

Maternal Neurotic Anxiety in the film *Run* (2020): A Psychoanalysis Study of Diane's Character

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Abstract – Anxiety manifests through excessive and uncontrolled emotions, as well as manipulative behavior. This is caused by intense internal and external conflicts. This study aims to show how films can represent the dynamics of the human psyche and broaden our understanding of the relationship between psychological trauma and anxiety disorder in fictional characters. Using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis approach, this study examines the things that can trigger neurotic anxiety in characters in films. The character Diane is not the main character in the film *Run* (2020), but she is at the center of all the problems that arise for the main character, Chloe. She is depicted as a very protective and impulsive mother towards her daughter, Chloe, who suffers from an illness that causes a disability. The theory used in this study is Freud's theory of personality structure, which includes the id, ego, and superego. This theory is used to analyze data obtained through observations of the script and film. The results of the study show that Diane's neurotic anxiety is triggered by the death of her biological baby and the fear of losing her mother figure, as well as a subconscious urge to act contrary to her reality as a mother.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Neurotic Anxiety, Structure of Personality, Film *Run* (2020)

Abstrak – Kecemasan termanifestasi melalui emosi yang berlebihan dan tidak terkendali, serta perilaku manipulative. Hal ini disebabkan adanya konflik internal dan eksternal yang intens. Penelitian ini bertujuan menunjukkan bagaimana film dapat merepresentasikan dinamika psikis manusia dan memperluas pemahaman kita mengenai hubungan antara trauma psikologis dan gangguan kecemasan pada tokoh fiksi. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud, penelitian ini mengkaji hal-hal yang dapat memicu kecemasan neurotik pada tokoh dalam film. Tokoh Diane adalah bukan tokoh utama dalam film *Run* (2020), akan tetapi dia menjadi pusat semua persoalan yang timbul pada tokoh utama, Chloe. Dia digambarkan sebagai seorang ibu yang sangat protektif dan impulsif terhadap putrinya, Chloe, yang menderita penyakit sehingga memiliki disabilitas. Teori yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah teori struktur kepribadian Freud yang mencakup id, ego, dan superego. Teori ini digunakan untuk menganalisis data yang diperoleh melalui pengamatan terhadap naskah dan film. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan neurotik tokoh Diane dipicu oleh kematian bayi kandungnya, dan ketakutan kehilangan sosok ibu pada dirinya, serta dorongan bawah sadar untuk bertindak yang bertentangan dengan realitas dirinya sebagai ibu.

Kata Kunci: Psikoanalisis, Kecemasan Neurotik, Struktur Kepribadian, Film *Run* (2020)

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is an expression of art that comes from the mind of an individual. According to Wellek and Warren (as quoted in, (Permana, 2022)) literature is defined as a work full of innovation, imagination, and elements of fiction. Literature and film are two powerful art forms in human culture that have existed for centuries. Both have the ability to convey stories, ideas, values, and emotions through different mediums.

Film was one of the most influential art forms of the 20th and 21st centuries. Movies serve not only as entertainment, but also as a tool to convey messages, influence public opinion, and portray human life from various points of view. In recent times, cases of mental health, especially anxiety disorders, have become a greater spotlight in society. Anxiety is one type of disorder that often appears in movie scenes, in Indonesia, anxiety disorders are a fairly common mental health problem.

Freud mentions three kinds of anxieties. “1). Neurotic anxiety comes from id impulses as apprehension toward uncertain danger. 2). Realistic anxiety is a closely possible danger relating to fear. 3). Moral anxiety regards right involvement between ego and superego” (Sartika^{1*}, 2024). In

this context, neurotic anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that is often the subject of films, either explicitly or implicitly.

Neurotic anxiety is a type of anxiety that deals with a person's inability to cope with complex inner conflicts, which can affect the mental and emotional well being of the individual. As shown in the film *Run* (2020) produced by Natalie Qasabian & Sev Ohanian. These psychological thriller film stars Sarah Paulson who plays Diane Sherman who is the mother of a 17 year-old girl named Chloe played by Kiera Allen. Diane is very protective and obsessive towards her daughter Chloe Sherman, who has a range of serious health problems, such as paralysis, is wheelchair-bound and isolated at home. Chloe also has asthma and heart disease, with Chloe paralyzed and sickly Diane finally finds a private tutor for Chloe and Chloe undergoes home schooling. After completing high school, Chloe wants to continue her education at the university level, and she even has a dream university. But this was strongly opposed by his mother, Diane. In fact, according in (Sutafti, 2022) to the main goal of education is to produce human personalities that are intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually mature, which requires an education system capable of instilling character values in children.

In this film, Diane's condition as a mother presents a phenomenon that can be categorized as maternal neurotic anxiety. Maternal anxiety has been associated with adverse outcomes for mothers, the mother-child relationship, and children's development and well-being (e.g., [Korja et al., 2017](#); [Lawrence et al., 2019](#); [Martini et al., 2015](#); [Micco et al., 2009](#); [Skouteris et al., 2009](#)) in (Yatziv, 2022). The trauma of losing a biological child is the dominant trigger driving that neurotic anxiety.

Instead of accepting reality and going thru the healing process, Diane projected that loss onto Chloe, the "replacement" child she raised. His excessive fear of losing a child again triggered extreme obsessive and protective parenting patterns. Thus, Diane's anxiety is not merely a form of maternal affection, but a pathological expression of maternal neurotic anxiety, which is a mother's anxiety rooted in trauma and an irrational fear of loss. This condition shows how the film *Run* (2020) functions not only as a work of art but also as a psychological representation depicting how trauma can transform into neurotic anxiety. This reinforces the film's relevance as a medium that reflects real-world issues in society, particularly the mental health struggles of a mother trapped in obsession and manipulation due to her inability to overcome past trauma.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative method with a psychoanalysis approach by using anxiety theory to analyze Diane's neurotic anxiety. The psychoanalysis approach is a theory of the human mind, a therapy for mental distress, an instrument of research, and a profession. This method was chosen because it is suitable for revealing the psychological aspects of fictional characters thru in-depth interpretation of their behavior, dialog, and conflicts.

It is impossible to discuss and analyze character or human beings without mentioning personality terminology. According to Sigmund Freud, a person's personality and behavior in maturity are largely shaped by their early infancy. According to him, our distinct associations with different people and things as youngsters shape a portion of our personalities. As a result, we each acquire a unique collection of character traits and a persistent behavioral pattern that distinguishes us from one another (JDrs. Much. Khoiri, 2014).

In this study, the researcher used the elements of character and characterization, examining their psychological issues as well as other elements of literary works (Baga, 2021). Descriptive qualitative research methods are themselves an effort to gain knowledge about an object, which must be in accordance with the object's existence as determined by theory (Yenni Karenita, 2025). Freud's psychoanalysis approach was used as a theoretical framework, particularly the concept of personality structure (id, ego, superego).

2.1 Source of the data

The primary data sources for this research are the film script and the movie *Run* (2020). The data consists of scene snippets, dialog, and actions of the main character, Diane Sherman, related to neurotic anxiety. Secondary data sources were obtained from books, scientific journals, and online articles relevant to Freud's psychoanalytic theory and previous research on anxiety in literary works and films.

2.2 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out in several stages: (1) watching the film *Run* (2020) repeatedly to identify important scenes, (2) reading the film script to note dialog related to Diane's inner conflict, (3) selecting visual and textual quotes that show symptoms of neurotic anxiety.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted by classifying the data based on Freud's theoretical categories: id, ego, and superego. Next, every scene and dialog indicating Diane's inner conflict is interpreted within a psychoanalytic framework to find the cause of her neurotic anxiety. The analytical process is contextual, emphasizing the relationship between Diane's behavior and past trauma, irrational thoughts, and unconscious drives.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to analyze Diane's neurotic anxiety as a mother in the film *Run* (2020). As stated previously, this study's goal was to identify the triggers that caused Diane's anxiety and to explain how they were manifested through her actions, dialogues, and psychological conflicts. The finding and discussion shows analysis reveals that Diane's neurotic anxiety is rooted in the dominance of the id, while the ego struggles to maintain balance.

Diane's id drives her to fulfill personal desires for emotional attachment and maternal fulfillment, while her superego enforces a sense of moral obligation to protect Chloe. However, these opposing forces generate conflict within Diane triggering her neurotic anxiety such as: **trauma, obsessive, manipulation, and criminal actions**. These categories were interpreted using Freud's psychoanalysis theory of personality structure Id, Ego, and Superego as the framework of analysis. The data were obtained from observation of the films's script, dialogues, and film's scenes.

3.1 Trauma of losing her biological child

Loss of her biological child has a deep connection with her neurotic anxiety, as the trauma likely serves as the main trigger for her obsessive need to control everything around her. The loss not only left an emotional wound but also created a deep fear of a similar loss in the future. This fear then developed into the tendency of neurotic anxiety that she experienced, where Diane tried to avoid the same pain by creating a situation where she had to control Chloe's life.

In her efforts to cope with the trauma she experienced, Diane projected her emotional needs onto Chloe, making Chloe not only a child to be protected but also a replacement for her lost baby. This made Diane extremely protective and obsessed with Chloe, to the point of crossing the boundaries of reasonableness. Diane's low point in life begins when she gives birth to her baby in a premature state as shown by the script excerpt below:

INT. NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

Mother, shaking with nerves, is pushed into the room by the doctor. But when she sees the incubator, she pushes herself.

Doctors make way for her. Mom looks inside the incubator...

...and cries.

Fact: there is no one happier and more in love than our Mother as she looks down at her newborn daughter. (On script *Run* (2020), page: 1)

The trauma of losing her biological child that Diane experienced can be understood as the root cause of the neurotic anxiety that controls her. Freud (1936) in (Adila Ally, 2024) stated that neurotic anxiety usually arises from past experiences that cause excessive fear of future threats, even though those threats are not always real. In Diane's case, the loss of her first child not only created emotional wounds but also built a deep-seated fear of potentially losing the child figure she had again.

The film's opening scene, showing Diane looking at her baby in an incubator, becomes an important symbol of her psychological state. The happiness and love Diane showed at that moment signified a very strong emotional bond, but also revealed her mental fragility if that bond were broken. From this, it can be understood why the trauma of loss later drove her to make Chloe a "replacement" for the lost baby. However, instead of aiding healing, this mechanism actually trapped Diane in obsession. Chloe is no longer just a child to be cared for, but a symbol of the enduring love of a mother that Diane doesn't want to lose again. This caused Diane to cross the line of reasonable parenting, ultimately restricting Chloe's freedom. Thus, the trauma of losing her biological child is not merely an emotional backdrop, but a primary source that shapes Diane's obsessive, manipulative, and anxious behavior.

3.2 Obsession: The fear of losing Chloe

Diane's fear of losing Chloe is at the core of the conflict Diane experiences, where Diane engages in manipulation and dangerous actions towards Chloe, all due to her obsession with Chloe. Similarly, if we look at it from Chloe's perspective, Diane's conflict is actually about how Diane keeps trying to maintain control over Chloe, especially when Chloe tries to escape. Diane, who initially seemed caring as we can see in the following film dialogue excerpt below:

MOTHER

I've taken care of Chloe for 17 years. And in all that time, I haven't travelled, gone out, or dated. (On script *Run* (2020), page: 4)

The dialogue above shows Diane's caring for Chloe, but it shows that Diane also has an excessive sense of ownership of her child whom we know obsessively. Has turned into a frightening figure in Chloe's eyes; Diane has now become someone who can no longer be trusted.

Diane's fear of losing Chloe reveals the true form of the neurotic anxiety that controls her. Freud explained that neurotic anxiety arises when unconscious drives (id impulses) overwhelm the ego, causing the individual to feel threatened by something that is often unreal or excessive. The id operates according to what Freud called the pleasure principle; the principle by which the id functions to avoid pain and maximize pleasure in (Lesmana, 2014). In Diane's case, the fear of losing Chloe was so dominant that it drove her to take manipulative and dangerous actions to ensure Chloe remained under her control.

The dialog showing Diane's sacrifice, that she never traveled, dated, or left the house for 17 years, does indeed seem like a mother's love. However, upon further analysis, Diane's statement also reveals her claim of ownership over Chloe, as if the sacrifice justifies Diane's control over every aspect of her child's life. This aligns with the concept of possessive love, where healthy love transforms into a restrictive obsession.

From Chloe's perspective, her mother's actions, which initially seemed full of love, later shifted into threats. This aligns with Freud's theory of how neurotic anxiety can transform interpersonal relationships into controlling ones. Diane's ego failed to maintain a balance between a mother's love and her subconscious fear of loss, making obsessive impulses more dominant. In other words, the fear of losing Chloe actually triggered behavior that ultimately pushed her away from the child she wanted to have forever.

3.3 Manipulation Diane towards Chloe

Since childhood, Chloe believed that she was paralyzed and also suffered from several other illnesses, which ultimately made her very dependent on her mother. However, unbeknownst to her, Chloe had been manipulated by her own mother, making her dependent on Diane and forcing her to take the medications prescribed by her mother.

However, as time went by, suspicion began to arise towards Diane when Chloe started to question the medication she was taking. This makes Diane anxious when Chloe finds the medicine labeled with her mother's name and asks Diane about it, as we can see in the following film dialogue excerpt:

MOTHER (CONT'D)

I picked it up today.

It's the same exact pill from Mother's pill bottle earlier. Confusion smashes back into Daughter's mind. Mother notices.

DAUGHTER

I thought... this was yours. (On script *Run*, page: 17)

Surprised by her daughter's words, Diane tried to remain calm and answered the question with a reasonable response to ease Chloe's suspicions. In this situation, Diane hoped that the answer she gave to her daughter would make Chloe believe her, allowing Diane to maintain control by lying further and continuing to manipulate her daughter.

However, Diane's answer could not reduce Chloe's curiosity about the drug which eventually led to a small debate between them, as shown in the dialogue excerpt below:

MOTHER

My name was on the receipt.

MOTHER

--looped around the side. that's where they put the receipt.

Mother leaves. Daughter studies the pill. Something feels off. But still, Daughter quiets her mind and swallows the pill. She turns over and tries to sleep. But her eyes stay open... (On script *Run* (2020), page: 18)

The dialogue above shows that Diane is manipulating Chloe's emotions by denying all questions from Chloe regarding the drug.

Diane's manipulation of Chloe is a clear manifestation of the neurotic anxiety she experiences. Diane's excessive fear of losing Chloe after previously losing her biological child drove her to create a false reality where Chloe must always depend on her. By manipulating Chloe's health and forcing her to take medication, Diane attempts to solidify her role as an irreplaceable figure in her daughter's life.

The dialog in the film shows how Diane attempts to rationalize her lies every time Chloe begins to suspect the truth. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this manipulation is not just about controlling the child, but also a way for Diane to relieve inner tension stemming from an unconscious fear of losing the child again.

Furthermore, Diane's insistence on Chloe continuing to take medication demonstrates how her neurotic anxiety developed into obsessive behavior. The more Chloe doubted and resisted, the greater the threat Diane felt, leading to more intense manipulation. This cycle demonstrates the close link between neurotic anxiety and control mechanisms: Diane's inability to cope with the possibility of separation leads her to maintain control thru lies, denial, and emotional dominance.

At the end, this manipulation reflects Diane's unstable psychological state, where neurotic anxiety drives her to blur the lines between a mother's affection and abusive actions. Thus, Diane's affection is no longer pure as a form of protection, but rather transforms into a manifestation of unresolved trauma and subconscious fears she experiences.

3.4 Criminal actions: The fear of Diane's secret being revealed

Besides harboring trauma from her past, Diane also keeps a big secret that eventually makes her feel anxious at any moment. One of Diane's biggest secrets is stealing a baby from the hospital

where she also gave birth to her deceased child. Diane did not even give her daughter access to a Smartphone; it was as if Diane was deliberately isolating her daughter from the outside world. As the following dialogue excerpt shows below:

HER BEDROOM DOOR

She slowly lifts herself off her bed, gets in her wheelchair, heads to the door and turns the knob, only to discover that. It's locked.

DAUGHTER

...Mom, are you there? Mom?

It's silent. Daughter wiggles the knob again. Nothing. Beat.

DAUGHTER (CONT'D)

I... I just want to talk. Can we do that? I'm sure there's a good explanation for everything. Can we talk and you can tell me? Please?

No response. It's dead quiet. (On script *Run* (2020), page: 48)

To keep her secret safe, Diane deliberately locked Chloe in her room so that she does not meet anyone who can reveal her secret to Chloe.

In theory, psychoanalysis tends to view crime as the result of an individual's internal conflicts, thus overlooking the strong influence of social and structural factors that affect criminal behavior in (Kadir, 2024). For example, Diane's criminal act of kidnapping a baby from the hospital demonstrates how neurotic anxiety drives her to take extreme measures to cover up her past. That big secret became a constant psychological burden, causing Diane to live in fear that the truth would one day be revealed. From a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective, neurotic anxiety arising from unconscious drives often leads individuals to engage in unhealthy defense mechanisms. In this case, Diane is trying to maintain the lie by having complete control over Chloe's life.

One type of control is seen when Diane intentionally locks Chloe in a room and even restricts her access to technology and the outside world. Diane's confinement of herself not only reveals her fear that secrets will be exposed, but also demonstrates her obsessive behavior in maintaining the world she has created. This isolation is used to prevent Chloe from finding information that contradicts the story Diane built earlier.

Additionally, Diane's efforts to shut herself off from conversation and refuse to provide explanations to Chloe demonstrate an intentional emotional distance. She no longer played the role of a mother who provided a sense of security, but rather that of a controller driven by her own fears. Thus, Diane's criminal actions not only serve as the backdrop of the story but also as a concrete representation of how neurotic anxiety shapes destructive behaviors that harm others, particularly the child who is the victim.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study is that Diane's neurotic anxiety in the film *Run* (2020) is primarily triggered by unresolved trauma, obsessive fear of loss, manipulation, and criminal acts, reflecting her inability to reconcile her id, ego, and superego. The findings revealed that the trauma of losing her biological child was the root cause of her pathological behavior, leading to excessive protection and obsessive control over Chloe. Diane's obsession with preventing another loss manifested thru manipulating Chloe's health, restricting her independence, and even criminal acts to hide the truth. These patterns illustrate how a mother's neurotic anxieties can distort parental love into destructive behaviors, highlighting the complexity of unconscious drives in shaping human actions.

By addressing these issues, the research shows how film serves not only as entertainment but also as a psychological representation of real-world struggles, particularly maternal anxiety rooted

in trauma and fear. However, this research is limited to the analysis of a single character in a single film using Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

Future research could expand this discussion by comparing neurotic anxiety in mothers across different films or literary works, using alternative psychological theories (e.g., the dark side of motherhood), or even exploring cross-cultural representations of maternal anxiety in cinema. Such studies can enrich our understanding of how trauma and anxiety are depicted across various genres, societies, and cultural contexts, providing deeper insights into the universal yet diverse nature of maternal psychological struggles.

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