

Analysis of Psychological Issues in *Me Before You*

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Abstract

This study examined the psychological issues and how they affect the behaviors of the protagonists Will and Louisa in the movie Me Before You and their decision-making processes. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach and incorporated Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyze the film's narrative. Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego provide insights into the underlying motivations driving the characters' actions. The findings revealed that Will's struggles with depression, loss of identity, and desire for autonomy drive his decision for assisted suicide while Louisa faces her own challenges with fear of change and societal pressures. The study concluded that experiencing accidents and depression could lead to risky behavior, while highlighting the importance of companionship and understanding, and emphasizing the role of psychological factors in decision-making. Applying Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concepts of id, ego, and superego to the protagonists, Will Traynor and Louisa Clark, offers valuable insights into their psychological struggles, enriching the narrative and enhancing its relatability for readers. Future research should explore the ethical implications of assisted suicide, the impact of social isolation on mental health, and the role of humor in caregiving relationships. This will contribute to a deeper understanding of human behavior in challenging circumstances.

Keywords: *psychological issues; Me Before You; psychoanalysis; decision-making process; human behavior*

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Introduction

Sometimes people make decisions due to psychological issues which greatly affect the decision-making process. Two separate studies found that “psychological factors such as personal preferences, hope, morality, and emotions play a significant role in decision-

making” (Blakeley et al., 2019; Latief & Niu, 2020). Psychological issues can significantly impact decision-making processes in various aspects of life.

Me Before You is a romance novel written by Jojo Moyes. Following its publication in 2012, the book gained international recognition and was eventually made into a hit

movie in 2016. The film is about Will Traynor, an athletic person who had a vehicle accident, resulting in being quadriplegic, and then met his caregiver, Louisa Clark.

Exploring psychological issues is fundamental for understanding the mental processes that affect human behavior. It's the key in understanding ourselves and others as it provides us insight into why people behave the way they do. As a result, this fosters self-awareness, develops empathy, and creates meaningful connections with others. "Studies found that psychological issues can lead to adjustment problems, affect social connectedness, and influence how individuals cope with stressors, ultimately impacting their mental health" (Alshammari et al., 2023; Lin & Lin, 2022). By recognizing and understanding these difficulties faced by individuals, we can offer support and understanding and potentially help them in overcoming obstacles. Acknowledging and respecting the diverse range of psychological issues people face can create a more supportive and inclusive community where everyone feels valued and understood. This empathy and awareness can make a significant difference in helping individuals navigate their mental health journey and lead more fulfilling lives.

Movies pave the way to explore and learn about human psychology. By looking at popular films from a psychological perspective we can discover valuable insights and deepen our understanding of the stories. "This aligns with a study that films provide a platform where theories and concepts in psychology are concretized, allowing viewers to understand and observe human psychology" (Durak & Senol-Durak, 2019). This research highlights the valuable role of cinema in bringing psychological principles to life and fostering a deeper understanding of the human mind and behavior. Hence, studying psychological issues in movies is important because it helps us gain deep insights into the characters' thoughts and feelings. It also makes us more aware of these challenges in real life. By looking at the psychological issues of the movie "Me Before You," people can better understand the challenges and emotions that the characters are experiencing.

In light of this a recent study by Alatawi and Harshan (2023) "shows that when people read, they form a strong bond with the characters. As they analyze the text, they develop true empathy for the characters". This study suggests that reading, including watching movies, helps people become more empathetic by allowing them to emotionally connect with the characters' experiences and involve themselves in fictional characters' lives and gain a deeper understanding of different perspectives and emotions. By engaging with the characters' journeys, readers can broaden their own capacity for empathy and compassion towards others in the real world. This method of emotional involvement helps in identifying and understanding the psychological issues that are depicted through the screen. Therefore, movies are reflections of real-life mental problems like what's been depicted in the movie "Me Before You". This assists the viewers to feel more connected and understand complex human actions and feelings. This involvement not only boosts emotional understanding but also encourages better understanding for human psychology. It will also help individuals in order to better understand themselves as well as other people more deeply.

The movie "Me Before You," has been the subject of several research studies that analyze various aspects of the film and its source material, the novel by Jojo Moyes. These studies explore the characteristics of the main character, the use of politeness strategies, depression, and the representation of disability in the narrative. It serves as a pathetic reflection on life, love, and the complexities of human emotions. It encourages viewers to contemplate the meaning of happiness, the power of human connection, and the impact of our choices on our own lives and the lives of others. The emotional journey of the main character, Louisa Clark, as she navigates love, loss, and personal growth, has resonated with many audiences. The portrayal of disability in the narrative has also raised important questions about representation and inclusivity in media.

One study aims to analyze the characteristics of the main character in the

movie "Me Before You" directed by Thea Sharrock. By examining the protagonist's esteem needs, "this research identified seven key personality traits that make up an esteem needs hierarchy: sensitive, open-minded, friendly, kind, confident, humble, and stubborn. This hierarchy reflects the human desire for approval, value, and recognition as a means of achieving self-esteem" (Anggraeni, Manalu, & Anggraini, 2021). This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological factors that influence an individual's sense of self-worth and overall well-being. Moreover, a study analyzes the politeness strategies and factors that exist in the movie "Me Before You" using Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategies. The research found that "the genre of the film, the ages of the characters, and the closeness of their relationships all play a role in determining the politeness strategies used" (Tetenaung & Heryono, 2022). This suggests that filmmakers carefully consider politeness when crafting dialogue, in order to create authentic and relatable interactions between characters, regardless of the specific context. In addition, Hariani & Wulan (2019) focused on the symptoms and causes of the protagonist's specifically in Will's depression. They argue "that depression is more than just feelings of unhappiness, clinical or major depression is a mood disorder, a medical illness that involves both the body and mind. Depression is an excessively sad feeling until it may make someone think that his life is meaningless".

The existing literature on "Me Before You" reveals a significant research gap in the integration of diverse psychological perspectives. While individual studies have examined specific aspects such as the protagonist's esteem needs (Anggraeni, Manalu, & Anggraini, 2021), politeness strategies (Tetenaung & Heryono, 2022), and symptoms of depression (Hariani & Wulan, 2019), these elements are often analyzed in isolation. Consequently, there is a need for a more holistic approach that synthesizes these findings with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Such an approach would examine how the interplay of the id, ego, and superego collectively influences the characters' decision-making and behavior. Addressing this

gap would enhance the understanding of the characters' psychological experiences and offer a more comprehensive analysis of their internal and external conflicts.

In connection with our study, the paper focuses not just on the protagonist's depression; rather, it focuses on the psychological issues experienced by Will and Louisa. The paper highlights Will's trauma against his accident, which caused him to suffer depression, the reasons for his attempts to push away loved ones, steady decisions, and his recurrent thoughts of ending his life that are clear manifestations of the profound impact of his sufferings. Lastly, a paper examines the portrayal of disability in the film "Me Before You" through a sociological analysis. The study focuses on the "better dead than disabled" trope, which suggests that living with a disability is a fate worse than death. (Mendez, 2019) This research critically evaluates the film's representation of disability and its potential impact on societal attitudes.

Expanding on the findings of the literature review, this study aims to explore the psychological issues of the protagonists Will and Louisa in the movie "Me Before You," and its impact on their decision-making processes. *Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which emphasizes unconscious motivations and conflicts that drive behavior, has significantly influenced personality psychology* (Zhang, 2020). Hence, through the perspective of Sigmund Freud's ideas about how people think, the study will look into what really drives the character's decision. This study will apply Freud's ideas about human thought to explore the underlying psychological motivations of the characters, analyzing the roles of the id, ego, and superego influencing their actions and decision-making processes. By applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory to Will and Louisa, this study seeks to reveal how their unconscious motivations and internal conflicts shape their decisions and interactions

Methodology

The literary approach employed in this study utilizes Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic

theory to examine the psychological motivations of the characters Will Traynor and Louisa Clark in "Me Before You." Freud's theory, which centers on the roles of the id, ego, and superego, provides a framework for understanding how unconscious motivations and internal conflicts shape the characters' decisions and actions.

In conjunction with this literary approach, the study employs a qualitative descriptive research method. This method involves "the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, primarily in the form of words, to gain insights into a particular phenomenon" (Fadli, 2021). By integrating this research method with Freud's psychoanalytic concepts, the study aims to explore the psychological issues depicted in the film and to provide insightful interpretations of the human experiences portrayed. Consequently, this approach allows for a nuanced analysis of the characters' psychological dynamics within the narrative.

The researcher began by analyzing the film "Me Before You" through initial viewing to identify the main characters' psychological issues. This study used Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyze the psychological motivations of Will Traynor and Louisa Clark, exploring the roles of id, ego, and superego in their decision-making processes and actions. Will Traynor's disability significantly influence both his conscious intentions and unconscious motivations. In contrast, Louisa Clark's personal struggles are marked by her use of humor as a coping mechanism, her fear of change, and her role as a caregiver. By examining these aspects, the study reveals how Freud's concepts apply to their psychological dynamics. Due to the descriptive nature of the research, this study focuses on the movie itself, and there are no participants involved in this analysis.

The primary source utilized by the researchers is the 2016 film adaptation of "Me Before You," produced by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Sunswept Entertainment, and distributed by Warner Bros. Directed by Thea Sharrock, the film features Sam Claflin as William Traynor and Emilia Clarke as Louisa Clark. Specific scenes are examined to

determine how the characters' psychological struggles are portrayed through their dialogue, actions, and interactions with other characters. The analysis begins with a screening of the film to identify key moments that highlight the psychological issues of depression, fear of change, and the desire for autonomy. These events are then investigated to see how the characters' actions correspond to the components of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, specifically the id, ego, and superego. In addition, the data gathered such as academic journals, articles, and related studies that discuss psychological theories, characters analysis, and film critiques. These sources provide context and theoretical support for interpreting the psychological motivations and behaviors of the characters. Previous studies are used to compare and contrast the psychological findings derived from the film analysis. The data analyzes synthesizes the findings from the film analysis and literature review to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological issues faced by Will Traynor and Louisa Clark. The study concludes by emphasizing the significant role of unconscious motivations and internal conflicts in shaping human behavior and decision-making, as illustrated by the characters in "Me Before You."

Results and Discussion

1. Will Traynor's Psychological Issues

Will Traynor, an athletic and successful banker faced an unfortunate vehicle accident that led him to be quadriplegic and was diagnosed with Autonomic Dysreflexia, "a serious condition often associated with spinal cord injuries, characterized by symptoms such as high blood pressure, headache, diaphoresis, and anxiety" (Alvarado et al., 2023). With a spinal cord injury, his body became paralyzed, leaving only his head mobile. Two years later, Will was depicted as grumpy, distant, has low self-worth, and barely leaving his house; which are clear symptoms of depression. Two studies found that "Will struggles with depression, a challenged sense of identity, and self-worth, ultimately leading to a tragic decision" (Hariani & Wulan, 2019) and "in times of stress or difficulty, individuals may experience

conflicts within their unconscious minds, leading to manifestations of tension and aggression either towards themselves or others” (Ayar & Demir, 2022). Therefore, when people are under a lot of stress or facing problems, they can have inner conflicts that they're not even aware of. This can cause them to feel tense and act aggressively, either by being mean to themselves or taking it out on others. This particular finding is seen in the scene where Will intentionally threw the frames with a picture of his former successful self after his ex-lover and best friend visited him, reminding him of his unfortunate current situation. Meanwhile, his self-worth is questioned when his ex-lover dumped him and had a relationship with his best friend. These challenges he experienced plays an important role in shaping his decisions and actions throughout the story, highlighting the impact of psychological struggles on individual choices and outcomes. Ultimately leading him to isolate himself from other people, including his family.

Based on a study of Choi & Kangas (2020) they argue that “when individuals face accidents, they may become distant for various reasons. Trauma survivors may distance themselves from their feelings to cope with invalidating situations’. This finding was clearly seen when no caregiver lasted until Louisa Clark came. His behavior of isolating himself and avoiding going outside has significant implications for his mental health and overall well-being. Social isolation has been consistently linked to an increased risk of depression across various studies. For instance, Mishra & Pradhan (2023) *found that* “socially isolated individuals are at a higher risk of suffering from depression”. Although Will had his family and Nathan on his side, he still had a barrier that created distance among them. Moreover, Will has given up almost everything including his job and relationship. This aligns with the argument that the “people with disabilities viewed life as a prison that destiny had ordained for them and trapped them in the fences of isolation, anger, regret, anxiety, sorrow, pity, and futility such that they require assistance from others as dependent individuals” (Hashemiparast, 2022). With his current situation, Will constantly feels discomfort and exhaustion, hence always

needing assistance. Therefore, Will's attitude reflected his struggle to come to terms with his circumstances, leading to bitterness.

To further illustrate this point, when Will brought up the topic that he wants to visit Paris, not in his current situation but instead with his former self, and said, “I don't want these memories erased by the struggle to fit behind a table,” reflected his frustration and hopelessness with his current situation and longing for his past version of himself. Additionally, as Will led a successful life as a banker and even an athletic person, the prospect of never experiencing that again and his loss of independence fueled his desire to end his life. This supports the idea that “the desire to maintain autonomy in the face of impending suffering or death is a common reason cited for choosing euthanasia” (Rajkumar, 2021). Thus, Will Traynor's decision to pursue assisted suicide can be seen as a manifestation of this desire, as he seeks to regain control over his life and body in the face of his unfortunate condition. This desire for autonomy is deeply rooted in Will's sense of identity and self-worth, which are significantly impacted by his quadriplegia.

2. Louisa Clark's Psychological Issues

Louisa Clark's character is portrayed as cheerful and optimistic despite initially struggling with Will's reluctance to let people into his life. Nonetheless, she frequently uses humor and lighthearted jokes in her interactions with Will and her family. Leading their relationship improving. It aligns with research findings that humor plays a significant role in caregiving. Studies have shown that “humor can have positive effects on caregivers and care recipients, such as reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and tension” (Moon et al., 2022). Later on, after watching Will's favorite movie together, Will was able to open up to her and their relationship grew close. However, after finding out that Will decided to have an assisted death, she devoted her time and effort to caring for Will and convincing him to live. The efforts made by Louisa Clark, to change Will's perspective and potentially alter his decision, highlight “the complexities of human relationships and the influence individuals can

have on each other” (Devi & Setyabudi, 2022). Louisa’s actions in order to bond with Will, empathize with his difficulties, and share a different perspective demonstrate how people can influence each other’s lives, even in tough times.

However, despite Louisa’s positive attitude, Louisa struggles with fear of change. This fear comes from her self-esteem, she has always been the provider to her family, a sudden change of events might cause her to overthink things such as not being enough to provide for her family where she has been doing for so long, she was always labeled as someone her family relies on. A study found that “fear responses can be influenced by different factors, including shifts in responsibilities and environmental changes” (Abdullah & Syariati, 2020). Connecting this to Louisa’s situation, after she was fired from her seven years job, she found herself feeling lost and desperate, which led her to accept a job that she was unfamiliar with. Similarly, three studies found out that “the fear of job loss and financial worries can lead individuals to accept positions they may not be entirely comfortable with, as seen in studies on job insecurity during the pandemic” (Bürmann et al., 2022; Elshaer et al., 2022; Bilal et al., 2022). By this, Louisa’s decision stemmed from fear of uncertainty after losing her job, driven by the need to provide for her family. This illustrates how external changes can trigger fear responses, influencing decision-making, especially during challenging times. Furthermore, the scene where Louisa shared with Will that she wanted to study fashion but did not pursue it illustrates how her family’s situation hinders her from following her ambition. This is supported by a study that found “feeling burdened by responsibilities, whether familial or societal, can create barriers to pursuing one’s aspirations” (Neuwelt-Kearns et al., 2021). Therefore, people often do not pursue their dreams due to a combination of factors such as lack of confidence and financial struggles, which is evident to Louisa’s underprivileged family situation.

3. The concept of id, ego, and superego by Sigmund Freud applied in Will Traynor and Louisa Clark’s psychological struggles

The protagonists of the story Will Traynor and Louisa Clark suffered from turmoil that cannot be seen with the naked eye. In order to analyze these turmoils the researcher uses the concept of id, ego, and superego by Sigmund Freud. *According to Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, the id is the primitive and instinctual part of the mind that contains sexual and aggressive drives and hidden memories, the superego operates as a moral conscience, and the ego is the realistic part that mediates between the desires of the id and the super-ego* (McLeod, 2023).

a. Will Traynor and Louisa Clark’s Id

After experiencing an accident, individuals often seek comfort and freedom for various reasons. Just like in the scene where Will said, “*No more pain and exhaustion,*” despite his love for Louisa. Will’s id desires to stop the pain and suffering he was going through, hence having the urge to end his life. This can be supported according to the study of HO et al. (2022) “that accidents can trigger a desire for freedom from suffering, leading individuals to prioritize minimizing pain and distress over other considerations”. Thus, the pain Will was experiencing since the accident exhausted him to the point of wanting to end his life despite having a privileged family and his new love affair with Louisa.

In the scene at the beach where Louisa said that she can make Will happy as long as he gave her the chance.

Louisa: “I thought I was changing your mind”

It was Louisa’s Id, driven by immediate desires and emotions, momentarily overrides her rational thoughts, causing her to inadvertently express her innermost feelings. In accordance with the study of (Supit, 2023) “When faced with the realization that Will has made a firm decision regarding his fate, Louisa’s id emerges, leading to a moment of

emotional outburst and impulsivity". Louisa's impulsivity can be viewed as a manifestation of her id emerging in the situation.

b. Will Traynor and Louisa's Ego

Will's ego surfaced when he decided to fulfill his parents' wish and live for six more months. Despite not wanting to live, his conscience led him to make that decision. This scene emphasizes his respect for his parents despite his struggles. This scene highlights the interplay between personal desires and obligations to others, showcasing the role of the ego in balancing individual needs with external expectations (Shoukat et al., 2021). Thus, his decision demonstrates the ego's role in making rational, reality-based decisions that incorporate both personal desires and well-being of others as seen in the movie.

On the other hand, Louisa's ego is prevalent in that scene when she chose to give up her dream for the sake of providing for the needs of her family, which is her top priority at that moment. This selflessness reflects her strong sense of responsibility and duty towards her loved ones. Her ego understands the external pressures such as the need for a steady job to fulfill her family's needs. "Her decision-making process is influenced by external pressures, such as the necessity for a stable job to support her family" (Gilbride et al., 2020). Her ego plays a crucial part in making a sound decision, considering the present struggle that she and her family are experiencing.

c. Will Traynor and Louisa's Superego

Will's decision to end his life, despite his deep affection for Louisa, remained unchanged. His choice was influenced by the concern that Louisa might not be happy in the long run with him. That eventually, Louisa would come to terms with the reality of his situation. This scene supports the argument when Will selfishly expresses that he doesn't want Louisa to feel any regret or pity for him in the future. While it may seem like he is disregarding Louisa's feelings, in Will's superego, he made the best decision for her to live the rest of her life without him as a burden. *This highlights the complex interplay between*

personal desires, altruism, and consideration for others' well-being in challenging circumstances (Giulietti et al., 2023). It demonstrates that when faced with difficult situations, people must balance their desires and needs with being caring and considering the well-being of others.

Louisa's superego can be interpreted when she chose to grab the caregiving job despite her having a far more different job that she wants to pursue, she used her judgment correctly as she herself knew that at that moment, that was the best decision she could do for herself, and for the sake of her family. Louisa's decision to prioritize a caregiving job over her personal career aspirations can be viewed through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, specifically in terms of her superego. "The superego, as described by Freud, represents the internalization of societal and parental values, morals, and ideals. It acts as a moral compass, guiding individuals to make decisions based on what is perceived as right or wrong" (Akber & Mazhar, 2021). In Louisa's case, her choice to take on the caregiving role despite her own career desires reflects a sense of responsibility towards her family and aligns with the nurturing and selfless aspects associated with the superego.

This finding connects with previous studies reviewed in the introduction, which emphasize the significant role psychological factors play in decision-making processes. For instance, Blakeley et al. (2019) and Latief & Niu (2020) highlighted how "personal preferences, hope, morality, and emotions influence decision-making". Louisa's decision-making is deeply influenced by her moral values and sense of responsibility, which underscores how the superego impacts her choices. This adds depth to our understanding of how psychological factors, such as the superego, shape decisions in complex situations.

Conclusion

By utilizing a Psychoanalytic framework, the study tackles the inquiry by giving a thorough comprehension of how these psychological factors form characters' internal conflicts and guide their decision. The research

problem centers on exploring the psychological issues faced by the protagonists Will and Louisa in the movie "Me Before You," particularly their impact on decision-making processes. By applying Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which emphasizes unconscious motivations and internal conflicts, the study provides a framework for understanding how these factors influence the characters' decisions and interactions.

The findings reveal that Will Traynor's life-altering accident led him to lose hope and consider death as an escape from his harsh reality that even Louisa could not change. This study finds that individuals who experience significant trauma and depression may be more inclined towards risky behavior and drastic decisions, as seen in Will's case.

Conversely, Louisa's character highlights the importance of companionship and understanding in helping individuals cope with their struggles, as seen in the evolving relationship between Will and Louisa in the story. Moreover, her character presents the struggles of a breadwinner who sacrifices personal dreams to provide for her family. This conflict underscores the broader struggle of balancing personal desires with the demands of supporting others. Additionally, it emphasizes that even the most cheerful person faces internal battles.

The application of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concepts of id, ego, and superego to the protagonists, Will Traynor and Louisa Clark provides valuable insights into their psychological issues. Will's journey reflects a constant battle between his id's desire to end his suffering, his ego's attempts to balance personal desires with external obligations, and his superego's concern for Louisa's long-term well-being. Louisa, on the other hand, navigates her emotional issues with moments of impulsive id-driven actions, selfless ego-driven sacrifices, and morally guided superego decisions. Sigmund Freud's concepts deepen their story, making it more meaningful and relatable to readers.

Based on the research findings, it emphasizes the significant role of psychological factors, such as personal

preferences, hope, morality, and emotions, in influencing decision-making. Individuals make decisions based on personal preferences shaped by experience and desires. Hope motivates decision-making by encouraging positivity and determination to achieve the goals. On the other hand, morality guides an individual in making a decision that aligns with their ethical principles and beliefs. While emotions significantly influence decisions, if an individual has positive feelings, then it will lead to careful decision making but if the person has negative emotions, then it will cloud their judgment and result in rash decisions. By applying Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the study provides valuable insights into the underlying psychological dynamics of the characters, enhancing the academic understanding of how internal conflicts and motivations shape human behavior and decision-making processes.

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