

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF JOE GOLDBERG IN CAROLINE KEPNES' *YOU AND HIDDEN BODIES* NOVELS

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**Abstract:** This research was aimed at analyzing the personality of the main character, Joe Goldberg, in Caroline Kepnes' *You and Hidden Bodies* novels. Joe's personality was analyzed by applying Sigmund Freud's psychological approach that took a focus on the id, ego, and superego of humans. Character and characterization theory by Kelly Griffith was added in identifying Joe to get a deeper and better grasp of what kind of character he is. As a result of the analysis of the research, it showed that Joe's id was described through the impulsiveness in his actions, his ego was portrayed through maintaining to have a positive self-image in front of a woman he likes while his superego was depicted through his awareness of having a good moral by doing righteous deeds. However, Joe's actions and behaviors tend to lean more towards his id, which is the instinct and basic urges of humans to bring pleasures and avoid any painful feelings to protect the individual. Overall, Joe's id, ego, and superego were depicted through his actions and thoughts throughout the story.

**Keywords:** psychological approach, character analysis, You, Hidden Bodies

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini ditujukan untuk menganalisa kepribadian karakter utama, Joe Goldberg, di dalam novel *You and Hidden Bodies* karya Caroline Kepnes. Kepribadian Joe dianalisa dengan menggunakan pendekatan psikologis milik Sigmund Freud yang memfokuskan pada id, ego, dan superego manusia. Teori karakter dan karakterisasi oleh Kelly Griffith juga ditambahkan dalam mengidentifikasi Joe untuk mendapatkan pemahaman yang lebih dalam dan lebih baik mengenai karakter seperti apa dia sebenarnya. Hasil dari analisa penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa id Joe dideskripsikan melalui tindakan-tindakannya yang impulsif, egonya tergambarkan melalui usahanya untuk menjaga kesan diri yang positif, sementara superegonya digambarkan melalui kesadarannya untuk memiliki moral yang baik dengan melakukan perbuatan-perbuatan budiman. Bagaimanapun juga, tindakan dan perilaku Joe cenderung condong pada id, yang merupakan insting dan keinginan-keinginan dasar manusiawi yang selalu membawa ke arah kenyamanan dan terhindar dari perasaan sakit untuk melindungi individunya. Secara keseluruhan, id, ego, dan superego Joe digambarkan melalui tindakan-tindakan dan pemikirannya di sepanjang cerita.

**Kata kunci:** pendekatan psikologis, analisis karakter, You, Hidden Bodies

## A. INTRODUCTION

As humans, our behaviors, thoughts, and, actions are the result of our inner selves. People tend to have concern towards others that they are engaged with to see who they are, who it is that they are dealing with, and what it is that they want from the other person, etc. The same matter goes to literary works, specifically the characters in a work of fiction because “the questions readers ask about characters are the same ones we might ask about a friend or family member” (Dobie 53).

Psychological approach is a tool for people in trying to “understand other people’s actions, behaviors, thoughts, relationships, motives for that matter, their own” (Dobie 53). Sigmund Freud’s psychological approach has this human personality structure: id, ego, and superego to analyze humans’ behaviors. Those three human personality systems are related to each other and form the behavior of humans, which is the product of the interaction of the three. “Id is a biological component, ego is a psychological component, while the superego is a social component” (Corey 14).

Novel is one of the literary works that is created out of an author’s idea that contains various imaginations. Some experts defined the word novel differently. W.E. Williams defines it as “a long narrative in prose detailing the actions of fictitious people”. Tillyard defines it as “a novel is a not too unorganized, fictitious narrative in prose of at least, say, 20,000 words.” In other words, the novel is an extensive life story of someone and the people around them that accentuates their characters. Novel authors tend to do their best to be able to provide direction for the readers to know the hidden message made by the author.

The writer chose a novel series to be the objects of the study. The novels are called *You* and *Hidden Bodies* which were written by Caroline Kepnes in 2015 and 2016. The book is a series, the first one is *You* and the second is *Hidden Bodies*. The reason why the writer chooses these two books as her objects and not choosing one to be analyzed is that the first book provides the needed material for the research. *You* showcases more on the main character’s impulsive behaviors in regards to “protect” the people he loves while the sequel, *Hidden Bodies*, provides some of the factors that underlie his deeds and his way of thinking.

There was one problem that the writer found in this research; How are Joe Goldberg’s id, ego, and superego portrayed in *You* and *Hidden Bodies* novels? Thus, based on this research problem, the purpose of this research was to describe how Joe Goldberg’s id, ego, and superego were portrayed in the novels. It was expected that this research could provide information about psychoanalysis and the human personality structure of id, ego, and superego by Sigmund Freud. It was also hoped that this research could give the information that can be used as a reference for students who study literature or psychoanalysis in conducting future research on Sigmund Freud’s psychological approach in other works of literature.

## B. RESEARCH METHODS

### 1. Research Design

The research design that the writer used to analyze this research was a qualitative research method. Qualitative research is “. . . an interpretive naturalistic approach to the word. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their

natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln 3).

The purpose of this method is to find deep understanding of a problem that is being analyzed or observed and the data that are being collected are more letters, words, or pictures than numbers. The writer took a novel series titled *You and Hidden Bodies* by Caroline Kepnes. The writer applied library research for this method, which the writer searched the book through libraries and this research did not include any kinds of surveys or interviews.

## 2. Data and Data Source

The data source for this research was a novel series by Caroline Kepnes titled *You and Hidden Bodies*. *You*, the first book, was published on September 30, 2015 by Atria/Emily Bestler Books while *Hidden Bodies*, the second book, was published on February 23, 2016 by Simon & Schuster. The writer took the data through dialogues, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that contain psychological elements of the main character, Joe Goldberg, in *You and Hidden Bodies* novels.

## 3. Research Instrument

The instrument of this research was the writer herself by reading both *You and Hidden Bodies* novels, collecting the data from the novels, analyzing the data and drawing the conclusion of the research.

## 4. Data Collection

The writer had some steps in conducting this research. Firstly, the writer read Kepnes' *You and Hidden Bodies* novels. Secondly, the writer marked the necessary data of the novel that would be analyzed in this research by lining the dialogues, phrases, sentences or paragraphs that relate to Freud's psychological approach of id, ego, and superego with a pencil. Lastly, the writer collected the marked data of the novel by writing those data down in a note where Freud's psychological approach points have been noted by the writer beforehand.

## 5. Data Analysis

In analyzing the data about the character analysis of the main character in *You and Hidden Bodies* novels, the writer used three steps; data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles and Huberman 10).

### a. Data Reduction

“Data reduction refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions” (Miles and Huberman 10). The first step that the writer did in analyzing a character in the *You and Hidden Bodies* novels was by selecting or choosing the character themselves. In this case, the writer chose the main character of the novel series and focused on that one particular character. Once the character was chosen, the writer looked for the data in some of the dialogues, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs in the novel that revolved around the characterization of the character and Sigmund Freud's psychological approach to the analysis. After all the

necessary data was found and collected, the writer marked and took notes of them which relate to the research problems for this research. Then, the writer classified the data such as, the id, the ego, and superego of the main character based on Sigmund Freud's principles of personality. When all the data had been classified, the writer analyzed the characterization of the main character in the novel by using Freud's psychological approach.

b. Data Display

According to Miles and Huberman (11), data display is designed to assemble organized information into an immediately accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move on to the next step of analysis the display suggests may be useful. In this step, the way the writer displayed the data to be analyzed was by arranging the data into a thematic form which includes classifying them per data theme and writing the them down under each theme along with the numbers of the data on top of them.

c. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

"Conclusion drawing and verification may be as brief as a fleeting second thought crossing the analyst's mind during writing, with a short excursion back to the field notes, or it may be thorough and elaborate, with lengthy argumentation and review among colleagues to develop "intersubjective consensus," or with extensive efforts to replicate a finding in another data set" (Miles and Huberman 11). In this last step of data analysis, the writer drew a clear conclusion with brief explanation of how the id, ego, and superego of Joe Goldberg as the main character are portrayed in Caroline Kepnes' *You* and *Hidden Bodies* novels.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. Joe's Id in *You*

a. Stalking  
Data 1

**The next thing the Internet gave me was your address. Fifty-One Bank Street.** Are you fucking kidding me? This isn't a frenzied Midtown block where harried worker bees storm to and from the office. This is tone, sleepy, ridiculously safe and expensive West Village real estate. I can't just hang out on your block; I have to fit in with the la-di-da folk. I hit up the thrift store. I buy a suit (businessman and/or driver and/or kept man), carpenter pants and some kind of tool belt (handyman on a break), and a bullshit tracksuit (asshole taking care of his precious body). (Kepnes 14)

The paragraph above reflected Joe's id when he realizes that he is interested in a woman and decides to find her home address on the Internet to know where she lives to satisfy his wants. He plans to walk around in her neighborhood just to see her up-close quietly. In this matter, Joe's id is portrayed indirectly which is through his actions. Caroline Kepnes, the author of the novels, reveals Joe's personal qualities through him wanting to get to know a person by stalking them which has become his id. Stalking his "preys" has become Joe's initial instinct to do since he needs to gather

some information in order to feel safe within himself of knowing who his “preys” are and what it is that he gets himself into before setting up accidental meetings every now and then. In this context, stalking showcases Joe’s characterization through his action of stalking, which indicates that he is a very curious and intrusive character.

If we look at the psychological side of it, Joe has followed the instinct of his id urges to get to know Guinevere Beck, a woman he just met by stalking her. This kind of action of stalking or being stalked is not something that people would like to experience in life nor tolerate as it is an act of invading someone’s privacy. But, for Joe, it is normal and he does not care what society thinks as long as his id’s needs are gratified.

## 2. Joe’s Ego in *You*

- a. Calm  
Data 30

Because of my current thought process, I almost freak out when I see a cop on my stoop. He blocks the front door and he is a giant and my brain freezes up on me—BenjiPeachCandacemugofurine—and it’s me he’s looking for. Like Ethan says, when you know, you know. This giant cop has his nightstick out and he’s not fucking around, “Is that you, Joe?”

**It takes everything I have left in me to walk toward this man when all I want to do is run.** (Kepnes 331)

Dealing with the police is the last thing Joe wants because of how many people he has killed in the past without being caught. He feels the need to run for his dear life, but he has to put up an innocent act and walk towards a cop who is looking for him. As a character who has a complex personality, Caroline Kepnes gives Joe a calm demeanor attributed to his characterization for him to face any possible obstacles being thrown at him. It is shown through his action which also reflects his ego when he confidently walks up to a cop instead of panicking and running away.

Psychologically viewed, the action Joe takes portrays his ego because he decides to stay and fight his id urges that is begging him to save himself by running away as soon as he sees a cop standing in front of his door. This type of staying calm in a havoc situation helps Joe to solve a problem he is in at the time. His ego tries to find a solution without causing any harm or more trouble than he already is. Therefore, Joe decides not to act reckless of showing that he is guilty by running away as the ego attempts to hinder the instinctual libidinal drives so that they submit to the reality principle.

## 3. Joe Superego in *You*

- a. Letting Beck Win an Argument  
Data 33

You don’t have the guts to stand up to Lynn and Chana and I’ll gladly be your whipping post tonight. “I’m sorry, Beck. I really am.”



You nod. You are loyal.

“But let me just say this. That building is tight. It would be seriously hard to break in.”

But you aren’t moved and you huff. “Well, it doesn’t matter if it happened. She feels like it happened.”

**I let you win; you’re a girl. You’re allowed.** (Kepnes 174)

The quotation above reflects Joe’s characterization through his action when he lets Beck win an argument. His action shows that Joe is a peace keeper, especially when it is regarding his romantic relationships. He would stay out of trouble with his girlfriends as much as he can even if it means suppressing and neglecting his own feelings.

Based on the psychological approach, the quotation above depicts Joe’s superego. It shows through his action when he lets his girlfriend win the argument because it is society’s common expectation to let women win as the superego includes moral ideas that an individual learns from their parents and society. It teaches him to go easy on women even though deep down he wants to confront and tell her how naïve and selfish she has been acting. However, Joe does it for the sake of keeping the peace within their relationship.

#### 4. **Joe’s Id in *Hidden Bodies***

##### a. **Cannot Take Rejection** Data 12

“I’m leaving you,” she said.

Then go, bitch. Go.

It wasn’t my fault that Candace followed me down to the water’s edge and it wasn’t my fault that I picked her up and held her down in the water and watched her pass on to the great beyond. She wanted to be there, or she wouldn’t have gone down here with me. **She knew she was killing me and she knew that I was not the type to go down without a fight.** (Kepnes 285)

Joe cannot handle rejection quite well. This quotation shows when his id starts taking control of his mind. Murder has become Joe’s id as his number one solution to almost everything that he does not anticipate to happen. His id takes care of the pain he feels by giving him the urge to get rid of Candace, his old girlfriend.

Kepnes indirectly reveals Joe’s characterization as a murderous individual through his actions and thoughts when he cannot take any rejection from Candace. Psychologically viewed, the quotation above explains how dangerous he can be when he does not get what his id wants or whenever he tries to “protect” himself from painful feelings. His id demands him to protect himself by getting rid of the pain he feels.

5. **Joe's Ego in *Hidden Bodies***

- a. Having Self-Respect  
Data 55

“You’re a noble small businessman with an admirable work ethic and a solid start-up business. You are, therefore, the farthest thing in the world from a gold digger.”

**I’ve been waiting for him to use that phrase and I was going to keep working anyway because I am not a fucking gold digger.** “I get it,” I say. “Right.” (Kepnes 196)

In this matter, Caroline Kepnes reveals Joe’s characterization of having self-respect through his initial thoughts of not wanting to take the money Forty insisted for Joe to take. Having self-respect for himself is Joe’s ego to avoid to having seen as a gold digger from Love’s family.

Looking at the psychological side of it, even though Joe accepts taking the money and it is enough to cover his needs for a while, his ego demands him to keep working. He decides to keep what he does for a living because he does not want anyone or even his own self to think that he is a gold digger just because he is dating the daughter of a wealthy family. The reality awakens Joe of how he should react to the fact that his girlfriend’s brother just offers him a lot of money. Therefore, Joe needs to put into consideration if he wants to accept the money as his ego wants him to have self-respect if he does not want to be seen as someone who uses other people’s resources for his benefits by the people around him.

6. **Joe's Superego in *Hidden Bodies***

- a. Being Honest  
Data 68

I’ve never opened up like this, never said it all out loud before, and I hold my knees to my chest and tell myself that what happens next is out of my control. I can’t make Love love me. **But I did the right thing. I told her what she wanted to know. I stopped lying.** (Kepnes 367-368)

In this context, his current girlfriend, Love, threatens to leave Joe if he does not want to tell her what he has been hiding. The next thing he does, he lets on about his past actions and what he has been keeping so close to his heart by opening up to her. Through the action, it shows Joe’s characterization in the story and it gives out a hint that Joe is someone who is able to be vulnerable around other people, which in this case is his girlfriend, Love. In consequence, honesty is Joe’s only solution to the problem he is facing at the moment and it becomes his superego.

Looking at the psychological side of it, Joe’s superego decides to do the right thing to stop lying to someone he really cares about. It leaves him devastated and he is well aware that he cannot control whatever happens next. Joe’s superego is portrayed through his action as he is willing to let his superego take over himself by admitting all of his attempted murders in the past to Love, knowing the fact that she

would just end up leaving him and risks him getting locked up in prison as well. Opening up to Love has become his superego to deal with the situation he is in as he finally wants to be honest, which he knows is the right thing to do at the very least.

#### D. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, these novels show the reader that love plays an important role in Joe Goldberg's life that leads him to do anything to get the love he wants. Seeing how he mostly acts based on his irresponsible and impulsive actions, it results in him leaning on his id more than any of the other personality structures to react to obstacles and face his problems in life. Caroline Kepnes, the author of *You* and *Hidden Bodies* novels, reveals Joe Goldberg's character through indirect characterization, which can be found by paying attention to his external details, dialogues, thoughts, and deeds in the novels. Therefore, based on the analysis of the study, it gives the answer that Joe's id is described through the impulsiveness in his actions, his ego is portrayed through his efforts to maintain of having a positive self-image in front of a woman he likes while his superego is depicted through his awareness of having a good moral by doing righteous deeds. Joe's actions and behaviors tend to lean more towards his id that shows his impulsive nature, his ego becomes his second base of the actions he takes while his superego is barely show up, especially in the beginning of the story. Overall, his id, ego, and superego are portrayed through his actions and thoughts throughout the story.

The writer suggests that future researchers could apply other theories if they decide to analyze the same object as the writer, whether it is in regards to the characters' personalities with Carl Jung theory of personality or other topics, such as the theme, plot, settings, and figurative languages of the story with relevant theories. There are a lot of interesting topics that can be discussed related to these novels and this study was a character analysis that the writer was compelled to analyze due to the main character's enthralling personality traits in the story.

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