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Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Harry Potter, Qualitative Research Design, Content Analysis

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Harry Potter Revisited: Exploring the selected series through Psychoanalysis



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Abstract

This paper takes into consideration one of the series in the world which has a huge name “Harry Potter” written by the famous writer J.K. Rowling. The study explores the characters' ability to remain focused and logical in the face of difficulties. The research uses a qualitative research design with a descriptive, exploratory and interpretative approach. Besides, the study uses content analysis by Hasieh and Shannon (2005) for the analysis using psychoanalysis theory. Freud (1900) divided the mind into three components: the superego (consciousness of good and evil), the ego (logic and balance), and the id (emotions and impulsive desires). The research uses these concepts to illustrate how the selected series illustrate the characters' internal conflicts between morality, reason, and emotions. Hence, this study is significant because it gives readers insight into how individuals actually deal with emotions and make decisions.

Keywords: *Psychoanalysis, Harry Potter, Qualitative Research Design, Content Analysis*

Introduction

Background of the Study

The series which is taken into consideration in the current study consists of sets of seven magical books that tell the story of a boy named Harry Potter, who learns he's a wizard and goes on big adventures. Published from 1997 to 2007, the seven books have won many prizes worldwide which has added to the literary importance of these books. Not only children, but adult too are fond of reading these books specially in a postmodern world of uncertainty (Bednar, 2025; Roman, 2025). These books are loved by people all over the world, selling over 500 million copies and turning into movies, games, and theme parks. The very first portion of the study depicts a clear picture of the way Harry Potter came into existence as a famous story, narration. Besides, here we also see how this series got popularity worldwide. Not only in children but among adults too. Moreover, since the framework used in the current research is based on Freud's concept therefore here we look into the series from psychoanalytic perspective. Moreover, we also take into consideration Carl Jung's concept to further elaborate the concepts in the current study. The purpose of taking Carl Jung's perspective is due to his rational approach towards narration. Besides, Freud had the capability to study deeper concepts within human nature such as feelings and deeper desires which the researcher finds useful in the present research. Since this concept of deeper desires would help to investigate and explore the said concepts in the events, incidents and characters in the selected series.

The year 1990 was a truly crucial year since it came up with a popular series Harry Potter. It is important to mention here that JK Rowling's creative skill seemed blessed while she was travelling through a train and the idea of Harry Potter emerged in her mind. The very notion of Rowling, while the train was not



moving, that a boy named Harry has a distinct identity. The boy in her imagination does not know he has the skills of a different creature that is wizard. Thus Rowling was lost into magical letters which led to the creation of her series. When the ideas triggered her mind, the entire world of her imagination was lightened up since she could see a world which was very different from the human world. This was a world of magic with different creatures living there. This moment enhanced excitement in the mind of the author. Once her imagination was triggered, she worked seven years in this magical imagination thus creating various characters such as Hogwarts, Wizard etc. The hard work of seven years paid her off and in 1997 she came up with her most successful write up. The story begins with Harry the major character of the entire series. Firstly he is shown an orphan. Since he is an orphan he has to face a very cruel treatment particularly by the Dursleys which include his uncle as well as his aunt. In one of the incidents he is locked in the cupboard as a punishment by his aunt while he is only 11 years old. Moreover, the life of Harry changes while he comes to know through a letter that he is not a human but a Wizard. Rowling, also discusses wizard school and magic in the book (Jamal, [2025](#)).

In this study, the researcher uses Freud's psychoanalysis for interpreting various desires which are not expressed directly. These repressed wishes are expressed by the behavior; a behavior which is impulsive in nature. The very psychological concepts which are superego, id and ego all three contribute to the understanding of human mind since the three among each other explain a clear clash between what society wants from us and what our mind has hidden as our true desire of what we want. Under this umbrella scholars like Khan (2021) and Yusuf ([2010](#)) assert that motivations which are unconscious; nightmares as well as tragedies influence our minds and need Freud's concepts for in-depth analysis and understanding.

Psychoanalysis and Lacan in Literature

Lacan being the follower of Freud believed that humans never feel complete and there is always some incompleteness in human feeling. Thus, we all have some desires which we do not know and never express. Then we use certain diction and finally we have suppressive feelings. When Lacan talks about Mirror stage, he actually wants to assert that mirror makes a human feel that a human can fully comprehend him/her. However, this is not the case. We never completely understand ourselves. The same is applied to Harry Potter and the characters within this series since here we find that the characters are very confused; they are not able to understand themselves. There is a continuous struggle in their wants and the social norms thrust on them (Beckstrand [2017](#)).

The concepts in psychoanalysis are applied to the Harry Potter series. These concepts include id which is seen in the character of Harry. Then the concept of ego is seen in the character of Voldemort. Finally, the character of Dumbledore clearly indicates the concept of superego. Id basically refers to the drives which are considered primary. Ego refers to the decisions which are considered rational. At last, superego refers to the conscience which is considered moral in nature. Thus the characters in the selected series are analyzed through the above mentioned concepts. Zetun ([2024](#)) asserts that the character of Voldemort also reflects id since his heart wants to live his life eternal. For this purpose he does all evil to achieve what he desires. Here he does not think about the morality or ethics even though throughout the series he is too scared to die. However the case of Harry is different. He struggles between good vs bad and his conscience always triggers him (Khan, [2021](#)). Thus we find a clear contrast among the characters in the series which adds to the beauty of the text.

Oedipus Complex and Relationships with Symbols

The child's unconscious competition with the same-sex parent and longing for the parent of the opposite sex are explained by Freud's Oedipus complex. In Harry Potter, relationships and identity are shaped by metaphorical parental figures. Harry's hostility towards surrogate authority figures like Snape and Voldemort is frequently contrasted with his relationship with Lily and James. According to scholars, Voldemort's shattered mind is partly caused by his incapacity to comprehend parental love (Subkowski, [2008](#)).

The text of the selected series mainly takes into consideration, certain memories which caused the major character Harry to suffer; these memories give rise to nightmares as well as heart break to Harry. The major loss that we find in Harry's mind is the suffering of his parents; the way they passed away due to murder. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, this childhood mental suffering that is losing his parents at a very age gives him an unending trauma. This trauma results in how his mind grows and keeps him in pain (Subkowski, 2004). Since he belongs to Wizard community, this trauma seems to get passed to all the Wizards that is from one generation to the next (Beckstrand, 2017). It is important to mention here Rowling introduces one of the tools from the wizard community which is called Pensieve. This tool enables Harry (the wizard) to recall his memories or what happened in his childhood. It can be called as a trick of the author to make metaphor work in the selected series (Jhajharia, 2024).

Harry's psychology can be easily comprehended through the dreams that are described by Rowling at various places in the book. The nightmares seen by the major character play a crucial role in the series since one can dive deep into the major psychological problems of Harry through the interpretation of these nightmares. One of the scholars asserts that the anxieties which are deeply hidden or suppressed are explained through the dreams (Yusuf, 2010). Moreover, while studying the psychology of human mind, Freud explained that dreams enable to fulfill human unsaid desires or anxieties. Thus using psychoanalysis we understand what mind issues disturb Harry's thoughts.

The very first impression of the novel goes as mythical series. However when we dive deep into the novel we find how Rowling uses symbols as well as archetypes to indicate the concepts of loss, tragedy and sadness to explain human nature and its sufferings. Similarly, horcruxes refer to the same concept in the novel at one place while dementors reflect the similar concept of suffering throughout the novel. Symbols and archetypes that relate to unconscious processes abound in the novels (Khan 2021; Zetun, 2024). The explanation of the scars and unfulfilled desires mark the major themes of the novel. One of the characters is a figure being shadowed and is considered a reflection of Freud's human psyche; while another character who is considered wise and acts as a mentor in the novel (Dumbledore) is a clear depiction of Jung's notions on human psyche.

In this story Rowling makes use of scar to show as a physical wound on Harry that continuously causes his memories to trigger particularly about his parent's murder. This is agreed by different readers that the scars are a reminder to explain and recall what actually happened in his childhood and then the crisis which he had to face due to this loss (Subkowski, 2004, 2008). Thus in words of Beckstrand (2017), Rowling depicts the scars as a huge memory of cultural cruelty; thus not considering it merely a scar. Thus the tragedy becomes a tragic loss from generation to generation. Another research considers the scar as something different; it considers it necessary tool to survive in the cruel world (Jhajharia (2024).

Freud's concept of Thanatos is clearly evident in the series. The character of Harry is an example to how one can adjust to the world even after suffering. Besides, the way Voldemort's death drive which is a concept from Freud's theory. Here we see the concept of life impulse in the character of Harry. He also symbolizes self-acceptance (Zetun, 2024). On the other hand, death denial is reflected in the novel through the character of Voldemort. Some critics who follow Lacan assert that Harry is divided into two worlds. One includes his personal desire while the other includes his responsibility (Beckstrand, 2017).

Prior Research on Psychoanalysis and Harry Potter

Numerous academics have read Harry Potter from a psychoanalytic perspective. The foundation was established by Subkowski (2004, 2008), who focused on trauma and psychological growth. One of the studies examines the character of Harry through the concept of dream (Yusuf (2010)). Another study took into consideration both Freud and Lacan in the entire series thus exploring major memory as suffering in the entire series (Beckstrand, 2017). In one more study Jhajharia (2024) also explores the series however from the perspective of culture. Besides, psychoanalysis in general has been explored in the books by (Khan (2021)). Individual character of Voldemort was examined by Zetun (2024) through the perspective of mind and morality.

The above mentioned studies reflect on morality, childhood experiences as well as myth. However, it is necessary to mention here that a deep analysis and reading of the selected text indicates that the text has much more depth than merely being a text of fantasy world. Taking into consideration all three major notions that is of Lacan, Freud and Jung, we dive deep into the journey of the major characters to explore suppressed desires, memory and a continuous struggle between what a human mind wants and what are the contrary social responsibilities. The death of Harry's parents puts his mind into unending childhood trauma which results in symbolic conflict in his mind. We can say that the life of Harry and his thoughts are built initially based on this early trauma. There is a scar on his forehead which symbolizes his suffering as well as violence and survival. In Harry's case, pain performs the task of a catalyst and enables him to think better with resilience (Subkowski, 2004). Harry's repeated act of horrific events enhances resilience in his mind where he becomes gutsy to face these events and this enables him to break the fear which he used to see in his dreams.

The introduction of Dementors, symbolize the struggle of the author herself and her own restlessness particularly in book one. On the other hand, the way Harry feels alone in the beginning of the series depict his anxiety and his thought as to fit in. the stairs and how Harry sits beneath those stairs symbolizes repression as well as exclusion and unwelcomeness. Here Harry feels concealed away from the whole world.

Freud's psychoanalysis is also depicted in the behavior of Dursleys. They are a symbol of how a child can be neglected through cruelty. Hence they are reflecting cruel substitutes, to Harry's loss of parents. Here we see psychological trigger when Harry thinks about parents in general as loving and empathetic. Moreover, for Freud children have their own fantasies about their parents which creates a clash in Harry's mind since he has not seen his parents and lived with the hostile substitutes.

Keeping in mind psychoanalysis, we find the character of Voldemort under Oedipus idea. Playing the role of a dark father he not only kills the parents of Harry but also links himself to Harry. The scar on Harry's forehead is a symbol to this concept. Thus Freud's concept that the love for mother can built a strange kind of feeling anger feeling in the mind of the son is indicated in the novel through Harry and Voldemort connection.

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one of the intense psychological reflections as seen in the novel is the role of the Mirror. The mirror is called Erised. This mirror is a demonstration of what Lacan called in his theory "Mirror theory". Here the external image of any human shapes his or her identity and comes up with a specific realization of his personality. This mirror enables Harry to desire his object in life which is lost in his childhood-his parents. Therefore, it is not about ideal ego here. The very fact spoken by Dumbledore in the series that many people have been trapped under this mirror reflects Freud's concept of stuck behavior of people due to unfulfilled desire. However, Harry's decision to go towards Hogwarts symbolizes a kind of change in his mind symbolizing growth. This is in clear contrast to Dursleys. The Dursleys reflect congestion and restriction. However, Hogwarts depict change in the form of truth. This makes a possibility of hidden desires to bring into practicality.

The various aspects of Hogwart particularly the sorting hat symbolizes superego since it reflects upon Harry's best qualities which include intelligence and loyalty. Besides, the weaker side of Harry is reflected too through his presence in the Slytherin indicating the affect of Voldemort on him. Harry demonstrates the ego's ability to curb instinctual aggressiveness and align with courage and communal values by enrolling in Gryffindor. The dog in the series is a reflection of Freudian model of structure id (instinctual drives), ego (mediator), and superego (moral authority). Only music, symbolizing culture and sublimation, can soothe the beast just as civilization tames instinct in Freud's account.

Quidditch serves as a vehicle for the sublimation of sexual and aggressive urges. According to Freud, play is a socially acceptable way for innate energy to be released. Harry's skill on the broomstick allows him to express his anger, competitiveness, and need for mastery through organized play. According to Lacanian critics, Harry's unconscious desire to escape the burden of pain and repression is expressed through flying, which also represents freedom from symbolic restraints.

The themes of immortality and limitless wealth are clearly evident in the series and at the center of the book. According to psychoanalysis, the Stone is the ultimate goal of want, also known as the Lacanian objet petit a (the forever-lost object of desire) or the unachievable "Thing" (das Ding) in Freud's terminology. The way Voldemort desires for the stone to become immortal and give defeat to death reflects a very narcissistic desire. Moreover, Harry's retention of stone in his pocket so that no one can use for bad purpose reflects his hidden desire of peace which is suppressed since his childhood.

Harry Potter and the world of Psychoanalysis

The selected series enables the readers to understand the connection between how human mind is connected to childhood. Harry's unfulfilled desires, his own identity as a wizard and his social responsibility all reflect this connection. Hence the characters in this story clearly reflect shaped identities due to childhood experiences. The character of Voldemort, and his very desire to be immortal and various themes in the story reflect childhood memories and a kind of sense of loss. In the coming section the researcher analyzes the themes through incidents under psychoanalysis framework.

In his theory, Freud asserts that childhood has a very important role in the development of human mind. Whatever a child goes through in his or her childhood becomes a hidden part of his mind. Thus, whether a good experience or a bad, the memory retains in the unconscious. This memory directly affects one's personality as well as specific behavior. In the selected novel, the early life of the main character serves as a catalyst or a medium to shape his personality or as a development to his psyche. Here the cruel behavior of Dursleys as well as the murder of Harry's parents and he as a witness to this murder shapes his mind. The repression is reflected through the scar which apparently is a physical abuse caused to Harry by the villain Voldemort, however reflects repression. Thus, in terms of Freud, this scar becomes a "repetition compulsion". This means he is used of regular loss. For instance, Sirius at one place while Dumbledore at another, help him to diffuse his early childhood loss.

In views of Freud, maternal love is very crucial in childhood since it embeds child mentality with kindness and compassion. One of the characters named Voldemort is deprived of this love in his childhood. His mother leaves him abandoned which develops a sort of regression in his personality. He creates Horcurxes, and tries to achieve immortality since there is a kind of fear in his mind that one day he would die which is in his unconscious due to his abandoned childhood.

Some of the minor characters in the novel also go through contrasting personalities due to childhood memory. For instance, one of the characters Severus Snape too has a tragic childhood. Then he goes through one-sided love. Whereas another character Neville Long faces the horrified death of his parents thus seen his parents tortured. All these childhood incidents are a part of their unconscious and enable them to become courageous in their future. However, at other place, some characters go through loyalty issues due to childhood memories that shape their mind and behavior.

Diving deep into psychoanalysis we find a concept "Bridge desire" which has its main roots in childhood. This is because the unconscious contains desires which are not fully met. The early traumas or wounds enable the characters to fulfill their unfulfilled desires in the novel. Here characters take specific roles or stands to achieve what lacked in their childhood. In terms of psychoanalysis, Id takes into consideration the desires or wishes which are not clearly visible but hidden or suppressed. These may also be called pleasure desire as well as mode of survival. In his desire of family love particularly love of parents he joins Dumbledore and develops close affinity with Sirius. In some cases, even both. Harry's desire for family and belonging stems from his parental loss, evident in his fixation clearly depicts the aspects of psychoanalysis. Moreover, on the contrary, in psychoanalysis there is an unimpeded pursuit too which helps the character of Voldemort to hide his weakness for family love and loyalty. This pursuit turns him towards uncontrolled desire to attain immortality.

Carl Jung the follower of Freud asserts that to attain wholeness, desire is crucial and he calls it as a journey-a journey where individual discovers himself/herself. The very desire of Harry to defeat cruelty and hegemony which he observes in Voldemort apparently seems an external war however, deep inside, it is Harry's internal desire to defeat cruelty. Both the characters have certain similarities such as both know

Parse tongue. Thus by facing the wickedness of Voldemort and by defeating him Harry conquers his dark aspect; the aspect of his personality which has been shaped since his childhood. Rowling also makes use of a stone which is called the resurrection stone; it is magical in nature and reflects human nature to achieve what is lost previously to attain completion.

Another psychoanalytical perspective as given by Lacan explains the concept of desire as in the form of something “lacking” or “a lack”. When Harry joins Hogwarts, deep inside his mind his desire and lack of family is fulfilled. Besides, the way Voldemort fights for “Elder Wand” again is a reflection of something lacking since his childhood. However, his pursuit for immortality is a certain behavior of non-acceptance or rejection of love. He also rejects showing his weakness or hidden desire for vulnerability, thus getting himself into unending incompleteness. Besides, Lacan’s concept of “Big Other” is clearly seen in the selected novel through the prophecy made by the Wizard world which calls Harry as someone who is chosen. Thus, the words chosen one assigns a specific task to Harry.

Certain incidents in the novel also indicate how identity is consciously formed by the main character. For instance, Harry rejects the offer to takeover power in the “deathly Hallows”. Moreover, while he is going in the forbidden forest, he also shows clear acceptance of death there. We find here that Harry consciously develops his own identity by taking conscious decisions to remove his fear of childhood memories. Thus, he makes his vulnerability of childhood as his strength and comes up stronger with the Hogwarts where his protective courageous nature is highlighted through his conscious actions. He does not accept “wrong” or injustice in any form and wants the Hogwarts to feel protected while giving them rational and courageous suggestions as well as planning to fight with the enemies.

The identity of the villain character Voldemort is also affected by childhood. He wishes to pursue immortality so that he should not suffer from abandonment as he suffered in his childhood. Thus he becomes a villain who is narcissistic in nature. Besides, the fact that he was not interested in receiving love is also a symbol of his shaped identity to avoid vulnerability. His behavior and personality turns partially divided. He even does not acknowledge the sacrifice made by Lily for him. This makes him to avoid individuation and leads to a shadow type personality. Such a personality indicated only in destruction. The major symbol related to Voldemort is the Horcruxes which indicate the shallowness of his personality, the shallowness that he could not fight alone and to escape from his true self.

One of the characters namely Hermione’s personality is also shaped through his unfulfilled desire since he is born as a magical child in a non-magical parenthood. Moreover, Hermione loves to seek more and more knowledge while struggles to prove his rationality. While trying to prove his identity as someone very powerful as well as resourceful, he struggles as a powerful witch. Besides, Ron’s character is marked by insecurity since is too young as compared to his other siblings. Thus, in this struggle to to make his place among his friends he is very loyal and devoted however at times a victim of self-doubt.

Other than the characters, the places shown by Rowling in the series particularly the world of Wizards itself reflects a particular psychological ground. The depiction of this place, the system as well as the setting has a clear connection between loss tragedy and shaping of one’s identity. Talking about Hogwarts indicate a specific place where the characters understand each other and their vulnerabilities; thus making it a place of learning, fighting against trauma and finally fulfilling their unfulfilled wishes. Thus, the place enables Harry to be a leader which is his childhood desire, making his identity strong. The hidden unconscious is further uncovered through the symbol of Sorting Hat which honors a specific person as per his traits. Thus, the character receiving the Sorting Hat is mainly motivated to shape his identity as per his unconscious.

Other than the places, Rowling makes use of certain objects which are magical in nature. For instance, Harry use “Pen sieve” so that he may actually see and understand what Snape had gone through particularly in his early age. Similarly, the mirror which is called “Erised” is also a magical mirror with which Harry can normalize diffusing his own cruel childhood memories. Moreover, the Horcruxes also are magical souls which are fragmented to avoid and escape trauma. These objects are used by Rowling to depict an environment of tragedy, loss and fulfillment of desires thus making the novel psychoanalytic in nature.

Moving towards certain creatures other than humans, Harry Potter comprises of Dementors who’s work is to take one’s soul and make humans unhappy. In contrast to them, there are other creatures named

Patronuses who give hope to the ones who are suffering in the novel. One of the Patronus is associated with Harry that motivates him to move forward in life and serve as a protector for the suffering wizards.

The major ideas in the selected series include the triumph of good over evil; certain choices made by the characters leading to their upgrade or downfall; justice and love; tragedy, loss of identity, abandonment and restoration to one's true self. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, there is clear contrast between how Harry views his trauma while the Voldemort treats his trauma is very different. This reflects two contrasting personalities, one being empathetic while the other as cruel depending on how the unconscious is affected in the both the characters respectively. Harry prefers to choose compassion and love, while Voldemort chooses violence and abusive power.

The role of chosen behavior also plays an important role in the book. For instance, Dumbledore believes in how a person shapes one's identity by making such choices which are conscious. Besides, Harry chooses to fight with the villain is conscious decision to lead and become heroic; while Voldemort's desire for immortality is too a conscious choice towards the world.

The element of love is also a part of psychoanalytic perspective in the novel. The love for leadership and heroic deeds enables Harry to develop love for the Hogarts while one of the characters Lily too is a symbol of love in the novel. The love chosen by Lily as well as Harry diffuses the trauma from their lives while Voldemort enters into unending hatred due to his abusive choice for immortality and power.

Conclusion

This study investigated and explored "Harry Potter" which is one of the most read series in the world from the psychoanalytical framework. The study concludes that Rowling's creative idea merely on her journey towards London lead her to write one of her best seller books. Besides the novel's various perspectives, trauma, justice, identity and unfulfilled desires hold a major perspective in the novel. Through different versatile characters, the author describes how identities are shaped through unconscious and conscious choices. Thus, psychoanalysis serves as a major medium in understanding the characters, their behavior and cause them either to lead or suffer.

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