

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPTS IN TAYLOR SWIFT'S "BLANK SPACE"

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ABSTRACT

“Blank Space” is a song that is sung by a singer, Taylor Swift. The lyrics tell about the lonely woman who dates a lot but always fails to manage her relationship. However, it does not make her worry to start a new relationship. The purpose of this study is to analyze the elements of the poetry in the lyrics and to show the readers the psychological contents as portrayed in the music video. The study uses intrinsic and extrinsic theories to analyze the data and library research to compile the data. Library research is used to get literary theories and psychological theories of Sigmund Freud. The finding of this study is the existence of psychoanalysis contents in American pop music included *Id*, *ego*, *superego*, defense mechanism act, and symbolization reflected in lyrics and scenes in the song and in the music video of “Blank Space”

Keywords: psychoanalysis, defense mechanism act, symbolization

1. Introduction

Song is not merely determined as a criticism toward social phenomenon or great culture event in certain society. Song is also a medium for people to simply express emotion such as; happiness, sadness, anger, disappointment, etc or to reveal their hidden thought. According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th Edition* (2010: 1419), song is "a short piece of music with words that you sing". The words in every song are called lyrics. Through the lyrics, songwriters can share their thought and feeling by using certain words. Taylor Swift is

one of the songwriters who is also the singer. She always expresses her feeling and her experiences into songs. How people judge her characteristic and her love story results in many songs, which one of them is "Blank Space". The song tells about a woman who is considered to be a player because she dates a lot, yet, actually she is a passionate lover. She already has many ex-lovers but she does not worry if her new relationship does not go well and then ends up with extending her ex-lovers list.

The writer decides to pick "Blank Space" as the object due to the simple lyrics and the interesting music video. Although the lyrics seem so casual, it may create different assumption. Moreover, the lyrics are the result of the singer's personal thought and feeling. Meanwhile the music video as the visual object visualizes the song into more attractive as it shows unique scenes. The scenes in the music video support the idea of the lyrics and help the audiences to understand the song.

This essay aims to analyze the elements of poetry in the lyrics of "Blank Space" and to show the readers the psychological contents as portrayed in the music video.

2. Theoretical Framework

In analyzing the lyrics and music video of "Blank Space", the writer uses Sigmund Freud's theories on psychoanalysis, defense mechanism, and psychodynamic dream and symbolization in dream. The element of poetry and cinematography are also used to support the analysis to reveal the psychological contents.

Theory of Psychoanalysis is developed by Sigmund Freud. According to Macionis (2006: 66), Freud combines basic drives and the influence of society into a model of personality with three parts: *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. The *id* (Latin for "it") is *the human being's basic drives*, which are unconscious and demand immediate satisfaction (2006: 66). The *ego* (Latin for "I"), *which is a person's conscious efforts to balance innate pleasure-seeking drives*

with the demand of society (2006: 66). The *superego* (Latin for "above or beyond the ego") is *the cultural values and norms internalized by an individual* (2006: 66).

Defense mechanism found by Freud, and then developed by her daughter Anna Freud. Defense mechanism is a way to block impulse or release it into more acceptable form. There are many forms of defense mechanism, one of them is displacement. According to Boeree (2006: 48), displacement is the redirection of an impulse onto a substitute target.

Sigmund Freud in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) believes that dream is a kind of wish fulfillment (Coon, 1983: 161). There are four dream processes that help us to reveal the hidden meaning of a dream, one of them is symbolization. Freud believes that dreams are usually expressed in images that are symbolic rather than literal in their meaning (1983: 161). In works of literature, sometimes, the author cannot describe sexual motives explicitly because it will be too vulgar or harsh. To disguise the actual meaning, the authors often use symbolization in their works. For example, when the authors want to describe male's and female's genital. Since mentioning the name of genitals explicitly is considered to be vulgar, they will use objects that represent the genitals.

The more ethical visualization for male's genital has many variations. According to Freud, male's genital is symbolized in many ways in dreams (2002: 159). Furthermore, besides the sexual genitals, the sexual intercourse is also visualized in other ways. Freud mentions that the sexual intercourse is represented by activities which have rhyme like dancing, horse riding, climbing or experience that implicates violence (2002: 161).

3. Research Method

The writer used library research to collect some informations related to the topic. Library research is often used to get secondary information source. The information on library research can be found from articles, books, and journals.

To analyze the data related to the topic, the writer used the objective and psychological

approaches. The objective approach is portrayed through close reading method to comprehend the lyrics, close listening to comprehend the music, and close viewing to analyze the visual in the music video. To support in analyzing the objective and psychological contents from both of the lyrics and the music video, the writer also used the cinematography elements. Psychological approach is used to understand the extrinsic aspect of the song and the music video. The approach determines the relationship of the work with the psychological concept of human being.

4. Discussion

4.1. Textual Analysis

In "Blank Space" lyrics and music video, there are some dictions and scenes that contain certain meaning. Every words in the lyrics and every scenes in the music video may give different meaning for the readers.

The music video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=e-ORhEE9VVg&feature=youtuve_gdata_player) is opened with a scene at 00:00:05 that shows a man driving a car heads to a big house but looks empty and deserted. This scene is taken in long shot mode to portray how big and luxurious a house in the video as the setting, however the lighting technique tries to make it looks gloomy. It turns out that the big house belongs to a woman who lives alone. At 00:00:08, the audiences can see a medium shot of a scene shows that she is only accompanied by her cat. Through these two scenes, the music video tries to tell the audience that the woman feels lonely. The proof is from the line that is sung at this scene, which is "Nice to meet you where you been". At this scene, medium shot is used to express that the woman feels lonely and she waits for a man in her life for a long time from her body gesture. She wakes up alone and looks so tired by stretching out her hand. Then, after knowing a man is about to come to her life, she welcomes him nicely.

"Blank Space" uses imagery both in the lyrics and in the music video. We can see from

the line "I could show you incredible things", the scene at 00:00:12, the woman sits on her bed with two tame horses at both sides of the bed. According to *buildingbeautifulsouls.com*, tame white horse is interpreted as service and trusting relationship. Therefore, we can conclude that the woman is going to give the man an extraordinary love that he never felt before. This scene also exaggerates that she is really lonely, only accompanied by animals in her big luxurious house, and she craves for love.

At scene 00:00:13, the audiences can see medium close up shot of the man walks to a door of the woman's house. Door has a meaning that the genital is open. From this point, we can assume that the woman has sexual desire to make love. It is proven by at scene 00:00:14 and 00:00:15, which the line is "Magic, madness, heaven, sin". The scene shows close up shot of a white horse and then the long shot of the woman walks out of the door. When she says "madness, heaven", the scene is the white horse, which means her crazy love and when she says "sin", the scene is the woman walks out of the door that can be interpreted that she "opens" her genital to make love. In society, if we are not married yet, we are prohibited to make love. Therefore, she considers it as a sin.

In "Blank Space" lyrics, there is a line that says, "Grab your passport and my hand". In real world, "passport", according to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 8th Edition* (2010: 1073) means an official document that you may have to show when you enter or leave certain country, or according to *thefreedictionary.com* passport is a quality, asset, etc that gains a person admission or acceptance. Since "passport" also has a meaning as an acceptance, so passport in "Blank Space" lyrics is connotation of woman's acceptance. It means that the woman accepts and allows the man to have sexual intercourse with her. Similar with passport, "brush" is connotation of male's genital. Meanwhile, "canvas" is considered to be the connotation of female's genital symbol. Although Freud only said that female's genital is symbolically represented by things that are made from paper or wood, here, "canvas" has the

possibility to be interpreted as the female's genital too. The function of the paper and the canvas is the same, as the media to pour something out like writing or drawing using tools like pencil or brush. When Taylor Swift sings the line, "Grab your passport and my hand", in the music video, there is no passport portrayed, yet it is replaced with two medium shot scenes at 00:00:43 and 00:00:44, show the man as the object of her painting and the woman paints the man's portrait on the canvas. Then at line "I can make a bad guys good for a weekend" which is portrayed at 00:00:48, a close up shot scene shows the woman holds a brush and shows flirty expression. It can be interpreted that the woman is about to have sexual intercourse with the man.

4. 2. Contextual Analysis

From "Blank Space" lyrics, the character of woman reflects the concept of *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego*. The *Id* is the human being's basic drive, which is unconscious. It seeks for the pleasure and satisfaction. From the line "I'm dying to see how this one ends", we can see that the woman is just curious about her relationship without thinking the bad or good effect for her. She just needs an immediate pleasure and satisfaction to fulfill her desire about man and sexual contact. She enjoys a relationship without thinking the risk because she assumes that love is just a game as stated in the line "love is a game, wanna play?" At scene 00:00:25, the woman reaches out her hand to the man like offering him to join in her love game. Then at scene 00:00:39 and 00:01:13 show that she spends her time by playing and having fun with the man. Meanwhile, *ego* covers her sexual desire to be with the man into the realistic one that is acceptable for society. It is called love. In the earlier part of the song, it shows that the woman is interested with the man. Then, she decides to be in a relationship with the man. In this state, the consciousness of the woman appears in the song lyrics. We can see from this line "Oh my God, look at that face, you look like my next mistake", the woman already knew that the man is not good for her. We can see the facial expression of the man, which is taken

in close up shot mode. His eyes and his facial expression do not reflect that he is a good man. From the whole scenes, the man shows flat facial expression and never smiles when he is with the woman. It looks like he does not really love her. At 00:00:33 and 00:00:53 show the man does not look happy when he spends his time with the woman. However, the woman's ego about having a love relationship makes her still dating him. *Superego* consists of the conscience and ego ideal communicate their requirements to the ego with feelings like pride, shame, and guilt. Marriage as a cultural value and norm that people, in general, believe to have sacred love is the embodiment of *Superego*. In "Blank Space", the woman feels guilty for doing something that breaks cultural value and norm. It is stated at line "magic, madness, heaven, sin". The word "sin" refers to her intention of making love with the man while they are not married. It causes her feeling guilty by stating that as a sin. Another kind of *Superego* in "Blank Space" is when the woman prefers to have relationship with the men who have tendency as players rather than with the good men. Therefore, she always wants similar type of men and proud of it. The problem is the ideal man that she has in mind is the man that is described in magazines. Indeed, the man who often appears in magazines must be handsome and elegant, as stated in the line "new money, suit and tie. I can read you like a magazine". In the end, the consequence is that she is always being hurt.

4. 2. 1. Love Turns to Hate in "Blank Space" and Displacement as The Defense Mechanism Act

In the earlier part of the lyrics and the earlier scenes in the music video, we can see that the woman is nice to the man and she shows that she loves the man very much. It is proven by lines "Nice to meet you, where you been. I could show you incredible things". However, when it comes to the middle until the end part, the conflict arises. We can see it in line "Wait, the worst is yet to come, oh no". The fact that the man cheats makes the women angry, as stated in lines "Oh my God, who is she? I get drunk on jealousy".

To deal the conflict towards the man, she shows her anger into some objects as symbolic

target to substitute the man. In "Blank Space" music video, we can see some scenes, which are considered to be displacement acts: Cutting the tree (it is shown at scenes 00:03:37 then 00:03:39 and 00:30:40. Tree is also the symbol of phallic. It can be interpreted that actually the woman wants to cut the man's genital, as it is an impossible thing to do, she substitutes her desire by cutting the tree since the tree is defenseless; Hitting the car (it is shown at scenes 00:03:14, 00:03:16, and 00:03:18. Rather than hitting the man whom she thinks is more powerful, the woman chooses to hit the man's luxurious car using golf stick. Since the car is very expensive, she considers that it may cause long term pain for the man; Scissoring the man's clothes and burning the man's suit (it is shown at 00:02:31, 00:02:43 and 00:02:46. Not only hitting the car, to release her anger towards the man, she also scissors the man's clothes, throws them and then burns the man's suit. The purpose is to humiliate the man. As we know that one of this man's prides is his clothes and suit; Squeezing and biting an apple (it is shown at 00:02:56, 00:02:57, 00:03:10, and 00:03:11. From that scenes, we can see that the apple has relation with the man. Apple as a symbolic substitute of the man's genital. The man shows that he is in a pain when the woman squeezes and bites the apple; Stabbing a cake (it is shown at 00:03:17, 00:03:21; and 00:03:23. The woman stabs the cake until it bleeds shows that she wants the man knows that he really hurts her. We can see the phallic symbol from the knife that she holds to stab the cake; and the last act is having cats as pets (it is shown at 00:00:08, 00:00:17, and 00:04:08. In the act of displacement, this act means that the woman does not have a chance to love man properly, instead, she has cat as pet to express her desire to love.

5. Conclusion

From the song and the music video of "Blank Space", we can see that the psychoanalysis concepts of Sigmund Freud are applied. To prove the *Id* (the woman's sexual desire), *Ego*

(love relationship), and *Superego* (the woman's preference about ideal man) in the lyrics, the music video shows some scenes that help the audiences to catch that idea in the song easier. Meanwhile, the reason of using words "Blank Space" as the title of the song also can be related to the *Id*. From the character of the woman as portrayed in the music video, her *Id* is to get sexual pleasure. From the analysis of both the lyrics and the music video, the writer finds that "Blank Space" can be concluded as the woman's longing for always having sexual intercourse with the man. It means "Blank Space" referring to the woman's genital when she does not do sexual activity.

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