

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF PERSONALITY DISORDERS IN JENNIFER NIVEN'S ALL THE BRIGHT PLACES

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Abstract: This study examines the manifestation of personality disorders through the character of Theodore Finch in the film adaptation of "All the Bright Places." The research specifically analyzes how Finch's personality disorder affects his behavior, relationships, and ultimate fate within the narrative. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study collects data through careful examination of selected scenes that demonstrate Finch's personality disorder symptoms. The theoretical framework utilizes Freud's structural model of personality, focusing on the id, ego, and superego as fundamental components that shape human behavior and decision-making processes. The analysis reveals that Finch's personality is significantly influenced by the dynamic interplay between these three psychic structures. The findings demonstrate how his impulsive actions are predominantly driven by the id's pleasure principle, while his ego attempts to mediate between his internal desires and external reality. Additionally, the study shows how his superego's moral constraints create internal conflicts that contribute to his psychological struggles. Through scene-by-scene analysis, this research provides insights into the complex representation of mental health in contemporary cinema and contributes to the broader understanding of how personality disorders are portrayed in modern media. The study's findings offer valuable perspectives for both film analysis and psychological character studies.

Keywords: *Personality disorder analysis; psychoanalytic theory; character development; mental health representation*

INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, film has emerged as a powerful medium of artistic expression, entertainment, and public education. As Safrudi (2018) notes, movies are a form of visual communication that employs moving pictures and sound to narrate stories through authentic situations. The cinematic medium has evolved to become increasingly sophisticated in its portrayal of complex psychological themes, particularly in depicting mental health issues and personality disorders.

Recent studies have highlighted the significant role of films in shaping public understanding of mental health. According to Martinez and Rodriguez (2023), contemporary cinema has become instrumental in destigmatizing mental illness through nuanced character portrayals. This trend reflects a broader societal shift towards more open discussions about mental health, with films serving as catalysts for public discourse and awareness (Thompson et al., 2022).

Within this context, psychological analysis of film characters has become an essential approach to understanding human behavior and mental health representations. The theoretical framework of psychoanalysis, particularly Freud's structural model of personality, provides valuable insights into character development and motivation. Freud (2009) established three fundamental systems in human personality: the Id, Ego, and Superego. The id functions as an energy source driving basic impulses, while the ego develops through interaction with the external world (Freud in Alwisol, 2015: 14). The superego, meanwhile, serves as the moral compass, guiding behavior according to internalized standards of right and wrong.

As Ali (2023) notes, films serve as a cultural mirror, reflecting societal concerns and values while simultaneously influencing public attitudes. This dual role becomes particularly important in addressing mental health, an area often shrouded in stigma. By presenting relatable narratives and characters, films provide audiences with a

deeper understanding of psychological struggles, fostering empathy and reducing prejudice (Posumah, 2024). Through engaging storytelling, cinema has the potential to educate viewers and inspire societal change, making it a crucial tool for public education (Husain, 2024).

In the case of "All the Bright Places," the film's portrayal of mental health challenges is a significant contribution to this broader discourse. Wuntu (2024) emphasizes the importance of accurate and sensitive representations of mental illness in media, noting that such portrayals can shape perceptions and encourage individuals to seek help. The film's exploration of Theodore Finch's and Violet Markey's experiences underscores the intricate relationship between trauma, personality development, and mental health.

This research is particularly significant as it contributes to the growing body of literature examining mental health representations in contemporary media. By analyzing Finch's character through a psychoanalytic lens, this study seeks to understand how personality disorders affect behavior, relationships, and overall well-being, while also evaluating the film's effectiveness in portraying these complex psychological issues. Through its analysis, this study not only contributes to academic discourse but also offers practical insights for filmmakers aiming to create authentic and impactful narratives.

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research methodology to analyze personality disorders depicted in film characterization. As defined by Corbin & Strauss (2015), qualitative research yields findings not derived through statistical procedures or quantification. This approach allows for in-depth analysis of behavioral patterns, emotional responses, and character development. Recent studies by Davidson and Martinez (2023) emphasize the effectiveness of qualitative analysis in examining mental health representations in media, particularly in

understanding complex psychological narratives.

2. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the portrayal of personality disorders in the film "All the Bright Places" (2020), adapted from Jennifer Niven's work. The study examines the narrative of two adolescents, Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, whose lives intersect while dealing with their respective psychological struggles. As noted by Williams et al. (2024), contemporary films increasingly serve as platforms for exploring mental health issues, making such analysis crucial for understanding media representations of psychological disorders.

3. Data Collection Methods

This research employs a comprehensive data collection strategy that encompasses both primary and secondary sources to ensure a thorough analysis (Maru, 2024). The primary data centers on the film "All the Bright Places" (2020) by Jennifer Niven, which serves as the main source of analysis. This includes systematic observation of specific scenes and detailed examination of character development throughout the narrative.

The secondary data collection involves an extensive review of academic literature, including peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, and contemporary mental health resources. As Thompson and Lee (2022) emphasize, utilizing diverse data sources is crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of mental health portrayals in media. These secondary sources provide theoretical foundations and contemporary perspectives that enhance the analysis of the primary source material.

4. Data Analysis Methods

The analytical process follows a structured approach that combines detailed scene analysis with theoretical interpretation. The scene analysis involves systematic note-taking during film viewing, focusing on documenting character development, behavioral patterns, and both verbal and non-verbal communication. This meticulous observation allows for a deeper understanding of how personality disorders are portrayed

through character actions and interactions within the narrative context.

The theoretical framework of the analysis is grounded in Freudian psychoanalysis and enhanced by contemporary psychological theories. As noted by Chen & Roberts (2023), integrating modern analytical frameworks with classical psychological approaches provides a more comprehensive understanding of character psychology. This methodology aligns with Kumar's (2024) approach to examining psychological elements in contemporary media, emphasizing the importance of combining detailed observation with robust theoretical analysis to achieve meaningful insights into the portrayal of mental health in film.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Finch vs himself

Theodore Finch is a troubled young man grappling with suicidal thoughts, depression, and anxiety. Each day is a struggle for him, and he uses the terms "asleep" to signify a bad day and "awake" for a good one. Finch continuously battles to remain "awake," aiming to maintain command over his life and conduct. He is determined not to succumb to the darkness of his mood, striving to avoid burdening others by promising himself to stay composed, silent, and appear normal. The dialogues below provide examples of his internal struggles.

Finch: I'm Theodore Finch. No labels. Not really sure why I'm here. I guess it's because I got in this fight at school and like I was there, but I wasn't there. I was watching myself, and I just get a little lost sometimes. I run a lot. Sometimes that helps. Kind of.

(01.16.33)

The dialogue presented above portrays Finch's visit to a mental health support group upon the recommendation of his teacher. Initially hesitant to label himself with any diagnosis, he expressed uncertainty about his presence there. Nonetheless, he proceeded to describe his challenges, including frequent bouts of confusion and losing control when faced with discomfort or provocation from

others, leading to negative thoughts. Finch elaborated on his coping mechanism of running to alleviate anxiety, negative thoughts, or unsettling feelings. Despite providing temporary relief, this action only offers brief respite, as the anxiety and obsessions will reappear.

2. Finch's character based on the Id

In Finch's portrayal, the depiction of the id signifies a dimension of personality that is innate from birth. This aspect constitutes the wholly unconscious segment of an individual's psyche, encompassing instinctual and primitive behaviors (Ali, 2024). According to Freudian theory, the id serves as the predominant origin and the primary source of all psychic energy, rendering it the most pivotal component of personality. The pleasure principle motivates the id, which seeks immediate gratification for all desires, wants, and needs while avoiding unpleasant feelings (Freud in Minderop, 2010). If an individual's needs are not promptly fulfilled, their anxiety or tension will increase. For instance, when someone experiences hunger or thirst, it signals the immediate necessity to consume food or beverages. The dialogues and explanations provided below serve as illustrations of such circumstances.

Roamer: You have no idea who he really is, do you? He is a freak!

Finch: Call me a freak one more time.

Roamer: You are a fucking freak. (students gasping, exclaiming)

(01:12:37)

The dialogue portrayed above illustrates a confrontation between Finch and Roamer. Roamer's persistent bullying serves as a trigger for Finch's anger, prompting him to react impulsively. Finch's behavior can be attributed to the influence of the id, as he responds immediately to his feelings of anger by engaging in a physical altercation with Roamer, deeming it an appropriate response to the provocation.

Violet: I am trying to help you.

Finch: I don't need your help! This is on me! This is not about you!

Violet: You need to tell me what's wrong.

Finch: You do not get it. (sobbing)

Violet: You are right. I do not get it.

Finch: Do you not know Violet? I am "the freak". I am fucked up! I need you to leave. Go!

(1:23:34)

In the dialogue above, Finch experienced depression. This condition worsened due to lack of support from his surroundings. He faced frequent bullying, being labeled as troubled and strange, making it hard for him to concentrate and stay calm. Finch often vanished without explanation and became angry. Without apparent cause, he reverted to his usual state as if nothing had transpired. Severely impacted by the traumatic environment fostered by his family, he confided in Violet during their exchange. The origin of Finch's emotional distress lay in the trauma inflicted by his father and the toxic environment. However, with neither present during the conversation, only Violet served as a recipient of his emotions. This behavior distinctly exhibited traits of the id, as Finch grappled with managing his anxiety and emotions. Consequently, he attributed responsibility to others for his experiences, given that the true source of his anger was absent.

At 1:29:49, Violet discovers Finch's clothes and the car he was driving on the shore of Blue Hole Lake. This is one of their 'Wanderings' spots and is where Finch ends his life by diving so deep that he can't resurface. Finch's actions are driven by his id, which is anxious about his circumstances, frustrated by feeling misunderstood, and confused by his inability to concentrate due to his underdeveloped ego and superego. Though Finch claims he stays balancing on the edge to reassure himself of his control over life rather than considering its end, he struggles with persistent thoughts of suicide.

He frequently researched ways to end his life, making lists and memorizing famous suicide notes. As he grows closer to Violet, Finch realizes he has found a reason to keep going and stay awake. Despite trying to resist the urge to give in to despair and stay with

Violet, Finch refuses help when it's offered. He disappears for weeks before sending mysterious emails to friends, family, and Violet. Violet later discovers that he drowned in Blue Hole Lake.

3. Finch's character based on the Ego

Finch's character, driven by the Ego, serves as the primary decision-maker within his personality, responsible for handling reality. It mediates between the id's demands and the superego's restrictions. The Ego evolves from the id and channels its impulses and pressures into acceptable behaviors. For example, in people with high aggression, their urges must be moderated and controlled. Thus, the Ego's role is to help individuals choose actions that satisfy their desires without causing harm. Additionally, the Ego supports essential mental processes like reasoning, decision-making, and problem-solving. The ensuing dialogues and explanations illustrate these concepts in practice.

Violet: So, what are you most afraid of?

Finch: Uh... I don't know. I guess losing my sister. My mom's gone lot. My dad left a while ago. New town, new family. So, Kate is basically all I have.

Violet: How did you get that? (Pointing to the wound on Finch's stomach)

Finch: I'm going in search of the bottom.

(01:01:03)

Finch's actions are shaped by the ego, according to Sigmund Freud's theory, which suggests that the ego functions as the reality principle, leading the personality with logical making choices. In the depicted scenario, Finch suppresses his feelings of unease when Violet poses a question. During their relaxed conversation after diving into Blue Hole Lake, they try to learn more about each other's lives. However, Finch's attitude changes when he talks about his relatives and avoids questions about a gash on his abdomen, choosing instead to change the subject and dive back into the lake.

Violet's investigation into Finch's prior trauma is what caused this reaction, caused by his father's violent actions. Disregarding

Violet's inquiries, Finch maintains his composure by keeping distressing or threatening thoughts out of his subconscious. His avoidance is not because he is offended, but because he wants to avoid recalling negative memories of his dad. Finch's actions indicate that someone dealing with past trauma, leading to inner conflict. People often avoid topics related to such conflicts to avoid confronting their own painful experiences.

4. Finch's character based on the Superego

The third element of the Personality Structure is the Superego, characterized by representing an individual's sense of morality. The superego functions like a conscience, distinguishing between right and wrong. Unlike the ego and id, the superego does not consider the reality or practicality of a situation. Instead, it acts as an internal regulator that guides individuals to adhere to the moral and ethical standards of society. For instance, consider a person named Wina who feels tempted to steal her friend's camera.

Wina may believe she can steal it without getting caught. However, when she contemplates the action, she recognizes that stealing is wrong and contradicts her moral principles. Despite the opportunity, Wina chooses not to steal because her conscience tells her it's wrong. In this scenario, Wina's Superego leads her to decide aligned with her moral values, even if it opposes her basic desires or the impulses of the id. Therefore, the Superego serves as an internal guide, helping individuals act according to societal norms and morality.

Mr. Markey: Finch!

Finch: If I could... I'm so sorry. It was my fault. I fucked up. Please, just don't blame her. Please, I'm sorry.

(01:08:26)

The conversation mentioned above happens when Finch and Violet accidentally fail to return home. They had been working on their "wandering" project and ended up sleeping in the train carriage. When they wake up the next day, they realize their mistake and rush home. Finch's actions in this situation show his moral perception concerning Violet

and her parents indicating His actions are guided by the superego, leading him to make decisions rooted in moral values. Although the situation wasn't completely Finch's responsibility, he could have avoided responsibility and left the issue unresolved. However, he understood the possible negative outcomes and how it could affect his relationship with Violet and her parents. So, he decided to take responsibility and apologize to Violet's parents because he felt guilty.

Violet: I do not understand what that means.

Finch: Sometimes I go blank. I get into these dark moods. I think too fast to keep track of anything, and then it is like all my thoughts are gone at once. And If I put them up there, I can focus and slowdown.

(01:22:15)

The conversation depicts Finch as someone under pressure, seeking a way to relieve it. Instead of facing the issue head-on and expressing his emotions to the right person or source, he finds an alternative outlet. Finch realizes he can't directly communicate his feelings to the source, leading him to find another way to ease his stress. Writing down his experiences and thoughts has become his coping mechanism, helping him relieve stress and stay focused.

Finch understands that his current state could negatively impact both himself and those around him. Aware of this, he tries to channel his anger elsewhere. This shows the influence of his superego, which aims to guide his ego towards idealistic behavior, even if it opposes the id's desires. With many unresolved emotions, Finch struggles to address them effectively. To prevent stress and anxiety from turning into passive-aggressive behavior, he knows the importance of finding healthy outlets for his emotions.

Discussion

The analysis of Theodore Finch's character in "All the Bright Places" reveals a complex interplay between the three fundamental components of personality as theorized by Freud: the id, ego, and superego. Through detailed scene analysis,

this study demonstrates how these elements manifest in Finch's behavior and ultimately influence his tragic fate. Recent research by Anderson et al. (2023) suggests that such layered character portrayals in contemporary media significantly impact public understanding of personality disorders.

Finch's internal struggle, characterized by his concept of being "asleep" or "awake," represents a profound battle with his id. His description of watching himself during confrontations indicates a disconnection between his conscious control and instinctual responses. This aligns with Morrison's (2024) findings on dissociative symptoms in individuals with complex personality disorders, where patients report similar experiences of feeling detached from their actions.

The manifestation of Finch's id becomes particularly evident in confrontational scenes, such as his altercation with Roamer. His immediate, aggressive response to being called a "freak" demonstrates the id's primitive need for instant gratification and revenge. This behavior pattern reflects what Thompson and Lee (2022) describe as "impulsive aggression in response to perceived social threats," a common characteristic in individuals struggling with personality disorders.

The ego's role in Finch's character is demonstrated through his attempts to maintain normalcy despite his internal chaos. His strategic avoidance of discussing trauma, particularly regarding his father, shows the ego's protective function. This defensive mechanism aligns with recent studies by Wilson et al. (2024) on trauma response patterns in adolescents with personality disorders, where avoidance serves as a primary coping strategy.

The superego's influence is evident in Finch's moral decision-making, particularly in his interaction with Violet's parents after their accidental overnight stay. His immediate assumption of responsibility reflects the superego's role in maintaining moral standards, even during periods of psychological distress. This demonstrates how the superego can remain functional even

when other aspects of personality are in turmoil.

Finch's coping mechanisms, particularly his method of writing thoughts on walls to maintain focus, represent the ego's attempt to mediate between the id's chaotic impulses and the superego's moral constraints. This behavior demonstrates the complex interplay between different personality components in managing mental health challenges.

The progression of Finch's condition throughout the film illustrates how untreated personality disorders can escalate when proper support systems are absent. His initial resistance to labeling his condition and subsequent rejection of help reflect common barriers to mental health treatment identified in contemporary research.

The relationship between Finch and Violet serves as both a stabilizing and destabilizing force, highlighting how interpersonal relationships can both support and complicate mental health recovery. His ability to find temporary stability through their connection, yet ultimate inability to maintain it, reflects the complex nature of relationship dynamics in personality disorders. The film's portrayal of Finch's tragic end emphasizes the severe consequences of untreated personality disorders. His final decision at Blue Hole Lake represents the ultimate dominance of the id over the ego and superego, indicating a complete breakdown of the personality's regulatory systems.

Significantly, the study reveals how media representations of personality disorders can provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals struggling with mental health. The detailed portrayal of Finch's internal struggles offers a framework for understanding the complexity of personality disorders.

The findings contribute to the growing body of research on mental health representation in media, particularly regarding the portrayal of personality disorders in young adult narratives. This analysis provides valuable insights for both mental health professionals and media creators in understanding how to sensitively

and accurately depict mental health struggles.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding how personality disorders are portrayed in contemporary media and their impact on public perception. By analyzing Finch's character through Freudian theory while incorporating modern psychological perspectives, this study bridges classical psychoanalytic theory with contemporary mental health discourse. This integration provides valuable insights for both clinical understanding and media representation of personality disorders.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the manifestation of personality disorders through the character of Theodore Finch in "All the Bright Places," utilizing Freud's structural model of personality as a theoretical framework. Through detailed analysis of Finch's behaviors, decisions, and interactions, the research demonstrates how the id, ego, and superego interact and influence an individual struggling with mental health challenges. The findings reveal that Finch's personality disorder significantly impacts his ability to maintain emotional stability, form relationships, and make rational decisions. His constant struggle between impulsive behaviors (id), attempts at rational control (ego), and moral considerations (superego) ultimately leads to his tragic end, highlighting the severe consequences of untreated personality disorders in young adults.

The implications of this research extend beyond literary analysis, contributing to our understanding of how mental health issues are portrayed in contemporary media and their impact on public perception. The study emphasizes the importance of accurate and sensitive representation of personality disorders in film, as these portrayals can significantly influence societal understanding and attitudes toward mental health. Furthermore, this analysis provides valuable insights for mental health professionals, educators, and media creators in understanding the complex interplay between different aspects of personality in individuals

with mental health challenges. The findings underscore the critical need for early intervention, proper support systems, and destigmatization of mental health issues, particularly among young adults

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