaching, researching, and traveling.

She was going to stop teaching, researching, travelling, and lecturing.

(Still Alice, p. 212)

From this sentences and quotations above, Conflict resolution to this conflict is accommodation. Accommodation is to provide opportunities for others to set up problem solving strategies, especially if the problem is important for others. This allows the emergence of cooperation by giving them opportunities to make decisions. Eric Wellman is the head of the psychology department at Harvard University. Eric wants Alice to stop teaching at Harvard University because her teaching ability has been decreased because her Alzheimer. Her students in her class give bad comments about her teaching in her class.



Therefore, Eric asks Alice to stop teaching before her Alzheimer becomes worse. Finally, Alice must obey Eric's order to stop teaching at Harvard University because she does not want to be a bad lecturer for her students.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

### 5.1 Conclusion

After reading, understanding and analyzing the novel *Still Alice*, the writer concluded that there are so many conflicts that occur to Alice Howland as the main character in the Novel *Still Alice*. Generally, there are four types of conflict in the Novel *Still Alice* according to the types of conflict in Kurt Lewin's theory has four types of conflict based on the theories of conflict, according to Kurt Lewin, that are: (1) the approach - approach conflict, (2) the avoidance - avoidance conflict, (3) the approach - avoidance conflict, and (4) the double approach - avoidance conflict. Finally, the type of conflict occurs dominantly in this novel is the approach - avoidance conflict.

### 5.2 Future Work

The types of conflict that are found in *Alice Howland* based on psychological approach. So the future researchers can analyzed the conflicts based on the other dicipline. The writer also suggests to analyze this novel from the others point of view, such as structure of literature, chronological stories, or else. This research also can be used as a reference and guidance to the other researchers who want to know to analyze a novel.

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