

The innocent id: a psychoanalytic exploration of Jenny Curran's unconscious desires in *Forrest Gump* (1994) film

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the psychological complexity of Jenny Curran in Forrest Gump (1994) through a psychoanalytic lens, focusing on how unconscious desires influence her actions and relationships. Using Sigmund Freud's concept of the Id, Ego, and Superego, the research explores the impact of childhood trauma and societal expectations on her self-destructive tendencies. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing content analysis of key scenes that depict Jenny's psychological struggles. Primary data includes dialogues, behaviors, and pivotal moments in the film, while secondary sources comprise psychoanalytic theory and literature on trauma and gender representation. The study interprets Jenny's decisions through the tension between impulsive desires and moral reasoning, revealing that Jenny's behavior is largely controlled by the Id, which seeks immediate gratification and escape from emotional distress. However, her Ego mediates between these desires and external reality, while her Superego reinforces guilt and internalized moral constraints. This psychological conflict shapes her unstable relationships, particularly with Forrest, as she alternates between seeking love and rejecting emotional security. Her journey illustrates the lasting effects of unresolved trauma and the unconscious forces that dictate human behavior.

By analyzing Jenny's character, this research enhances the understanding of female character development in film through psychoanalysis. It demonstrates how cinematic narratives depict internal struggles, offering insights into the portrayal of women's experiences in media. Furthermore, it contributes to discussions on trauma, identity, and psychological depth in film storytelling, highlighting the role of unconscious motivations in shaping characters arcs. These findings underscore the significance of psychoanalytic film analysis in understanding how past trauma influences characters' actions and relationships, providing a deeper perspective on the psychological complexities of female figures in films.

Keywords: unconscious mind, trauma, self-destruction, character analysis

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Introduction

Childhood trauma is a critical issue that leaves lasting imprints on an individual's unconscious mind, shaping their desires and influencing behavior into adulthood (Elliott et al., 2014). While *Forrest Gump* (1994) primarily follows the life of the main character, Jenny Curran's journey offers a compelling exploration of trauma and unconscious motivations. Her character provides a lens through which analyze the psychological struggles of individuals coping with childhood abuse, particularly through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework (Brierley, 1965). This study delves into Jenny's psychological struggles, analyzing her actions through Freud's concept of the Id, highlighting the

interplay between her traumatic past and the societal pressures shaping her desires.

Characterization in films often portrays psychological struggles, reflecting the complexities of the human psyche and the impact of environmental factors on mental well-being (Heath, 2019). *Forrest Gump* is no exception. While Forrest embodies resilience and innocence, JC's character presents a stark contrast, illustrating the consequences of unresolved trauma. Her actions, relationships, and life choices were apparently driven by deep-seated psychological conflicts, making her a significant subject for psychoanalytic study (Mulvey, 2013). These narratives allow audiences to witness the internal conflicts and external pressures that character face,

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examining how her experiences align with the concepts of the Id, Ego, and Superego. The film not only reflects the complexities of the human psyche but also shows how environmental factors impact mental well-being.

Based on Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the Id represents instinctive desires often associated with uncontrollable instinctual drives, the Ego mediates between desire and reality, and the Superego provides moral boundaries (Stam, 2017). According to Ballas (2017), female characters are frequently portrayed as torn between societal expectations and their unconscious drives, a struggle that resonates in JC's character. Jenny's behavior frequently drifts between these three components, manifesting in impulsive actions, moments of self-awareness, and recurring guilt. By examining key scenes in the film, this study explores how childhood trauma fuels Jenny's unconscious desires, leading to self-destructive tendencies and an inability to maintain stable relationships (Dye, 2018).

Forrest Gump is a 1986 novel by Winston Groom and adapted as a film in 1994 with Robert Zemeckis as the director. Previous studies on *Forrest Gump* have largely focused on historical contexts, innocence, or Forrest's character. Forrest is an only child who lives

alone with his mother (Kartika, 2022). However, research specifically addressing JC through a psychoanalytic lens remains limited. Some scholars have analyzed female characters in film through trauma theory, emphasizing how women navigate patriarchal constraints and psychological distress (Jamili & Roshanzamir, 2017). Gabbard (2018) further explains that female figures in film often serve as symbols of deeper psychological processes, reinforcing the argument that Jenny's behavior reflects unresolved trauma. This study extends such discussions by focusing on internal conflicts within Jenny's psyche, contributing to broader analyses of female character representation in media.

This study aims to describe the unconscious desires motivating JC's actions and the conflicts between the Id, Ego, and Superego that shape her internal struggles and external relationships. By integrating psychoanalytic and trauma theories, this research provides deeper insights into Jenny character and enriches discussions on female portrayals in film. It underscores how unresolved trauma influences behavior and relationships, adding to the broader discourse on psychological depth in cinematic storytelling (Jones et al., 2018).

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore the meaning contained in characters and action in the film, and provides a deeper understanding of the subconscious motivations that shape JC's behavior, based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study comes from the *Forrest Gump* film directed by Robert Zemeckis, focusing on dialogues, actions, and JC's expressions that depict psychoanalytic conflict. Secondary sources include academic literature on Freud's psychoanalytic and prior research related to film character analysis. The data collection technique was carried out through the following steps:

1. Watch *Forrest Gump* film carefully to get a complete picture about JC's character.
2. Identify scenes that show psychoanalytic conflicts or Jenny's unconscious desires.

3. Read psychoanalytic theory literature, especially related to the Id concept to provide an appropriate analytical framework.

Objects of the Study

The research object of this study is the character JC in the film *Forrest Gump*, with a focus on uncovering her unconscious desires. This study examined JC's behavior, which does not always seem rational, and identifies how the concepts of Id, Ego and Superego applied to understanding this character. The researcher also analyzed the interaction between Jenny and Forrest as a representation of the influence that the dynamics of unconscious desires have on the actions taken.

Data Analysis

The study follows a qualitative analysis using Freud's psychoanalytic framework. Scenes depicting Jenny's conflicts between the Id, Ego, and Superego were analyzed in relation

to her childhood trauma and unconscious desires. The analysis includes scene descriptions, psychoanalytic interpretation,

and thematic discussions of her internal struggles and relationships.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the analysis about JC's unconscious desires. The main focus of the analysis is to describe how traumatic experience and subconscious conflict influence Jenny's actions, decisions, and interpersonal relationship. By observing key scenes, dialogues, and characters' action. This study aims to reveal complex psychological dynamics within Jenny, as well as its relevance to psychoanalytic concepts such as the Id, Ego, Superego.

The influence JC's unconscious desires to her action and choices

JC's character in *Forrest Gump* is deeply influenced by her unconscious desires, which shape her actions, decisions, and relationships. Through a psychoanalytic lens, her struggles can be understood in relation to Sigmund Freud's concept of the Id, Ego, and Superego. The Id, which operates on the pleasure principle, drives her impulsive behaviours and desire for escape. Her Ego mediates between these instinctual drives and reality, attempting to create balance. Meanwhile, her Superego imposes moral constraints, leading to moments of guilt and self-awareness. This section analyses key moments in Jenny's life where these unconscious desires manifest, demonstrating how her internal conflicts impact her choices.

One significant moment occurred when Jenny, as a child, frequently sneaked into Forrest's house at night, seeking refuge from her abusive home (00:19:35). In Forrest's narration, he said, "Some nights, Jenny would sneak out and come over to my house, just 'cause she said she was scared. Scared of what, I don't know..."



Figure 1. Jenny sneaked to Forrest's house (00:19:35)

Jenny's unconscious desire (Id) pushes her to seek security, even though her action may not be fully rational. The Ego acts as mediator to searching for a practical solution, i.e. by going to a safe place, like Forrest's house. The Superego then tries to rationalize this action as a natural thing to overcome fear. This early instance illustrates how trauma shapes her unconscious desires, pushing her to a decision rooted in fear and seeking for protection.

As an adult, Jenny was often seen making seemingly impulsive decisions to chase freedom. In the scene (00:36:38), Jenny fulfilled her dream as a singer, though she had to do it in a bar that exploiting her.



Figure 2. Jenny sing in a bar naked (00:36:38)

Her Id motivates her desire for freedom and self-expression, putting aside concerns about the moral implications of her choices. The Ego helps her rationalize the situation as a means to achieve her aspirations, while the Superego manifests as guilt, reflecting her awareness of degrading environment. This internal struggle highlights how her unconscious desires influence her life trajectory, often leading to self-destructive outcomes.

Another key moment is when Jenny's desires to "fly far away". It symbolizes her deep

longing for freedom, yet it also reveals her suicidal tendencies (00:38:34). In this scene, she asked Forrest whether she could fly off the bridge, reflecting her internal conflict.

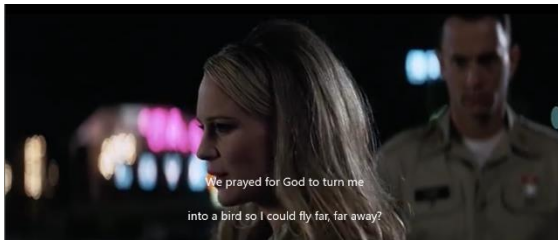


Figure 3. Jenny remembers her words about “fly far away” (00:38:34)

In that scene Jenny said, “You remember that time we prayed, Forrest? We prayed for God to turn me into a bird so I can fly far, far away?” Forrest replied, “Yes, I do.” Jenny asked, “You think I can fly off this bridge?” Forrest hesitated. “What do you mean, Jenny?” “Nothing,” Jenny murmured.

Her Id fuels her wish to escape permanently, while her Ego briefly intervenes, allowing her to mask her despair by dismissing the thought as “nothing.” Her Superego, influenced by societal norms and moral reasoning, prevents her from acting on her impulse. This moment underscores the profound impact of trauma on her psyche, reinforcing the ongoing tension between her unconscious desires and reality.

Another defining moment is seen when Jenny stood at the edge of a balcony (01:29:48-01:31:20). Jenny stepped out onto the high-rise balcony. She stepped up on a table and stood at the edge of the balcony. Jenny looked down to the intersection below. She slipped over the edge, regained her balance, turned and looked back at the intersection, and began to get down from the edge, grabbing a hold of the ledge and carefully climbing down. She sat down on a chair, rocking back and forth as she cried deeply. She looked up at the sky.

This scene reflected her Id’s desire to escape from pain through a destructive way. Although the Ego succeeded in controlling this urge by pulling her back to reality, she realized the dangers of such actions. The Superego emerged with guilt and regret, which could be seen when Jenny cried after coming down from the balcony.



Figure 4. Jenny stood at the edge of the balcony (01:29:48-01:31:20)

Jenny’s relationship with Forrest often becomes a conflict arena between Id, Ego, and Superego. In the final phase of her life (02:03:55-02:04:47), Jenny finally proposed to Forrest to marry her, after confessing her severe illness.



Figure 5. Forrest wants to take care of Jenny and their son (02:03:55-02:04:47)

In a serene park, Jenny revealed to Forrest that she was gravely ill with an untreatable virus. Forrest, ever devoted, offered to care for her and their son at his home. Moved by his love, Jenny asked him to marry, and he agreed with heartfelt simplicity.

Jenny’s Id was implicitly seen in her desire to seek comfort and love during her difficult situation. Her Ego was evident when she honestly revealed her condition to Forrest and made a rational decision to ask him to marry her. The Superego emerged when she accepted his sincere love, demonstrating her moral and emotional growth. Her unconscious desires also influenced her actions, as she acknowledged her illness and vulnerability, accepting that she might not have long to live. By asking Forrest to marry her, she recognized the love and stability he offered, driven by a mix of longing, fear, and a desire for closure.

This reflected a shift in her psychological state. She desired love and comfort as she faced a terminal illness, but her Ego acknowledged reality, prompting her to accept Forrest’s unwavering care. The Superego reinforced this decision as morally and emotionally appropriate, marking a resolution in her internal struggle. This moment signified Jenny’s journey toward reconciliation with her

past, demonstrating the long-term effects of trauma and unconscious desires in her character arc.

JC was the representative of complexities from the conflict between Id, Ego, and Superego, where her childhood trauma formed an unconscious desire that influenced her behavior and choices. The Id's desire for freedom, love, and acceptance often clashed with reality and moral norms, creating a full tension internal dynamic. Despite often making impulsive decisions to her own detriment,

The Id conflict contribute to Jenny's internal struggles and external relationship

Jenny's life was marked by the constant struggle between the Id, Ego, and Superego, as explained in Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The Id, representing impulsive desire and instinct, often clashed with Ego's efforts to adapt with reality and Superego, which shaped by guilt and trauma. This internal conflict deeply influenced her emotional struggle and her relationships with others, especially with Forrest.

Id-Driven Behaviors

Jenny's internal conflict could be seen in various moments throughout her life. The Id drove to search for satisfying desires, often with destructive ways, such as consider to suicide as an escape from her pain. This was proven in the scene (01:29:48-01:31:20), when Jenny on the balcony considered to suicide.



Figure 6. Jenny on the balcony (01:29:48)

In this scene, Jenny stepped out onto the high-rise balcony. She stepped up on a table and stood on the edge of the balcony. Jenny looked down to the intersection below. She slipped over the edge, regained her balance, turned and looked back at the intersection below before beginning to get down from the edge. Jenny grabbed a hold of the ledge and carefully climbed down. She sat down on a chair. Jenny rocked back and forth as she cried. She looked up at the sky.

Jenny in the end showed effort to find peace and resolve her internal conflict through her relationship with Forrest. This description highlighted how the movie uses Jenny's character to describe the profound impact of trauma and unconscious desires in human life. By analyzing her struggles through a psychoanalytic framework, this study revealed the deep psychological undercurrents influencing her behavior, contributing to a richer understanding of female character development in film.

The instinct of Id drove to escape from her pain in a destructive way. Otherwise, the Superego, shaped by her guilt and childhood trauma, emerges anger and regret. When Jenny threw rocks to her old house as a form of emotional release (01:45:53-01:47:14).



Figure 7. Jenny threw rocks to her old house (01:45:53)

In this scene, Jenny walked toward her old house and stops. She stared at the house. Forrest walked toward Jenny. Jenny suddenly heaved a rock angrily at the house. She threw other things at the house. She broke a window, and Jenny collapsed to the ground and sobs. Forrest knelt down next to her.

Her Ego, that tried to mediate between those two aspects, struggled to maintain control, for example when she refused Forrest's help to maintain her sense of freedom (00:38:07) or when she searched for security by accepting Forrest's proposal after confessing about her illness (02:03:55-02:04:47).



Figure 8. Forrest and Jenny talked on the bridge (00:38:07)

This scene reflected Jenny's deep pain and longing to escape her troubled life. The childhood prayer about becoming a bird symbolized her desire for freedom, and her question about flying off the bridge hinted at her despair and thoughts of self-destruction. Forrest's confusion highlighted his innocence and love for her, the ego tried to maintain self-control by refusing help that was perceived as threatening her freedom.



Figure 9. Jenny proposed Forrest (02:04:39)

In a serene park, Jenny revealed to Forrest that she was gravely ill with an untreatable virus. Forrest, ever devoted, offered to care for her and their son at his home. Moved by his love, Jenny asked him to marry her, and he agreed with heartfelt simplicity.

The Relationship with Forrest Gump

The internal conflict had a significant impact on Jenny's relationship with Forrest. Her impulsive decision to love Forrest emotionally and physically, then suddenly leave him

Discussion

In Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the conflict between Id, Ego, and Superego plays a major role in directing impulsive behavior, especially for individuals who experienced childhood trauma (Rennison, 2015). This study found JC's behavior was dominated by the Id which drove her to act without considering rational thought in search of freedom and love, while her Ego tried to balance that urge with reality. On the other hand, Superego influenced by guilt and social norms, was often against her will.

This analysis was in line with previous research by (Dye, 2018), which showed that childhood trauma has long-term impact on the psychological state of the individual, including destructive and impulsive behavior tendencies. However, this study provided a new contribution by analyzing how the conflict between the Id, Ego, and Superego contributed

(01:49:47-01:51:08), showed how the Id dominated her behavior without rational judgment. When in the scene Forrest lay in his bed as the door opened, Jenny got into bed next to Forrest. Yet, in the morning she left him.



Figure 10. Jenny comes to Forrest bedroom (01:49:47)

However, her acceptance of Forrest's proposal reflected Ego's efforts to reconcile her desires with reality. Her relationship with Forrest became a reflection of her internal struggles, showing her efforts to find stability while facing her past and psychological conflict.

Jenny's internal conflict—the Id is full of impulsive desires, the Ego adapts to reality, and the Superego regulates morality—created a complex web of internal struggles and external behavior. These dynamics shaped her tumultuous relationship with Forrest and her path towards reconciliation with her past and herself.

to Jenny and Forrest's relationship dynamics. Previous research had focused more on the impact of trauma in general, while this study showed how trauma shapes Jenny's incompetence to accept love and stability in her life. In addition, the work of Jones et al., (2018) emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships as a recovery factor from trauma. This finding supported the argument by pointing out that Forrest, as the only stability and source of love for Jenny, played a role in reducing her internal conflicts. Jenny continued to struggle with Id's urges that kept her away from Forrest before in the end accepting to marry him at the end of the film.

This study also aligns with Naufal & Nurhayati (2025), which discussed the influence of psychological factors on character development in film. Naufal & Nurhayati (2025) highlighted how his repressive upbringing and societal ostracism shape his unconscious desire

for connection. Similarly, Downey & Crummy (2022) examined the internal conflicts within female characters and their struggle to reconcile past trauma with presents relationships, reinforcing the psychoanalytic framework applied in this study.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, this finding reinforces Freud's theory of the dominant role of Id in leading individuals' behavior with trauma. In some scenes, such as when Jenny stood on the edge of a balcony (01:29:48-01:31:20), her Id dominated by driving her to give up on despair. Meanwhile, her Ego eventually managed to pull her back to reality, showing that even though her Id was strong, her Ego still played a major role in preventing that destructive behavior.

Furthermore, research by Newsom & Myers-Bowman (2017) supported this study's findings by emphasizing how childhood trauma shapes self-destructive tendencies in adulthood. The interplay between trauma and decision making, particularly in Jenny's case, reflected broader psychological theories of attachment and emotional regulation. Thus, Riggs (2019) discussed the representation of psychological struggle in female characters,

Conclusion

This study explored JC's character in *Forrest Gump* film through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, mainly focusing on the conflict between the Id, Ego, Superego in shaping her unconscious desires. Jenny's childhood trauma significantly influenced her impulsive decisions, emotional struggles, and unstable relationships, particularly with Forrest. Her Id drove her pursuit of freedom and love, often leading to self-destructive behavior. Her Ego attempted to mediate between these desires and reality, while her Superego, shaped by guilt and societal norms, creates internal conflict.

Jenny's psychological journey reflected the long-term impact of unresolved trauma, affecting her behavior and relationships. Her struggle between seeking love and fearing emotional vulnerability underscored this theme until she ultimately accepted Forrest's care. This study contributed to broader discussions in film studies and psychoanalysis by showing

demonstrating how unresolved emotional conflicts influence behavioral patterns over time.

This study also contributed to female characters analysis in films by showing how the tension between the Id, Ego, and Superego could be used to make sense of decisions that appeared contradictory. This differed from more general research on female characters in film, which often emphasized social constructs rather than internal psychological conflicts. Additionally, research by (McDowell, 2020) expanded upon this discussion by analyzing the impact of narrative structure on the audience's understanding of trauma-driven behavior, further supporting the conclusion drawn in this study.

Overall, these additional references from academic sources reinforced the study's argument regarding the psychological depth of Jenny's character. By integrating various perspectives, this research provides a comprehensive analysis of how unresolved trauma, psychoanalytic conflicts, and narrative representation intersect in cinematic storytelling.

how female characters navigated trauma-driven psychological conflicts.

The implications of this study extended beyond film analysis to psychological research, particularly in understanding how trauma shaped behavioral patterns. While this study primarily focused on the Freudian model, future research could integrate attachment theory or other psychological frameworks to further explore how trauma survivors navigated relationships and self-perception. Examining similar characters in other films could have also provided further insight into how film portrayed complex psychological struggles and healing processes.

In conclusion, this study underscored the value of psychoanalysis in understanding cinematic characters and their unconscious motivations. Jenny's character served as a compelling case study of how unresolved trauma influenced personal decisions and relationships, reinforcing the importance of psychoanalytic approaches in media studies.

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