



Survival Genius Analysis Faced by the Main Characters in All Is Lost Movie by Jeffry McDonnell Chandor

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ARTICLE INFO

Received:
04 December 2024

Accepted:
20 February 2025

Published:
05 April 2025

Keywords:

Character, Movie,
Self-defense
Mechanisms,
Psychological

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the psychological dimensions of human behavior as depicted in the film *All Is Lost*, directed by J.C. Chandor. Focusing on the main character, the research aims to examine behavioral patterns and uncover underlying psychological aspects presented throughout the narrative. The analysis is based on Sigmund Freud's Semium (2006) theory of defense mechanisms and personality structure, as well as Anna Freud's (1936) elaboration on defense mechanisms. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, data were collected through careful observation of scenes and note-taking techniques. The findings reveal four distinct psychological aspects portrayed by the protagonist, with the survival instinct emerging as the most dominant. This study highlights how cinematic representation can reflect complex psychological processes in extreme conditions.

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.59011/austronesian.4.1.2025.1-9>

1. Introduction

Literature, as a form of artistic and cultural expression, reflects the complexities of human life and society. It integrates content, form, emotion, language, and aesthetic value to convey meaning and provoke reflection (Małeck et al., 2018; Wellek & Warren, 1956). Traditionally, literary works encompass a variety of genres, including poetry, fiction, nonfiction, drama, journalism, film, and even song lyrics. These works are generally categorized as either fiction or nonfiction: nonfiction is grounded in factual representation, while fiction involves imaginative storytelling enhanced by metaphorical and symbolic language (Klarer, 2013; Sudewa & Gaho, 2024).

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Among these literary forms, film occupies a distinctive space as a medium that combines visual, auditory, and narrative elements, creating a uniquely immersive experience. Unlike written texts that rely solely on language, films communicate through moving images, sound, and cinematic techniques, making them a dynamic form of literary art (Monaco, 2009; Taniş & Cengizhan, 2010). As such, films share fundamental narrative elements with traditional literature, such as character, plot, setting, and theme, all of which contribute to their potential for academic and psychological analysis.

One of the most crucial elements in both written and cinematic literature is character. Through character development, emotional states, psychological patterns, and behavioral responses are vividly portrayed (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010; Passandaran, 2019). Egri (1960) identified three primary dimensions of character: physiology, sociology, and psychology. These dimensions provide a framework for understanding how characters respond emotionally, rationally, and behaviorally to various challenges. While characters in films are commonly human, they may also be represented by animals, abstract figures, or symbolic entities, depending on the narrative context (Branigan, 1992; Chatman, 1980).

This research focuses on the psychological analysis of the protagonist in *All Is Lost* (2013), a survival drama directed by J.C. Chandor. The film presents a solitary character facing a life-threatening maritime disaster, portraying human resilience in the face of isolation, danger, and existential crisis. With almost no dialogue and only one visible character, the film becomes a study in non-verbal emotional expression and psychological endurance. This study aims to identify the self-defense mechanisms employed by the protagonist, drawing on Sigmund Freud's theory of personality structure (Semium, 2006) and Anna Freud's classification of defense mechanisms (Freud, 1936).

This study is contextualized by previous research, such as Ramadhani (2015), who examined the character development and emotional maturity in *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green. Ramadhani employed objective criticism and utilized theoretical frameworks from Abrams (1999), Murphy and Kovach (1972), and Stanton (1965) to analyze themes of social experience and death acceptance. While that study focused on emotional transformation through interpersonal interaction, the present study takes a different approach by analyzing solitary survival psychology.

The aim of this article is to explore how an individual navigates the psychological and emotional terrain of survival when completely isolate. Through an in-depth analysis of *All Is Lost*, the study seeks to uncover the valuable life lessons conveyed when the protagonist is confronted with overwhelming adversity—ultimately leading to a profound act of surrender and acceptance.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have employed Freud's theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms to analyze the psychological dimensions of fictional characters in film. Rezeki et al. (2023), for instance, examined Cecilia in *The Invisible Man* (2020), identifying neurotic and realistic anxieties along with defense mechanisms such as repression, rationalization,

fantasy, denial, and reaction formation. Although their study applied Freudian theory effectively, it lacked an in-depth discussion of how these mechanisms shaped Cecilia's behavioral progression. In a similar vein, Kartini (2023) explored Crown Prince Hyojang's psychological struggles in *Sado* (2015), identifying several defense mechanisms, including dysplasia, reaction formation, and repression. While the study highlighted emotional conflict within a historical context, it fell short in linking these mechanisms to specific events that could explain Hyojang's psychological reactions.

Other research has focused on more contemporary or symbolic characters. Nurfatima (2022) analyzed Arthur Fleck in *Joker* (2019), whose psychological deterioration was rooted in childhood trauma and maternal abuse. The study mapped a wide array of mechanisms—repression, sublimation, fixation, and projection among others—but did not empirically connect past experiences to Arthur's behavioral responses, leaving causality underdeveloped. Similarly, Prasetyanto (2016) investigated Frank Abagnale Jr. in *Catch Me If You Can*, noting defense mechanisms like identification and rationalization. However, the study lacked analysis of the chronological development of these defenses and their influence on decision-making processes.

Animated characters have also been subjects of psychological inquiry. Cahyati and Hamidah (2022) identified mechanisms such as regression and sublimation in Marlin from *Finding Nemo* (2003), emphasizing his neurotic anxiety and protective behavior. Despite its clarity in applying Freudian theory, the study did not explore how Marlin's behaviors affected his relationships with others. In contrast, Tarigan et al. (2022) offered a broad inventory of mechanisms in Big Mike from *The Blind Side*, but failed to assess how these defenses influenced his social adaptation, particularly within a racially charged and class-divided environment.

Putri and Nurhamidah (2020) analyzed Charlie in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2012), connecting his anxieties to childhood sexual trauma. However, they did not elaborate on the specific defense mechanisms used by the character, thus weakening the psychological depth of the analysis. In a more complex narrative, Aripin (2014) studied Jack in *Fight Club*, connecting various types of anxiety to dissociative symptoms such as insomnia and the creation of an alter ego. While the study effectively applied theory to behavior, it neglected to address the broader social and ethical implications of Jack's violent actions.

Some scholars have explored trauma-induced psychological breakdowns. Anggraeni and Widyaningrum (2024) discussed repression and denial in Hannibal Lecter from *Hannibal Rising*, showing how trauma contributed to his moral decline. Despite its depth, the study overlooked the ethical dimensions of representing a character with extreme antisocial behavior. Lastly, Sipayung (2022) explored Zhu in *She Who Became the Sun*, recognizing mechanisms such as sublimation and regression. Though the study emphasized psychological resilience, it failed to consider cultural influences that could contextualize Zhu's responses more fully.

In summary, these studies demonstrate the versatility of Freud's theory in interpreting cinematic and literary characters across various genres and settings.

However, most remain predominantly descriptive and narrowly focused on mechanism identification, often lacking contextual depth, longitudinal character development, or ethical and cultural considerations. Therefore, this study seeks to fill these gaps by offering a holistic psychological analysis of the protagonist in *All Is Lost* (2013), a character uniquely portrayed through silence, isolation, and survival. Unlike previous works, this study integrates psychological theory with close narrative analysis, emphasizing the evolution and impact of defense mechanisms in extreme solitude.

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the psychological aspects of the main character in the film *All Is Lost*. The analysis focused on emotional responses and behavioral patterns using the theoretical framework of defense mechanisms proposed by Sigmund Freud and further elaborated by Strachey & Freud (1955).

The primary data source for this research was the film *All Is Lost*, an ocean-themed survival drama released on October 3, 2013, and directed by Jeffrey McDonald Chandor. The film was selected due to its minimal dialogue and intense focus on the protagonist's psychological journey, making it a suitable object for in-depth emotional and behavioral analysis.

Data collection in this study was carried out through several systematic steps to ensure the accuracy and depth of the analysis. First, the film *All Is Lost* and its script were obtained from credible online sources. The film was then watched repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the narrative and emotional development of the main character. During the viewing process, detailed notes were taken, particularly focusing on scenes that potentially illustrated the character's psychological responses and defense mechanisms. To ensure precision in capturing these moments, the film was segmented scene by scene, and playback was paused frequently to allow for thorough observation and data extraction. This method enabled the researcher to identify and document significant verbal and non-verbal expressions that aligned with the theoretical framework of defense mechanisms.

The collected data were then analyzed thematically, categorizing the main character's responses based on the typologies of defense mechanisms. The results were interpreted and presented descriptively to illustrate the underlying psychological constructs.

4. Results and Discussion

Researchers found three psychological aspects of the main character shown in the movie: survival genius, ambition, high self-confidence, and motivation, as demonstrated below.

a. Self-Defense Mechanism

Based on the story in the movie, Self-defense mechanism is so awesome that he works hard to fix them by himself that one is amazed by the audience; that is so epic a

scene that the researcher found in the movie “All Is Los.” which if seen by humans can not last long in the ocean The main system of the body that influences adjustment is the nervous system, glands, and muscles. The nervous system that usually develops healthily is an absolute requirement for psychological functions to function optimally, which has a good effect on adjustment. A healthy physical condition can lead to self-acceptance, self-confidence, self-esteem, and the like, which will be favorable conditions for the adjustment process. However, all of this is only temporary; humans cannot survive long in the vast land that is watery.

Data 1



Figure 1. The big container crashed the ship
Source: All Is Lost movie

The main character, Robert Redford, woke up in the morning because his clothes were wet, and all of a sudden, he just saw the water come into the boat; he went out of his bed, and he had no idea when he saw the red container hit his boat and get stuck into his boat's edge. On the other hand, he tried to repair the ship with glue and some of the bags on his boat. Based on the scene above, Robert adopts the self-type defense mechanism to control his emotions and express her feelings in the opposite method. This type of self defense mechanism is known as a Reaction Formation. Freud mentions that Reaction Formation is an ego defense that causes a person to deny something, threatening to think about an event and behave in a way opposite to what he thinks or feels (see also Ashour, 2022). Defense mechanisms help Robert avoid disturbing his mind with his cold sensation.

b. Ambition

Ambition is something that every human has in their life. Nonetheless, this ambition can be viewed with a positive perspective, but it can also be viewed with a negative perspective, depending on the context in which it is contained. According to the movie “All Is Lost.” However, that does not mean that Robert Redford does not have ambition, our life will run smoothly. Without ambition, usually, many people usually lack quality of life because their life goes on without goals and challenges. This makes them unaware of their other potential but never honed in.

Data 2



Figure 2. Patience is the key to success independent man
Source: All Is Lost movie

Fig 2 above is the scene in a movie where Robert Redford Finally decides to move to an emergency rubber boat after the ship that Robert was using had sunk. At this moment, it can be seen that Robert is a person who does not give up easily in doing something. When Robert decided to move the rubber boat, it was not an easy thing for Robert to do, but the situation forced the situation to keep moving, even though Robert had to bear the risk of storms day and night and had to endure hunger and cold. At that time, he began to rise from despair, but it did not make him keep giving up, as he knew Robert was a hard worker and did not give up easily.

c. High self-confident

Confidence is an essential part of success because it gives Robert confidence in the skills to Robert has to overcome various types of challenges. Developing self-confidence often requires continuous reflection and practice. By increasing your confidence, you may also feel more comfortable facilitating meetings, networking, interviews, and appearing in leadership roles. In this article, researchers explain self-confidence, why it is important, and what characteristics people have.

Data 3



Figure 3. Robert's confidence brings happiness
Source: All Is Lost movie

This scene shows Robert has High self-confidence even though until the end of his life, Robert decided to surrender to his situation, Robert still believed that someone would come to help him; in the last scene, someone came to help Robert, and relief will always be there as long as we can be patient and always surrender to God.

d. Motivation

Motivation is the reason why you act or behave in a certain way. It is the force that drives you to take action, regardless of fear or taking it. Motivation is one of the driving forces behind human behaviour. It fuels competition and sparks social connections. Its absence can lead to mental illnesses such as depression. Motivation encompasses the desire to continue striving toward meaning, purpose, and a life worth living. Psychologists define motivation as a process by which it is initiated, directed, and sustained so that certain needs are met.

Data 4



Figure 4. Learn how to use a compass and cardinal directions
Source: All Is Lost movie

The scene is when Robert tries to learn about compass with the guidebook. Robert tries to learn about the cardinal directions and also techniques for using compass. Then, he came up with the idea that Robert burned all the papers. He had to ask for help because from afar, he saw a cargo ship about to pass, but the freighter just ignored the wave from Robert, who was very depressed at that time. Based on the scene above, Robert adopts the self-defence mechanism, which is when he tries to move his emotions into something constructive (Zaviera, 2009). Defence mechanisms stimulate Robert to stay optimistic when the freighter ignores him, which makes him think clearly and remain patient.

5. Conclusion

Self-defense mechanism analysis and the main character in the movie All is Lost has given the writer some results in the main character in the movie. All has given the writer some results such as the main character's successful attempt to save himself in a survival situation is affected by his strong desire to survive by adopting four kinds of self defense mechanisms such as; motivation, high self-confidence, ambition, and self-defense mechanism (see Hidayat, 2021). Each defence mechanism gives Robert Redford perspective and stimulates him to take action to survive. Does the main character adopt

the most dominant defense mechanism during the pressure moment, which causes him to act constructively by putting an endless effort to save himself from the accident? The defense mechanism also helps Robert control his personality structure or self-confidence.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this research.

Authors' contribution

The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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