

The Inferiority Complex of Homunculus in Hiromu Arakawa's *Fullmetal Alchemist*

Thenady, T.P.¹ and Limanta, L.S.²

^{1,2)} English Department, Faculty of Letters, Petra Christian University, Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, East Java, INDONESIA

e-mails: princ3ling@hotmail.com; satya@peter.petra.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This article explores the causes and effects of inferiority complex in a character of a *manga* created by Hiromu Arakawa, *Fullmetal Alchemist*. Commonly seen as a child's play and underestimated by the society of literature, comic book or *manga* actually has the same quality as those considered as literary arts and stands equally with them. It embraces issues freely without the restriction of social rules and individual or group and uncontaminated by social, personal, or political influences. One of the issues most people think will not be in a comic book is psychology. Started from comparing himself to humans, the main antagonist, Homunculus, suffers from an inferiority complex caused by several factors such as parental attitude, physical defects, and envy. Furthermore, as the effect of suffering inferiority complex, Homunculus develops psychological defenses to ease his inferiorities: compensation and superiority complex. He tries to compensate his inferior feelings by excelling in another area and covers up the inferiorities by striving for superiority and omnipotence.

Keywords: *Manga*, Alchemist, Homunculus, Inferiority Complex, Compensation, Superiority Complex

Hiromu Arakawa is a Hokkaido-born *manga* artist whose career began with *Stray Dog* in 1999. One of her most successful works is *Fullmetal Alchemist*. This *manga* had won numerous awards such as 49th *Shogakukan Manga Award* for *shounen* category, 15th *Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize* "New Artist" category, and 9th 21st *Century Shounen Gangan Award* (Shogakukan). Its popularity outside of Japan also proved by topping the *New York Times*' Best Seller Manga List, "BookScan's Top 20 Graphic Novels", and the "USA Today Booklist". The *anime* or cartoon adaptation itself (*Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood*) won numerous awards in *American Anime Award* for "Long Series", "Best Cast", "Best Anime Theme Song"; Twenty-Sixth Annual *Animage Readers' Poll* for "Favorite Anime Series" and Tokyo Anime Fair for "Animation of the Year" (ICv2).

The story of this popular *manga* is about the journey of two brothers looking for a way to recover their missing limbs and body after committing a taboo in alchemy: human transmutation. The elder brother, Edward Elric or Ed, replaces his right arm and left leg with automails (artificial body parts from metal) while the younger brother, Alphonse Elric, lost his whole body except for his soul which then transferred using alchemy by Ed to a huge armor set. Therefore, they gain the nickname of "Fullmetal" alchemists as they join the armed forces and become the government's 'dog'. In search for a way to recover their limbs and body, they discover a huge power source which will enable them to retrieve their bodies easily, that is the philosopher's stone. Unfortunately, they find out that a philosopher's stone is made out from humans' soul and discover that it is also the reason for the annihilation of a country named Xerxes a thousand years ago because of the king's greed that was manipulated by Xerxes' creation, Homunculus. That is why the two brothers set out to prevent Homunculus to repeat the same disaster again and to find a way to recover their normal selves.

In this article, we want to find out the causes that inflicted inferiority complex to the story's main antagonist, Homunculus, and what kinds of effects will come out as the result of that psychological disease. Therefore, we will use the theory of inferiority complex to analyze its causes. As for the effects, we will use the theory of compensation and superiority complex because a defense mechanism will usually be applied to deal with anxiety as the result of inferiority complex.

THE INFERIORITY COMPLEX OF HOMUNCULUS

It is common for an individual to have inferior feelings and it is a necessity required in order to progress and achieve emotional maturity (Lin, 1997, p.1). In life, sometimes, inferior feelings are also needed to help individuals recognize their limitation and capacities and push them to achieve better: accept one's limitations, adjust the inferior feelings, and then overcome them. Meanwhile, an inferiority complex is an inferior feeling that overwhelmed an individual: the inferior feeling causes the individual ultimate failure and maladjustment and prevents the individual to move forward (p.1).

The Causes of Inferiority Complex

Although there are no set of causes of inferiority complex that can be said conclusively, Timothy Lin's research found that there are four external factors that contribute more to the development of inferiority complex in an individual (pp.1-2). Those factors are parental attitudes, physical defects, mental limitations, and social disadvantages. While internally, based on the book *Subtlety of Emotions* by Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, another crucial element fuels inferior feelings to inferiority complex and rounded up the other factors is envy (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000, p.285).

The first factor, parental attitude, means the bad parenting that affect the child's mental growth. This bad parenting involves giving constant negative remarks to the child, emphasizing the child's inabilities or mistakes, ignoring the child and so on. These are what the scientists of Xerxes do to the child of their experiment, Homunculus. As the 'parent', Xerxes scientists interact with Homunculus only when they need something and when they do not need him, which actually happens most of the time. Moreover, Homunculus is placed in a messy and abandoned laboratory. The placement of Homunculus itself is a sign of indifference and ignorance from the scientists toward their 'child'. Communication between the scientists as the 'parent' and Homunculus as the 'child' is scarce since the scientists only talk to Homunculus only when they need something but even when they talk to him, they talk harshly.

Scientist	: Hey! Did you take him out of the lab again, Hohenheim? I've got business with Homunculus, hand him over.
Van Hohenheim	: My apologies.
Scientist	: It seems the king want to talk to you.
Homunculus	: Oh
Van Hohenheim	: (The king? What could he want?)
Homunculus	: Immortality? Hmm...why does someone with so much power and influence want to mess with that?
Scientist	: Bite your tongue, Homunculus. (Arakawa, 2008, p.6)

The term 'hand him over' is referring to how the scientists see Homunculus only as a tool or a means to acquire their goal. He could have said, "I need Homunculus to come with me" which is more polite or more humane rather than "hand him over" as if Homunculus were just a mere ball that could talk. This causes Homunculus to unconsciously make a mental note that he will only receive attention if he can be useful, otherwise he will be neglected. It adds more to his natural inferior feelings, aside from those created by the external factors, which then will be boosted up by those external factors.

The second factor, physical defects, revolves on the insecurities and inferior feelings caused by disproportional figure or defective body parts and speech defects. Homunculus can be considered as physically defected and disproportional as his original form is actually a ball of living mass caged in a flask. With that kind of appearance and in an environment where its entire citizen has hands and feet, it might inflict psychological comparison in the Homunculus' mind that they are different in a negative way. This difference in appearance may contribute some of the inferior feelings in Homunculus, but what actually boosts this external factor is because he lacks the freedom to do whatever and to go wherever he wants like the humans.

Van Hohenheim	: Maybe it seems foolish from your point of view, but we humans get a lot of joy from friends and family
Homunculus	: Hmm...if you say so...
Van Hohenheim	: What would bring you happiness then?

Homunculus : Well... Nothing luxurious... If I leave this flask, I'll die. So maybe having my own body, and being released from this container. (p.5)

Because of his defected figure, it hinders Homunculus to achieve his yearning of freedom, unlike the humans with its physical appearance that allows them to do whatever and go wherever they want freely. That is why, because he lacks freedom caused by his appearance, Homunculus feels inferior toward the humans in terms of having a body that enable them to achieve freedom.

The third factor, social disadvantages, is created by elements like race or ethnicity, social status, religion, belief, and so forth. The fact that Homunculus is different from the humans in terms of origin (Homunculus is created scientifically while humans biologically), race, or ethnicity already gives a reason for him to feel inferior since he is not like the majority. The fact that he is not a 'human race', since their form clearly does not represent those who are human: a body, head, two hands and legs and so on, already becomes a disadvantage for him to blend in and become sociable

The fourth factor, mental limitations, is created through the first three factors and acted as a mental reminder about his differences which causes him to be casted off and alienated by the society. The treatment that he gets from the surroundings and the scientists when he is still in his original form frankly states that they are indeed different and therefore lower than the humans. This will sum up the inferiorities and creates a psychological conclusion in Homunculus that he is indeed different and therefore lower than the humans.

The last factor, envy, works as an internal element that causes inferiority complex through constant negative comparison made by the individual, in this case, Homunculus. According to Ben-Ze'ev's *The Subtlety of Emotions*, inferiority stems from many kinds of factors like the external factors mentioned above and envy can be born from any or all of those factors (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000, p.281). In all of the previously explained factors, there is always a comparison made unconsciously by Homunculus and reflected in his compensatory measure in order to cover what he lacks when he compares himself with the humans.

Ed : You're envious of humans. We're so much weaker than you homunculi, but battered, confused, even when we're beaten, and about to collapsed...even when we know it's pointless, we always stand back up. And if we can't, our friends will lift us. You'll never have that...and it's made you jealous of us

Envy : How humiliating...reduced to this pathetic form...with you humans...you pieces of shit mocking me...and worst of all, the lowest, most disgusting of you...the fucking kid, is the one who understands how I feel! It's the ultimate insult... (Arakawa, 2009, pp.16-20)

After realizing what the humans have and what he does not, envy starts to emerge from within Homunculus' psyche, and therefore completes the transformation of his inferior feelings to inferiority complex.

The Symptoms of Inferiority Complex

To confirm the existence of inferiority complex inside Homunculus, I will match their behavior throughout the story of the comic with the symptoms of inferiority complex according to Eduard Ezeanu. According to Ezeanu, there are 3 symptoms that can be commonly found on individuals who suffer from inferiority complex (Ezeanu, 2010).

The first symptom is isolation, where the person tends to shut him/herself from the crowd and prefers solitude. With the comparative nature of inferiority complex, an individual who suffer from this will not enjoy socialization because of the tendency to compare oneself with the people there and it will bring more inferior feelings to the individual. That is why Homunculus chooses to isolate himself underground because he wants to avoid any kinds of contact with other humans. It is because of the comparative nature of inferiority complex that makes him unable not to make any unfavorable comparison towards the humans, especially when he has bad experiences and inferior feelings towards human beings.

The second symptom is hiding mistakes and flaws. The most apparent evidence of this symptom is how Homunculus separates all of the human's seven sins from himself after he achieves his human form.

Pride : ...

Van Hohenheim : I am, aren't I? Say something, you little shut-in. Are you mad?
 Pride : Mad? No. There is no wrath inside me. No wrath... and... No lust. No sloth. No greed. No gluttony. No envy. Those useless emotions have all left our Father. My name is Pride. (Arakawa, 2008, p.23)

Homunculus or 'Father' indirectly hides his flaws in the form of casting aside his flaws into new creature that each represents the thrown flaw. This relieves him from his insecurities for being imperfect after he becomes human while in reality, the cast-off Homunculi are still one and the same with him as a whole being. He does this because an individual with inferiority complex is uncomfortable with his flaws. If other people see his flaws, it will trigger a large amount of shame which makes things more miserable and makes oneself feel more inferior.

The last symptom of inferiority complex is excessive boasting. Most of the occasions of encountering the protagonist and his friends, Homunculus always throws a degrading or humiliating remarks to the humans.

Lust : Look at them, Gluttony. Humans just can't stop being so foolish.
 Gluttony : Foolish, foolish. (Arakawa, 2002, p.13)

Envy : You should just weigh it on a scale! The people of this country and the people in your village. I wonder which side weighs more! If you give up that village, you can save many people more!

Dr. Marcoh : ...you can't just add and subtract human lives!

Envy : Ha! Ahahahaha! Yes! That's what "humans" are like! The last man was like that too. I turned into his wife, and he couldn't attack me. They're so easy to break apart. Humans. (Arakawa, 2005, pp.12-13)

Envy : Trash... Don't you weaklings start gloating yet!
 Ling : Don't underestimate humans, Homunculus! (Arakawa, 2006, p. 13)

In order to hide his insecurities, Homunculus who suffers from inferiority complex will try to conceal his inferior feelings through constant boasting. By mocking and belittling the protagonists who are humans, Homunculus is able to achieve the so-called self-ease. It means that by doing those acts that emphasize the weaknesses of the opponent, it calms the mind of Homunculus that he is not lower than the humans and he is doing the self-reassurance through boasting.

The Effects of Inferiority Complex in Homunculus

There are some effects of inferiority complex that will be experienced by the individual who suffers from it. This involves the way the individual deals with his/her inferiority complex and the result of his/her coping with inferiority complex. In Homunculus' case, the effects of the inferiority complex will be analyzed in this subchapter.

Compensation

Compensation, according to *The Neurotic Constitution*, is a type of defense mechanism where the user tries to compensate their failures in one area by excelling in another area and it happens because the individual tries to cope with something in order to overcome the inferior feelings (Adler, 1921, p.6). Through this defense mechanism, Homunculus will be able to compensate his flaws and imperfections in one area by excelling in another (Peters, 2009). Particularly, Homunculus uses over-compensation where he uses a nonsensical, impossible, and obsessive goal to overcome his inferiority.

The first evidence that proves him using this defense mechanism is his goal to be a perfect human. The reason why he chooses to be a human can be reflected from the factors that cause him to feel inferior. Since the scientists neglect him when they don't need him, having a disfigured appearance, being different from the rest of the society, the piling feeling of inferiority, and how he is unable to achieve freedom. He opens up his true desire, which is to be free from the flask and to have his own body.

Homunculus : Well... Nothing luxurious... If I leave this flask, I'll die. So maybe having my own body, and being released from this container. (Arakawa, 2008, p.5)

Since there is no such thing as a perfect human, this kind of goal may exist because of a trigger, which is when the king willingly slaughters his own people to gain immortality. This shows how greed and lust for power as a fatal flaw for humans and so does the other 5 sins (sloth, gluttony, wrath, envy, pride). Homunculus tricked the king and he can finally be able to acquire his own human body plus a beneficial addition where he obtains immortality and power big enough to cast off the 7 deadly sins from his new self.

The second evidence is his other impossible goal about becoming a god.

Homunculus : Yes... come to me... I will no longer be bound by your rules. I'll drag you down to earth, and make you a part of me! (Arawaka, 2010, p.41)

Hinting from his statement where he will no longer be bound by god's rules, it suggests his first and foremost yearning of being free. Based on that desire, he starts his impossible goal for being a god. Why he chooses a god is because by becoming the ultimate being that creates all, he will have no more restrictions and he can achieve the ultimate freedom.

Along the process, a few compensatory measures of Homunculus to counteract his inferiority complex can be identified based on the factors that cause it. The first compensatory measure is for the parental attitude. If previously Homunculus is treated badly and neglected by the scientists or 'parents', he tries to compensate that by playing house. Playing house is what children usually do where they pretend to be a mother, father and the son or daughter. After obtaining his human form, Homunculus casts away 7 human flaws and those cast-offs also take the same form as him and they call him 'Father'.

Homunculus : A conflict between brothers... Do not do that in front of your father. (Arakawa, 2004, p.23)

This act of playing house reflects his unconscious desire or inferiority about what he has experienced previously. He never mentions his feelings about how the scientists treated him in the past but the pain that he feels is reflected by this particular action. In order to compensate the hurt feelings of being neglected by the 'parents', he in turn plays the role of the 'parent' while his cast-off human flaws or the other homunculi play as the children.

The second compensatory measure is the way he deals with his physical defects. His compensatory measure is choosing a human form as his new appearance (Arakawa, 2008, pp.24-25). This action explains his inferior feelings toward humans who have freewill and freedom. One other explanation as to why he chooses human form instead of the other is because human is the highest creation in the world. Since he feels inferior towards humans, he will not choose to change as a being lower than humans like animals or any other unknown form.

Thirdly is his compensatory measure to counteract his mental limitation and social disadvantage. Since these two factors always remind him about his inferiority, lacking, and all the unfavorable comparison that he made, he uses bragging or boasting in order to feel better. By belittling others down and brag about what he is capable of will make him feel at ease psychologically and it will hide his insecurities such as in the second volume of the comic (Arakawa, 2002, p.13). Since individual with inferiority complex like Homunculus has a big problem with his insecurities, he will promulgate his abilities and impress other about how important he is, or in Homunculus' case, how powerful and almighty he is.

The fourth compensatory measure that counteracts the feeling of envy is related a little bit with the third measure. Since the point of envy desires what other people have that the individual does not, the individual must somehow fill in the gap of the things that s/he lacks with something else. Therefore, using compensation, the individual will try to excel or highlight other areas that s/he is good with. Homunculus' way of highlighting this particular area is by boasting it to the humans and mocks them because of their foolishness and weaknesses.

Ling : Just what you'd expect from the homunculi's boss. Laughing at humans and calling them "fools"... He has the same eyes as them.

Father : "Foolish"? I do not think that. Do you humans see beetle crawling on the ground and think of it as "foolish"? Even when an insect is struggling, aren't your level's so different that you don't spare any emotion? What I feel toward you humans is the same as that. (Arakawa, 2006, p.12).

Therefore, all of the compensatory measures done by homunculi including 'Father' is a form of defense mechanism of compensation where they cover up the area that they lack by excelling in another area such as power, domination over weak humans, and omnipotence.

Superiority Complex

As Adler says, taken from Heinz and Rowena Ansbacher's *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler - A Systematic Presentation in Selections from his Writings* (p.260), a superiority complex is a result that acts as a compensatory measure for the inferiority complex. Homunculus shows symptoms of this new complex such as arrogance or haughtiness, tendency to brag, and a lack of empathy.

For the first two symptoms, arrogance and bragging are related to each other since no one would brag if s/he is not arrogant. In Homunculus case, he constantly shows his arrogance whenever he or his minions encounters the protagonists and friends and bragging is never absent from Homunculus' talk (Arakawa, 2006, p.12). From the dialog, it shows his arrogance and indirectly states how superior Homunculus feels when he compares his new self (with his immortality and super powers). These two elements are needed for individuals who suffer from inferiority complex and use superiority complex to cover it up. It is because the individuals feel inadequate or unimportant in some ways and s/he attempts to compensate it through an illusory superiority and egotism.

For the third symptom, lack of empathy, an individual with superiority complex will use or manipulate others with no regard to their feelings in order to achieve his/her own goal. It is because an individual with superiority complex has a high sense of self-importance so s/he will find no reason to bother about the others because what matter the most is his/her own self.

Ed : Never... I'll never get it. Why do you follow him? Look at what we've done to you. You've got one foot in the grave and he's never so much as looked back at you! (Arakawa, 2010, p.32)

Homunculus left behind one of his homunculi, Pride, who is already quite beaten up to be left alone fighting with the main protagonist without even looking back. A person with superiority complex and an ambitious goal such Homunculus will even take his own 'children', the other homunculi, as a trivial matter: a disposable pawn and sacrifice. Because his goal is already in front of his eyes, he does not care about the others even his own comrades.

As for two of his outrageous goals (becoming the perfect being and god), it is done in order to fill the hole created by his inferiority complex (unfulfilled desire, hope, or wanting). The individual will try to use defense mechanism in order to cope with his/her inferiorities by excelling in another area so that it can cover up the area that s/he lacks. In Homunculus' case, he uses his superpower and immortality to achieve or excel in a specific area: perfection by becoming a perfect being and a god. So his nonsensical goals as an individual who suffer from superiority complex are actually his measure to cover up his inferior areas.

CONCLUSION

In the end, Homunculus is just an example of a person who cannot accept himself for who he is and what he is. Instead, he keeps on denying his true self and decides to pursue something that is originally not him from the start. When a person cannot accept oneself, s/he will give in to the inferior feelings and starts to fuel the already-existent inferior feelings. Other external factors also contribute to this phenomenon since what makes a person to what s/he is in the current state comes from the interaction from the surrounding people. Besides giving in to the inferior feelings, making comparison between oneself and others also worsen the inferior feelings. That is why, in order to ease that inferior feelings because of the inability to have or achieve what others have, individuals who suffer inferiority complex will attempt to compensate using all kinds of manner and even pursue nonsensical obsessions and superiorities.

REFERENCES

- Adler, A. (1921). *The neurotic constitution*. New York: Moffat, Yard and Company.
- Ansbacher, H. L., & Ansbacher, R. R. (1956). *The individual psychology of alfred adler - a systematic presentation in selections from his writings*. New York: Basic Books Inc.
- Arakawa, H. (2002). *Fullmetal alchemist*. (Vol. 2, p. 13). Japan: Square Enix.
- Arakawa, H. (2004). *Fullmetal alchemist*. (Vol. 8, p.23). Japan: Square Enix.
- Arakawa, H. (2005). *Fullmetal alchemist*. (Vol. 12, pp. 12-13). Japan: Square Enix.
- Arakawa, H. (2006). *Fullmetal alchemist*. (Vol. 13, p.13). Japan: Square Enix.
- Arakawa, H. (2006). *Fullmetal alchemist*. (Vol. 14, p.12). Japan: Square Enix.
- Arakawa, H. (2008). *Fullmetal alchemist*. (Vol. 19, pp. 5-6, 23-25). Japan: Square Enix.
- Arakawa, H. (2009). *Fullmetal alchemist*. (Vol. 23, pp. 16-20). Japan: Square Enix.
- Arakawa, H. (2010). *Fullmetal alchemist*. (Vol. 26, pp.32,41). Japan: Square Enix.
- Ben-Ze'ev, A. (2000). *The subtlety of emotions*. Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Ezeanu, E. (2010, December 14). Inferiority complex symptoms [Supplemental material]. *Ezine Articles*. Retrieved from <http://ezinearticles.com/?Inferiority-Complex-Symptoms&id=5551494>
- ICv2. (2007, February 26). *American anime award winners*. Retrieved from <http://www.icv2.com/articles/news/10138.html>
- Lin, T. (1997). Inferiority complex: Prevention in children and relief from it in adults. *Biblical Studies Ministries International*, 1-5. Retrieved from <http://www.bsmi.org/lin.htm>
- Peters, D. (2009, June 12). What is Psychological Compensation? [Supplemental material]. *Helium: Where Knowledge Rules*. Retrieved from <http://www.helium.com/items/1480542-what-is-psychological-compensation>
- Shogakukan. (2004). Retrieved from <http://comics.shogakukan.co.jp/mangasho/rist.html>