

Research Article

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Tom Hansen's Defense Mechanisms in *(500) Days of Summer* Movie by Marc Webb

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Abstract

The writer intends to analyze one of the remarkable movies directed by Marc Webb which is titled *(500) Days of Summer* in this thesis. This thesis is written in a purpose to analyze acts of defense mechanisms portrayed in the main character of the film, Tom Hansen, as well as to analyze several intrinsic elements of the film including characterization and conflict. The writer utilizes psychological and objective approaches in order to analyze Tom Hansen's existing defense mechanism and the intrinsic elements in the film. Meanwhile, library research is used as the method of research in collecting the data for this thesis. Finally, the result of the data analysis shows that there are several acts of defense mechanisms represented by Tom Hansen character to struggle with his love for Summer Finn such as projection, denial, displacement, reaction formation, and sublimation that differ in how they operate to undergo Tom Hansen's negative effects.

Keywords: *(500) Days of Summer*; Marc Webb; Tom Hansen; Defense Mechanisms; Movie.

1. Introduction

(500) Days of Summer is an American romantic comedy-drama movie that portrays a relationship between Tom Hansen and Summer Finn, a couple who shares different beliefs on love. Written in Tom's point of view, it depicts the struggle of Tom in maintaining the relationship until he has to give up on Summer since she only perceives Tom as her best friend in spite of the intimate relationship shared between each other and marries another man in the end of the film.

Due to Tom's struggles in maintaining the relationship, this study is going to analyze how Tom Hansen attempts to defend himself from any impediments that he faces in the relationship. The term "defense" exists in psychological extent, particularly regarding Sigmund Freud's theory of defense mechanism. Defense mechanism is a mental process

programmed unconsciously inside the human mind. Our defense mechanisms are invisible methods by which we exclude unacceptable thoughts and feelings from awareness. In the process, they subtly distort our perceptions of reality – in both our personal relationships and the emotional terrain within us [1]

Defense mechanism has its function to protect each of the individuals from these feelings including anxiety, guilt, disgust and shame. If this attempt fails to occur on protecting the individuals, negative emotions may overwhelm the individual causing loss of self-esteem, panic, and, in the extreme, feelings of annihilation [2]. Knowing that defense mechanisms cannot be separated from the existence of anxiety and how the individual's psyche works, this study is also going to analyze Tom Hansen's types of anxiety and psychological conflicts as well as Tom's different parts of mind cooperating together in controlling his actions throughout the film, under the title of this thesis named as "Tom Hansen's Defense Mechanisms in *(500) Days of Summer* (2009) by Marc Webb".

2. Methods

2.1. Research Approach

In this study, the writer utilizes objective and psychological approach. The writer uses objective approach in order to examine the intrinsic aspects encompassing intrinsic and cinematic elements knowing that, according to Abrams, objective criticism deals with a literary work that stands free from any extrinsic aspects related to the poet, the audience, and enviroing world [3]. It describes the literary product as an object that is autonomous and self-sufficient. It needs to be contemplated on its own and to be judged and analyzed merely according to intrinsic criteria [3].

The second approach used by the writer is psychological approach. The psychological approach is applied to examine the extrinsic elements of the movie according to psychological defense mechanism theory. Psychological approach is defined by Abrams as a method to analyze psychological state of mind and personality of a character or an author of a literary work [3].

2.2. Method of Data Collection

In finding the needed data and information to analyse the problems of this paper, the writer relies on library research. George stated that "library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point" [4]. Library research collects data related to the topic from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include original works that are going to be analysed, while the secondary sources are the studies done by other researchers analyzing the information of the primary sources found from books, magazines, newspaper, internet or audio visual. In this research, *(500) Days of Summer* film is used as the primary source while several journals, articles, and electronic books are used as the secondary sources.

3. Discussion

3.1 Intrinsic Elements

3.1.1 Characterization

Characterization is an intrinsic element that defines the character involved in the story according to the values they have. It typifies a character with some definite quality [5]. The characterization of a character in dramatic or narrative works can be defined through one's values such as particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities reflected from the way they act and speak [3]. Characterization is shown through the character's utterances or other's utterances about him [6].

3.1.1.1 Characterization of Tom Hansen

Tom Hansen is the main character of this film that holds several values in building his characterization. Emotional quality of a character is considered as a value to define one's characterization. His childhood has a massive impact on constructing his value about love in the later years due to an exposure of sad British pop music and *The Graduate* film. He believes that his happiness will never exist until he finds his true love. Thus, this notion shapes his emotional quality as a hopeless romantic and determined person in fighting for the one that later on tends to make him as a self-centered and unyielding person. He is also characterized as a denial person who tends to build his own perception in perceiving the reality, particularly when it comes to his relationship with Summer.

3.1.2 Conflict

According to the circumstance of the tension in which it takes place, conflict is classified by McKee into three levels. They are inner conflict, personal conflict and extra-personal conflict [7].

3.1.2.1 Inner Conflict

Inner conflict is a type of conflict that occurs between a character against himself or herself influenced by the innermost components inside the character which are mind, body and emotions [7]. Tom struggles against himself towards the one-sided relationship he is afraid to admit after realizing his sister's concern towards Tom's relationship with Summer.

3.1.2.2 Personal Conflict

Personal Conflict is a type of conflict that derives from one character's disagreement against the others who are bonded in a personal relationship with. For instance, family, lovers, and friends [7]. Personal conflict occurs between Tom and Summer that stems from their contrast beliefs of love. This friction evokes tension especially towards Tom's mental state as Summer does not want to take thing seriously regardless of all the things they have done throughout their blurry relationship.

3.1.2.3 Extra-Personal Conflict

Extra-personal conflict is a type of conflict arises between one character and another character coming outside of his or her personal circle. This conflict could also emerge between one character and a wider social circumstance such as institutions, society and environment [7]. This conflict happens between Tom and the institution he works at. Due to Tom's depression, it triggers his realization towards his job that he blames his company for feeding other people's hopes with cards. At the end of the movie, he perceives himself as a part of the company providing a service that keeps telling lies to the consumers, which does not feel right for him.

3.2 *Extrinsic Elements*

3.2.1 Id, Ego, Superego

Freud divides human's mind into three parts which are id, ego, and superego [8]. The id is an unconscious region of human's psyche that programs under the pleasure principle [9]. The ego is a human's mind component that works based on reality principle fueled by the energy of id to deal with external world [9]. The superego works against the ideals of id. with its moralistic and idealistic principles that demands perfection [9].

3.2.1.1 Tom's Id

Tom's id is represented through a scene where Tom and Summer go to IKEA. In IKEA, Tom and Summer pretend like a married couple. Tom's id is shown as an intense impulse to express his love through physical touch by kissing Summer that demands to be satisfied immediately at a time regardless of the situation he is in.

3.2.1.2 Tom's Ego

Tom's ego that prominently gives a huge impact towards the flow of the story exists as he decides to maintain his love for Summer despite the superego that warns him about Summer's perspective on love by remaining friends all over the film.

3.2.1.3 Tom's Superego

Tom's superego is seen in a scene after leaves IKEA with Summer and goes back to Tom's apartment. When Tom and Summer are about to get more intense making out on Tom's bedroom, he excuses himself and quickly goes to the bathroom and reassures the id that the relationship should not be taken seriously regardless the intimate actions he did with Summer.

3.2.2 Psychological Conflict

In general, *(500) Days of Summer* revolves around the story of Tom Hansen that struggles to maintain his relationship with Summer due to the different love perspectives. There are psychological conflicts that happen to him against his internal and external

world. Internally, the psychological conflict occurs between Tom's id and his superego. Meanwhile, externally, the psychological conflicts occur between Tom's id and Summer's id as well as her superego.

3.2.2.1 Tom's Id against Tom's Superego

Tom's id struggles against Tom's superego in a scene where Tom is going to Summer's party. Tom's id is shown in a split screen between his expectation and reality in Summer's party. For example, wanting to kiss Summer and express his love towards her through physical touch. However, Tom's id struggles against his superego after seeing Summer's hand with an engagement ring on her finger.

3.2.2.2 Tom's Id against Summer's Id

Tom's id struggles against Summer Finn's id in the end of the film. Both of the Tom's id and Summer's id have their own different needs to be fulfilled regarding their feelings. Tom's id really wants to have Summer as his lover, but Tom's id has to struggle with the fact that Summer decides to marry someone else due to her instinct, in which coming from her id.

3.2.2.3 Tom's Id against Summer's Superego

Tom's id struggles due to Summer's Superego. It happens in the beginning of the film where Tom meets Summer at the office event in a karaoke bar. For the first time he tries to have a deep talk conversation with Summer. They talk about their point of view on love. Tom's id values the idea of true love. Unfortunately, the superego of Summer makes her believe that there is no such thing as love.

3.2.3 Anxiety

Anxiety is "a particular state of expecting the danger or preparing for it, even though it may be an unknown one" [10] (Freud, 2015:6). Anxiety is differentiated by Freud into three types in terms of the source such as reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moralistic anxiety [11].

3.2.3.1 Anxiety of Tom Hansen

According to the theory of anxiety by Freud, there are two out of three types of anxiety experienced by Tom Hansen in this film such as reality anxiety and neurotic anxiety.

3.2.3.1.1 Reality Anxiety

Tom's reality anxiety exists due to a song he used to love that reminds him of Summer. After breaking up with Summer, Tom starts feeling threatened as he hears the song playing on the bus.

3.2.3.1.2 Neurotic Anxiety

Among the three different types of neurotic anxiety, Tom experiences the third type of neurotic anxiety, which is the panic or near panic reactions. Tom's anxiety suddenly occurs as he sees a random couple walking around the street after he gets out from the convenience store to buy drinks and snacks.

3.2.4 Defense Mechanism

Defense mechanism is an unconscious mental process that helps the ego struggle against painful or unendurable ideas or affects [8]. There several types of defense mechanism by Freud [12]. Some of which that are going to be analyzed in this study are projection, denial, displacement, reaction formation, and sublimation. Projection is a defense mechanism type that replaces one's internal instinctual danger to the external world [13]. Denial is a type of defense mechanism that ignores or excludes unpleasant thoughts, feelings, wishes, or events from the state of consciousness and awareness. This kind of mental operation can be in form of refusal in order to perceive the reality of an extreme illness, a financial problem, an infidelity of one's partner, and an addiction [14]. Displacement is a type of defense mechanism that discharges one's tensions related to fear and hostility by taking them out on a target who or which is less threatening [14]. Reaction formation is a defense mechanism type which denies threatening impulses by altering and repressing them with the opposite into one's attitude [13]. Sublimation is a kind of defense mechanism which unconsciously channels either the unacceptable sexual or the aggressive desire into an expression that is accepted in the society as well as elevated into novel, skilled behaviours in which the real drives are being satisfied [14].

3.2.4.1 Defense Mechanisms of Tom Hansen

There are several types of defense mechanism reflected through Tom Hansen character that exist in this film such as projection, denial, displacement, reaction formation, and sublimation.

3.2.4.1.1 Projection

Projection occurs by the way Tom attributes negative impulses to protect his overwhelming insecurity in the beginning of the film where he tries to get close with Summer. This projection is rooted from his great admiration of Summer.

3.2.4.1.2 Denial

Denial occurs during Tom's heartbreak after being hit by the reality that Summer resists to see Tom again. Due to Tom's heartbreak, his friends and sister come over his apartment and accompany him to provide emotional support regarding the situation he has to face. Unfortunately, Tom becomes denial towards them.

3.2.4.1.3 Displacement

Displacement is depicted where heartbroken Tom who is been told by Summer to stop seeing her again breaks several plates in the kitchen as his friends seek help from his sister to come over and stop him from destroying other things in his apartment.

3.2.4.1.4 Reaction Formation

Reaction formation is operated in the beginning of the film where Tom averts his interest towards Summer after hearing a rumor about her that is told by one of his closest co-workers.

3.2.4.1.5 Sublimation

The most noticeable sublimation done by Tom exists where he decides to create his new path of life by pursuing his innermost passion of becoming an architect.

4. Conclusion

(500) *Days of Summer* tells a story of Tom Hansen's unrequited love towards Summer Finn, someone that he admires with his value about the one. This movie revolves around Tom's struggles due to the blurry, one-sided relationship in which psychological defense mechanism plays part throughout the movie. Defense mechanism is a mental process processing under the awareness of individuals to tackle any unpleasant affects causing threatening emotions that will harm them. Defense mechanism has various types in terms of how it operates which differ in the actions of the individual.

This film illustrates several types of defense mechanisms regarding Tom Hansen character such as projection, denial, displacement, reaction formation and sublimation. These types of defense mechanism operate differently on how Tom Hansen deals with the triggering impulses coming from Summer Finn, Tom Hansen's lover. Projection happens by attributing Tom Hansen's reality and impulses towards the closest people in his life due to his admiration towards Summer Finn, Denial operates by rejecting Tom Hansen's painful reality, displacement occurs in relocating Tom Hansen's impulse to another less harmful target, reaction formation exists in averting Tom Hansen's true feelings, and sublimation takes place in shifting Tom Hansen's deep desire into a valuable personal achievement that is beneficial for him and the society.

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