The Mental Health Crisis of Unfulfilled Needs in Black Swan Movie by Darren Aronofsky

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Article Info

ABSTRAK

Black Swan (2010) karya Darren Aronofsky mengeksplorasi krisis kesehatan mental mendalam yang dihadapi oleh tokoh utama, Nina Sayers. Film ini menampilkan Nina, seorang balerina berbakat, saat ia berjuang untuk mewujudkan peran ganda sebagai White Swan dan Black Swan dalam pertunjukan balet. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif. Data dalam penelitian ini dikumpulkan dengan menonton film untuk mengumpulkan informasi tentang data, membuat catatan dari setiap dialog atau adegan, dan bahkan paragraf yang berisi hierarki kebutuhan menggunakan teori Abraham Maslow, yang mengklasifikasikan data berdasarkan hierarki kebutuhan. Hasil penelitian ini adalah tokoh utama, Nina, yang merasa sulit untuk sepenuhnya mengambil peran Black Swan karena kehidupan sosialnya yang tertutup dan tidak adanya ikatan romantis dan emosional yang dibutuhkan untuk peran tersebut. Sikap protektif yang berlebihan dan harapan yang tinggi dari ibunya menjebaknya, memusatkan perhatiannya hanya pada karier baletnya dan menghambat bidang lain dalam hidupnya. Film ini menyoroti krisis kesehatan mental, dengan fokus pada gangguan yang disebabkan oleh tekanan pekerjaan dan perfeksionisme, konflik antara identitas pribadi dan harapan masyarakat, perasaan terisolasi, dan kurangnya dukungan sosial.

ABSTRACT

Black Swan (2010) by Darren Aronofsky explores the profound mental health crisis that the main character, Nina Sayers, faces. The movie presents Nina, a talented ballerina, as she struggles to embody the dual roles of the White Swan and Black Swan in a high-stakes ballet performance. This research used qualitative research. The data in this research is collected by watching the movie to collect information on the data, making notes of each dialogue or scene, and even a paragraph that contains a hierarchy of needs using the theory of Abraham Maslow, which classifies the data based on the hierarchy of needs. The research results are the main character, Nina, who finds it challenging to fully take on the Black Swan role because of her inadequate social life and the absence of romantic and emotional bonds required for the part. Her mother's excessive protectiveness and high expectations trap her, concentrating her attention solely on her ballet career and stifling other areas of her life. The movie highlights mental health crises, focusing on disorders caused by work pressure and perfectionism, conflicts between personal identity and societal expectations, feelings of isolation, and a lack of social support.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) projects that by 2030, depression will be the leading cause of disease burden worldwide [1]. Additionally, mental health concerns are increasing in the United States. The percentage of individuals with mental illness is increasing, contrary to the national targets established by the Healthy People 2020 initiative [2].

The rising mental health phenomenon has led the movie industry worldwide to address the same theme. Movies with themes of mental health began to appear in the early 20th century. However, these early films often had very different perspectives from our current understanding of mental health. A Beautiful Mind (2001) is a movie that tells the real-life story of mathematician John Nash, who started to portray mental disorders with more empathy and precision. Similarly, Ordinary People (1980) delves into how mental health issues affect a family.

Writing about people and their interactions with one another is a common thread connecting the fields of literature and psychology. There is a functional and indirect relationship between psychology and literature. While there is a functional relationship since literature and psychology both learn about human psychology, there is a direct tie because both disciplines study human life. The distinction lies in the fact that the experience is genuine in psychology, but in literature, it is purely fictional [3].

The literary psychology approach is related in three main ways: author, literary work, and readers[4]. According to Minderop [5], literary psychology pays attention to problems related to the emotional aspects of fictional characters in literary works. Literature is an exciting study material because it is not merely a study of dull text but a study material involving the character or personality of characters in literary work. The psychological problems in life can explain many human characteristics and the activities they do in every life. Many aspects can be analyzed from a psychological point of view, such as the type of conflict that occurs in the story, challenges, and tragedies [6]. Various forms of psychology experienced by the characters in a literary work can be understood with the science of literary psychology. Literary psychology is a study that examines psychological reflection in the characters presented in such a way by the author so that readers feel lulled by psychological problems contained in the literary work.

According to Wellek and Warren [7], literature is a creative activity, a work of art. Based on the statement, we know and understand that literature and human life are closely related. Literary work has now developed more rapidly and in a more varied way. One type of literary work is the movie, as well as other works of art; the movie has a characteristic that

exists in the composition of artistic variety. The literary influence in the movie is one of the developments in the movies. The development of literature in the movies itself can be seen by the fact that many movies are made based on the story in a literary work. This research focuses on the main character of the Black Swan movie, Nina Sayers.

Black Swan movie, directed by Darren Aronofsky, is a psychological thriller that follows the story of Nina Sayers, a dedicated and talented ballerina in a prestigious New York City ballet company. The film explores themes of ambition, obsession, and psychological instability through the lens of the competitive world of ballet. Nina is selected for the lead role. The role requires Nina to portray both the innocent and fragile White Swan and the seductive and dark Black Swan. While Nina is a perfect fit for the White Swan, Thomas doubts her ability to embody the sensuality and recklessness of the Black Swan. As Nina strives for perfection, she becomes increasingly pressured and stressed, pushing herself to her physical and mental limits. Nina's primary competition comes from a new dancer, Lily, who embodies the qualities of the Black Swan naturally. Nina's fear of being replaced by Lily leads to a growing paranoia. She begins experiencing vivid hallucinations and psychosomatic symptoms, blurring the lines between reality and delusion.

Every individual has an internal condition, where the internal conditions also play a role in their daily activities. One of these internal conditions is motivation. Motivation is a basic impulse that moves a person to behave [8]. One of Abraham Maslow's theories on the psychology of motivation emphasizes the hierarchy of human needs. Maslow believes that humans are motivated by a tendency or need to actualize, maintain, and improve themselves.

A psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow in his book "A Theory of Human Motivation" is one in which Maslow then broadens his ideas with assumptions about humans who are motivated continuously by one need and other needs. This theory accurately describes many realities of personal experiences. Many people find they can understand what Maslow says. They can recognize some features of their experience or behavior that are true and identifiable but which they have never put into words.

Maslow is a humanistic psychologist. Humanists do not believe that human beings are pushed and pulled by mechanical forces, either of stimuli and reinforcements (behaviorism) or of unconscious instinctual impulses (psychoanalysis). Humanists focus on potential. They believe that humans strive for an upper level of capabilities. Humans seek the frontiers of creativity, the highest reaches of consciousness and wisdom. This has been labeled "fully functioning person," "healthy personality," or, as Maslow calls this level, "self-actualizing person."

Maslow has set up a hierarchic theory of needs. All of his basic needs are instinctual, equivalent to instincts in animals. Humans start with a very weak disposition that is then fashioned fully as the person grows. If the environment is right, people will grow straight and beautiful, actualizing the potential they have inherited. If the environment is not "right" (and mostly it is not), they will not grow tall, straight and beautiful.

Maslow [9] has set up a hierarchy of five levels of basic needs. In this concept, there are 5 levels standing in the pyramids; (1) Physiological Needs, basic needs such as food, water, oxygen, and so on. This need is a very important and crucial need that must be filled because, basically, these needs are the main support of humans to fill other needs. The Feist explains, when a human is hungry, he will look for food, not looking for friends or feelings to be

appreciated. Even the human mind will not think more than food when they are hungry. It has been said by Maslow, a person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else. (2) Safety Needs, the need for security, stability, dependence, protection, freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos. It is the need for structure, order, and others. Many argue that safety needs are the same as or included in physiological needs because both are equally important and crucial. In fact, the need for security is as important as physiological needs, but it is still different because the need for security cannot be completely filled. In other words, humans cannot be protected (totally) from any danger that threatens them at any time. (3) Belongingness and Love Needs, after physiological needs and a sense of security are met, a motivation will emerge to look for friends, find a partner, have offspring, and seek for self-attachment to a person, group, environment, and nation. This need is the need for love and belonging. This need also plays an important role in a person's psychological development. At this stage, a person may or may not realize that this is a necessity, some may also realize but reject it, and some may realize but take an excessive reaction, thereby destroying the process. (4) Self Esteem Needs, at the level of self-esteem needs, Maslow found that there are two levels of needs; reputation/prestige and self-esteem. Self-esteem is the desire for strength, achievement, freedom, a feeling of a person's worth, and belief toward themselves. In comparison, reputation/prestige is a perception of prominence from others toward someone. Reputation and self-esteem are two different things; self esteem is far more basic than reputation because self-esteem is something that is based on real competence rather than merely the opinions of others. Maslow stated, "Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability, and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world. But thwarting these needs produces feelings of inferiority, of weakness, and of helplessness". (5) Self-actualization, at the last (highest) level, there is self-actualization. A need that includes self fulfilment, the realisation of all one's potential, the need to be able and creative. Feist and feist explain that someone who has reached the level of self-actualization becomes more human, more authentic in expressing himself, not influenced by culture. This need is different from other needs in its development. When a person reaches this stage, they no longer depend (worries) about the lower needs that lead a person to self-actualization. In this level of needs, humans have been at the point of accepting self, circumstances, and everything about them.

This research aims to reveal the causes of the mental health crisis experienced by the main character in the movie Black Swan. There are two research questions:1) How does the concept of unfulfilled needs affect the development of the main character in the movie? 2) What insights about mental health concerns in the real world can we draw from Black Swan's portrayal of the mental health crisis?

2.   METHOD

This research used qualitative research. Handcock [10] said that qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena. In other words, it aims to help us understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are.

The source of the data in this research is obtained from dialogues and scenes in the movie. The Black Swan movie was released in 2010 by Darren Aronofsky. The data in this

research is collected by watching the movie to collect information of the data, making notes of each dialogue or scene, and even a paragraph that contains a hierarchy of needs using the theory of Abraham Maslow, which classifies the data based on the needs by divided each need, and put the dialogues into each need, identifies the data that pertinent information, identifies additional studies that should be reviewed, puts all the hierarchy of needs words into sequences.

The data in this research is analyzed by reviewing the collected data in dialogues and scenes carefully, classifying the data, analyzing the data by explaining the reason why the data has a hierarchy of needs, and the last is making a conclusion of the data descriptively.

3.   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
3.1   Unfulfilled Needs
Physiological Needs
Data 1

> *Nina sits at the table, a half-grapefruit placed in front of her, and a neatly arranged row of vitamins beside it.*

From this scene, it is illustrated that Nina, as a ballerina, needs to maintain her food intake so that her weight meets the standards for ballerinas, who must have a small and slim body. The lack of food intake and the added pressure of training she experienced to play the character of Swan Queen can increase the stress she experiences.

Safety Needs
Data 1

> *Erica removes the earrings, then walks behind Nina to unzip*
> *her. Nina faces her.*
> **Nina   : I can do it.**
> **Erica : Turn.**
> *Nina turns back around, reticent.*

In dialogues above, Nina wants to take care of herself. She does not want to be treated like a child, but her mother treats her like a little girl. Even changing her clothes are handled by her mother and some scenes also show that.

Data 2

> **Erica   : *(to person outside)* Can I help you? *(pause)* I'm sorry, she's not in.**
> *Erica shuts the door. Nina rushes out to see who it was.*

The dialogue and scene above, it is evident that Nina's mother greatly restricts her social interactions. Nina has no friends and her daily activities are solely focused on ballet, with no other activities.

Data 3

> *Nina lies wide awake after a restless night. She slowly reaches down under the covers,*
> *down between her legs, to complete Leroy's "homework assignment."*
> *She closes her eyes and starts to maneuver.*
> *She suddenly hears a rustling sound and a short snore.*
> *She freezes and opens her eyes. She slowly sits up in bed and sees Erica sleeping on a*
> *chair in the corner of the room.*
> *Nina glares at her.*

In this scene Nina tries to complete Leroy's "homework assignment" but she is very surprised when she realizes that her mother is in her room and asleep in a chair. Nina's mother seems overly protective of her now adult daughter.

Belongingness and Love Needs
Data 1

> **Leroy : Good. So, do you have a boyfriend?**
> *She's caught off guard by his question and just smiles uncomfortably. He waits for an*
> *answer. Finally she manages a reply.*
> **Nina   : No...**
> **Leroy : Have you had many in the past?**
> **Nina   : A few. But no one serious.**
> **Leroy : I have a homework assignment for you.**
> **Nina   : Yes?**
> **Leroy : Go home and masturbate. Live a little.**

The dialogue and scene above take place while Leroy and Nina are chatting in Leroy's apartment. Leroy is trying to explore Nina's love life. He wants Nina to fully embody the character of the Black Swan, who is portrayed as a seductress. This scene reveals that Nina does not have much experience in romantic relationships, which makes it challenging for her to portray the Black Swan character effectively.

Self Esteem Needs
Data 1

> *Nina slips the lipstick into her bag and exits the room.*

In this scene, Nina steals Beth's lipstick, which she admires as a ballerina. Nina thinks that when she wears the lipstick, she will be as charming as Beth.

Data 2

> **Nina   : I just wanted to tell you, I practiced the coda last night, and I did it.**
> *Insecure, she looks like she wants to run out of the room.*
> **Leroy : All that discipline, for what?**
> **Nina   : I want to be perfect.**
> *He laughs.*

The dialogues and scene above indicate that Nina wants to play the lead roles of both the White Swan and the Black Swan. However, Leroy does not find the Black Swan persona within Nina. Until now, Nina has relied solely on her dancing technique to perfect performance.

Data 3

> *Nina and David finish the section, completely soaked with sweat.*
> *They look at Leroy, heaving breaths.*
> *Leroy comes face to face with Nina.*
> **Leroy : Nina, your Black Swan still looks no different than your White Swan.**
> **She's's just as...frigid.**

Data 4

> *Lily emerges from the darkness, dressed to leave.*
> **Lily   : You okay?**
> **Nina   : I'm fine.**
> **Lily   : You sure?**
> *Nina wipes off her tears with her hand.*
> **Lily   : So, want to talk about it?**
> **Nina   : Just had a hard day.**

From both of these data, it is evident that Nina's character is beginning to feel the pressure from Leroy due to her failure to deliver the Black Swan character. As the show day approaches, Nina feels pressured and has not achieved the satisfactory results she desires.

3.2   Mental Health Concern in the Movie

The film highlights the extreme pressures of striving for perfection, particularly in highly competitive fields like ballet. Nina's obsessive drive to achieve perfection leads to severe anxiety and self-destructive behavior. The main character reflects how high expectations and the relentless pursuit of perfection can contribute to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

Nina's struggle with her dual role as the White Swan and the Black Swan symbolizes her internal conflict between her true self and her public persona. This can be related to issues of identity and self-esteem in real life, where individuals may grapple with their sense of self-worth and the personas they project to others. The movie shows how conflict between personal identity and external expectations can lead to mental health crises.

The movie illustrates Nina's social and emotional isolation as she is distanced from her peers and lacks genuine support from her mother and colleagues. This isolation exacerbates her mental health issues, highlighting the importance of social support and meaningful relationships in maintaining mental well-being.

4.   CONCLUSION

Black Swan, directed by Darren Aronofsky, is a psychological thriller that centers on Nina Sayers, a devoted and gifted ballerina in a top New York City ballet company. The film delves into themes such as ambition, obsession, and mental instability, set against the backdrop of the fiercely competitive ballet world.

Nina, the protagonist, is cast as the Swan Queen, portraying both the White Swan and the Black Swan. In her everyday life, Nina mirrors the White Swan's innocent, sweet, and delicate traits, making her life relatively trouble-free. In contrast, the Black Swan represents a more seductive, provocative, and deceptive persona. Nina struggles to embody the Black Swan due to her poor social life and lack of the romantic and emotional connections needed for this role. Her mother's overprotective nature and expectations confine her, limiting her to a singular focus on her ballet career while restricting other aspects of her life.

The film highlights issues related to mental health crises, including disorders stemming from intense pressure and perfectionism, the clash between personal identity and external expectations, feelings of isolation, and inadequate social support.

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