

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Humans are complex beings with all their minds and behaviors, creating different personalities in each individual. This makes humans unique and interesting creatures to study. The human mind and behaviors with their complexities have been a major theme in literature and film for years, providing a mirror that allows individuals to understand and learn their internal conflicts, mental health, and identity. By the early 1900s, Freud had pioneered psychoanalysis and established himself as an authority on the unconscious mind. He developed the tripartite theory of the id, ego, and superego, which he continued to refine over the next decade and which remains influential in explaining the human psyche today. (Tarzian et al., 2023, p. 2). This contextual framework helps uncover the unconscious conflicts and motivations that influence and shape an individual's identity and behavior.

Film is often an effective medium for depicting the dynamics of the id, ego, and superego. Through characters and narrative conflict, viewers can witness the struggle between instinctive drives, rational considerations, and moral imperatives that shape human behavior and identity. The relationship between psychoanalysis and film, therefore, provides many opportunities to explore complex psychological issues, such as psychopathy and identity crisis. Although Freud did not discuss identity crisis or psychopathy, his theory provides important concepts for understanding how the conflict between the id, ego, and superego

plays out in such conditions. Such as how weak superego development, id dominance, and ego dysfunction play a role in a psychopath's personality. Freud argued that experiences in the first few years of life, especially interactions with parents or caregivers, ultimately shape a person's personality through the workings of the unconscious mind. According to his theory, all behavior throughout life is governed by three core components: the id, the ego, and the superego. Later, unresolved conflicts or challenges during these formative years can have long-term consequences. (Tarzian et al., 2023, p. 3-8).

Film often serves as a reflective medium by featuring characters whose internal conflicts highlight broader psychological and social issues. This medium can evoke strong emotional responses in viewers. By immersing themselves in the story and observing the complexities of the various characters, viewers can gain insight into how emotions and conflicts are portrayed. Engaging with the multiple perspectives offered by these characters also helps people understand different aspects of life and human behavior on a deeper level.

Characters struggling with psychological issues such as psychopathy and identity crisis are common in contemporary film narratives, offering a rich medium for artistic expression and critical analysis. Previous research by Leistedt and Linkowski (2013) showed that although most cinematic characters labeled as psychopathic displayed some psychopathic traits, only 21% actually met the clinical criteria for psychopathy according to Hare's checklist. The research highlights that films often omit important developmental background and may misrepresent psychopathy, potentially influencing public and juror perceptions. Furthermore, previous research by McCartney (2018) demonstrated that film

audiences construct understandings of characters in fictional narratives and how this process relates to the formation of self-identity in the real world. Through detailed case studies of six films, the study highlights the inherent fragility of our sense of self, suggesting that cinematic depictions of identity crisis can reflect and influence our own experiences.

In psychological films, Hervey Cleckley (1941) described psychopathy as typified by emotional detachment, impulsivity, and a lack of empathy, an especially intriguing issue. Robert D. Hare (1999) portrays psychopaths as “social predators who charm, manipulate, and ruthlessly plow through life.” Glannon (2008) further notes that “Psychopathy involves impaired capacity for prudential and moral reasoning due to impaired capacity for empathy, remorse, and sensitivity to fear-inducing stimuli. Brain abnormalities and genetic polymorphisms associated with these traits appear to justify the claim that psychopaths cannot be morally responsible for their behavior. Yet psychopaths are capable of instrumental reasoning in achieving their goals, which suggests that they have some capacity to respond to moral reasons against performing harmful acts and refrain from performing them.” In this way, Freud’s psychoanalysis helps explain psychopathy by showing a failure in the balance between the Id, Ego, and Superego. Hare’s work provides empirical data on how this imbalance manifests itself in real-world psychopathy, particularly through impulsivity, lack of empathy, and emotional detachment.

Freud’s psychoanalytic theory and Erikson’s concept of identity crisis both explore conflicts within the self, particularly between unconscious desires and societal expectations. Freud’s tripartite framework of the human psyche explains

how unresolved internal conflicts shape personality, while Erikson (1968, p. 16-18) described the identity crisis as “a crucial turning point, a crucial moment, at which development must move in one direction or another, mobilizing the resources of growth, recovery, and differentiation” during adolescence. The crisis involves a struggle to achieve ego identity to establish a coherent sense of self and personal identity amidst internal and external pressures. Erikson framed the crisis as a conflict between identity and role confusion, the failure to resolve which leads to insecurity and low self-esteem in adulthood.

Although Erikson did not link the identity crisis to psychopathy, the conflict he identified involves unresolved conflicts and tensions that may be associated with psychological difficulties, including maladaptive behavior or disturbances in identity formation. When the Ego fails to mediate between the impulses of the Id and the moral constraints of the Superego, identity instability occurs, potentially leading to antisocial tendencies or dissociation. Thus, both Freud and Erikson provide a basis for analyzing how identity crisis reflect deeper psychological struggles, particularly in characters who exhibit psychopathic traits.

In Korean cinema, films and dramas often combine complex narratives with deep character development while raising relevant social issues that align with the theme of this study. In particular, these works carefully highlight the darker aspects of society through deeply moving storytelling techniques, particularly regarding social injustices such as wealth disparity, deep-rooted class differences, moral indifference among the wealthy, and widespread skepticism of the Korean justice system. (Gao et al., 2024, p. 268). For example, *The Glory* (2022) depicts the main character who is bullied (bullying is a well-known issue

in Korea) experiencing character development where she grows into a strong woman who has a desire for revenge (deep character development) the plot of this story shows the woman's journey to avenge her (complex narrative). With the complexity of aspects owned by Korean cinema, it opens up many opportunities for people to research more deeply the issues raised in the existing films or series. This is exemplified in the TV series *A Killer Paradox*, where such issues are embodied by the main character, Lee Tang. Therefore, the writer is interested in using the TV series *A Killer Paradox* as a data source.

The above issues are clearly depicted by Lee Tang, the main character in the Korean TV series *A Killer Paradox*, which premiered in 2024. The series shows Lee Tang's journey as a college student looking for something interesting to do with his life. His life as an ordinary person, which was initially very monotonous, suddenly turns upside down into a killer, marked by his identity crisis and psychopathy. Lee Tang's personality transformation offers an in-depth examination of his psychological development, along with the internal conflict that Lee Tang experiences, which distinguishes him from other fictional killer characters, making the narrative structure in this film an interesting case study for psychoanalytic examination. This study aims to explain how the dynamics of Lee Tang's id, ego, and superego manifest in his psychological growth and contribute to his identity crisis, which then shows psychopathic characteristics in Lee Tang afterwards.

Kenney (1966), states that the character can be divided into three types based on function, those are: main character, second character and supporting character. They are also known as protagonists, antagonists, and tritagonists in a

story. Every narrative always presents characters constructed with human traits, both in psychological, social, and moral aspects (Aristotle, 335 BC; Abrams, 1953). In the story structure, character development is often in line with the narrative stages as explained by Freytag (1863). This study focuses on a fictional character rather than a real-world figure, namely Lee Tang in *A Killer Paradox*, especially how his psychopathy and identity crisis develop in the story structure. To analyze this, Freud's psychoanalytic approach, Hare's psychopathy theory, and Erikson's concept of identity crisis are used.

The writer found several previous research articles related to this topic and aims to expand the scope of earlier studies by incorporating a more comprehensive psychoanalytic approach. Some studies on tripartite human psyche, identity crisis, and psychopathy traits have been discussed by several previous researchers. First previous research by Muhammad Issa and Muhammad Naseem (2023) examines psychopathy and psychosis phenomena in D.H. Lawrence's novella *The Fox* through a psychoanalytic lens. Using a qualitative method and descriptive analysis, the study investigates how Henry Grenfell displays manipulative psychopathy, devoid of guilt and empathy, and how Nellie March exhibits psychotic behaviors characterized by hallucinations and delusions. Drawing on psychoanalysis, the findings suggest that poor parenting and environmental instability contribute to these psychological disorders.

Second previous research by Anagha Sreenivas and Khushboo Gokani (2023) explores the psychopathic tendencies of Amy Dunne in Flynn's *Gone Girl*. Employing Freudian psychoanalytic theory and close textual analysis, the study highlights Amy's manipulative and narcissistic behavior as manifestations of

internal psychological conflicts. The findings emphasize Amy's cunning and self-centered traits, which are exacerbated by her antisocial personality disorder.

Third previous research by Jiaxin He (2024) analyzes the psychopathic psychology and mental deterioration of Roderick Usher in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Using Freud's id, ego, and superego framework, the study examines how internal conflicts within the protagonist's psyche leads to his psychological breakdown and ultimate death. The research reveals that Roderick's demise stems from unresolved internal struggles.

Fourth previous research by Faiza Kiran (2023) investigates Emily Grierson from *A Rose for Emily*, on how is her psychopathy and mental decline through a psychoanalytic perspective. Employing textual analysis, the research uncovers Emily's psychological fragmentation, rooted in her isolation and the societal neglect she experiences. The findings critique a society that fails to intervene, showing how isolation can exacerbate mental disorders.

Fifth previous research by Aphiradi Suphap (2024) examines the psychological transformation and identity crisis of Juliette, the protagonist in the *Shatter Me* book series. Using post-feminist and totalitarian theory, the study explores how Juliette's identity is destabilized by an oppressive regime, leading to struggles with self-worth. Despite the challenges, Juliette evolves into a strong, self-empowered leader. The findings highlight the themes of psychological resilience and identity reconstruction.

After conducting in-depth research, the writer has also found a previous study that discuss *A Killer Paradox* as a data source. A previous research by Tiya

Elizabeth Thomas (2024) reveals that while the use of nudity in *A Killer Paradox* (2024) initially appears gratuitous, a deeper analysis uncovers its significant role in developing the protagonist's psychological complexity and moral ambiguity. This critical perspective highlights that, rather than detracting from the series' artistic integrity, the nuanced portrayal of nudity ultimately enriches its aesthetic and narrative depth.

Although both studies address psychological dimensions, this research distinguishes itself by delving deeper into the identity formation of Lee Tang as a killer. The current study does not merely analyze psychological complexity in general, but specifically investigates the construction and evolution of Lee Tang's identity as a murderer. This focus on identity provides a new perspective and serves as the novelty of this research, demonstrating that *A Killer Paradox* can yield diverse insights depending on the analytical lens applied.

The previous studies above are in line with this study. However, the writer found novelty in this study, where most previous studies only focused on psychopathy or mental disorders in general. This study adds a new dimension by linking psychopathy to identity crisis, which is rarely explored simultaneously in previous studies. Most previous studies have analyzed psychopathy in antagonist or villain characters, while this study examines the main character, who may have a deeper moral complexity than just the villain archetype. By using Erikson's approach, your study can further explore how social factors and Lee Tang's life experiences influence his psychopathy and search for identity. This can open up a broader discussion about the impact of the environment on the formation of

psychopathy, unlike previous studies that emphasize more on the internal aspects of character.

By examining how psychopathy and identity crisis are depicted in film narratives, this study also fills a gap in psychoanalytic theory with film studies. Previous studies that have examined these issues also used films as their data source, while this study uses TV series as its data source. In addition to the data sources used being broader and more detailed, this study also provides a new perspective on the relationship between identity crisis and psychopathy by concentrating on the psychological aspects of the protagonist. This helps to clarify how the story reflects larger psychological and social issues. This study helps to broaden our understanding of how mental health is depicted in contemporary television by applying a psychoanalytic perspective. Another reason that strengthens the writer to choose *A Killer Paradox* is that the series, which is an original Netflix adaptation of a webcomic, based on IMDB has received 3 award nominations at the Baek Sang Awards and stars Oscar-winning actor Choi Woo-shik as the main actor, making *A Killer Paradox* one of the most famous Korean thriller series.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background above, the writer has determined the following formulation questions of problems:

1. How are the dynamics of the id, ego, and superego reflected in the main character's psychopathy and identity crisis in *A Killer Paradox*?

2. How is psychopathy related to identity crisis in shaping the psychological profile and behavior of the main character in *A Killer Paradox*?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Based on the research question above, the writer has determined the following purposes of the study:

1. To analyze how the dynamics of the id, ego, and superego contribute to the main character's psychopathy and identity crisis in *A Killer Paradox*.
2. To examine how psychopathy is related to identity crisis in shaping the psychological profile and behavior of the main character in *A Killer Paradox*.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the transcript of the eight episodes of the Korean TV series *A Killer Paradox* released in 2024, with a particular emphasis on the psychological development of its main character. The analysis is based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, specifically the concepts of id, ego, and superego, as well as the psychological constructs of psychopathy and identity crisis. This study examines how the interaction of these elements shapes the main character's psychopathy and contributes to her identity crisis.

This study is limited to an analysis of the main character's internal conflict and psychological transformation as depicted in the film. This study does not conduct an in-depth analysis of other characters or broader narrative elements beyond their relevance to the protagonist's psyche. Furthermore, this study focuses only on the internal psychological dynamics depicted in the film and

excludes external social or cultural factors that are not explicitly depicted in the narrative.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The writer has determined the following significances that the writer hopes to achieve:

1. Theoretically

This study aims to contribute to the field of psychoanalytic literary criticism by examining the interplay of the id, ego, and superego in shaping character development, as well as the relationship between psychopathy and identity crisis, on how an unresolved identity crisis can be a contributing factor to the development of psychopathy. Through the analysis of the main character in *A Killer Paradox* (2024), this research seeks to deepen the understanding of how cinematic characters represent complex psychological phenomena such as internal conflict, identity formation, and transformation. The study also highlights the relevance of psychoanalytic theory in analyzing contemporary film narratives, broadening its application in modern literary and cinematic criticism.

2. Practically

a. For Study Programme

This study provides a resource for literature and film studies programs, particularly for students and instructors focusing on psychoanalytic criticism, identity crisis, and psychopathy in character analysis. It offers valuable material for exploring psychological dimensions in character construction, narrative structure, and thematic analysis.

b. For students

The study aims to help students gain a deeper understanding of psychoanalytic concepts, particularly Freud's theory of the id, ego, and superego, as well as identity formation and crisis. By applying these theories to the main character's psychological profile, the research offers a practical framework for analyzing characters in literature and film.

c. For general readers and scholars

This research serves as a guide for understanding how characters navigate psychopathy and identity crisis in cinematic narratives. By analyzing the main character's psychological journey in *A Killer Paradox*, it encourages readers and scholars to explore the intersection of psychology and storytelling, enriching their interpretations of similar works.

