

## The Analysis of the Main Character's Mental Depression in "A Girl Like Her Film" Directed by Amy S. Weber Using Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory

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### Abstract

*Psychoanalysis is a method for treating mental illness and also a theory which explains human behavior. In psychoanalysis itself, there is defense mechanism, the psychological strategies that are unconsciously used to protect a person from anxiety arising from unacceptable thoughts or feelings. This research will focus on the main character's mental depression in "A Girl Like Her" film directed by Amy S. Weber in 2015. This film raises the issue of depression. The main character, Jessica Burns was a victim of bullying and it makes her commit a suicide because of depression. This research uses the theory of Defense Mechanism in Psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud (1936) to find out the behavior of the character. Therefore, this study aims to find the defense mechanism in depression experienced by Jessica Burns. The data are taken from all utterances spoken by the characters in the film, and journals, articles related to film, also websites to support. This research uses a qualitative method, the type of method that uses words, images, and feeling except numbers. As a result, this research shows that there are six defense mechanisms related with the film, repression, denial, projection, displacement, regression, and sublimation, which show that the behavior can lead to depression.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a written communication, whether in poetic shape or in dramatic or fictitious shape. It always communicates human experiences and employs narrative devices (Totawad, 2016:150). The literature presents the author's inner experience to the reader or the public. Literary work (Pradopo (1994:26) depicts the world and human life. Truth is the main criteria put on the literary work, it is everything that wants to be pictured by the author. However, literary works are not only about true stories that happened. Humans can spill their imagination into literary works.

Film as one of the literary works can describe the plot of a story very clearly compared to other literary works such as novels, short stories, poetry, and more. Because the film is complete with a demonstration scene

told with a background explanation of place, time is delineated (Totawad, 2016:151). Depression cannot be taken lightly, and depression is a disease that must be cured. Depression can lead to suicide. During the depression, the person experiences sadness, irritability, emptiness, or a loss of pleasure or interest in activities nearly daily. Other symptoms are also present, including poor concentration, excessive guilt or low self-worth, hopelessness about the future, thoughts about death or suicide, disrupted sleep, changes in appetite or weight, and feeling especially tired or low in energy.

Girl Like Her is an American drama film footage directed by Amy S. Weber. This film tells us about a teenage girl who gets bullied and decides to commit suicide. 16-year-old Jessica Burns has a secret, she is afraid to share with anyone except her best friend, Brian Slater. For

the past year, she has been victimized by another girl who is her former friend, Avery Keller, one of South Brookdale High School's most popular and beautiful students. Avery's actions were so unbearable to Jessica. She did not know what made her hate Jessica so much that she did many bad things, which made her depressed. Her depression makes her distance herself from anyone, so she is always in denial about whatever is happening in her life and lives in her subconscious mind. In the literature itself, we can learn about things related to this. Psychoanalysis is a set of theories and therapeutic techniques used to study the unconscious mind. We use defense mechanisms to create defenses in ourselves against anxiety, guilt, etc.

The writers chose the film because the film is suitable for everyone nowadays to study in order to be able to help people who are affected to tackle such a problem when we know nowadays the society ignores the depression of others. It is still a big problem because the number of cases of suicide is continuously increasing every day. We have to be more aware of this and do not let death cases continue to increase. This is what backgrounds the writers to choose this film to be analyzed through psychoanalysis. Based on the background of the study, the writers would like to find the answer to the research question: How does the defense mechanism reveal in Jessica Burns characterization?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### I. Freud Psychoanalysis Theory

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939) was the founding father of psychoanalysis, a method for treating mental illness and a theory explaining human behavior. Freud talks about the defense mechanisms in works such as inhibition, symptom, and anxiety (1926). These defenses describe, on the one hand, the type of mental

disorder; on the other hand, they can be associated with the structuring phases of the psychological apparatus.

### II. Defense Mechanism

Defense mechanisms are known as a set of behaviors that are learned when feeling stressed. Freud (1936) believed that the ego seeks to restore balance through various protective measures known as defense mechanisms. When certain events, feelings, or yearnings cause individual anxiety, the individual wishes to reduce that anxiety. To reduce anxiety, the individual's unconscious mind uses ego defense mechanisms, unconscious protective behaviors that aim to reduce anxiety. The ego, usually conscious, resorts to unconscious strivings to protect the ego from being overwhelmed by anxiety.

When we use defense mechanisms, we are unaware that we are using them. Further, they operate in various ways that distort reality. Further Freud (1936) asserts we all use ego defense mechanisms.

Defense mechanism help reduce or prevent negative emotions, specifically anxiety, from arising within someone when he or she experiences an uncomfortable situation. It always arises unconsciously to perform specific actions to protect one from being mentally harmed.

They do not reflect on one's personality in general, but they affect the development of personality. Freud (1896) categorizes Ego Defense Mechanisms into fifteen types: repression, sublimation, projection, displacement, rationalization, reaction formation, regression, aggression, fantasy, dissociation, compartmentalization, intellectualization, undoing, compensation, and assertiveness.

a. Repression is an internal process created by the ego to prevent unpleasant or threatening feelings from entering our

- unconscious mind.
- b. Sublimation is a form of diversion. Its objective is to replace the feeling of fear or anxiety with socially beneficial activities.
  - c. Projection is placing one's uncomfortable or unpleasant feelings on another person or object.
  - d. Displacement is a means of displacing a feeling of hatred towards someone or something else.
  - e. Rationalization is to give a person a reasonable motive for his or her actions.
  - f. Reaction Formation is when someone acts the opposite way of what they experience or feel.
  - g. Regression is when someone acts in an uncontrollable behavior or acts like a child.
  - h. Aggression is the act of releasing resentment or dissatisfaction shown specifically to another object or someone that creates anxiety or frustration.
  - i. Fantasy is the act of fantasizing about something to reduce anxiety and also to find a solution.
  - j. Dissociation is a feeling when a person loses track of time and/or person, and instead finds another representation of their self in order to continue in the moment. A person who dissociates often loses track of time or themselves and their usual thought processes and memories.
  - k. Compartmentalization is a lesser form of dissociation, wherein parts of oneself are separated from awareness of other parts and behaving as if one had separate sets of values.
  - l. Intellectualization is the overemphasis on thinking when confronted with an unacceptable impulse, situation or behavior without employing any emotions

- whatsoever to help mediate and place the thoughts into an emotional, human context.
- m. Undoing is the attempt to take back an unconscious behavior or thought that is unacceptable or hurtful. For example, the person is attempting to counteract the damage done by the original comment, hoping the two will balance one another out.
  - n. Compensation is a process of psychologically counterbalancing perceived weaknesses by emphasizing strength in other arenas.
  - o. Assertiveness is the emphasis of a person's needs or thoughts in a manner that is respectful, direct and firm.

### III. Depression

Depression is not just a form of extreme sadness. It is a disorder that affects both brain and body, including cognition, behavior, the immune system, and the peripheral nervous system. Unlike a sad passing mood, depression is considered a disorder because it interferes with ordinary functioning in work, school, or relationships. Depression also differs from ordinary mourning in that the mourner experiences the world as empty or wrong. In contrast, clinically depressed individuals locate their sense of emptiness or badness in the self. (PDM Task Force, 2006, p. 109).

### III. METHODS

In this research, the writers use the qualitative methods to analyze the data. It means the writer focuses on definition and concept. Qualitative research involves any research that uses data that do not indicate ordinal values. The data are generally non-numerical. The writers use library research such as browse the relevant internet website to answer the research question. The subject matter of this research is "A Girl Like Her" a film directed by Amy S. Weber (2015). The writers chose this film

because this film is related to what happened nowadays, the problem of this film is often we faced in this era. The main character experiences bullying from her friends in school, and the impact on herself is making her decide to suicide.

There are some steps that were taken in order to complete the study. The first is choosing the film to be studied. The second is watching the film several times to understanding the story. The third is the writers related theories from character, characterization, depression, and defense mechanism theory according to Freud's theory. The fourth is searching for relevant sources to help analyzing the film and the character. The last one is makes conclusion based on the data that the writers findings.

#### IV. RESULT

In this chapter, the writers would like to analyze the characterization in the film entitled "A Girl Like Her" using Freud's Psychoanalysis theory of defense mechanism (1936) to answer the research question related to this study. The writers will explain that this study focuses on analyzing the defense mechanism of the main character in dialogues which are used the characters in film entitled "A Girl Like Her" by Amy S. Weber.

##### *Defense Mechanisms in "A Girl Like Her" Film*

Freud (1936) believed that feelings of anxiety result from the ego's inability to mediate the conflict between the id and superego. When this happens, Freud believed that the ego seeks to restore balance through various protective measures known as defense mechanism.

The writers based on the film and found several defense mechanisms related to Jessica Burns. They are:

##### a. *Repression*

Repression is the first self-defense mechanism in the film related to the main character, Jessica Burns. As a self-defense mechanism, repression is an unconscious mechanism employed by the ego to keep disturbing or threatening thoughts from becoming conscious. In this film, there are several scenes of evidence supporting that Jessica always remembers what Avery said in her subconscious, and it becomes a scary memory that cannot even make her concentrate on one thing.

*Jessica Burns : It's... it's not like just at school. It's on my phone, it's online. It just consumes my life, and I just... I can't concentrate on anything else, no matter how hard I try. No matter where I go, no matter what I do, she always... she just... She just always... finds a way to get at me. (min 30:15 – 30:46)*

With the dialogue above, it can be seen that Jessica has always lived in the shadows of what Avery had told her. She continues to get bullied by Avery. She cried all day and marveled why she had to endure all this. During this situations, negative thoughts are repressed.

##### b. *Denial*

The second defense mechanism is denial, it is a refusal to accept reality, thus blocking external events from awareness. In this case, we can see this as seen from Jessica Burns' behavior. She just thought that she was fine, whenever it was. But in reality, she just denied what she felt. Even though she got bullied, she didn't respond with emotion at all for Avery's treatment. She just shut up and accepted. She even hurt herself by attempting suicide.

Whatever Avery does, Jessica will be silent. She didn't say a word. In Jessica's mind, if she fights, it is entirely useless. However, she did not realize that it was damaging his mind, so her thoughts were only to hurt herself. Avery's treatments really made Jessica Burns

depressed. Her mental shattered and she lived in her unconscious mind.

(While joking around with Brian, Jessica got messages from Avery) Brian Slater: *You gotta just blow up. You can talk to me.*

Jessica Burns: *I don't want to talk about it, there is nothing, there is nothing else to talk about.*  
(min 14:23 – 14:28)

Brian Slater always tried to convince Jessica to tell everything, even Brian created a small camera so he could see what Avery did to Jessica. However, whatever method Brian has done, it still doesn't give results. Jessica just always denied, and said that she had no problem at all. Jessica's behavior is very clear that she always tries to deny everything. This is certainly one of the factors experiencing depression. She has family and friends, but she chooses to deny all her problems with Avery.

#### c. Projection

Another self-defense mechanism is Projection, it occurs when someone ascribes the fear, problem, or guilty desire to someone else and then condemning him or her for it, in order to deny that he has it himself (McLeod 2020). It happens to Avery Keller as a bully and she did it to Jessica. Through her interviews, Avery Keller admits that she has no one to talk to even though she is popular at school. Therefore, he took it out on Jessica Burns.

Reporter: *I'm very proud of you. This is... this is really hard. I think you're a very, very powerful young woman who people love and people follow. But I know that's not you, and I know underneath that, there's someone who's just in a lot of pain, who needs to talk to somebody and get it out. Don't you just want to get it out?*

Avery Keller: *Yeah, but, I mean, who would I talk to? I have nobody. My mom doesn't talk to me. My dad doesn't talk. My friends don't care about real life. They care about shopping.*

*They don't... I don't have any real friends.* (hour 01:19:01 – 01:19:30)

Through the matter above, it can be seen that Avery Keller has her own problems. But she made Jessica Burns his target, because Jessica never fought her.

#### d. Displacement

As a self-defense mechanism, Displacement works similarly to Projection. It occurs when someone "takes it out" on someone or something less threatening than the person who caused his fear, hurt, frustration, or anger (McLeod 2020). It happens to Avery, and Jessica became the victims. Avery is known to have her problems in her family, her father has work problems, and her brother named Josh is also not working and only likes to play video games.

This made Avery's mother always make a fuss at home and Avery really didn't like her family. But, she always takes it out on Jessica. Her anger had nothing to do with Jessica, but Jessica could only accept it. So this became one of the factors of her depression.

(Avery's Parents had a fight)

Avery Keller: *OK, so, uh, this is a typical night in the Keller household.*

Josh Keller: *What the hell are you doing? What, are you taping them? What are you doing?*

Avery Keller: *Stop asking me questions. Get out of my \*\*\*\* business, Josh.*

Josh Keller: *Is this \*\*\*\*, are you \*\*\*\* is this a joke? What are you \*\*\*\*. You better delete that, whatever it is.*

Avery Keller: *Oh, my God! Go back to playing video games. You \*\*\*\* loser! Yeah.* Josh Keller: *You're such a \*\*\*\*.*

Avery Keller: *Oh, I'm a \*\*\*\*? I'm a \*\*\*\*? Is that the most creative thing you could've come up with, Josh? Why don't you try going back to school?*

Josh Keller: *You grow up!*

Avery Keller: *Grow up, really? You're how old and you dropped out of college, still living at home?* (min 56:38 – 57:36)

Avery Keller : *Yeah, not only do my parents fight, my brother's a \*\*\*\*, so... so, yeah, that's my night.* (min 57:43 – 57:48)

Avery Keller's family is not okay, the behavior at home affects what Avery does in other environments, such as school and her friends. However, her way of hurting other people to fulfill her own satisfaction is a big mistake. She didn't feel guilty at all for giving Jessica Burns such a bad treatment. She does not think what bad influence she brings from her problems on other people's lives.

#### e. Regression

Regression occurs when we are troubled or frightened, our behaviors often become more childish. Jessica Burns has been feeling scared for her life lately because of bullying by her schoolmate Avery Keller. She never felt safe, because anywhere, Avery would find Jessica.

Jessica Burns: *It's not gonna get better, it's gonna get worse. It's never gonna end. It's never gonna end.*

Brian Slater: *Jess...*

Jessica Burns: *It's never gonna get better. I just feel like I have no way out. I can't. I can't. I can't do it.* (min 30:52 – 31:02)

Jessica Burns couldn't fight her fear, even though her friend wanted to help her, she still refused because she felt that nothing else would make things better. She only thought about disappearing from Avery and not seeing her again. Avery's behavior towards Jessica is very influential on Jessica's mental state. Jessica Burns took a lot of pills in her attempts to commit suicide. This decision is not in her control, she is afraid and does whatever can make her disappear from the problem.

#### f. Sublimation

Sublimation is similar to displacement, but takes place when we manage to displace our unacceptable emotions into behaviors which are constructive and socially acceptable, rather than destructive activities. Avery Keller often plastered Jessica's name into harsh words that

did not deserve to be mentioned, pushed her suddenly, cursed her many times, does not even hesitate to do physical bullying. Avery always takes her anger out on Jessica.

Avery Keller: *Seriously, Jessica, if you disappeared, the world would be a better place. You're a \*\*\*\*. Did you really just push me?*

Jessica Burns: *No. I was pushed.*

Avery Keller: *Are you... kidding me? You weren't pushed. You just pushed me. You know, that was a dumb move, Jessica. I am just gonna have to beat your \*\*\*\* now. Why don't you just go kill yourself? I have this funny, funny feeling that she thinks that everything is just gonna get better from here on out. Just end it.* (min 49:57 – 50:30)

Avery repeatedly advised Jessica to kill herself. Avery said that the world would be more beautiful without Jessica. Of course, these words affected Jessica's feelings and mentality. This was very painful, especially since she didn't dare to tell anything and kept it to herself. This is even more subtle than verbal bullying. This includes emotional methods aims at getting someone else to feel isolated, alone and may even prompt depression. This type of bullying is designed to get others to ostracize the person being bullied. The impact of

bullying can lead to permanent problems in the victim's life, such as Jessica Burn experiences. The bullying that Avery Keller did had already made other people depressed and tried to commit suicide, but despite the bad things she had done, the people around her must still respect her apology. It can be seen that behavior is very influential on the people around. Freud believed that the unconscious continues to influence behavior even though people are unaware of these underlying influences. Freud believed that many of our feelings, desires, and emotions are repressed or

held out of awareness because they are simply too threatening. Freud also believed that all of our basic instincts and urges were also contained in the unconscious mind, the life and death instincts.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis the writer found three significant characters in this film, Jessica Burns, Avery Keller, and Brian Slater. It can be concluded that Jessica Burns is as a protagonist in "A Girl Like Her" film directed by Amy S. Weber. She was a victim of bullying by Avery Keller which made her depressed. Several cases of bullying that Jessica Burns received from Avery Keller, such as glaring, saying harsh words, giving messages with bad words, physically attacking, and even suggesting suicide. These things did not happen once but occurred continuously.

There are six defense mechanism that are related with this film, such as repression, denial, projection, displacement, regression, and sublimation.

1. The first is repression. Jessica Burns couldn't concentrate on one thing, because her mind was full of Avery Keller's bad words. Her life was based on what Avery said, and she has memorized all.
2. The second is denial. Denial is one of the defenses people do, but in the case of Jessica Burns, it's a bad choice. Because by her denial, she almost lost his life. She also refused all the help from her friends.
3. The third is projection. Avery Keller has family problems, she does not have a harmonious family. She never spoke to her father, even her mother does not listen to her. So, out of anger at the situation she was in, she took it out on Jessica Burns.
4. The fourth is displacement. It works in line with projection, Avery's family behavior made her stressful and she distract it with bullying Jessica.

5. The fifth is regression. Jessica Burns took a lot of pill in her attempt to suicide, she did it because she thought that was the only thing that could make her better.
6. Lastly is displacement. It works same as projection and displacement. Although in the end Avery admitted his mistake and apologized, but venting anger towards other people is not the right thing. It affects people's behavior.

Jessica's depression is not something to be underestimated, and it happens daily and it's serious. In defense mechanism point of view it can be seen that Jessica Burns's depression and her decision to commit a suicide is bullying, which is caused by Avery Keller.

The writer would like to suggest to the readers who want to know more about how depression that cause so many problems should read this analysis. This research is recommended the lecturers should have this as their sub-material for their students with significant literature who want to find out about mental depression. The readers are also asked that this research improve their knowledge regarding mental depression especially the people who still do not know about the symptoms of pressure and depression, so the author wants that this paper should increase their knowledge.

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