



The Problem with the Inferiority Complex in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*

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Résumé : Les gens naissent avec différentes personnalités et différents types de caractères. Certains sont humbles, modestes, ouverts d'esprit et prévenants ; par contre, d'autres sont fiers d'eux-mêmes, vaniteux, bornés et inconsiderés. Ceux qui sont extravertis et ouverts d'esprit ont tendance à être philanthropiques, tandis que ceux qui sont introvertis ou bornés ont tendance à être des narcissiques ou des individualistes. La pièce de théâtre d'Harold Pinter porte sur Davies, un personnage complexe ruiné par un complexe d'infériorité. Basé sur l'approche littéraire psychanalytique freudienne, cet article cherche à montrer comment le complexe d'infériorité est dangereux pour la cohésion sociale et comment il peut nuire au bien-être et au développement de l'individu.

Mots clés: complexe d'infériorité, conséquences, cohésion sociale, épanouissement de l'individu.

Abstract: People are born with different personalities and different character types. Some are humble, modest, open-minded and considerate, while others are proud, vain, narrow-minded and inconsiderate. Those who are extravert and open-minded tend to be philanthropic, whereas those who are introvert or narrow-minded tend to be narcissistic or individualistic. Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*, is a play about Davies, a complex character ruined by inferiority complex. Depending on Freudian psychoanalytic literary approach, this article seeks to show how inferiority complex is dangerous for social cohesion and how it can undermine people's welfare and fulfillment.

Keywords: inferiority complex, consequences, social cohesion, individual welfare.

Introduction

Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker* satirizes the life of Davies, a caretaker who refuses to yield to his superiors' orders, because of his old age which hoists him high above his bosses' heads. Instead of accepting his subservient and inferior position as a caretaker so as to succeed in life, he wants to put his age forward and lord it over everybody involving his own bosses without whom he cannot survive. The inferiority complex dominates Davies' life fully giving him no chance to show human virtues that could contribute to his social, professional emancipation and welfare. The inferiority complex creates in Davies what one can term character disorder, instead of playing his role of employee or servant to be in peace with people, he becomes vain, embittered and arrogant to everybody without distinction. Wherever he goes, his buzzword is that people do not respect him, despite his old age and broad life experience. He refuses people to

give him orders; he refuses to listen to people; he refuses to admit his faults; in short, he wants to appear Mr Know all everywhere and whenever.

Consequently, this article while depending on the Freudian psychoanalytic literary approach, intends to show how the inferiority complex can be a threat for social integration and how it can undermine an individual's welfare and fulfillment.

The work is divided into three parts, namely the Concept of the Inferiority Complex, the Inferiority Complex in the play and the Consequences of the Inferiority Complex in the play. While the first part presents the concept of inferiority complex in general, the second part focuses on the manifestation of the phenomenon of inferiority complex through the character of Davies in the play, and the third and last part finally, lingers on the bad effects of inferiority complex in the play, impeding the social harmony and the individual welfare.

1. The Concept of the Inferiority Complex

To start with, the theory of the *inferiority complex* was first advanced by Adler in his studies concerning the development of the human personality throughout the child's growth. He believed that the inferiority feeling in man is part of human nature and therefore universal, and is induced by a gap between, the ability of an individual and the task which he is expected to perform. The individual resorts to inferiority complex to shield any criticism to his incapacity to do a task.

The superiority complex is one of the ways that a person with an inferiority complex may use as a method of escape from his difficulties. He assumes that he is superior when he is not, and this false success compensates him for the state of inferiority which he cannot bear. The normal person does not have a superiority complex; he does not even have a sense of superiority.

Some authors have argued that the superiority and inferiority complex cannot both be found in the same individual since an individual with a superiority complex truly believes that he is superior to others. Kahn & Doctor (2000)

Looking at this collectively, an inferiority complex is the psychological phenomenon which is formed from the time of birth onwards through comparison between self and the environment. It is the universal objective phenomenon which occurs to all people who are separated and exist apart from one's ability and position in reality. However, if the wrong direction is taken within an inferiority complex, there is a possibility of a person continuing in a negative way of life. Thus, an inferiority complex is essentially neither good nor bad. Sweeney (1998, p. 13)

Adler reveals that an inferiority complex stems from the lacking of a person's disposition and that it is also a constant state of tension and strain. (Adler, 1942, p. 52) Furthermore, the exaggerated consciousness of people brings about excessive mental tension and forces perfection. This is why exaggerated ambition ultimately does not promote the ability to work, but on the contrary limits it. Hwan (2005, p. 23)

An inferiority complex forms when one is not at the level that one wants to be. This may arise when a person thinks that he is not at the same position as his peers or from the thought that he is totally unable to deal with an issue. Thus, an inferiority complex is the expression of a person's fear of confrontation with problems and also the conviction that he is unable to solve a problem due to his lack of preparation for that problem. Adler says that an inferiority complex invokes tension, causes a limit in a person's actions, and makes one to be static during trials or to move backwards in such difficult situations. Adler (1942, p. 52)

According to Eun-Mi, the problem of an inferiority complex is diversely evident in the worker. An inferiority complex may originate from a personal experience, the living environment or irrational thoughts. Workers are regularly exposed to situations of a comparative nature, for example, from the results of a promotion test, a process which is not easy on the workers. Eun-MI (2011, p. 8)

People compare themselves with one another, or they have a generalized pursuit of competence and power. Following this ever-changing, fast-paced society brings about a loss in humanity, and this leads to psychological and emotional discord. The emotions that stem from the loss of self-confidence in such a rival society develop into inferiority complexes.

Since humans exist in the nature of the society, we are constantly in a situation of comparison with and reflection off of one another, an inferiority complex is born out of the endless comparison that is a part of one's natural and inevitable life. There is, of course, no one who is totally free of the awareness of comparison.

The incorrect comparison made between an individual and another person leads to self-abasement, self-loss and inner emotions of worthlessness which do not allow for one to properly adjust to society. These are also the main source for the development of an inferiority complex. The social problems that arise through inferiority complexes are those that do not allow for personal relationships to develop between people at work or in an organization; along with the sad effect of people expressing their bad and negative emotions to their family which hurts them.

The psychoanalyst Adler (1998, p. 139) has stated that the inferiority complex is a basic emotion present in all humans, and that it heavily influences their actions.

The inferiority complex that is deeply imbedded within a person does not easily show itself externally. A person with this kind of inferiority complex may try to hide their complex by transforming their emotional deficiency and turning those emotions into blame or disregard of others; as well as putting on a bluff or façade over that which they lack. However, on the other hand others with an inferiority complex may fall into despair, desperation, renunciation and disappointment. Goo (2001, p. 43).

Inferiority complex may be defined as an abnormal or pathological state which, due to the tendency of the complex to draw unrelated ideas into itself, leads the individual to depreciate himself, to become unduly sensitive, to be too eager for praise and flattery, and to adopt a derogatory attitude toward others. Moritz, Werner & Collami (2006)

Inferiority complex is an exaggeration of normal inferiority feelings and individuals with inferiority complex display a tendency towards overcompensation and overreaction. Heidbreder (1927) Inferiority complex or lack of self-esteem leads to negative or risk-seeking behaviors in young people. Moritz (2006)

The next point is focusing on the inferiority complex as it is experienced in the play.

2. The Inferiority Complex in the Play

With reference to psychologists, a past negative experience, for instance, an experience of weakness, helplessness, insecurity, rejection and dependency leads to a low self-esteem which also plays a huge part in building inferiority complex. Superiority complex is one of the ways that a person with an inferiority complex may use as a method of escape from such difficulties or experiences. The character of Davies goes through this experience in Harold Pinter's *The Caretaker*.

Like Davies, an individual with the inferiority complex suffers from the inability to fit into the society or peer-group. A person who is not properly trained to answer life's problems may try to prove to be of a personal superiority at all cost in order to fit into the society or peer group. If an individual cannot be better than another on their own merit, they will attempt to tear down another person or group to maintain their superior position.

A person suffering from an inferiority complex finds himself to be much less and low when weighed on different qualities as compared to any other man. For instance, a student may feel inferior to others he considers brilliant in his class

because of his poor performance. Feeling inferior stems from comparing oneself with others and perceiving oneself as not being up on equal level with others on a certain scale.

As a matter of fact, Davies displays many symptoms of inferiority complex in the play. Haughtiness, pride and arrogance are some symptoms of inferiority complex that are visible in the character of Davies in *The Caretaker*. Davies' reactions and attitude towards his workmates at the workplace denote haughtiness, pride and arrogance. Let us consider the following reaction of his when his comrades ask him a service:

DAVIES (*following*). Yes, well say I had! Even if I had! Even if I was supposed to take out the bucket, who was this git [**silly, stupid, annoying, idiot**] to come up and give me orders? We got the same standing. He's not my boss. He's nothing superior to me.

(Pinter, 1977, p. 18-19)

A close prospect of Davies' reaction above reveals lots of disdain, arrogance and pride towards his workmates he is supposed to respect without discrimination of age, race, sex or whatsoever for a good harmony in the mist of the working group. Workers are supposed to love one another, respect one another to preserve a good atmosphere among the workers so as to achieve good results for the boss or the employer. But the presence of Davies among the workers creates a lot of tension between them because Davies is not friendly and easy-going. He is inconsiderate towards others whose orders he finds impossible to obey, claiming they are not his boss. He is always rebellious and adamant; he is not serviceable, helpful and obliging like others; he is really uncontrollable and inflexible. The simple fact of asking him to take out the bucket sets him aflame and raging like a mad dog, abusing others, calling them git, which means they are silly, stupid, idiot and annoying to him. This is a strong evidence that Davies is probably a victim of the inferiority complex in the play.

Still showing Davies' haughtiness, arrogance and pride, let us look at the conversation below:

ASTON. Try these. *Davies takes the shoes, takes off his sandals and tries them on.*

DAVIES. Not a bad pair of shoes. (*He trudges round the room.*)

They're strong, all right. Yes. Not a bad shape of shoe. This leather's hardy, en't? Very hardy.

Pinter (1977, p. 24)

In the dialogue above, Davies is critically in need of shoes. Because of his inability to work and live with others, Davies becomes homeless like a loose dog, wandering here and there aimlessly until he comes to Aston with bare feet, he wore only some worn-out sandals and therefore needed shoes for his poor feet. But, when this kind and compassionate man named Aston is about to offer him shoes, Davies' arrogance and pride is out again. Instead of accepting the shoes immediately, he tries to find fault in them claiming the leather is hardy, which could vex the donator.

A similar case that highlights Davies' haughtiness, arrogance and pride, is when Aston proposes him to find shelter in his room because Davies is a nomadic, wretched homeless old man, wandering aimlessly:

Aston (attending to the toaster). Would ... would you like to sleep here?

Davies. Here?

Aston. You can sleep here if you like.

Davies. Here? I don't know about that. ...

Pinter (1977, p. 25)

Davies is homeless, Aston moved with compassion proposes him to sleep with him in his room. But, look at the way Davies react to the offer. Instead of jumping at the opportunity and show utter gratitude to the benefactor, Davies knowing well that he has nowhere to go, says he does not know whether he will accept to stay with him or not. What a proud man Davies is!

Another aspect of Davies' haughtiness, arrogance and pride concerns his attitude in the sleeping room by Micks:

DAVIES. Listen. I've lived all my life in the air, boy. You don't have to tell me about air. What I'm saying is, there's too much air coming in that window when I'm asleep.

Pinter (1977, p. 62)

Here above, the homeless Davies if offered a room by Micks where he sleeps with Micks' brother Aston. In order to allow a bit of the air inflow in the room, Aston opens the windows a bit, which gets Davies very annoyed claiming that rain comes in in the room on him. Actually, it is true, because a few drops of rain could come into the room without any great disturbance. But, look at the way Davies react, he is violent to his host whose sole aim is to help him, to give him a shelter. He goes far as to ask his host, his landlord, to exchange beds:

DAVIES. But listen. I'm with you, I'll be here, I'll do it for you. Pause. We'll do it together! Pause. Christ, we'll change beds!

Pinter (1977, p. 86)

So, instead of being polite to his benefactor and landlord, Davies wants to dictate and lord it over him out of the inferiority complex. Another symptom of Davies' inferiority complex, is that, he wants to be always right for others to be always wrong, in such a way that he is always in disagreement with people around. Due to his inferiority complex, Davies finds everybody lacking, wrong and out of place. He even finds monks, the religious men whom he once served, short of his expectations. He goes far as to insult them, calling them bastards: "DAVIES. Them bastards at the monastery let me down again." Pinter (1977, p. 22)

Davies is always craving for attention, for a bagatelle, he rages like a roaring lion. What makes him to call the monks bastards is that they do not give him enough food to eat, they feed him like a bird, like a dog, like a wild animal:

DAVIES. ... I went round to this kitchen, see? Meal they give me! A bird, I tell you, a little bird, a little tiny bird, he could have ate it in under two minutes. Right, they said to me, you've had your meal, get off out of it. Meal? I said, what do you think I am, a dog? Nothing better than a dog. What do you think I am, a wild animal?

Pinter (1977, p. 23-24)

Everything good thing that the good people do for Davies is lacking according to him. He is never satisfied with the service people do to him while he himself is incapable of doing any service to them in return. He finds faults everywhere, he is always complaining of the wrong people do to him, but he is not able to account for the good he does for people. One can notice social withdrawal in his character. As people with the inferiority complex, Davies usually feels uncomfortable being around others, particularly in a crowded place like the working place he has deserted because of his incapacity to live with other workers.

Just as people with inferiority complex, Davies is always angry claiming that people lack him respect. He feels disrespected all the time. Because he feels a certain low esteem of himself, he wants people to show him respect by all means. He does not deserve respect, but he claims it by force:

DAVIES. ... Look here, I said, I'm an old man, I said, where I was brought up we had some idea how to talk to old people with the proper respect...

Pinter (1977, p. 19)

The statement above denotes his naughtiness claiming respect at all costs. Under normal circumstances, he does not need to tell the younger ones to respect him, respect is natural and deserved, not gained.

In fact, Davies' symptoms of inferior feelings are of two general types: withdrawal tactics, including self-consciousness, sensitiveness, and withdrawal from social contacts; and aggressive tactics, including excessive seeking for attention, criticism of others, overly lack of dutiful obedience, and worry. Withdrawal strategies are frequently used as the aggressive strategies.

The sensitivity of people with inferiority complex to criticism produces resentment to unfavorable comparisons, offense at friendly jests, rebellion at correction, defense of their self-chosen course of action, desire for praise, and an excessive attention to little things. It always suspects personal injustice and is ever ready to make a defense. Withdrawal from social contacts shows fear of people and lack of self-confidence, sometimes resulting in daydreaming about being the conquering hero or the suffering martyr type. Although aggressive tactics are used less frequently than are withdrawal strategies, the former are more violent in nature. Excessive seeking for attention and popularity often leads to the sacrifice of principle in order to gain the favor of others.

As a matter of fact, Davies, as a man with inferiority complex, likes criticizing people without being ready to be criticized in his turn:

ASTON. Were you dreaming or something?

DAVIES. Dreaming?

ASTON. Yes

DAVIES. I don't dream. I've never dreamed.

DAVIES . . . what kind of noises?

ASTON. You were making groans. You were jabbering.

DAVIES. Jabbering? Me?

ASTON. Yes.

Pinter (1977, p. 31)

The dialogue above shows that Davies is quite allergic to criticism. He likes feeling the victim, but never the perpetrator. Davies makes a lot of noise when asleep, his snoring prevents Aston from enjoying sleep. Aston the host, the owner of the room just informs Davies about this uncomfortable situation. Davies rejects the reproach outright claiming that he has never dreamed, which is pompous and blatant exaggeration. How can a human being claim not to dream! Not dreaming is synonymous of not sleeping, because without dream without

sleep! Instead of apologizing for this unconscious phenomenon of snoring, he wants to reason out to nib his nonsense in the bud. At times, he will say no one has ever question him like Aston is doing. Somebody finds you accommodation and you do not want to respect him claiming that you are older than him, he should not tell you, you are wrong. On the whole, Davies' behavior as a person with the inferiority complex foresees and predicts a danger in the play.

The next point emphasizes the consequences of the inferiority complex on the characters in the play.

3. The Consequences of the Inferiority Complex in the Play

Inferiority complex has negative effects on the individual's relationship with people around due to his haughtiness, arrogance and pride. Socialization, let say, interacting with other people around requires much self-denial and sacrifice. A person with inferiority complex, is not ready to make sacrifices in terms of renunciation of his egos, self-pride to live smoothly and harmoniously with others around. Because he is reluctant to other people' reproaches to him, offering resistance any time he is reprovved or criticized, no one would like to be with him. Human beings are imperfect creatures, but at the same time, they should get prepared to accept criticism that can help them improve their behavior and become better and more sociable as social beings.

Mick and his brother Aston were much willing at the beginning to accept Davies, a wretched old man and stranger to them because they believe in human hospitality, philanthropy, humanitarianism, love and compassion. But, since the old man despite the fact that he was a stranger to these men, did not show them any consideration, let alone any grain of gratitude or gratefulness due to his inferiority complex, the latter have rejected him as people would do to a stinking and filthy goat. Mick who was gentle, considerate and meek to Davies at the beginning, has become nasty towards him because Davies is quite unbearable with his inferiority complex. He criticizes people, but he refuses to be criticized in turn, which is not normal. The diction used by Mick in his conversation with Davies insinuates a lot of anger, disinclination and repugnance towards the person of Davies:

MICK. ... I think I'm coming to the conclusion that you're an old rogue. You're nothing but an old scoundrel.

[...]

MICK. You're stinking the place out. You're an old robber, there's no getting away from it. You're an old skate. You don't belong I a nice place like this. You're an old barbarian. Honest.

Pinter (1977, p. 44)

A close look at Mick's choice of words to depict and qualify revilingly Davies, shows that Mick is out of control; he has lost his temper because Davies has got on his nerves. Mick is red with anger because Davies' complex of inferiority-based behavior has broken the record in terms of insubordination and insubjection.

Through this dialogue, Mick is trying to vilipend and vilify Davies to let him know that interacting with other people demand lots of humility and courtesy, which are cruelly lacking in the character of Davies victim of inferiority complex. Mick calls him a rogue, then a scoundrel, then an old skate, then a barbarian. It is quite a litany of insults to the character of Davies because of his inferiority complex which denies him any sense of humanity and sociability.

The pile of abuses addressed to Davies underline his worthlessness brought about by inferiority complex. First, he is said to be a rogue, meaning he is a villain, unprincipled, deceitful and unreliable person, which is true to his behavior in the play. Throughout the play Davies' behavior is always predictable in terms of arrogance and unpredictable in terms of awkwardness, waywardness and perverseness of temper. The second attribute of Davies is scoundrel, which means he is a mean, worthless fellow, a person without honor and virtue. The third qualification is skate, which means Davies is a mean, worn-out and contemptible person. The fourth attribute is barbarian, which means Davies is uncivilized or uncultured person, a cruel and savage person, one without pity or humanity. All this vilifying and abusive language perfectly fits Davies' character due to his inferiority complex. Shall we listen to the conversations below to discover more the character of Davies who has many difficulties to live with people around due to his inferiority character?

DAVIES. Don't come too near!

ASTON. You've no reason to call that shed stinking.

DAVIES points the knife.

You stink.

DAVIES. What!

ASTON. You've been stinking the place out.

DAVIES. Christ, you say that to me!

ASTON. For days. That's one reason I can't sleep.

DAVIES. You call me that! You call me stinking!

ASTON. You better go. (Pinter, 1977: 78)

DAVIES. ... It was your brother who must have told you. He's nutty!...

MICK. What did you call my brother?

DAVIES. When?

MICK. He's what?

[...]

MICK. Nutty? Who's nutty? Pause
Did you call my brother nutty? My brother. That's a bit of That's a bit of an
impertinent thing to say, isn't it?

Pinter (1977, p. 82)

Through the conversation above, Davies sounds despicable and scornful because he is aggressive in the language use. He does not want people to tell him the truth about him, he is always on defense. He is retaliatory and ready to fight back to save his image at all costs. Suffering from inferiority complex, Davies has never recognized the real values of things, everything he comes across is vilified and vilipended. Indeed, Davies is a stranger by Aston and Mick, yet he abuses everything theirs though he entirely depends on them for his survival: food, clothing and accommodation. It is as if Davies is sawing a branch on which he is perched, which is quite absurd and misunderstandable. This gets Mick greatly annoyed so as to abuse Davies back by telling him he is more stinking than the properties he insults. Davies goes so far as to say, his host is nutty; because of pride, he disrespects someone who gives him a shelter and takes care of him. Mick lets him know it is pure insolence to behave like that, to be arrogant instead of being thankful. How can he bully his benefactors! This is a proof that Davies is a victim of inferiority complex, there is a weakness in his character he is trying to hide through dodging the reality and exercise of violence on things and people that stand as his mainstays. Davies develops a mala fide behavior towards people with bona fide behavior; out of inferiority complex, he disgraces and humiliates people who are philanthropic to him.

It stands to reason that Mick and his brother Aston are just being benevolently altruistic to Davies an old man stranger to them, but the latter happens to have difficulties of socialization and cohabitation because of his inferiority complex. Nutty means crazy, mad or insane. How dare Davies associate somebody who shows him full hospitality to all these implications and connotations of the term nutty! Mick wonders whether Davies is a normal person:

MICK. What a strange man you are. Aren't you? You're really strange. Ever since you come into this house there's been nothing but trouble. Honest. I can take nothing you say at face value. Every word you speak is open to any number of different interpretations. Most of what you say is lies. You're violent, you're erratic, you're just completely unpredictable. You're nothing else but a wild animal, when you come down to it.

Pinter (1977, p. 82)

MICK. ... You're a barbarian. And to put the old tin lid on it, you stink from arse-hole to breakfast time. Look at it. ...

Pinter (1977, p. 83)

For Mick, and let alone for the audience, Davies displays a very strange character based on comedy of character or humors which is based on foibles, silly habits and mannerisms or unconscious bad behavior. The inferiority complex has made Davies a blind person. In fact, he is blind about his own character and its implications and about the good people around are doing for him; this makes him ungrateful and thankless; he fails to acknowledge his own weaknesses despite which people around are helpful and welcoming to him.

Conclusion

From the beginning, this article, while depending on Freudian psychoanalytic literary approach, intended to show how the inferiority complex can be a threat for social integration and how it can undermine an individual's welfare and fulfillment. Then, it results from the analysis that the inferiority complex is a bad pattern of human behavior that destroys both the individual and the society he or she belongs to. Owing to his inferiority complex, Davies has suffered a great deal in terms of his own realization and integration into his community as an individual. The study has also shown that the inferiority complex as a pattern of individual behavioral trait, hinders social harmony through the narcissism of the individual victim of inferiority complex. All individuals being the different links of the social chain, when an individual is infected with the virus of the inferiority complex and fails to play his role properly, the whole social chain is actually in trouble.

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