

**In Search of Authenticity: Thematic Narratives and Character Development
in Uglies Movie by Scott Westerfeld (2024)**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the thematic narratives of authenticity search and the impact of beauty norms in the movie "Uglies" (2024) by Scott Westerfeld. This research uses qualitative methods, because qualitative methods concentrate on examining the movie's substance, they are employed. The research will explore how social pressure and imposed beauty can shape, but also limit, individual identity. The analysis will explore the relationships between characters that affect the process, including the dynamics of friendships and emerging conflicts. Through the journey of the character Tally Youngblood, this movie shows how the social pressures and unrealistic standards of beauty can define, but not limit, individuals' identity.

Keywords: Thematic Narrative; Characters Development; Movie

INTRODUCTION

Literary existence cannot be separated from everyday human life. This is because humans can be both a subject and an object in literature. Literary work is part of human thought expressed in written or spoken form, including novels, dramas, and poems, and can tell the truth about human experience (Lestari & Nurochman, 2022). Subjects and objects will always be involved in the process of creating literary works. Literature can be formed through the ideas, imaginations, and experiences of a person who is then poured out in the form of literary works. The building elements of literary work are intrinsic and extrinsic. Movie is one of the literary works that continues to evolve to this day.

The world is entering an era of globalization, causing changes in economic structure, power, and education systems. Literature, as part of the art of language, plays a crucial role in this change. Classical literature, created during customs, aims to deliver moral, ethical, and educational messages while also being entertaining. It was spread through word of mouth and had various versions, with authorship often

not published or anonymous. Today, literature consists of two types: classical and modern.

Refers to the title, authenticity is assessed by the congruous relationship between the entity and the feature of development over time that serves as a referent (Dammann et al., 2021). Authenticity is assessed based on the consistent relationship between entities, such as cultural artifacts or historical sites, and the developmental characteristics that occur over time, which serve as a reference. This assessment considers the integrity of the entity, historical significance, and the relationship it maintains with those features and developments. Authenticity predicts greater presence of meaning in life, in general (between-persons) and in the moment (within-persons). Authenticity is related to the experience of meaning in life, both in the context of the individual and interpersonal relationships. Individuals who live authentically tend to find more meaning and feel more connected to their values and goals. In certain moments, acting in accordance with one's identity also creates a more meaningful experience.

Character studies emphasize the importance of authenticity in character development, as it helps the audience understand the depth of meaning in a story. In 2024, the movie "Uglies," adapted from Scott Westerfeld's novel, explores the theme of seeking authenticity in a dystopian society where physical appearance is a primary focus. The movie follows Tally Youngblood, who doubts the values societally instilled in him, as he witnesses the consequences of plastic surgery. The movie explores the conflict between the desire for acceptance and the need for true identity, highlighting the impact of socially constructed beauty.

The movie also highlights the tension between the desire to look perfect and the search for deeper happiness. Each character's background and motivation contribute to the depth of the story, with Tally's transformation from an obedient girl to a brave rebel. Through powerful narration and characters, "Uglies" not only provides entertainment but also a profound reflection of issues relevant to modern society. Through powerful narration and characters, the movie encourages audiences to explore the deeper and more humane values of beauty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review article synthesizes earlier research to improve the body of evidence by offering a thorough summary of previous research on an issue, concept, or methodology (Paul & Criado, 2020). Literature reviews are essential to academic research since they help gather up-to-date material and evaluate the state of an area. The purpose of this literature review is to gather information, carry out research, and adhere to particular standards when creating a proposal. The fundamental ideas associated with the title under investigation are explained here.

Cognitive literary studies explore the ethical and pedagogical functions of literature, contributing to personal, social, and environmental improvement

through reader processing and ethical involvement (Easterlin, 2019). Research and literature studies are closely intertwined. The literature must almost always be examined in research projects. A literature review is a very useful tool for research paper writing. One of them talks about the most current discoveries in study. Duplicate slices from previous investigations will definitely exist because no research is truly new. A literature study method is a series of steps that include processes for preserving research resources, reading and recording materials, and gathering data from repositories.

When written effectively, literature might motivate people, offer provocative ideas, as well as advance society by preserving a country's lifestyle and legacy (Murmur, 2023). Obviously, a researcher needs to be fluent in the subject of the study in order to carry it out. If not, the study's failure can be verified in a large presentation. One should exercise caution while selecting sources. due to the fact that not all study findings can be cited. The theories behind the issues and areas that need to be investigated can be found by doing a literature review. One way to solve problems is through the study of literature, which involves locating previously published sources.

Previous Related Study

Studies on related topics are essential in guiding new research, as they allow researchers to compare findings, identify existing gaps, and avoid duplication. Relevant studies help validate the scientific reliability of a research project and clarify the originality of the current study. By examining these prior works, the author ensures that the research maintains its academic integrity and avoids unintentional replication. The focus of this current study on imaginary elements and narrative structures has been previously explored by several scholars, indicating that while the topic is not new, each study, including this one, introduces unique perspectives and objects of analysis. The following are several previous studies that have inspired and informed this research.

The first study is a journal article by Ririn Marlina (2012) titled "*The Analysis of Thematic Role in Narrative Texts of Senior High School Textbooks.*" This qualitative study uses the theories of Jackendoff and Saeed to examine the thematic roles of noun phrases in narrative texts found in Senior High School textbooks for Grade X. Marlina's research emphasizes how thematic roles are tied to grammatical function and significance, analyzing ten narrative texts from *Developing English Competencies* and *Interlanguage* textbooks.

The second relevant study is by Mia Annisa Utami and Isti Siti Saleha Gandana (2018) in their paper "*The Magic of Howl's Moving Castle: An Analysis of Character Development in a Fantasy Novel.*" This research explores how magical experiences in Diana Wynne Jones' *Howl's Moving Castle* contribute to the protagonist's character development. The authors argue that surprise and

amazement—common features in fantasy literature play a crucial role in transforming the characters, particularly the main protagonist.

The third study is by Candra Nila Pangestuningtyas, Nur Hidayat, and Ririn Ambarini (2023) titled "*The Characters Development in the Film Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll and its Contribution to Teaching Drama.*" This study highlights sixteen types of character development within the film *Alice in Wonderland*, identifying traits such as obedience, imagination, assertiveness, gullibility, and kindness. The research emphasizes the film's educational value in drama teaching, especially regarding the complexity of character traits.

The fourth study is authored by Marselina Mistin Asmiaty, Singgih Daru Kuncara, and Indah Sari Lubis (2022) under the title "*The Character Development of Isabella Linton in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights Novel.*" Using Kenan's and Griffith's theoretical frameworks, the researchers analyze Isabella Linton's transformation through narration and dialogue. The study concludes that Isabella evolves from a naïve and pampered woman into a strong, independent individual. This character progression reflects the profound psychological and emotional changes brought about by personal experiences.

These previous studies provide a strong foundation for the present research while also highlighting the uniqueness of this study's object—*Uglies*, a dystopian movie adaptation by Scott Westerfeld. While the thematic focus on character development and imaginary elements is shared, this study offers a new lens through which to view those themes in the context of modern dystopian cinema.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study employed a qualitative research approach using narrative and character analysis methods to explore the theme of authenticity in the 2024 film *Uglies*, adapted from the novel by Scott Westerfeld. The qualitative design allows for an in-depth exploration of the movie's content, particularly focusing on its structure, character development, and thematic presentation. As Aspers and Corte (2019) note, qualitative research helps bridge the gap between descriptive understanding and interpretative depth by generating new insights into complex social phenomena—in this case, identity and beauty as portrayed in dystopian fiction. The selected sample for this study is the movie *Uglies*, which serves as the primary object of analysis. The film was chosen for its rich thematic content, particularly regarding self-perception, societal control, and the concept of beauty.

Instruments and Procedures

Data collection was carried out through comprehensive screening and close observation of the *Uglies* movie. The researcher systematically analyzed the movie's narrative elements, such as plot progression, dialogue, and symbolic imagery related to the themes of beauty, conformity, and personal identity. Special attention was given to the main character, Tally Youngblood, and other key figures to trace their emotional development and transformation throughout the film. The data collection process included taking notes on important scenes and dialogues, listening closely to each line spoken, and creating a detailed summary table that maps significant plot events. In addition, literature-based instruments were employed, including journal articles, books, and theoretical texts that examine beauty standards, self-acceptance, and gender representation in media. Although the study did not involve direct empirical collection of audience feedback, it incorporated secondary sources such as reviews, online commentaries, and social media responses to better understand public reception and cultural interpretations of the movie. This multi-faceted method ensures that both narrative content and external perceptions are considered in the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a systematic process to ensure accuracy and depth in interpreting the movie's themes and character arcs. The following steps were taken: (1) watching the entire *Uglies* movie from start to finish to capture the full narrative scope; (2) paying close attention to every scene for thematic and symbolic significance; (3) carefully listening to every line of dialogue for emotional tone, linguistic cues, and thematic clues; (4) documenting key observations and moments relevant to character development and authenticity; and (5) organizing the findings into a structured table that highlights important events, their narrative function, and their relation to the central theme of authenticity. This analysis was further contextualized using supporting literature and theories from media studies, cultural criticism, and feminist thought. Through this method, the study aimed to reveal how *Uglies* reflects broader societal messages about identity, transformation, and resistance to imposed norms in modern culture.

RESULT AND DISUSSION

Thematic Narratives in the *Uglies* Movie and Reflect on the Theme of Authenticity

In this part, we will analyze how the thematic narrative in the movie *Uglies* (2024) reflects the main theme raised in this work, namely the search for authenticity. This theme is presented in depth through character development, moral conflicts, and the representation of a dystopian world that pressures individuals to conform to beauty standards set by society. In this context, the movie *Uglies* not only explores the concept of beauty but also delves into who we truly are and how individuals can struggle to find their true identity in a system full of social manipulation.

Dystopian World and Socially Constructed Beauty Standards

The movie *Uglies* tells the story of a dystopian world, where physical beauty is the main measure of an individual worth. In this society, everyone of a certain age is required to undergo plastic surgery to change their appearance to “Pretty”, which is the uniform and desired beauty by the entire community. However, these imposed beauty standards hide a deeper reality: The outward appearance is not a true representation of who someone is. The thematic narrative reflects the main conflict in the story: Does external beauty truly reflect a person's essence, or is there another, more authentic dimension that needs to be discovered within humanity. The thematic narrative also raises questions about how social systems can influence individuals' views of themselves and the world around them. In this case, *Uglies* criticizes the significant influence of the media and social pressure that drive people to conform to a narrow definition of beauty.

Tally's Character Journey

From Compliance to the Quest for Authenticity Tally Youngblood, as the main character, becomes the centre of this narrative. She was initially a character who desperately wanted to undergo surgery to become “Pretty” and felt satisfaction in being part of the accepted social norm. However, after meeting Shay, who rejected the operation and chose to live outside the system, Tally began to question the true meaning of beauty and Self-Identity. The narrative of Tally transforming from someone who conforms to norms into an individual who begins to seek the truth about herself reflects the theme of authenticity in this movie. Tally's inner journey from uncertainty to understanding the true value of freedom and self-acceptance is the core of this thematic narrative. Tally realized that the beauty imposed by the system only concealed the great lie about who she truly was.

Social and Moral Conflict the Choice between Compliance and Rebellion

The social and moral conflicts faced by Tally further strengthen the theme of authenticity. In the World of *Uglies*, society regulates the identity of each individual in a highly structured manner, and those who oppose the system are considered a threat. Tally is faced with the dilemma of following the predetermined path or rebelling and seeking the truth about who she is. This movie clearly depicts how social pressure can create discomfort in Individuals, who want to live authentically. Tally must choose between adhering to the norms expected by society or following Shay's path, who strives to live without the constraints of the existing system. This is a representation of the search for authenticity: One must face the difficult choice between being part of the system order struggling to be oneself, even if it means going against the tide.

Thematic Reflection on Beauty and Identity

The movie *Uglies* also reflects a profound thematic narrative about how society defines beauty and identity. The society in this movie imposes a very uniform standard of beauty, where Individuals, who do not conform to that standard, are considered “ugly” or less valuable. However, the narrative of this movie invites the audience to ponder whether true beauty can really be defined solely by physical appearance. On the other hand, this movie illustrates that the quest for authenticity is not about physical achievements or outward appearances, but rather about achieving self-understanding and acceptance of who we truly are. Tally, in her journey of self-discovery, finally understands, that a person's true identity does not lie in their physical appearance, but rather in their choices, actions und self-awareness.

Tally Youngblood and the Search for Authenticity in *Uglies* Movie 2024

In this part, we will discuss the development of the main character, Tally Youngblood, in the *Uglies* movie 2024, with a focus on her search for authenticity. Tally is the protagonist in the dystopian world introduced by Scott Westerfeld in the novel *Uglies*, which has been adapted in a movie. Tally grew up in a highly structured society, where physical beauty and adherence to social norms became the main goals of every individual's life.

Introduction to Tally Youngblood

Tally Youngblood is a teenage girl living in a society that divides its citizens in two main classes: “Uglies” and “Pretties” At a certain age, everyone is required to undergo cosmetic surgery to become “Pretty”, which is a uniform and highly valued beauty standard. Tally, like many others, longs for this change. However, the character Tally faces a major dilemma when she begins to question the meaning of true beauty and what actually makes someone “authentic” or “real”.

The Process of Seeking Authenticity

Tally’s search for authenticity begins when she meets Shay, a friend who refuses to undergo the operation and chooses to escape to a group called the “Smokes”. This group strives to live free from social control, that pressures them to change physically for the satisfaction of a larger system. In this journey, Tally is faced with a significant moral choice: to follow the norms set by society or to question those values and seek a more authentic way of life. Tally, at first, saw the operation as a path to happiness and acceptance in society. However, as time went by and interactions with Shay and the members of the Smokers group, he began to feel discomfort towards the external changes demanded by society. Dieses reflects the search for authenticity – whether a person's identity is truly reflected in their outward appearance, or if there is something deeper that determines who they really are.

Internal Conflict and Character Development

Tally experiences a profound internal conflict, between the desire to be part of the "Pretty" society and the urge to discover the truth about herself. In this journey, Tally's character evolves from someone obsessed with outward appearance to an individual who is more reflective and daring enough to question the existing system. At a certain point, Tally feels that she has to choose between staying loyal to her friends (like Shay) or following the social desire to become "Pretty", which means, she would have to betray more authentic principles. These decisions illustrate the moral dilemmas often faced by Individuals in a world trapped in narrow beauty standards and social norms.

Achievement of Authenticity and Tally's Transformation

The peak of Tally's journey towards authenticity occurs when she realizes that true beauty is not about physical appearance, but about choosing to be herself, without the pressure to meet others' expectations. In this process, Tally not only faces external pressures, but also transforms into a stronger, more independent individual, aware of the impact of her decisions. Through the character development of Tally, the *Uglies* movie invites the audience to reflect on what it means to be authentic in a world that is often obsessed with outward appearances. Tally finally understands that the beauty imposed by society only obscures the true essence of identity and personal freedom.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the 2024 movie *Uglies* presents a powerful thematic narrative centered on the search for authenticity, as portrayed through the emotional and psychological journey of Tally Youngblood. Her character development—from initially conforming to society's beauty standards to ultimately rejecting imposed norms—illustrates the struggle many individuals face in defining their identity. The film critiques how external pressures and idealized images of perfection can suppress individuality, while also emphasizing that true authenticity arises from self-awareness, personal choice, and the courage to defy societal expectations. Tally's transformation embodies the message that reclaiming one's authentic self requires inner strength, reflection, and the determination to live in alignment with one's own values, not those dictated by others.

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