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The Fragmented Self In Wintergirls As Seen In Laurie Halse Anderson: A Psychological Analysis

¹Helmita, ^{*2}Ano

¹Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Ekasakti, helmita.sasingunes@gmail.com

^{*2}Universitas Ekasakti, ano123@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

Ano

Universitas Ekasakti, ano123@gmail.com

Abstract

This research analyzes the concept of "fragmented self" in Laurie Halse Anderson's novel Wintergirls, focusing on Lia Overbrook's struggles with anorexia nervosa and bulimia. This issue significantly reflects contemporary mental health challenges exacerbated by social pressures and internal conflicts. The concept of the fragmented self here refers to the disunity or incoherence encompassing an individual's identity, thoughts, and emotions, often manifesting through dissociative conditions, eating disorders, self-harming behaviors, or severe anxiety. The objective of this research is to conduct an in-depth psychological analysis to uncover Lia's self-fragmentation, identify its underlying causes, and understand the psychological consequences she experiences. In this analysis, the researcher utilizes the Freudian psychoanalytic theoretical framework, specifically the concepts of Id, Ego, and Superego. Through applying a descriptive qualitative method by careful textual analysis and literature review, the researcher found that anorexia nervosa is the root of Lia's problems, triggering severe internal conflicts, and this is also reflected in the fragmented writing style of the novel. This research is expected not only to enrich the understanding of psychological concepts within literary contexts but also to raise awareness and empathy towards adolescent mental health issues. Through highlighting Lia's journey, the researcher aims to explain the widespread issue of fragmented identity in contemporary society, providing insights into the psychological basis of such struggles and advocating for greater understanding and support for those facing similar challenges.

Keywords: *Psychoanalysis, Fragmented Self, Anorexia Nervosa Trauma, Theory Freud*

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I INTRODUCTION

The human mind is an intricately complex entity, profoundly shaped by a myriad of internal and external forces. In contemporary society, there is an increasing recognition of mental health issues, particularly among adolescents and young adults, who often navigate significant psychological challenges. Among these challenges, the concept of a "fragmented self" stands out as a critical psychological phenomenon. It is characterized by a pervasive disunity or incoherence within an individual's sense of identity, thoughts, and emotions, often manifesting through dissociative states, eating disorders, self-harm, or severe anxiety.

Mathews (2003 : 205) mentions that fragmentation self is a condition where our view of the world and ourselves becomes fractured. This occurs due to rapid changes in our collective knowledge and lifestyles, which make the world feel unstable and difficult to grasp. More importantly, it also affects how we perceive ourselves, often making us feel fragmented because we have to fulfill various different roles and images in modern life, making it difficult to maintain a coherent and consistent identity. In the real world, this phenomenon is increasingly prevalent, particularly among younger generations, often exacerbated by pervasive social pressures.

For instance, the relentless pursuit of unattainable ideal self-images propagated through social media platforms, coupled with intense academic performance demands and future uncertainties, frequently forcing individuals to construct multiple versions of themselves one for public consumption, such as a perfectly curated online persona like Anya's Instagram and another for their private struggles, and others examples such as Budi's hidden anxieties despite public success, or Sarah's efforts to conform to peer expectations. This constant negotiation between the '*ideal self*' and the '*real self*' fosters a deep sense of inadequacy and self-estrangement, ultimately contributing to a fragmented identity. News reports and mental health campaigns frequently underscore an alarming rise in conditions such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders among adolescents, directly correlating with this inability to integrate a coherent sense of

self amidst overwhelming external demands and internal conflicts.

Literature, serving as a powerful mirror to human experience, consistently delves into the complexities of the human mind and its struggles, offering unique insights into characters' psychological landscapes. Laurie Halse Anderson, a distinguished young adult fiction author, is renowned for her courageous exploration of difficult and sensitive topics, often portraying characters grappling with profound internal conflicts, trauma, and their arduous journeys toward healing. Anderson's novel *Wintergirls* stands as a poignant example.

This compelling narrative immerses readers in the harrowing experiences of Lia Overbrook, a teenager battling severe anorexia nervosa and bulimia. Beyond the evident physical symptoms, Lia's internal world is depicted as profoundly fractured and chaotic. She grapples with overwhelming guilt, self-blame, a distorted perception of reality, and an inability to reconcile her public image with her private torment, illustrating a deep disarray in her sense of self. The novel masterfully portrays how trauma, loss, and the relentless pursuit of an unattainable ideal collectively lead to a profound fragmentation of the self. Lia's struggle thus serves as a compelling microcosm of the real-world challenges faced by countless individuals who maintain a facade of perfection while battling severe internal turmoil, often intensified by societal pressures.

From a psychological standpoint, Lia's experiences in *Wintergirls* offer fertile ground for in-depth analysis. Psychological theories provide essential frameworks for understanding the underlying mechanisms and manifestations of a fragmented self, encompassing concepts such as cognitive dissonance, identity diffusion, and the impact of societal beauty standards. Through examining Lia's internal monologue, her interactions, and her coping mechanisms through a psychoanalysis approach, we can achieve a deeper understanding of the complexities of mental illness and the psychological processes inherent to self-fragmentation.

Lia's anorexia and self harm portraying these behaviors as manifestations of her fractured identity. Lia perceives her body as an adversary to be controlled and punished, leading to a profound

detachment from her physical self. This detachment is evident in her obsessive calorie counting and self-inflicted injuries, mechanisms she employs to exert control and express inner pain.

Anderson was inspired to write *Wintergirls* after receiving numerous letters from readers dealing with eating disorders and self-harm. She aimed to shed light on these issues and encourage open conversations about mental health. The novel has been praised for its honest portrayal of mental illness, though some critics have expressed concern about its potential to trigger vulnerable readers. Ultimately, *Wintergirls* stands as a powerful narrative that illuminates the complexities of mental illness and the path toward healing. Through Lia's experiences, Anderson emphasizes the importance of empathy, understanding, and the courage to seek help.

Activity anorexia is a biologically based self-starvation syndrome that is triggered by diet and exercise routines. The syndrome occurs in several species of animals including rats and humans. For humans who live in affluent parts of the world, type of diet and exercise patterns are largely determined by sociocultural factors. According to Epling and Pierce (1996 : 3). Anorexia occurs when food intake declines, and

this reduction in caloric intake results in an increase in physical activity. Increased physical activity causes an additional decline in food intake, which further increases activity, and so on. This simple negative feedback loop organizes several diverse research literatures with regard to human anorexia.

The framing of an issue was required to obtain targeted research outcomes. The problem formulation process began with the identification of the problem, which was derived from the background information that included inquiries about the subject matter that the researcher had explored in her research. The researcher used research that was detailed in a scientific publication to answer questions that Author had raised.

For the research to be conducted properly and effectively and to meet its goals, the research objectives must be met. A statement expressing the existence of a consequence of something to be accomplished or addressed in research is the research objective. Being able to justify the conclusions to be drawn from the research is an advantage of the research purpose. The research goals can be accomplished through research and will have been previously documented in a research proposal and research report.

II RESEARCH METHOD

In general, psychoanalysis is a method that analyzes the psychological factors that determine individual behavior and specifically investigates the activities of the unconscious and mental disorder within. Psychoanalysis its self was first revealed by (Freud in Martin 2023), a prominent psychologist born in Moravia, Austria. In researcher prespective, psychoanalysis offers a uniquely radical approach to textual analysis. It begins by examining texts generated through subconscious expressions like free association, jokes, slips of the tongue, and dreams, moving towards interpretations that transcend the conscious reasoning of classical and Enlightenment philosophy. Trough Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly the structural model of the mind, is an essential tool for understanding the psychological struggles of Lia, the protagonist of the novel *Wintergirls*. This research argues that her self destructive behaviors

and fragmented identity are not simply external issues but are rooted in an internal conflict between the *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego*.

From *the Id's* represented by Lia's powerful and irrational desire for control, which manifests as her anorexia. This primitive part of her psyche seeks the immediate gratification of a warped need for thinness, driving her to starve herself without regard for the severe physical and mental consequences.

The *Ego* rational mediator fails to balance these two competing forces. In Lia's case, her Ego is overwhelmed and unable to reconcile the *Id's* destructive urges with the *Superego's* relentless condemnation. This failure is what creates her fragmented sense of self. This research will demonstrate that author Laurie Halse Anderson effectively portrays this internal battle, showing how Lia's actions and thoughts are a direct consequence of her Ego's inability to find a

healthy middle ground, leading to a profound psychological crisis.

The *Superego* acts as a harsh, judgmental force, shaped by societal ideals and personal guilt. It relentlessly criticizes Lia, setting impossible standards for her body and self-worth, and punishing her with shame and feelings of inadequacy whenever she fails. This constant criticism only fuels her self-destructive cycle.

Method can be interpreted as the path or method that must be taken to achieve a certain goal. In this research the method use by researcher is qualitative method. According to (Woody in Kothari 2004) *Research and Methodology: Methods and Techniques* research comprises defining and redefining problems, formulating hypothesis or suggested solutions; collecting, organizing and evaluating data; making deductions and reaching conclusions; and at last carefully testing the conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulating hypothesis. Data collection methods refer to the specific approach used to collect research data. It is important for Researcher and individuals involved in scientific endeavors to carefully select the most appropriate types of data.

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method for data analysis, specifically utilizing textual analysis within the framework of Freudian psychoanalysis literary criticism to analyze Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Wintergirls* (2009). The analytical process began with a meticulous close reading and initial coding

of the text, highlighting passages depicting Lia Overbrook's thoughts, emotions, and actions. These textual data were then systematically examined using Sigmund Freud's structural model of personality the *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego* along with various defense mechanisms, to explore Lia's psychological conflicts and coping strategies.

The data collection technique involved a comprehensive and iterative literature study, beginning with a meticulous close reading of the novel from the first chapter to the end. During this process, detailed notes were taken on key elements such as the main characters (specifically Lia and Cassie), their traits, dialogues, internal monologues, actions, and settings, which were deemed relevant to their psychological profiles and the fragmented self. This active reading approach aimed to deeply understand the characters and the intricate content of *Wintergirls*. This research used a qualitative descriptive approach that is highly relevant for analyzing data in the form of literary texts, particularly the novel *Wintergirls*. As a researcher believe that this approach is the most appropriate because it allows for an in depth exploration of Lia's psychological condition without using quantitative technique. The analysis process will begin with textual analysis, which involves reading and selecting important data in the form of dialogue, internal monologues, and descriptions of Lia's behavior related to the research theme. The collected data will then be interpreted using Freud's psychoanalysis literary criticism framework.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research results based on the data analysis regarding the *fragmented self* experienced by Cassie and Lia and the complexities of their relationship. What is contained in the novel *Wintergirls* by Laurie Halse Anderson will be explained in the form of data findings, data analysis, and research discussion about the *fragmented self* and the dynamics of Cassie and Lia's relationship."

4.1 The Acute Impact of Anorexia Nervosa on Lia's Physical and Mental Condition

The previous chapter explained the concept of "fragmented self", which is a condition in which a person's identity is disrupted due to trauma or internal conflict. This chapter will

discuss how this condition manifests in Lia, especially due to the severe impact of anorexia nervosa on her physical and mental health. The analysis will show that this disease not only damages her body, but also exacerbates the conflict and guilt she feels, especially in relation to her relationship with Cassie. This can be seen from the data below:

"I dab a little ketchup at the corners of my mouth, scrape the entire mess into the garbage disposal, turn on the hot water, and flick the switch. While the disposal is running, I try to detour my mind recite the Constitution, list the presidents in order, remember the names of the seven dwarfs I can't stop thinking that. she called

(*Wintergirls* 2009 : 31)

self perception of their bodies, minds, and identities, resulting in feelings of incompleteness and internalized self segregation. Anorexia driven behaviors, such as the excessive physical activity described by “activity anorexia,” an eating

disorder, further exacerbate this conflict, making the “*fragmented self*” a direct manifestation and severe consequence of their struggle with *anorexia nervosa*.

IV CONCLUSION

Based on the research that has been done above with psychoanalysis investigation conducted, it can be concluded that the narrative structure of *Wintergirls* plays a pivotal role in illustrating Lia's profoundly fragmented self. Laurie Halse Anderson meticulously constructs a storyline where Lia's internal battles, driven by severe mental health issues, are laid bare through a chronologically designed yet psychologically fragmented plot. The novel's progression, moving through stages of exposition, complication, crisis, climax, declining action, and resolution, effectively mirrors the tumultuous journey of Lia's psyche. Through this structure, Lia's conflicted feelings, distorted perceptions, and overwhelming emotions are conveyed via a detailed exposition of her disordered thoughts, revealing the complex interplay of her id, ego, and superego in crisis.

Anderson's brilliance lies not only in her ability to craft a compelling story but, more crucially for this analysis, in her skillful use of narrative techniques to convey Lia's unreliable and often fractured internal world. It is one thing to present a character with mental illness, but another entirely to immerse the reader so deeply in the experience of a fragmented self. Anderson achieves this by presenting Lia's internal reality through a highly subjective and often contradictory lens. Her stylistic choices, such as the personification of Lia's body parts (“My traitor fingers”), the raw internal dialogues, and the juxtaposition of external events with Lia's distorted interpretations, are pivotal in revealing the constant battle within her mental disorder.

Through Lia's relationship with various characters, and importantly, with herself, Anderson meticulously builds a narrative where Lia's mental state directly shapes the unfolding events. Chapter subtitles, ambiguous pronouncements, and the direct, unfiltered access

to Lia's chaotic thought processes serve as crucial clues for the reader, indirectly revealing the extent of her psychological turmoil. Ultimately, Anderson masterfully portrays how Lia's sense of self is shattered by her struggle, forcing the reader to confront the disorienting reality of a mind grappling with severe internal division. The novel stands as a testament to Anderson's capacity to represent the lived experience of a fragmented self with harrowing accuracy, thereby evoking profound empathy and facilitating a deeper psychoanalysis understanding of Lia's condition.

Laurie Halse Anderson's novel “*Wintergirls*,” with a special emphasis on various other aspects of its narrative and characters beyond the scope of this study. While this research has applied Freudian psychoanalysis to the fragmented self, future academics are encouraged to investigate the novel using alternative Freudian concepts such as the specific psychosexual stages (oral, anal, phallic) and their potential fixations in Lia's development, the complex workings of the id, ego, and superego in greater detail, or the nuanced interplay of specific defense mechanisms like repression, projection, or sublimation.

Furthermore, it is highly recommended that additional academics investigate *Wintergirls* using alternative psychoanalysis hypotheses or related psychological theories to delve deeper into its contents. For instance, future research could explore the novel through the lens of object relations theory to understand Lia's internal representations of her relationships, or attachment theory to examine how her early bonds influenced her later psychological state. Studies could also expand beyond a sole focus on Lia to analyze other characters' psyches and their impact on her condition, or delve into the broader societal pressures depicted in the novel as they relate to mental health from a psychological perspective.

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