

Psychoanalytic Analysis of The Main Characters in The Shawshank Redemption (1994) MovieAqsa Rani*, Maryum Firdous², Syeda Adeena Tahir³, Anum Abrar⁴**Original Article**

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Abstract

The current study focused on analyzing the personalities of the two main characters of the movie (Andy Dufresne and Ellis Boyd Redding alias Red) in light of the Freudian personality theory. Sigmund Freud provided the concept of personality dynamics known as the Id, Ego, and Superego. He also proposed the idea of ego defense mechanisms: used when a conflict between the Id and Superego arises. Therefore, the characters above were examined using the psychoanalytic structure of personality: id, ego, and superego. The id includes impulses, the ego demonstrates rational thinking, whereas the superego introduces moral standards. The data was obtained by watching the movie, selecting the quotes, and studying the theme and story plot of the movie. According to the findings, the two characters used various defense mechanisms such as intellectualization, regression, and rationalization. Andy Dufresne is also presumed to have a more powerful ego and superego than Red. The study also discusses the theme of the movie and one of its important lessons.

Keywords: Freudian personality theory, Personality dynamics, Ego defenses, Psychoanalysis, Shawshank Redemption (1994)

Introduction

Infact human beings are the subject of research in different sciences including literature and psychology. Literature is a reflection of human life represented in various forms such as poetry, theatre, films, plays, and many other forms of fiction. If we take a fiction book as an example, we can assume that the author could express his own issues, needs, and how they perceive and value life. In the same way, psychology is the study of the human mind and behavior that ultimately makes humans its research object, either directly or indirectly.

In the modern world, psychology is the integration of different academic disciplines such as the humanities, social sciences, sociology, and cognitive and behavioral sciences. The blend of various aspects makes psychology not only the study of mind and behavior but also gives us a profound understanding of the human personality.

Freud concentrated on the internal and unconscious processes of human personality, providing an insight into their hidden desires, and suppressed conflicts. Therefore, the main purpose of the present study is to analyze the personality of the main characters of the movie, *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) by identifying the unconscious needs and conflicts, as theorized by Freud.

The movie "*The Shawshank Redemption*" (1994) is based on a Stephen King novel of the same name and directed by Frank Darabont. In the film, the central focus revolves around Andy Dufresne, portrayed by Tim Robbins, who finds himself at the center of the narrative. His journey begins in 1949 when he receives two life sentences for the murders of his wife and her boyfriend, setting the stage for the story's unfolding. He was a wise and accomplished banker, and throughout the trial and his time in jail, he claimed to be innocent of the crime.

Summary of The Movie

The narrative revolves around the wrongful conviction and imprisonment of an innocent man, highlighting his enduring friendship with a fellow inmate known as Red. Their bond deepens over several years as they find comfort and eventual redemption through acts of kindness and decency within the harsh prison environment. Throughout their shared detention, these two prisoners forge a strong connection, forming a mutual respect born out of their shared hardships. The film depicts a man's adaptation to a harsh new reality through his interactions with fellow inmates, focusing on his deep bond with an experienced prisoner named Red.

When Andy was transferred to Maine's Shawshank prison, he experienced the brutal realities of jail dehumanization from the first day of his detention. From witnessing a fellow prisoner being physically assaulted by the guards for asking about food to all new prisoners being hosed down and led naked to their cells. After being quiet for a few months, Andy gradually began to interact with others and develop connections. Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding, portrayed by Morgan Freeman, was the first prisoner Andy made friends with. Red is the prison's black-market seller, who initially assisted Andy in reaching his objective by demonstrating the materials he most essentially required. Red portrayed himself as a person with two personalities who switched from person to person. The movie demonstrates that substance use is the most valued kind of smuggling in prison.

It did not take long for Andy to become a victim of sexual harassment and to be assaulted by other prisoners who were essentially a group of homosexuals. Andy had to deal with this until he provided Captain Hadley with some sort of personal assistance, after receiving favors and personal work from Andy, the captain assisted him in the harsh environment and even provided beer to Andy and his friends in one scene.

The religious warden provided a distinct perspective on the events. Although he was a corrupted man, he utilized religion and the Bible to present himself as a man of honor and dignity. The warden participated in the cruel mistreatment and torture of prisoners. He arranged for the inmates to perform manual labor outside the jail. In the movie, a local contractor pays the warden to prevent the prison from operating in his area. Andy assisted the warden with his bribe money and money laundering operation.

The film also portrays the harsh reality of individuals who spend a long time in prison and how it impacts their lifestyle and thinking. This long-term impact is shown through an elderly character named Brooks. Old Brooks had gotten so used to life as a prisoner that when he was

given parole, he attempted to murder another prisoner just to remain in prison. However, he was eventually stopped by Andy along with other groups of companions, who changed his mind to accept the parole and live a "normal" life again. Brooks was paroled out of the Shawshank prison, however, he eventually committed suicide by hanging himself since he could not bear to live this strange existence any longer, indicating the effects of being institutionalized.

On the other hand, Andy maintained his own style of dealing with everyone throughout the film with his unique approach to life. He portrayed himself as a highly sharp, level-headed, and calm individual, and his ability to change his personality depending on the circumstance was his best quality. But deep down, he had an ardent desire to pursue his dream of breaking out of prison. It took him several years, but he never gave up, he also kept this desire to himself and did not even tell anyone about it. Andy approaches Red because he knows Red smuggles things into the prison from outside. He asks Red to smuggle in a rock hammer for him, and he queries Andy about his motives regarding that hammer, but Andy provides a little information that the hammer is essential for his hobby of carving rocks and laughs it off.

Andy spends much of his time during the first two years of his imprisonment fending off Boggs and the homosexual inmates or working in the prison laundry. Andy is frequently beaten and raped but does not speak out about it since he constantly fights them back. Andy also made another unusual request, asking for a poster of the actress Rita Hayworth. Red is taken aback by the request but decides to place the order. All Andy needed was a hammer to dig a hole to escape from the prison and a poster to cover it up to accomplish tasks.

Theoretical Framework

The explanation provided by Freud (1989) about the id, ego, and superego helps recognize and examine the several types of strategies that the movie characters employ and execute in *The Shawshank Redemption* movie. The ego has several tools that must be used in it; they serve as mediators and aid in ego defenses. The term for it is "ego defense mechanisms". Psychoanalytic Theory by Freud states that the human mind consists of three elements: ID, Ego, and Superego. The ID contains the unconscious psychic energy (libido) and instincts. The urges created by ID often lack rational thinking, hence ignoring the harmful consequences. The Ego is part of the conscious mind, functioning as the decision-maker as it experiences the outer world through the senses. So, the Ego experiences pressure from both the Id and Superego which can create a conflict if not balanced properly. Additionally, Freud explains anxiety in his theory. Every person has internal conflicts, and the id, ego, and superego are related to anxiety. The ego may experience anxiety because of internal conflicts between the id and superego. To combat this feeling, the ego employs defense mechanisms as well. According to Freud, the Ego is the strongest in a healthy personality as it can satisfy the needs of the ID; without going against the standards of the Superego.

Literature Review

Rahmi and Arianto (2019) examined the symptoms of acute schizophrenia in the main character (i.e., Teddy alias Andrew Laedis) of Dennis Lehane's *Shutter Island* novel. The researchers utilized the Freudian theory of personality, which included personality dynamics, and ego defense mechanisms. Andrew's ID was dominant, evident by his denial of accepting the reality of her wife being mentally ill. When Andrew loses his children, he develops another identity in his mind: indicating a weak ego that cannot cope with the loss. Psychodrama: a treatment approach that directly teaches the patient about reality, was also discussed.

Kadam (2017) also utilized Freud's personality theory to analyze the intrinsic element involving audience interest in successful Indian movies. The researcher discussed the placement of the id, ego, and superego within the leading characters as the common intrinsic element. They further highlighted the role of conflict between the id, ego, and superego that is resolved by the defense mechanism of sublimation and keeps the audience engaged.

Research conducted by Sabila and Khoiri (2022) discussed how childhood trauma influences an individual's adult life in Gerald's Game movie, in the light of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The researchers highlighted that sexual abuse manifests in nightmares, while emotional abuse by parents during childhood may result in difficulty learning and socializing later in adulthood. They also discuss how fear and anxiety are embedded in an individual's unconscious due to traumatic childhood memories.

Another similar research by Saggu (2020) analyzed the character of Arthur Fleck in the movie Joker (2019) through Freudian theory. The researcher discussed the superego being the main driving force of Arthur's personality, which is later dominated by his ego after social isolation and continuous mistreatment by society. His alter-ego is a manifestation of his repressed urges in the unconscious; these urges were fulfilled in his dreams before the violent transformation. The researcher also highlighted the importance of providing people with mental illness with proper care and support systems.

Another similar research aimed to investigate the absence of a mother figure in Disney movies. The researchers concluded that this phenomenon was influenced by the Electra and Oedipus complex of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. They also discussed the possibility of Disney movies' subliminal messages influencing children subconsciously. Therefore, advised parents to accompany their children while watching Disney movies; and provide a direction for good thinking (Aftani et al., 2019).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are stated as follows:

- 1) To explore Andy Dufresne's personality structure in the Shawshank Redemption Movie (1994)
- 2) To explore Red's personality structure in the Shawshank Redemption Movie (1994).

Methodology

The research methodology involved applying Freud's concept of psychoanalysis, focusing on structural dynamics, and ego defense mechanisms. The Shawshank Redemption (1994) movie, downloaded from a website, was the main source for the personality analysis. Moreover, the explanations of the chosen theory are sourced from the book, 'The ego and the id' by Freud (1989). The initial stage was to watch the movie and comprehend the theme and the whole story plot. After that, the main characters were selected to be the focus of the research, and various concepts of the theory were applied to provide an understanding of their personality.

Analysis and Discussion

Andy Dufresne's Personality in Freudian Theory Personality Structure

ID. The Id's strength is primarily lacking, but it stands out notably in two instances: first was when he spontaneously gives financial advice to Captain Hadley as seen in the following dialogue:

Andy: If you want to keep that money, all of it, just give it to your wife. See, the IRS allows you a one-time-only gift to your spouse. It's good up to sixty thousand dollars.

Hadley: Naw, that ain't right! Tax free?

Andy: Tax free. IRS can't touch one cent.

Secondly, when he eventually escapes from Shawshank prison in 1966 in the movie.

Ego. Although the defense mechanisms employed by his ego to cope with anxiety may appear pathological, they were utilized in limited circumstances. Ultimately, all of his behaviors can be interpreted as logical, serving the purpose of self-preservation.

Superego. The superego's dominance was infrequent, yet noticeable through his self-blame for his wife's demise, despite her infidelity. This suggests that he felt responsible for her well-being and experienced remorse for his inability to prevent her death. The dialogue below may represent Andy's superego's ethical principles:

Andy: My wife used to say I'm a hard man to know. Like a closed book. Complained about it all the time. (pause) She was beautiful. I loved her. But I guess I couldn't show it enough. (softly) I killed her, Red.

Andy: I didn't pull the trigger. But I drove her away. That's why she died. Because of me, the way I am.

Ego Defense Mechanisms

Intellectualization. It refers to avoiding thinking about stressful thoughts, a person engages in intellectualization, which involves trying to think of non-stressful ideas that can take their place (Freud, 1963b). After a fight, Andy stalked his wife the night before the crime, and the prosecutor questioned Andy during the trial regarding his testimony and whether he killed his wife and her lover or not.

D.A.: When they arrived, you went up to the house and murdered them?

Andy: No. I was sobering up. I realized she wasn't worth it. I decided to let her have her quickie divorce.

D.A.: Quickie divorce indeed. A .38 caliber divorce, wrapped in a hand towel to muffle the shots, isn't that what you mean? And then you shot her lover!

Andy: I did not. I got back in the car and drove home to sleep it off. Along the way, stopped and threw my gun into the Royal River. I feel I've been very clear on this point.

The above dialogue demonstrates Andy's use of intellectualization as a form of protection mechanism. By avoiding uncomfortable thoughts, Andy can respond to the lawyer's inquiry by thinking about less stressful alternatives in their place.

Regression. It refers to acting like a child rather than an adult in a difficult situation (Freud, 1977).

It usually occurs due to stressful circumstances; more stress may cause more regressive behavior. After Andy started to work as the librarian, he wanted to collect some funds to renovate the library and bring in the latest books and other literature that the inmates might be interested in.

Norton: Far as them Republican boys in Augusta are concerned, there's only three ways to spend the taxpayer's hard-earned when it comes to prisons. More walls. More bars. More guards.

Andy: Still, I'd like to try, with your permission. I'll send a letter a week. They can't ignore me forever.

From the above dialogue, Andy Dufresne clearly engages in regression. Regression is a type of coping strategy that entails acting like a child in a challenging situation rather than acting more maturely. The issue is that Andy believes the prisoners have severe issues with certain things after taking over the library. He is adopting a child's perspective and later started writing two letters a week to the State Senate in Augusta, Maine asking for funding for books. He exploited regression to get the library expanded. He always writes a lot and sends applications to the Maine State Senate. In Shawshank, it makes him feel better than doing nothing.

Repression. It includes burying painful thoughts in the unconscious mind's more remote regions (Freud, 1963a). When something happens that the person cannot manage right, immediately, they push it away. Whenever Andy was asked by his fellow inmates about his work with the warden, he would refuse to talk about it. He was never interested in discussing that aspect of his life, which is understandable. Repression is the purposeful erasing of information connected to conflict and stress, performed by Andy Dufresne. However, when Red wants to talk about his work with Warden Norton, Andy remembers everything about it and prefers not to discuss it with him because he no longer wants to remember it. Andy tries to suppress the memory of his dirty work with Warden Norton because he believes that if he does, it will make him feel bad about himself.

Red's Personality in Freudian Theory

Red is determined to stay in the prison and is a person with a strong personality which is evident in his ability to adapt to the environment of the prison as he even managed to make a standing of himself as someone who knows his way around the prisoner and the provider of outside things. He eventually adapted to his environment and believes he has also been institutionalized like another prisoner named Brooks. When Red saw Andy for the first time, he perceived him as a meek person with a weak personality who would eventually have a mental breakdown in his harsh and violent environment.

Personality Structure

ID. He wanted to have some control over his life. Due to this, he supplies all the desired things of the people in prison, for example, he supplies posters to Andy and even manages to give him a smaller hammer.

Ego. It is balanced and stable because he fulfilled the desires of the Id in such a way that was somewhat appropriate and not harmful in such an environment. This indicates the tendency of the Ego to be the self-preserving aspect of the personality. He also keeps to himself and tries to

avoid situations where there could be a potential danger, the one scene where his ego is a lot more prominent is when he tries to call Andy back when Andy is impulsively advising the captain about the finances.

Superego. Although it is assumed that his superego is weak as he did commit murder, and continues the smuggling process, we get to see a glimpse of his standards in the scene where he tries to convince Brooks to remove the knife away from Tommy's neck and not kill him.

Red: No. We'll handle this. Ain't that right, Brooks? Just settle down and we'll talk about it, okay?

Brooks: Nothing left to talk about! It's all talked out! Nothing left now but to cut his fuckin' throat!

Red even went to look for others when he saw that Brooks would not listen to him. It is evident from this that although less prominent, Red does have the sense of differentiating between right and wrong and standards according to it.

Ego Defense Mechanisms

Rationalization. It is an unconscious effort to evade confronting the underlying causes of behavior (Jones, 1908). He shuts out any hope of getting parole and states that it is better that way because now he has been institutionalized.

Red: Jesus, Andy. I couldn't hack it on the outside. Been in here too long. I'm an institutional man now. Like old Brooks Hatlen was.

As indicated by the above dialogue, Red refuses the offer of Andy to escape together because he believes he has been institutionalized when in reality he was just afraid of the uncertainty.

Reaction Formation. It involves behaving oppositely to what one thinks or feels (Freud, 1963b).

Red is a valuable person in Shawshank prison because he can bring in anything from the outside. He has protection and respect from other prisoners because of this. In a violent and exploitative society, Red controls the prison's business and looks out for his own interests. Despite this, he struggles to find meaning in his life inside and outside of prison. He uses the reaction formation defense mechanism to hide his fear and uncertainty. Red presents himself as confident and intelligent, but in reality, he is the opposite. The film reveals him to be insecure and confused about his purpose, and fearful of his actions. Despite this, he continues to engage in smuggling without any apparent fear.

Red: (V.O.): Terrible thing, to live in fear. Brooks Hatlen knew it. Knew it all too well. All I want is to be back where things make sense. Where I won't have to be afraid all the time.

As indicated by the above dialogues, it was evident that Red harbored fear and insecurity, despite projecting a confident persona in the prison.

Conclusion

The Shawshank Redemption describes Andy Dufresne, the main character, going through the Shawshank State Prison. The story starts with Andy arriving at the prison for murdering his wife and her lover. Andy was found guilty according to the evidence and sentenced

to life imprisonment. The study aims to help ease doubts about the types of defense mechanisms Andy Dufresne used throughout the film. The Sigmund Freud theory is used for this analysis. Due to his stable attitude and image as a self-possessed, asocial, and smart figure, Andy Dufresne is revealed to be both a key character and a static character (a literary or theatrical character that experiences little or no inner change).

According to the analysis, Andy Dufresne supposedly uses six out of nine types of defense mechanisms. The most frequent method is Intellectualization, followed by Rationalization and Regression. Similarly, Reaction Formation, Projection, and Repression are used minimally. However, the usage of Displacement, Denial, and Sublimation is absent in the movie. The only methods that Andy, the movie's main character, uses frequently—intellectualization, rationalization, and regression—are discussed here. He uses logical/rational reason instead of real reason because the real reason makes him anxious.

Additionally, repression is also evident as he buries his uncomfortable thoughts and suppresses his anxiety. The final two are reaction formation and projection, which allow Andy to act in a way that distances him from his feared position and allows him to project his uncomfortable thoughts onto another person. This allows Andy to transfer the thoughts or feelings that he needs to repress to a convenient new target.

Throughout the movie, the theme of freedom is manifested through Freud's psychoanalytic defense mechanisms and inner conflicts experienced by the characters. Red is motivated by the concept of living an independent life and the freedom of self, which comes from one's perception of life rather than being outside of prison walls. One of the most important lessons the movie taught us was that we must overcome our biases and break the mental barriers of our misguided thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions to achieve what we desire.

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