

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In this modern era, loneliness and social isolation have become increasingly prevalent and significant problems, especially in urban areas. The rapid development of technology that connects people virtually can often lead to emotional disconnection in real life. Smith and Alheneidi (2023) that loneliness arises when the need for satisfying social relationships is not met. When this situation happens to someone to avoid social interaction, this will increase feelings of loneliness.

This phenomenon is reflected in the movie *Aloners* (2021) a lifestyle phenomenon in South Korea that is referred to as *honjok*. The term "*honjok*," which can be translates to "alone tribe" is a combination of the word *나홀로* (nahollo) which means "by myself", and the word *족* (jok) which means "tribe" (Ann, 2020).

According to Ann (2020), what is meant by "by myself" can be vague, but ultimately it depends on the physical and psychological boundaries one creates around oneself, such as doing recreational activities alone, managing one's own household, or limiting one's social circle. In 2020, the proportion of single-person households in South Korea increased to a high of 31.7%. People between the ages of 20 and 30 make up the largest age group of one-person households (Rashid, 2022).

This phenomenon is not only a social problem but also affects human psychology, as it has a significant impact on individual mental health and one's ability to form meaningful relationships. As discussed by Gong (2024) in the article titled "*Social isolation takes a toll on a rising number of South Korea's young adults.*" The problem of social isolation is increasing in South Korea. A pre-pandemic study from 2019 by the government agency Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA) estimates that around 3% of the South Korean population aged between 19 and 34 years suffers from isolation, characterised by a lack of meaningful interaction outside of their family and work, particularly those who live together. There is no one to turn to when needed. The longer solitary people stay in isolation, the more likely they are to experience physical and mental health problems.

In a 2022 survey by the Seoul metropolitan government, more than 5,000 isolated or solitary youth in the city, it was found that 8 out of 10 experienced some level of depression (Gong, 2024). In addition, research conducted by Myung Kim et al. (2021) on *Social Isolation, Loneliness, and Their Relationships with Mental Health Status in South Korea*, involving 1,700 participants from three major cities in South Korea with an age range of 15 to 74 years showed that social isolation was found in 17.8% of participants while loneliness was found in 4.1% of participants. This study shows that social isolation and loneliness are relatively common problems in South Korea and have a significant impact on mental health, including an increased risk of depression, social anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Lack of social support in the form of regular interaction, emotional closeness, or practical help is a key factor in loneliness. Therefore, loneliness is not only about "how many people

are known" but also how meaningful the relationship is to the individual (Myung Kim et al., 2021).

Therefore, movies, as a platform to convey messages through stories in the form of entertainment as well as social or moral messages, sometimes illustrate how these social problems arise by providing perspectives that exist within the story, exploring the complexity of human emotions and relationships.

One of the films that raises this theme is *Aloners* (2021), a South Korean film directed by Hong Sung-Eun. This film tells the story of Jina, a woman who works as a call center operator at a credit card company. She lives in solitude and deliberately avoids social interaction. Jina's character represents the struggle of a modern individual who, despite being surrounded by people, still feels isolated. Jina's journey in this movie depicts loneliness, self-discovery, and the human need for social connection. Therefore, the film *Aloners* (2021) makes an interesting subject to be analyzed more deeply through a psychological approach, particularly in understanding how individuals deal with isolation and search for meaning in their lives. Additionally, according to IMDb data, this movie garnered 10 award nominations. Some of these include the Best New Actress category at the Blue Dragon Awards 2021, the Best Acting Award at the Jeonju International Film Festival 2021, and the Best Film award at the CinemAsia Film Festival 2022.

Bowlby's attachment theory and Jung's individuation theory, which focused on one of the individuation processes, the shadow archetype. These theory were chosen as analytical approaches in this study because both can help understand the psychological development of Jina's character in the movie *Aloners* (2021). The

concept of attachment was first introduced by John Bowlby, who observed that attachment is not only based on biological needs but also has complex forms, such as obtaining a sense of security and protection. According to Bowlby, attachment is an emotional bond formed between a child and his or her primary caregiver, characterized by the child's drive to seek physical closeness and comfort from the caregiver (Xu, 2022). On the other hand, attachment consists of several types, and one of them is avoidant attachment. Avoidant attachment is a form of insecure attachment that develops when the caregiver rarely responds to the child's emotional needs and fails to show sympathy or comfort when the child exhibits signs of stress or affection. This can result in a child having learned not to rely on the caregiver due to an emotionally absent response. A person who grows up with these feelings will suppress their emotional needs and appear independent, even though they still experience psychological distress internally (Xu, 2022).

In brief, avoidant attachment can be understood as a defense mechanism developed in response to individuals prioritizing independence over seeking support due to relationship difficulties and distancing themselves from emotional closeness due to the belief that seeking help from others is worthless or undesirable (Dor et al., 2018). This can affect emotional health and interpersonal interactions throughout an individual's life, as avoidant individuals may be at higher risk of developing conditions such as anxiety and depression due to their inefficient coping strategies in emotional situations (Biyik & Akkaya, 2020). This can be seen through the context of the movie *Aloners* (2021), where Jina, as the main character, shows an avoidant attachment pattern, where she tends to keep her distance from others

and avoid closeness. This pattern influences her interactions with others, and it is one of the contributing factors to her loneliness.

On the other hand, Carl Jung's theory of individuation refers to the psychological journey in which a person brings together the various parts of themselves to achieve wholeness and a deeper understanding of their true identity. This process involves trying to resolve conflicts between different aspects of the inner self (soul), including the conscious and unconscious, which eventually leads to the emergence of the true self.

One element in this process is the recognition and assimilation of the various archetypes that exist in the collective unconscious. These archetypes include the persona (the mask an individual uses to interact with the outside world), the shadow (the dark side of the personality that is often ignored or rejected), the animus/anima (a representation of feminine traits in men and masculine traits in women), and the self (a symbol of psychic unity and wholeness). The shadow, as one of the archetypes, represents a part of the self that is considered negative or unacceptable by consciousness, such as pain, anger, or jealousy. The process of confronting the shadow can reveal unresolved issues and hidden aspects of the self, indicating a journey towards self-realization (Ayuningtyas & Jatmiko, 2021).

In the movie *Aloners* (2021), the character Jina experiences a psychological journey where she begins to face her shadow, such as pain, loneliness, and fear. As well as connecting the hidden aspects of her personality. This process allows the protagonist to achieve higher self-awareness and open herself to more meaningful relationships with others.

These two theories were selected to support the research because they complement each other and help explain Jina's psychological state. Attachment theory can help understand how Jina's relationship patterns with others are formed, while individuation theory, which focuses on the shadow archetype, describes how she develops psychologically through the process of self-recognition and integration. By correlating the two theories, this research aims to provide an analysis of Jina's character and her psychological journey in dealing with loneliness and social isolation.

Several previous studies have explored the psychological development of fictional characters by using Carl Jung's theory of individuation and John Bowlby's attachment theory. The first study by Kılıç (2020), titled "*A Jungian Hero's Journey as Individuation Process in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*," analyzes Harry's character transformation as a process of individuation. The study identifies how Harry confronts the representation of shadow and persona as a part of his journey toward self-realization and maturity. This study emphasizes that literary characters can undergo significant psychological growth through archetypal encounters, making it relevant to fiction character-based analysis.

A similar study was also found in Depci and Erkin's (2021) study, "*Individuation Process and 'Shadow' in Murakami Haruki's Dance Dance Dance*". This research explores how the protagonist experiences psychological emptiness and confronts the shadow base. Various characters and motifs represent these through a symbolic journey. It showed that confronting the shadow enables the protagonist to achieve self-integration. This supports the idea that confrontation with the shadow is an essential part of the individuation process.

In the study “*The Portrayal of Persona and Shadow in Normal People by Sally Rooney*” (Rahayu and Suprayogi, 2023), the focus is on the archetypes of persona and shadow, particularly how repressed emotions such as fear, violence, or shame influence a character’s external behaviour. The research highlights how the characters wear different masks to adapt socially, while their darker, unconscious selves manifest in harmful or self-destructive behaviours. This study supports the view that shadows contain parts of the self that are often hidden or denied.

Aside from the literature analysis, several psychological studies have explored how attachment style influences emotional development and interpersonal functioning. The first one is a study by Henschel et al. (2020), titled “*Emotion Regulation and Empathic Abilities in Young Adults: The Role of Attachment Styles*,” which found that individuals with avoidant attachment often showed lower empathy and had more difficulty regulating emotions. Hence, these emotional struggles affect how they relate to others, usually leading to distant or defensive behaviors in relationships.

Similarly, Maranges et al. (2021), in “*Insecure and Insensitive: Avoidant and Anxious Attachment Predict Less Concern for Others in Sacrificial Moral Dilemmas*,” showed that individuals with high avoidant attachment tend to have low empathic concern and are less likely to respond to the emotional needs of others. This study explains that people with avoidant attachment often hide their emotions to avoid getting hurt.

Previous research has demonstrated that Jung’s theory of individuation, which focuses on shadow archetypes and attachment styles, as explored by John

Bowlby, plays a significant role in emotional development and self-transformation, particularly in literary and psychological narratives. However, no research has specifically combined the two approaches in the context of film analysis to examine how avoidant attachment can function as part of a character's shadow or how confronting the shadow can lead to psychological growth.

This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the character of Jina in the film *Aloners* (2021). The focus is on how her avoidant attachment style represents a part of her shadow, her hidden emotional struggle, and how being aware of this hidden side can bring about change. While many studies have explored the relationship between attachment patterns and emotional expression, few have examined how these patterns are portrayed in fictional characters, particularly in movies. This study bridges the gap by utilizing psychology to gain a deeper understanding of how emotional development is expressed through character transformation.

Although previous research has explored the process of individuation and character development, several gaps in our understanding remain. First, most of the existing research focuses more on Western literature or films, and only one analyzes Japanese literature, while Korean films such as *Aloners* (2021) are rarely discussed. Secondly, there has been no research on how Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Jung's Individuation Theory can work together to provide a deeper understanding of character psychology. Thirdly, the idea that attachment styles can change as a result of individuation is rarely discussed, although this could help explain how social relationships affect personal growth. Lastly, the theme of loneliness and social isolation in modern urban life remains under-explored, making *Aloners* (2021) a timely and relevant subject.

This study proposes a novelty by analyzing the film *Aloners* (2021) using a combination of Bowlby and Jung's theories. By focusing on a Jina woman living in emotional isolation, research explores how her avoidant attachment style affects her relationships and how her confrontation with her inner self (shadow) leads to transformation. This approach also provides a new perspective on the psychological effects of loneliness and disconnection in the 21st century. Ultimately, by combining both theories, this research not only adds to the field of literary psychology but also deepens our understanding of emotional growth and human relationships in modern life.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How does Jina's interaction with others reveal her attachment pattern?
2. How does Jina's psychological journey trigger changes in her attachment patterns in interaction?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

1. To analyze how Jina's interactions with others reflect her attachment patterns.
2. To explore Jina's psychological journey that can trigger changes in her attachment patterns in interaction.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This research focuses on the main character, Jina, in the film *Aloners* (2021). Other characters will be discussed if they contribute to Jina's psychological development. This analysis employs the attachment theory approach developed by

John Bowlby and the individuation theory proposed by Carl Jung. The data used in this research come from dialogue, character expressions, and scenes in the film that illustrate the pattern and psychological development of Jina.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the study of literary psychology by applying the theories of Carl Jung and John Bowlby in analyzing characters in Korean films. Through exploring the movie *Aloners* (2021), this research can be a reference in understanding how the themes of loneliness, individuation, and the search for meaning are portrayed in modern films. Additionally, this research can offer insight into the psychological impact of social isolation on humans, as well as the importance of finding meaning in life.

