

A Psychoanalytic Examination of Female Trafficking Depicted in Rashel Lloyd's *Girls Like Us*: Insights from Sigmund Freud's Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

The present study aimed to examine the phenomenon of female trafficking from a psychoanalytic perspective using Sigmund Freud's theoretical framework. The psychological analysis of the book *Girls Like Us* by Rachel Lloyd was conducted with the aim of discovering the hidden psychological layers of victims of sex trafficking; the focus was on how the painful and traumatic experiences of the victims penetrated their unconscious structure and were reflected in their behaviors and psychological reactions. In this research, the fundamental concepts of Freud's theory, including repression, displacement, id, ego, and superego, were relied on to examine the psychological dimensions of this phenomenon from deeper angles. To collect data, a qualitative content analysis method was chosen and the texts of the book were studied and coded. Information was extracted from the memories, quotes, and narratives expressed by survivors of female trafficking in the text of the book. Each of these data was examined from a psychoanalytic perspective, and an attempt was made to identify signs of the functioning of psychological defense mechanisms among the statements and experiences of these girls. Psychoanalytic concepts such as the suppression of memories of sexual abuse, the conflict between the id and the superego, and the representation of repressed anxieties in sudden behaviors were analyzed. The data were coded and interpreted by several researchers to prevent the influence of individual bias and bias and to increase the validity of the analysis. As a result, it was determined that female trafficking has consequences beyond physical harm and has caused disruption in their psychological and identity structure. Analysis of the narratives in the book showed that many victims resorted to mechanisms such as repression, denial, and identification to survive in difficult circumstances; bitter memories of the past were repressed at the unconscious level of their minds and resurfaced in the form of constant anxieties, nightmares, and risky behaviors. In many cases, the conflict between the demands of the institution and the moral limitations of the superego led to anxiety and psychological disintegration in the victims.

Keywords: Psychoanalytic Perspective, Female Trafficking, Oedipus Complex, Repression, Defense Mechanisms

Introduction

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory opened a new window into the origins of behavior, identity, and psychological trauma, and depicted the mind not as a static space but as a battlefield between instinctual

desires, reality pressures, and internalized values (Noy 155). By introducing the three structures of the id, ego, and superego, the human psyche was divided into a three-part system in which the id is the source of primitive and irrational desires such as the desire for pleasure, power, and survival; the superego represents the conscience and values internalized by parents and society; and the ego, as an intermediate element between the two, is responsible for regulating, moderating, and maintaining balance so that the individual can participate in society without disintegrating from within (Konain 149). This structure not only shapes personality, but also lies at the root of many decisions, reactions, and psychological conflicts. Freud considered the role of early life experiences, especially in childhood, to be very fundamental in the formation of psychological patterns; experiences such as love, rejection, or violence that settle in the unconscious layers of the mind and are reproduced throughout the individual's life in a cycle of unwanted repetition of the same injuries; what Freud referred to as "compulsive repetition" is a kind of unconscious attempt to reconstruct a painful situation from the past, perhaps with the unseen hope that this time the individual will have control over it (Zhang 81). In the meantime, mechanisms such as repression, displacement, projection, sublimation, and regression act as defensive shields against anxiety and tension, but their price in many cases is the rupture of identity and the continuation of psychological wounds that remain hidden behind a consistent and logical appearance (Naz 203).

In such a framework, the book *Girls Like Us* by Rachel Lloyd finds a special place. This memoir and analytical work describe the lives of girls who have fallen into the trap of sex trafficking, and the narrator herself arose from this bitter reality. Combining personal experience and a socially active perspective, Lloyd gives voice to girls who have always been marginalized. The stories in the book tell of lost childhoods, parental absence, domestic violence, emotional and sexual abuse, and the relentless repetition of suffering. In the context of this deep and complex theory, Rachel Lloyd's book *Girls Like Us* shines as a living text of the wounded human psyche. This book is not just a collection of memories or observations, but a rich account of the accumulated suffering of girls who have been victims of a system of sexual exploitation, of which the author herself was one. In a sincere, transparent and honest language, Lloyd depicts the lives of girls who have been exposed to violence, neglect, rape and abandonment since childhood and have ultimately lost their identity, body and security in human trafficking networks. The stories are full of signs of psychological helplessness; girls who have lived with addicted, absent or violent parents as children, have moved many times, have been placed in temporary homes, have been exposed to rape, and have not had a secure bond with another at any point in their development. Rachel Lloyd presents these narratives not from a purely sociological perspective, but from an internal perspective steeped in lived experience. The girls in her book are not simply victims of economic or criminal structures, but wounded souls whose identities have been shaped by rejection, humiliation, and lack of love; souls who, beneath layers of violence and distrust, desperately yearn to be seen, understood, and belong. The book is not only a description of a social crisis, but also a reflection of the fragility of the human psyche when deprived of meaning, love, and security in childhood.

Many of the girls in the book share experiences of childhood abandonment, lack of parental affection, the presence of abusive or absent fathers, and depressed or indifferent mothers. Such conditions are the breeding ground for psychological breakdown and the development of disorders that Freud saw as the result of unresolved fundamental conflicts during development. The girls' repeated return to traumatic relationships or exploitative men is often not intentional, but rather a recurring pattern that the unconscious mind uses in an attempt to recreate what has been repressed in the past; as if the mind is trying to re-

experience a painful situation in order to perhaps control it. Concepts such as regression and identification with the perpetrator of violence also feature prominently in Lloyd's narratives. Some girls have developed an emotional and psychological attachment to those who have exploited them, a phenomenon that Freud explored in the form of "identification with the aggressor." This complex relationship is not due to personality weakness, but rather a reflection of psychological defenses that are formed against helpless situations. In this regard, denial of reality, fragmentation of identity, and displacement of anger inward are signs of psychological defenses that the victim resorts to for survival. With a deep and empathetic look, Lloyd's book allows for an understanding of the victim from an internal perspective, and along with it, with psychoanalytic analysis, it is possible to link social and psychological structures. What is considered a "crime" or "deviance" at the level of society may be an unconscious attempt within the individual psyche to regain a sense of worth or control over lost experiences. By emphasizing this connection between the past and the present, the conscious and the unconscious, Freudian theory helps to recognize trafficking in women not simply as a social crisis but as a psychological tragedy that requires reaching into forgotten unconscious minds and unfinished stories to understand.

Analysis of Female Trafficking Depicted in Rashel Lloyd's *Girls Like Us*

The book *Girls Like Us* by Rashel Lloyd is an influential account of the lives of girls who are trapped in the trap of exploitation and abuse. With an intimate prose and a realistic perspective, the author narrates her personal experiences alongside the stories of girls who have become victims of unjust social and economic conditions. This theory believes that many of an individual's decisions and behaviors are rooted in the unconscious layers of his mind. By addressing these topics, the author provides a platform that can be used to understand the psychological structure of the characters more deeply. Analyzing this narrative within the framework of Freud's theory shows how a past full of pain and repression can shape the course of life and what factors in the individual's unconscious cast a shadow on his decisions and behaviors.

The Id, Ego, and Superego in the Lives of Trafficked Girls

The characters in *Girls Like Us* are engaged in a constant struggle between instinctual desires, logic, and moral constraints; a struggle that forms the basis of their decision-making and behavioral responses. The ego, as a representative of insatiable desires and rebellious instincts, plays a dominant role in the lives of these characters and guides behaviors that seek immediate and immediate satisfaction of inner needs. In response to this instinctual pressure, the "ego" tries to strike a balance between the demands of the ego and external reality. Continuous pressures, psychological trauma, and successive experiences of exploitation disrupt the logical functioning of the psyche and lead the characters towards decisions that are neither in line with moral principles nor with their inner truth. Meanwhile, the superego, which represents conscience and social values, has a strong presence in the minds of these characters and is always in conflict with the ego. This conflict, especially in moments when the characters are faced with violence, aggression, or betrayal, intensifies and causes the individual to be caught in a psychological crisis; a crisis in which decisions must be made in order to survive that are either in conflict with morality and inner principles or in conflict with deep-rooted instinctual tendencies. This psychologically disturbed state creates a deep gap in the characters' identities and traps them in a cycle of self-denial, shame, and psychological frustration.

Danielle makes her best tough-girl face to demonstrate how unscared she was. "I kept weapons, in case the tricks acted up. So I wasn't never scared of them. They stupid. Especially the white ones. They be the ones that want to do the dirty stuff but I wasn't having none of that. . . ." And finally, Danielle begins to tell me about her experiences in the sex industry. Now she's animated, confident to be the expert, schooling me on which johns are the best paying, which hotels are the nicest, which tricks you have to be careful of. (Girls Like Us 12).

Danielle tries to prove that she is fearless by putting on a tough and tough face. By carrying a gun to protect herself from her clients, she demonstrates the survival instinct that, in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, is rooted in the "id." Her aggressiveness reflects the id's primal need to control and survive in an environment where death and violence are ever-present. However, the influence of the "command" in her psyche seems weak and chaotic. The moral values of society, which condemn prostitution, are at odds with the reality of her life. In a situation where survival is the main priority, feelings of guilt or shame are usually suppressed (Boag 164). Danielle, with a rough and fearless face, puts on a tough face to show off his fearlessness. Carrying a weapon to confront customers is a manifestation of the survival instinct, which in Freudian psychoanalysis is associated with the "id." This part of his being seeks only the immediate satisfaction of basic needs - the need for security and survival in an environment where there is an immediate threat of death or violence.

She vigorously denies that he knew she was eleven (despite the fact that I haven't asked), and claims he thought she was eighteen. I nod as if I believe her, but I'm not convinced. She warms up as we talk about safer subjects but when I begin to bring up the circumstances that led her to the Port Authority Bus Terminal, the wariness comes back. (Girls Like Us 11).

Danielle's narrative in this section of the book reflects the psychological complexities of an individual who is involved in exploitation and violence and is trying to process the bitter reality of her life. On the other hand, the id is still active in the background of his mind. In parts of this narrative, the influence of the id can be seen in his emotional reactions. When the discussion turns to difficult and sensitive topics related to his past, he becomes worried and cautious. This indicates his unconscious attempt to escape the unpleasant and painful feelings that the id, as an instinctive part, drives him towards. The superego plays a lesser role in this part of the story, but its presence can be seen in moments when Danielle tries to reduce feelings of guilt or shame by accepting a more acceptable narrative than the past. The superego, which reflects moral and social values, may exist in Danielle's mind as a vague and repressed voice, but it has a more limited impact in the face of the pressures of the id and its defense mechanisms.

An examination of this part of the book shows that the minds of trafficked girls are caught between three opposing forces. The ego, in order to maintain psychological stability, uses defense mechanisms such as rationalization and denial. The id leads them to escape unpleasant feelings and try to avoid pain. The superego, which should play a moral and normative role, is marginalized in an environment dominated by exploitation and violence (Freud 275). These psychological conflicts paint a profound picture of the internal struggle of trafficking victims.

It isn't surprising to me then that the girls go back to the familiar, where they are at least accepted, even if that means being sold and abused. Most of them really didn't have anywhere else to go. The girls are surprised, and then relieved, when they realize I won't judge them. In the beginning, simply

not judging them and my own story are about all I have to give, and while we develop some good relationships, I know that I have to be able to offer them more. (Girls Like Us 25).

The girls' behavior in returning to the familiar environment of exploitation reflects a deep conflict in their psychological structure. The "command" or moral conscience of these girls has been shaped by social rejection and stigmatization, in such a way that they accept returning to the environment of violence as the only possible option. Acceptance from the exploiters, although destructive, satisfies the need for belonging and worth that the "I" seeks. The "ego" of these victims, responsible for balancing the institution's desire for acceptance and the lack of healthy solutions, has fallen into the trap of self-destructive behaviors. This situation not only demonstrates the inability of the "I" to find constructive solutions, but also testifies to how pathological environments transform moral conscience into a tool for justifying the status quo. In such conditions, psychological structures are redefined not in the service of individual growth, but in the direction of survival accompanied by suffering.

I am both numb and oversensitive, overwhelmed by the need, the raw and desperate need of the girls I am listening to and trying to help. I'm overdosing on the trauma of others, while still barely healing from my own. I cry for hours at home and have fitful nights of little sleep. My nightmares resurface as my own pain is repeated to me, magnified a thousand times. (Girls Like Us 27).

In this excerpt, the id, ego, and superego are reflected in the psyche of the trafficked girls from a Freudian perspective. The id is evident in the raw and ruthless need that the narrator experiences. This need manifests itself in the form of an insatiable desire to relieve the pain of others, without setting boundaries for emotions or self-care. The ego, which is responsible for balancing the id and the superego, appears fragile and weak in this part of the narrative. The narrator is caught between his feelings of sympathy for the girls and his own unresolved wounds, and the ego is unable to draw a line between the two. The narrator's experience of "oversensitivity" and "simultaneous numbness" reflects the ego's unsuccessful attempt to cope with a reality in which the needs of others overshadow his own. The superego, as the moral force that should guide the narrator towards a rational balance, burdens him rather than controlling the situation.

Trauma and Repression: The Psychological Aftermath of Trafficking

Female trafficking, as a deep and damaging experience, creates many psychological traumas in these characters, which causes them to resort to defense mechanisms such as repression. According to Freudian theory, repression acts as an automatic defense mechanism by which a person tries to keep painful and traumatic experiences away from their conscious level. The female characters in this novel, especially those who are victims of trafficking, face severe psychological pressures that cause them to unconsciously transfer their bitter experiences to their unconscious minds. Repression manifests itself in the characters' behaviors in various ways. These characters may avoid expressing their feelings and thoughts about their traumas or try to constantly avoid remembering them. These behaviors can also affect their relationships with others. For example, characters may have difficulty forming or maintaining healthy relationships because they find themselves caught up in feelings of guilt, shame, or fear that prevent them from having real, healthy relationships.

There is an "incident" when I am three years old. Something that is done to me in a park by older teenage boys. My mother tells me later that I won't speak afterward and just want to sleep for days. She has some friends pray for me and apparently I get better. My mother believes she has done the

right thing, and the "incident" won't be mentioned again until my teenage years when I begin to have blurry, intrusive flashbacks. (Girls Like Us 30).

In this section, we can analyze clear signs of trauma and repression from a Freudian perspective. A three-year-old child who is raped in a park suddenly becomes speechless and begins to sleep excessively. This reaction can be analyzed as one of the unconscious defense mechanisms; the mind pushes the event deep into the unconscious to protect itself from intense psychological pain. Trauma appears here not as a passing experience, but as a fundamental point in the formation of the personality psyche. The fact that the "incident" is not remembered until adolescence confirms the mechanism of repression in Freud's theory; a memory that is too destructive is marginalized and only returns when the structure of the psyche is no longer able to contain it (Billig 483). Vague and disturbing flashbacks are signs of the return of the repressed, that is, the return of the repressed content to the surface of consciousness, not in a coherent form, but in the form of vague and frightening images. By emphasizing prayer and not following through, the mother unwittingly helps to consolidate this repression. By eliminating language and denying narrative, she prevents the child from processing the trauma. In the Freudian apparatus, language is a fundamental tool for transforming trauma into an understandable experience, but in its absence, the memory of the incident remains in the unconscious as a raw and disruptive force (Mack 161).

After we wrap up the interview (Danielle actually gives me an awkward, brief hug when I leave), and I give my basic assessment (PTSD, needs far more support than the foster care agency can give), I rush out, unable to stay in the building one second more. (Girls Like Us 30).

The child welfare system's failure to respond to this level of trauma sets the stage for the continued psychological pain and the impossibility of healing. This type of reaction is a form of secondary trauma, where the boundary between personal experience and the psychological representation of another is blurred. Danielle's cold, emotionless embrace at the end of the interview is a subtle hint at the difficulty of establishing human contact in someone whose body and psyche have been repeatedly violated. Rather than remaining confined to the past, trauma is reproduced in the present; through soulless touch, through fear, through escape. The Freudian psyche sees these moments as scenes in which repression is failing, and the unconscious finds an opportunity to manifest itself in behavior or emotion (Freud 294). The narrator's inevitability to leave the space is a sign of the pressure his psyche is enduring against the repressed force. It is as if being near another's suffering activates a hole in his psyche, where words are no longer enough and the only response is escape.

Jennifer, my next tutor, is a moonfaced Latina who would call me at 6 a.m. after a beating. I'd meet her at the train station and let her sleep on my couch. After a night or two, Jennifer would find her way back to her pimp, although eventually she stayed with me three, four nights, then for almost two weeks as I searched desperately for a program out of state that would take her. From Jennifer I learn that leaving the life takes practice, that girls need to try multiple times without having someone give up on them. (Girls Like Us 26).

Jennifer's repeated relapse into abusive situations and re-dependence on her abusive son also indicate repeated attempts to escape the cycle of violence. This process suggests that breaking free from trauma and abuse requires ongoing practice and support, as Jennifer attempts to build a new life but is still caught up in psychological dependencies that are subconsciously familiar to her. Jennifer, who repeatedly returns to the world of rape and abuse, is an example of this dependence on abuse, which Freud called "trauma

dependence" or "victim attachment." In Freudian analysis, relationships in which pain and pleasure are intertwined become a kind of complex psychological relationship in which the person keeps themselves trapped in the abuse rather than escaping it (Freud 151). Jennifer cannot escape her abusive environment because her mind feels threatened by the new situation, which is psychologically alien to her. The feeling of security seems unreal to her, and instead, the experience of abuse, which is linked to her past memories and experiences, acts as a familiar and almost natural source for her.

Some girls are numb, so accustomed to pushing down feelings and ignoring their own needs that it's hard for them to feel anything at all. Others are consumed with anger that's built up over time, a rage that's directed at no one and everyone. Some girls struggle with trauma reenactment, a compulsion to recreate the same situations over and over, continually putting themselves in danger, trying to have a different outcome this time. Other girls crave some level of danger just to feel "alive." (Girls Like Us 151).

Girls who have deep, accumulated anger and indirectly direct this anger at no one and everything are an example of the psychological reconstruction of past abuse. These angers do not only arise from physical or sexual trauma, but are also a reflection of repressed emotions that have never been fully processed. In Freudian theory, these angers and psychological tensions are the result of unconscious experiences that are unconsciously expressed in the body and behavior of the person due to repression or the inability to process them correctly. The repression that leads to anger and rage is itself a sign of the inability to analyze or express emotions correctly (Doran 57).

Several girls constantly repeat past tragedies; in fact, they unconsciously try to create similar situations and hope that this time the outcome will be different. This behavior can be considered as "trauma representation" or "trauma reconstruction", in which the person unconsciously tries to re-experience similar situations from the past with the aim of changing their fate. Girls who embrace danger in search of a sense of "being alive" are psychologically seeking experiences that will make them feel real. This need for danger and indifference to security is itself an unconscious defense based on a lack of emotional and psychological security in childhood or later traumatic times. This desire for danger is a response to emotional repression, where the individual is forced to resort to emotions such as fear, anxiety, and excitement in order to keep alive a feeling that has been repressed for a long time. In Freud's view, this behavior is a form of projection in which, instead of confronting past suffering, the individual unconsciously seeks out adrenaline and dangerous stimulation to regain the feeling of being alive.

Girls believe that their pimps will act on their threats to hurt, to maim, to kill, and with good reason. So many of these girls have experienced rape, had guns held to their head, heard their trafficker talk about other girls he's killed—enough violence, in other words, to ensure that girls are hesitant about running away. One girl I worked with, Marlene, went on a date to a bowling alley with a guy she'd met at the train station. Upon leaving the bowling alley, she was thrown into a van by her date and his accomplice and had her identification taken away. (Girls Like Us 132).

Victims are not only afraid of physical threats, but they are also psychologically trapped in a pathological dependence on the trafficker. On the other hand, the confiscation of Marlene's ID is symbolic of the loss of identity, a theme that Freud explored in his studies of dissociation. When a person is systematically separated from their identity, the mind denies part of reality in order to protect itself. This is the dissociative state that is often seen in victims of sex trafficking—a state in which the person distances themselves from their true

self in order to endure unbearable conditions. Finally, this text shows how systematic violence enslaves not only bodies but also psyches. Freud emphasized in his studies that deep traumas distort a person's ability to interpret reality (Freud 171). Victims of sex trafficking are engaged in a complex psychological warfare—a real fear of death on one side and old wounds that have never healed on the other. This deadly combination keeps them in a cycle of terror and passivity; exactly what traffickers need to maintain control.

The Oedipus Complex and Distorted Familial Relationships

One of the psychological dimensions that has a profound impact on the lives of these characters is the deficiency or disruption in the presence and functioning of parents. In the lives of trafficked girls, the absence or ineffectiveness of parental figures causes these girls to have a disruption in the formation of healthy emotional bonds. The Oedipus complex, in which the child desires to receive parental attention and affection, may manifest in these girls as an unconscious need to find family-like relationships. They seek someone who can fill the void left by their parents, but because these relationships are often formed in abusive and exploitative environments, this search can lead to deception and trauma. Trafficked girls, especially in situations where they are subjected to sexual exploitation or forced labor, can easily fall prey to predators who use this emotional need and search for affection as a means of exploitation. The Oedipus complex is particularly applicable in this context indirectly, as these girls may struggle with their identity and status in an attempt to regain the affection and attention they lost in childhood. These struggles not only lead to the creation of harmful relationships, but also cause them to experience a crisis in their identity formation and to be unable to find their place in society or in healthy family relationships.

For girls who have experienced incest, sexual abuse, or rape, the boundaries between love, sex, and pain become blurred. Secrets are normal, and shame is a constant. The lessons learned during sexual abuse are valuable ones for recruitment into the commercial sex industry. As Andrea Dworkin once said, "Incest is boot camp for prostitution." Numerous studies estimate that 70 to 90 percent of commercially sexually exploited youth and adult women in the sex industry were sexually abused prior to their recruitment. No other industry can boast of such a large correlation between early sexual abuse and future "employment." Sexual abuse lays the groundwork. The pimp, the trafficker, doesn't need to do much training. It's already been done—by her father, her uncle, her mother's boyfriend, her teacher. She's well prepared for what's to come. (Girls Like Us 59).

The text suggests that human traffickers and sex workers have little need to "educate" their victims, since the initial abuse has done that. Because of the internalization of violence, he or she accepts it as part of the "normal" nature of relationships. When a child is abused in the family environment, their understanding of love and intimacy is distorted. These early experiences, according to Freud, form the psychological foundations of the individual and, if accompanied by violence, also influence future communication patterns.

Freud believed that the mind pushes painful memories into the unconscious in order to protect itself, but these repressed memories do not disappear—they manifest as neurotic symptoms, anxiety, or repetitive behaviors (419). Victims of childhood sexual abuse are often drawn into relationships in adulthood that are characterized by repeated violence and humiliation. This is the "repetition compulsion" that Freud spoke of: an unconscious attempt to master a trauma that has never been properly processed (Freud 419). Finally, this text shows how unresolved sexual trauma not only destroys the individual's psyche but also prepares them

for continued victimization. Freud had anticipated this dynamic: early experiences, especially those involving sexuality and violence, can shape the individual's psychological destiny.

"Maria's trippin. She worry too much. I'm good, I'm straight." Tiana's working overtime to convince me that she doesn't need any help. "My daddy takes good care of us." She gestures to her Baby Phat jacket and jeans as proof. "How many girls are there?" I ask. "There's five of us; all the other girls are older. I'm the baby." "What's your daddy's name, hon?" I'm curious if I know anyone else who lives there. She hesitates, thinking she probably shouldn't tell me, but unable to contain herself she proudly says, "Dollars." (Girls Like Us 52).

Tiana, in a situation where she should be supported by her family, is trapped in an exploitative relationship and mistakes violence for care. This is the same defense mechanism Freud referred to as "projection" and "rationalization"—the mind rewrites reality to endure the pain, redefining the abusive relationship in a way that is acceptable to her (Cramer 530). Tiana's delay in revealing "Dollars's" name, and then her proud statement of it, reveals a painful contradiction. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this behavior represents failed repression—she knows that the relationship is abnormal, but she cannot accept this awareness because to accept it would mean breaking down the only fixed image she has of "care." Freud believed that the human mind pushes unbearable truths into the unconscious rather than confronting them, but this repressed content manifests itself in her behavior and speech. The gap between Tiana's claim ("My daddy takes good care of us") and the reality of living under the control of a trafficker is a clear example of cognitive dissonance. Not only does she deny the violence, but she proudly points to Dollars, as if this connection gives her identity and value. This is the dark spot that Freud discovered in his studies of the tortured psyche—humans can love, despite all their suffering, that which destroys them, because this bond is all they know.

Robert had gotten drunk and tried to choke her on the ferry back from France. I beg her to leave him, but she thinks maybe she should just try harder. The incident in France is just the first of many. Within our first month as a family, Robert loses control one night, hits me, and drags me screaming by my hair up a long flight of stairs. My mother cries and begs him to stop. After that night, I keep my distance from him. Robert is an alcoholic who alternates between cold indifference and violent rage. His drinking leads to hitting, which leads to her drinking. (Girls Like Us 31).

In this situation, the mother is clearly weak and submissive, and her role in the family becomes that of victim. The daughter, in contrast to her usual role, is forced to protect her mother. This transformation of roles and responsibilities is part of a structural disruption in family relationships that is the result of ongoing trauma. In Freudian analysis, the daughter's relationship with her stepfather, who influences her through violence and domination, creates a chaotic transformation in her psychological needs. Emotions can shift unconsciously from love to hate or fear (Kihlstrom et al 86). This psychological conflict between being a victim and the responsibility of caring for a vulnerable person takes the relationships between family members out of their natural state and into a direction in which the girl's individual identity is severely affected. Robert's violent behavior and the mother's reaction to it reflect a repetitive pattern of behavior in which a dominant individual not only oppresses family members but also places them in reconstructed roles. The trauma here is transmitted through a repetitive pattern, in which the victim, instead of escaping the situation, becomes involved, which ultimately leads to an inability to break the cycle of violence. In this situation, the psyche of a person suffering from violence can tend to suppress emotions and avoid real issues because facing the truth and accepting it is too overwhelming.

Psychosexual Development and the Stunting of Emotional Growth

One of the most important aspects of this trauma is related to issues of trust, intimacy, and personal identity, which are affected by the traumas caused by trafficking. In the early stages of psychological development, trust in others and the establishment of intimate relationships play a very important role in the formation of a person's personality and identity. However, the traumas caused by trafficking, especially at sensitive ages, cause these girls to be seriously impaired in these stages. They may face serious problems in learning to trust others, because negative and exploitative experiences make any social connection threatening for them. As a result, feelings of insecurity and distrust take root in their personal relationships, and over time, they reduce their ability to create intimacy and healthy connections. In the later stages of psychological development, personal identity and sexuality play a prominent role, which is disrupted by traumatic experiences. The characters in this novel who have been trafficked may face an identity crisis. They not only regress emotionally, but also do not gain a proper understanding of their sexual and personal identity. This identity crisis prevents them from continuing their emotional development properly and in many cases, they suffer from a kind of self-destruction and a sense of worthlessness. In this way, as Freud pointed out, any deviation or disruption in the different stages of psychological development can have profound effects on their personal relationships and social interactions, which is clearly seen in the characters of victims of trafficking.

Children who are victimized through sexual abuse often begin to develop deeply held tenets that shape their sense of self: My worth is my sexuality. I'm dirty and shameful. I have no right to my own physical boundaries. That shapes their ideas about the world around them: No one will believe me. Telling the truth results in bad consequences. People can't be trusted. It doesn't take long for children to begin to act in accordance with these belief systems. (Girls Like Us 58).

Children who are sexually abused unconsciously develop a set of fundamental beliefs that not only shape their identity but also affect their psychological and emotional future. In Freud's psychoanalytic theory, childhood, and especially the stage of sexual development (the Oedipal stage or projection period), is crucial for the formation of sexual and psychological identity (Freud 271). When these natural developmental stages are disrupted by abuse and sexual trauma, the child is unable to draw healthy and natural boundaries between their body, feelings, and identity. As a result, the child learns that their body is nothing more than a tool to meet the needs of others, and this feeling of worthlessness severely affects their personal identity. The development of these false and harmful beliefs about themselves, which include feelings of guilt, shame, and lack of control over their body, disrupts the child's emotional development. According to Freud's theory, these types of traumatic experiences cause a person's psychological development to stop or be disrupted early in life. For a person who grows up in these conditions, normal and healthy feelings of self-worth or respect for their body no longer exist, and they are unable to even establish healthy and trusting human relationships (Snajdr 229). These psychological issues unconsciously become an internal belief system that the person follows constantly. In general, sexual abuse not only disrupts the child's sexual and physical identity but also prevents his natural emotional development. These emotional repressions, according to Freud's theory, lead to a delay or halt in the process of psychological development of the individual and the individual will not be able to experience healthy emotions and human relationships.

Some girls struggle with trauma reenactment, a compulsion to recreate the same situations over and over, continually putting themselves in danger, trying to have a different outcome this time. Other girls crave some level of danger just to feel “alive.” It’s the emotional equivalent of going from living in Technicolor to living in black-and-white. Girls whose nights were filled with fighting and violence, a level of danger every time they got into a car or went into a hotel room, who dodged and ran from the police, who never knew what to expect at any moment, now struggle with the relative safety and the danger-free, “excitement”-free, existence that the “square” world affords them. (Girls Like Us 153).

This section of the book deals with the phenomenon in which victims of sex trafficking, despite being freed from the exploitative environment, continue to show a tendency to recreate the traumatic situation. From a Freudian perspective, this behavior can be explained by a disruption in psychosexual development and fixation in the early stages of emotional development. When an individual is exposed to persistent violence during the period of identity formation, the natural mechanisms of psychological growth are disrupted and the individual is arrested at a stage of development in which danger and anxiety have become the main elements of self-perception (Freud 280). In his theory of psychosexual stages, Freud points out that fixation in the early stages of development can lead to repetitive and maladaptive behaviors in adulthood (419). Victims who seek danger are actually seeking to restore the level of stimulation that has become “normal” for their nervous system. The difference between a past risky life and a current safe environment can also lead to a feeling of disconnection from reality. Freud explained this state with the concept of alienation, where a person loses touch with the new reality when faced with drastic environmental changes. For those who have lived for years in an environment of intense stimulation, ordinary life can seem empty and meaningless, because their psychological system is no longer able to adapt to ordinary stimuli.

Pimps use the divide-and-conquer tactic that has been so popular historically to control girls and young women. One girl, the bottom, is set up as the head girl, who may get certain privileges or perhaps less abuse, until she does something wrong and is punished more severely because she is expected to “know better.” The head girl is generally the girl who makes the most money, although it may be the girl who has children with the pimp, the one who’s been there the longest, or the one’s who’s the best “behaved,” and it can change accordingly. Like Holocaust victims who cooperated with their abusers to stay “safer,” and like house slaves versus field slaves, the dynamic of one oppressed person set in a position of relative power over other oppressed people helps to ensure that there is little solidarity and therefore less likelihood that there will be an uprising against their oppressor. (Girls Like Us 83).

By choosing a girl as the “main girl” or “bottom girl,” traffickers place her in a position where she has privileges over others or is less likely to be abused. The girl may be chosen because she earns more, has children with the trafficker, has been around longer, or has behaved “better,” but this position is fragile and she is punished more severely for the slightest mistake, because she is expected to “know more.” This dynamic reveals layers of the human psyche that Freud explored in his theory of psychosexual development (Yiğit & Sakaryalı 155).

The superego, which represents conscience and moral values, is under intense pressure in these girls. Choosing the “main girl” and giving her relative power creates an internal conflict; she must choose between loyalty to her comrades and obedience to the trafficker. This dynamic, which Lloyd compares to historical situations such as the Holocaust or slavery, demonstrates the depth of the psychological effects of this

control. Freud believed that repressed experiences in the unconscious manifest themselves as symptoms such as anxiety or maladaptive behaviors, and here, the lack of solidarity and the arrest of emotional development are symptoms of this repression (17). Girls, who under normal circumstances could develop through human relationships, in this structure become instruments for maintaining the oppressor's power, which deprives them of the ability to reach mature emotional and psychological capacities. Lloyd's book, by describing this harsh reality, reminds us of how domination and abuse not only enslave the body but also the human psyche, delaying or permanently halting its natural development.

Discussion and Conclusion

The psychoanalytic study of women trafficking through the lens of Sigmund Freud's theories and its reflection in the book *Girls Like Us* by Rachel Lloyd reveals the depth of the pain and inner conflicts of girls who are not only victims of physical exploitation, but also captives of invisible forces of the psyche. The id, ego, and superego, as the three fundamental components of personality, have lost their balance in the psyche of these girls. The id, which acts in pursuit of pleasure and immediate satisfaction of desires, has been given the opportunity to grow unsupervised in the absence of a healthy upbringing and in an environment full of instability, violence, and abandonment. The innate desires of these girls, especially in the absence of parental love, physical security, and psychological approval, have taken on a defective form and, instead of being connected to healthy pleasures, have manifested themselves in destructive and painful paths. The superego, which should play the role of observer and representative of internalized moral values, is often weakened, humiliated, or, conversely, excessively harsh and judgmental. As a result, the ego, as the intermediary entity, is constantly in turmoil under the pressure of the unbridled desires of the ego and the strict dictates of the superego; the ability to make conscious decisions in a state of psychic disarray is lost, and the ego, instead of regulating tensions, becomes an arena of internal conflict. This internal conflict can be observed in behaviors such as repeated relapses into violent relationships, self-blame, or an endless effort to gain the approval of those who have done the most harm.

The psychological wounds that are imprinted in the experience of sex trafficking are largely not expressed on a conscious level. The girls whose stories are told in the book all bear signs of deep trauma and repression. Childhood memories of abandonment, neglect, abuse, and violence are buried in the unconscious, but they make their presence known in the form of nightmares, chronic anxiety, emotional paralysis, or self-injurious behaviors. In order to survive in the face of indescribable suffering, the mind resorts to defense mechanisms such as repression, dissociation, projection, regression, and sublimation, but these defenses, although they temporarily prevent breakdown, lead in the long run to the formation of harmful behavioral patterns. Many of these girls, unable to express their painful experiences, unconsciously recreate them; not by choice, but from a painful connection to familiar patterns of the past. The man who hurts them sometimes conjures up for them the image of a father, a lover, or the only support available. The mind transforms violence into love for psychological survival, and the victim, by denying her position, is led to complicity with the aggressor.

The analysis of the theory of the Oedipus complex in Rachel Lloyd's narratives sheds a bright light on the chaotic patterns of family. Girls who did not have any kind of secure bond with their parents in childhood have suffered from disorders in the process of forming the Oedipus complex, the effect of which continues into adulthood. The position of the father, which is important in the child's psychological structure as a source of authority, law, and approval, has in many cases been either empty or filled with a destructive presence,

accompanied by violence, humiliation, or aggression. Such an experience of the relationship with the father has caused the image of a man as a safe haven not to be formed in the psyche of these girls. On the other hand, the relationship with the mother has often been accompanied by instability, lack of love, or imposed competition. This transformation and failure in the formation of the Oedipus triangle not only undermines the psychological structure, but also affects the subsequent paths of identity formation, attachment, and partner choice. Some of the girls in the book take refuge in men who represent the same repressive structure of childhood; the same forced repetition that Freud referred to as the unconscious reproduction of trauma. They take refuge in a traumatic relationship not for love, but to repeat an unresolved relationship; a relationship that may this time be able to restore what was destroyed in childhood, but often only adds another wound to the old one.

The arrest of psychosexual development is another direct consequence of these girls' violent experiences. Freud defined five stages of psychosexual development that begin in infancy and continue through adulthood. Disruption or stalling in any of these stages can lead to the fixation of the individual at an immature level of development. In the book's narratives, girls are seen who are unable to establish a healthy and balanced relationship with their bodies, their sexuality, and the other. Many of them suffer from sexual aversion, or conversely, a kind of obsessive dependence on physical contact that stems not from desire, but from insecurity, anxiety, and the need for approval. For these girls, sexual experience is not an arena for pleasure, intimacy, or attachment, but an arena for survival and humiliation. The identity that should grow through positive experiences stops in the face of painful experiences, and the mind, in an unconscious attempt to control the situation, manifests repetitive, unhealthy, and self-destructive behaviors. Many girls, at an age when they should be experiencing the play, discovery, and love of childhood, have entered an adult world devoid of understanding, power, and agency. This early entry refines identity, burns away trust, and freezes the psyche at a point of growth.

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