

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONFLICTS OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN *THE WHALE*

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the psychological conflicts of the main character, Charlie, in the movie *The Whale* and how he resolves the conflicts. The writer employs Kurt Lewin's theory of conflicts, which divides conflict into three categories: approach-approach conflict, approach-avoidance conflict, and avoidance-avoidance conflict. Furthermore, Kurt Lewin defines valence as decision making or the resolution of psychological conflicts, which is divided into 3 types, there are positive valence, negative valence, and neutral valence. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. According to the findings, Charlie's most common experience is approach-avoidance conflict, which occurred 10 times. This form of conflict arises when Charlie is torn between desire and the consequences. The writer also discovered two cases of approach-approach conflict, in which Charlie must pick between two positive results, as well as three instances of avoidance-avoidance conflict, in which he is forced to select between two undesirable possibilities. Meanwhile, for resolutions, the findings show that Charlie dominantly resolves his conflicts with negative valence, mostly when he faces approach avoidance conflict. He also resolves conflicts with positive valence, with 4 data found in this study. However, the writer found neutral valence appears 2 times. In conclusion, this finding shows that Charlie often lets his emotions control his choices, especially when it comes to Ellie. He believes that taking care of her, even from a distance, is more important than taking care of himself. This explains why he often resolves approach-avoidance conflicts with negative valence, when he wants something but knows it has bad consequences, he follows his emotions instead of logic.

Keyword: psychological conflict, valence, The Whale, Charlie

INTRODUCTION

Human existence is inextricably linked to psychological conflict. Psychological conflict is defined as a psychological struggle a person has with himself (Bruno, 2002). Deutsch (1999) stressed that people experience this conflict when they are torn between competing ideas or goals. This type of conflict is based on our ability to think through and select the best solution when solving a problem. Psychological conflict refers to a person's internal conflict over what to do or think. This is the individual's primary conflict, and he or she must find a solution on their own.

Psychological conflicts are an integral part of our daily lives. For instance, one may want to pursue one's career while also prioritizing one's family. One may want to stay in a job he enjoy

while also exploring new opportunities. Conflicting motivations can vary between individuals and over time. The feeling that 'we can't have it all' is common among most people. Understanding these conflicts is crucial in psychology as they reveal the underlying motivations and complexities of human nature, providing deeper insights into the psyche (Sverdlik, 2012).

According to Von Franz (1980), psychology and literature have an unbreakable connection because they both originate from the human psyche. Literature often serves as a medium to explore and portray complex psychological themes, allowing readers to engage with and understand the intricacies of the human mind. There is a functional relationship between psychology and literature, which can be used to investigate other people's mental states. The variations and human psychological symptoms depicted by literary characters offer insights into the multifaceted nature of human psychology.

By examining these conflicts through various lenses, such as psychological theories and literary analysis, one can gain a comprehensive understanding of how people navigate and resolve psychological conflicts, ultimately contributing to the larger field of human behavior or psychological research.

This study examines Charlie's psychological conflicts in the *The Whale*. The film follows the story of Charlie, an English teacher living in isolation in his apartment. Charlie suffers from extreme obesity, making it difficult for him to move and carry out daily activities. The story begins as Charlie attempts to mend his long-broken relationship with his teenage daughter, Ellie. Charlie was estranged from Ellie and his ex-wife, Mary, after choosing to live with his male lover, who later passed away. This loss deepened Charlie's feelings of guilt and regret, exacerbating his health condition.

Charlie's struggle to reconnect with Ellie amidst his profound guilt and fear of rejection is a significant condition that highlights the psychological conflict central to his character. This scene and the underlying conflict demonstrate the relevance and depth of using Kurt Lewin's theory to analyze Charlie's experiences in *The Whale*. The film's exploration of these complex emotional and psychological dynamics makes it an excellent subject for this thesis on psychological conflicts.

The writer believes that everyone experiences psychological conflict in daily life. Thus, the study aims to delve into Charlie's psychological conflict as the main character in *The Whale* demonstrating the importance of psychological conflict in human experiences. The writer will reveal the various psychological conflicts Charlie encounters and examine his resolutions, contributing to a deeper understanding of psychological conflicts in film. The findings of this study are expected to provide insight into how psychological conflicts affect human behaviour, particularly in cases where guilt and self-worth play a significant role.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Psychology of Literature

Literature and psychology will complement one another as both can be utilized to understand the process behind the creation of a literary work. Literature often delves into the human psyche, presenting complex emotions, motivations, and behaviours that can be analysed through psychological theories. This approach helps in understanding not only the characters and their development but also the broader human experiences depicted in literary works. The goal of psychology of literature is unquestionably to comprehend the psychological elements present in the literary work, including those originating from the author, characters, and readers. In literary works, psychology is required to analyse the characters' psychology and all other aspects of psychology that the author presents (Wellek & Warren, 1949).

Von Franz (1980) defines psychology as an analysis of a literary work that takes into account and makes use of psychological science. This refers to the application of psychological science to literary analysis that considers the psychiatric perspectives of authors, characters, and readers. In other words, it is also true that the psychology approach investigates the mental health of literary authors, characters, and readers. However, the writer examines the psychological conflict in the character, excluding authors and readers.

2. Psychological Conflict

Lewin (1935) claims that psychological conflict is the argument brought about within the person when addressing a conflict brought on by an inner urge in the psyche. This conflict results from the simultaneous selection of at least two conflicting intentions or goals. It is a person's internal struggle that is depicted in this essay as a psychological conflict. The mental conflict between two opposing forces can alter a human's behaviour.

Lewin (in Bruno, 2002) states, people live in a psychological environment with a set of fundamental relationships. Kurt Lewin's method of describing living space through mathematics is known as typology. The interaction of everything in the human soul is the main topic. Conflicts develop as a result of people's tendency to approach or avoid specific things or goals. Kurt Lewin used the concept of approach and avoidance tendencies to define various psychological conflict types.

A. Approach - Approach conflict

This type of situation happens when an individual is faced with two equally attractive choices. They are required to pick only one, but since both options are favourable, selecting either one does not result in any negative outcome. Choosing one simply means not choosing the other, without any harmful effect. For example, a man is trying to decide between two television shows that he believes are equally enjoyable. If he chooses one of these TV programs, there will be no hesitation in ignoring the other option because both are considered equal favourable to him. It has been demonstrated that approach-approach conflict situations will only last a short time before being resolved (Levinger, 2015).

B. Avoidance - Avoidance conflict

This conflict occurs when a person is confronted with two dislike options. Another way to describe it is that confusion arises as a result of two bad motives arising, which implies that they must also satisfy other bad motives as they move away from the original motive. One will feel uneasy when confronted with this type of conflict. As an example, a person may dislike his current job and thinks about quitting, but he understands that doing so will leave him without employment. This conflict puts him in a position where he must choose between two unpleasant choices (Bruno, 2002).

C. Approach - Avoidance conflict

This type of conflict arises when a single goal or decision has both attractive and unattractive aspects, creating ambivalence as the individual feels both drawn to and repelled by the same option. For example, a professional is offered a lucrative promotion that includes a significant pay raise and increased responsibility. However, the promotion also requires relocating to a city with a much higher cost of living and being further away from family and friends. Attractive Aspect; The career advancement and financial benefits are highly desirable, making the promotion appealing. Unattractive Aspect; The relocation to a more expensive city and increased distance from loved ones are significant drawbacks, making the decision difficult (Ehrlich & Fasbender, 2016)

D. Double Approach - Avoidance conflict

A double approach-avoidance conflict occurs when an individual perceives both positive and negative goals. This conflict is a more complex version of the singular approach-avoidance conflict. For instance, Let's say Pamela is on a diet. She's having lunch at a restaurant. She is considering ordering a burger and fries or a salad with broiled chicken. Goal 1, the burger and fries are Pamela's preferred choice in terms of taste and overall appeal. The disadvantage is that the combination will be high in calories, causing her to cheat on her diet. Goal 2, the salad with broiled chicken, is the more appealing choice for Pamela in terms of caloric content. On the other hand, the negative aspect is that she is tired of salad and wants a treat (Ehrlich & Fasbender, 2016)

3. The Resolution of Psychological Conflict

Lewin (1935) used the word "valence" to describe the decisions making of a person to resolve psychological conflicts. Valence enables a person to determine if the outcome of achieving a certain objective is viewed positively, negatively, or neutrally. The subjective worth of a person, thing, event, or other living thing in their life space is known as valence. This subjective worth can be positive or negative. Lewin also stated that valence, which functions as a force of Positive or negative pull, plays a crucial role in influencing how individuals behave to fulfil their needs. The idea can dictate how a psychological conflict manifests itself in action. According to Kurt Lewin, valence is divided into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral valence. Here are 3 types of valences according to Kurt Lewin.

A. Positive Valence

If an action that resolves a conflict has a positive value, it is deemed to have a positive valence. If something is prioritized or liked enough to be chosen or done, it can be viewed as positive. For instance, if someone wants to be wealthy, they decide to work hard, earn money, and save frequently. If someone takes these kinds of positive actions, they are categorized as resolving conflicts with a positive valence. This includes someone who wants to become wealthy first. When actions taken to resolve a conflict produce positive outcomes. such as pleasure or fulfilment, they are seen as having a positive valence. Being able to enjoy the results of one's efforts brings satisfaction and happiness. (Lewin, 1935).

B. Negative Valence

A conflict-solving action is seen as possessing negative valence if the outcome is unfavorable or carries a negative impact. If something is disliked or is prioritized to be avoided, it can be considered to have a negative parameter. A person who steals out of hunger is an example. Since stealing has a negative valence, it is not a constructive way to resolve conflicts. Negative effects that will manifest later, typically in the form of regret for the decisions or actions made earlier, can also be used to define negative valence. Violence, theft, and other criminal acts all have a negative valence and are typically followed by regret (Lewin, 1935).

C. Neutral Valence

In neutral valence, the individual resolves conflict by engaging in an action that is not particularly appealing, yet not rejected either. This approach reflects a middle path in addressing internal conflict. For instance, in a decision-making poll, some participants may adopt a neutral stance, having no strong opinion and disagreeing with others' perspectives, which results in their decision to refrain from joining the discussion. A person who settles a dispute amicably won't typically experience either satisfaction or regret (Lewin, 1935).

RESEARCH METHOD

Method outlines how research is carried out. Method provides controlled and effective strategies for successful research implementation. The writer used a qualitative descriptive method to explain the problems and answering the questions provide in this research. Sandelowski (2000) stated that qualitative descriptive studies are ideal for providing clear descriptions of phenomena.

This research uses Kurt Lewin's conflict theory, which is a concept from the discipline of psychology of literature. This theory is not found within the film text itself but is applied to gain a deeper understanding of the psychological conflict of the main character. Thus, the use of this external theory directs the research towards an extrinsic approach. This study focuses on analyzing the psychological conflicts experienced by Charlie in *The Whale* and how he resolves these conflicts. The results of the analysis are presented descriptively, enabling the researcher to provide detailed explanations of the findings. In this research, the writer applies the observation technique to highlight relevant statements and phrases related to the study's theme and problems. According to Ciesielska et al., (2017), There are two types of observation: direct and indirect. Direct observation involves observing events first hand as they happen, whereas indirect observation utilizes recordings or documentation of past events instead of immediate observation. The writer focused on the dialogues and scenes that showed the activities related to the psychological conflict faced by Charlie as the main character by watching the *The Whale*. In this study, the data analysis technique used by the writer is a content analysis technique. Content analysis is a scientific study technique that describes material qualities and draws conclusions from them. Content analysis examines written or printed material in the media (Schreier, 2014). This is used because the writer is working with the content of an existing literary work. The writer focusses on the psychological conflicts and the resolution of psychological conflict of the character in *The Whale*.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1. Psychological Conflicts

Psychological conflict refers to a person's internal conflict over what to do or think. This state of confusion and hesitation creates tension during the decision-making process. (Lewin, 1935). Based on the findings of this study, the data reflecting Charlie's psychological conflict will be categorized according to the three forms of psychological conflict outlined by Kurt Lewin.

A. Approach – Approach conflict

This type of psychological conflict occurs when a person has two or more positive motives at the same moment. Then he will feel confused and hesitant since he must choose one of two options, both of which are appealing to him. The confusion arises due to the difficulty of selecting one of the choices.

Datum 1:





**Fig 1. (a) Charlie is given a new wheelchair by Liz. (b) Charlie's expression when he considers to accept or not accept the wheelchair
(Darren, 2022, 47:52-48:19)**

LIZ. It's a fat guy wheelchair.

CHARLIE. Why do I need a wheelchair?

LIZ. I was talking with one of the E.R. doctors, he said that moderate activity would be a good idea. Sense of independence might help you out.

CHARLIE. How much did you pay for this thing?

LIZ. Nothing. We ordered it for a patient a few months ago, it's just been sitting around.

CHARLIE. What happened to the patient?

LIZ. Try it out. (D. Hunter, 2022)

In figure 1a, it is known that Liz introduces the wheelchair to Charlie. Throughout the film, Charlie has relied on his cane or struggled to move without additional support. The fact that Liz offers him a wheelchair implies that he previously used a different mobility aid, which in this case would be his cane, as seen in figure 1a. However, he looks hesitant to accept the wheelchair. His expression of hesitation can be seen in figure 1b. This suggests that Charlie has 2 options in this moment, whether to continue using his cane or switching to the wheelchair. As can be seen in the dialogue from datum 1, Charlie's question, "Why do I need a wheelchair?", indicates that he is considering whether he actually needs to make this change. If he had no alternative, there would be no reason for him to question it. His hesitation suggests that he still sees his cane as a viable option. Additionally, Liz tries to convince him that using the wheelchair would be beneficial. This moment leads him to a psychological conflict as he was torn between accepting the wheelchair or refuse it and keep using the cane. The writer categorized this data into approach - approach conflict because neither choice has a negative consequence to him. Both options would help Charlie with his mobility, and his struggle comes from choosing which one is better for him.

B. Avoidance – Avoidance conflict

An avoidance-avoidance conflict arises when a person must choose between two equally disliked options. The presence of two negative motives creates confusion, as avoiding one alternative may involve dealing with another undesirable consequence. This type of conflict often results in a sense of tension and discomfort (Lewin in Bruno, 2002).

Datum 2:



**Fig 2. Stressful expression on Charlie's face
(Darren, 2022, 24:55-25:30)**

ELLIE. Stand up and walk over to me.

CHARLIE. What?

ELLIE. Come over here. Walk toward me.

Charlie pauses, then reaches for his walker.

ELLIE. Without that thing. Just stand up and come over here.

CHARLIE. Ellie, I can't really--

ELLIE. Shut up. Come over here. (D. Hunter, 2022)

Figure 2 shows an expression of being stressed on Charlie's face. There seems to be a wrinkle on his forehead, which shows that he is under pressure or in a discomfort situation when he was faced with two choices that were difficult for him.

From the dialogue in datum 2, it can be seen that Ellie demands that Charlie to stand up and walk toward her without the aid of his walker, Charlie is placed in a deeply uncomfortable situation. Despite his hesitation, Ellie's persistence forces him to confront his physical limitations. In this moment, Charlie experiences an avoidance-avoidance conflict, as he faces two negative motives. The first negative motive is attempting to walk without the walker, which is physically painful and potentially dangerous given his severe obesity and health condition. The second negative motive is refusing Ellie's demand, which can make an already bad relationship even worse and disappointing her, and Charlie doesn't want that to happen. Charlie's initial pause and reluctance reflect psychological conflict between these two undesirable options. This conflict highlights the complexity of Charlie's emotional and physical battles as he navigates his desire to connect with Ellie while grappling with the painful reality of his limitations.

C. Approach – Avoidance conflict

Approach-avoidance conflict occurs when a person perceives the same goal in both positive and negative aspects. This type of conflict creating ambivalence as the individual feels both drawn to and repelled by the same option.

Datum 3:

CHARLIE. I'm not interested in being saved. I appreciate you helping me out the other day, but you can go, this doesn't--

THOMAS. Okay, look--I really think God sent me here for a reason, there's a reason I knocked on your door when you needed someone the most.

(short pause)

Isn't there any way I can help? That's why I became a missionary in the first place, right?

(Pause.) Charlie looks at him. (D. Hunter, 2022)

From the dialogue in datum 3 above, Charlie experiences a psychological conflict when interacting with Thomas. Previously, Thomas introduced himself as a missionary from one of the churches, he wanted to help people return to God by giving lectures about religious teachings. Thomas good intention to help Charlie actually made Charlie feel uncomfortable because it made him remember the bad thing that happened to his lover who had died, where his lover died by committing suicide after studying religion. This makes Charlie hesitate to accept help from Thomas, lead him to psychological conflict. On the one hand, Thomas' offer of help has a positive aspect because it can have a good impact on Charlie with the condition he is experiencing now, Thomas' presence may be a good thing to help with everything related to physical or as a friend who can accompany him when he is alone. On the other hand, Thomas's offers also makes Charlie uncomfortable because it makes him remember bad memories of his girlfriend, and Charlie rejects the idea of being "saved" as offered by Thomas. His rejection comes from the belief that he does not deserve or does not want such help. When Charlie pauses and looks at Thomas without immediately responding, it shows his inner struggle between accepting help or maintaining distance. This scene reflects Charlie experiencing an approach - avoidance conflict between accepting Thomas' support or rejecting Thomas' offer.

2. The Resolutions of Psychological Conflicts

Every psychological conflict needs to be resolved; conflicts are settled by choosing between alternatives. There are three sorts of valence: positive, negative, and neutral. The presence of this valence enables person to determine which demands they will prioritize in resolving a psychological conflict, whether positive, negative, or neutral.

A. Positive Valence

Actions taken to resolve conflicts can be viewed as having a positive valence if they have a positive result for individual's goals, values or well-being. If an action that resolves a conflict has a positive value, it is deemed to have a positive valence. If something is prioritized or liked enough to be chosen or done, it can be viewed as positive (Lewin, 1935)

Datum 4:



Fig 3. Charlie keeps moving backward, reaching the wheelchair. He collapses down into it. (Darren, 2022, 48:40-48:48)

Even though Charlie was hesitated to accept the wheelchair at first, he finally chooses to reach it and choose to accept it. Using the wheelchair helps Charlie move more easily and reduces physical pain. This action is categorized as positive valence because by choosing to use a wheelchair, Charlie can do his activities more easily compared to using a cane which makes him have to rely on objects to help him do activities, which is not a good thing for his physical condition.

B. Negative Valence

An action taken to resolve a conflict is considered to possess negative valence when it results in an undesirable outcome. Any situation or choice that is disliked or intentionally avoided is generally associated with negative valence.

Datum 5:

The effort of bending forward is painful, but he doesn't stop. He is almost able to get on his feet, but a surge of pain brings him back to the couch. (D. Hunter, 2022)

Charlie faces a tough choice when Ellie demands that he stand and walk toward her without using his walker. On one hand, he knows trying to stand will be painful and physically overwhelming (avoidance). On the other hand, refusing Ellie's request is also an avoidance. Charlie chooses to try, despite knowing how hard it will be. He pushes himself, struggling to rise, but the pain becomes too much, and he collapses back onto the couch. This resolution reflects a negative valence, as his effort ends in physical pain and failure.

C. Neutral Valence

This type of valence describes a condition where an individual settles a conflict by taking an action that is not preferred but also not outright rejected. The resolution involves choosing a compromise or midway option to resolve the psychological conflict.

Datum 6:

CHARLIE. There is--something you can do. (D. Hunter, 2022)

When Thomas came to Charlie's life to give a lecture about religion, Charlie was actually not interested in it, even he had one reason that made him not want to be related to religion again. But on the other hand, Thomas kept insisting that he could help Charlie. This brought Charlie to the approach - avoidance conflict. Charlie finally resolved this conflict with neutral valence. Instead of accepting or rejecting Thomas's offer, he actually diverted it by asking for another help from Thomas, it can be seen in this quotation "*There is--something you can do*". This option is categorized as neutral valence where Charlie not rejected or accepted Thomas's request, but he found the third choice to resolve this psychological conflict.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, it can be concluded that Charlie often chooses negative valence when his conflict is related to his daughter Ellie. This means that he prioritizes his emotions over his own well being. Instead of thinking about what is best for his health, he focuses on his feelings and his guilt about being a bad father. The findings shows that Charlie often lets his emotions control his choices, especially when it comes to Ellie. He believes that taking care of her, even from a distance, is more important than taking care of himself. This explains why he often resolves approach-avoidance conflicts with negative valence, when he wants something but knows it has bad consequences, he follows his emotions instead of logic.

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