

REVEALING CASSIE HOWARD'S ELECTRA COMPLEX IN *EUPHORIA* FILM (2022)

Hananda Aida Fitria Mustikaningrum

English Literature, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya
hananda.19077@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi *father complex* Cassie Howard di sepanjang film *Euphoria*. Tujuannya adalah untuk melihat bagaimana kepribadian Cassie mencerminkan teori *Electra complex* Freud. Sigmund Freud mendefinisikan *Electra complex* sebagai hubungan antara orang tua dan anak perempuan dalam perkembangan masa kanak-kanak, yang pada akhirnya akan membentuk perilaku anak pada fase remaja hingga dewasa. Dalam pengumpulan data, penulis memilih untuk menonton series, membaca transkripsi series, menganalisis elemen sinematografi, memilih kutipan, serta mengidentifikasi data berdasarkan tema studi dan mengklasifikasikannya dengan *Electra complex* milik Freud. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan psikoanalisis Freudian dan teori *Electra complex* Sigmund Freud. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa perilaku dan pertumbuhan mental Cassie ternyata berakar pada perkembangan masa kecilnya dimana dia tidak memiliki orang tua yang aman serta tidak adanya sosok ayah. Dalam perkembangan masa kecilnya yang sempat mengamumi dan mencari ayahnya yang pergi, berdampak besar padanya saat dewasa. Karena itu, dia mencari kebahagiaan dalam validasi laki-laki daripada menghadapi kenyataan dan berdamai dengan dirinya sendiri. Pola ini adalah hasil dari pertumbuhan psikoseksual wanita yang tidak terpenuhi dan disebut kompleks Electra.

Kata kunci: Electra complex, teori psikoanalitik Freud, film, perilaku, cassie howard, euphoria

Abstract

This study aims to identify Cassie Howard's father issues throughout the *Euphoria* movie. The goal was to examine how Cassie's personality reflected Freud's Electra Complex theory. Sigmund Freud defined the Electra complex as how the relationship between parents and female child in childhood development will eventually shape the child's behavior in their teen to adult phase. In order to assemble the data, the author chose to watch the season, read the season's transcription, analyze the cinematographic elements, select the quotes, identify the data based on the study's theme, and classify the issues related to Freud's Electra complex. The research method applied to this study is the Freudian psychoanalytic approach and Sigmund Freud's theory of the Electra complex. The result found that Cassie's behavior and mental growth happened to be rooted in her childhood development, where she had non-secure parents, as well as the absence of a father figure. In her childhood development, she admired and longed for his father, and the father suddenly left. The absence of her father had a big impact on her as an adult. Thus, she seeks happiness in male validation instead of facing reality and making peace with herself. These patterns of looking for male validation are the results of the unfulfilled psychosexual growth of women. The unfulfilled result of this crucial phase in female children is labeled the Electra complex. **Keywords:** electra complex, Freudian psychoanalytic theory, movie, behavior, cassie howard, euphoria

INTRODUCTION

Humans, through the process of growth, have a complex mind that contains many things, including memories. Those memories affect human behavior and shape their own personality (Lerner et al., 2020). The process of studying the complexity of human beings with so many elements included the birth of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud developed psychoanalysis with Calvin S. Hall (1954).

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the birth of modern psychology, which was created in an attempt to understand the dynamics as well as the structure of the inner world in human beings. The attempt accelerated the development of the psychological study of literary texts and is called psychoanalysis criticism (Schwartz, 1999). This criticism is based on ideas advocated by Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud. According to Hossain et al. (2017), Literary works are generally examined from a psychological perspective since they serve as a fictional representation of the author's mental state and personality traits. We can learn from psychoanalysis to replace the grasp of meaning with the ability to listen. The reader must learn to fight with this idiom rather than replace it with premade theories since the literary text, like the analytic patient, provides the terms of its interpretation (Ellmann, 1994). Literature and psychoanalysis are somehow connected.

The study conducted by Sigmund Freud that addresses the issue of one gender getting too attached to the opposite sex caused by their parental and growth issues is called Oedipus Complex. According to (Muhammad Umar et al., 2022), The Oedipus complex is used for the male child that tends to be overly attached to the opposite sex or mother complex. The term for the opposite, where the female child is overly attached to male parents, is defined as Electra complex. However, Freud's student collaborator Carl Jung first used the term Electra. Initially, Freud only associated the Oedipus complex with the psychosexual development of young men and women, but later constructed the female part of the hypothesis as the graceful Oedipus disposition and the opposite Oedipus complex (Khan & Haider, 2015).

The terms Oedipus complex was first introduced by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899). Later in the 1900s, the term began to be a scientific discipline (Minderop, 2010, p. 11). Oedipus complex discusses psychosexual growth or the phallic stage that occurs from three to six years of age in a child. If the phallic phase is unsatisfied, it has an erogenous zone, a conflict or crisis, and future fixation repercussions (Tariq, 2019).

According to Freud, psychosexual development is when all people are born with basic instincts, such as a

need to satiate their physical requirements for food, shelter, and warmth. This need's practical fulfillment pleasures that Freud classified as "sexual" pleasure.

According to Freud, humans go through five stages of development: the oral phase, the anal phase, the phallic phase, the latent phase, and the genital phase. Freud's Electra complex theory is depicted in Cassie's personality as a serial monogamist, where she cannot stand alone and needs male validation to bring her a sense of identity. Cassie's symptoms of father complex and troubled childhood may all be revealed through the lens of Freud's theory of Electra complex.

Teenagers these days are often related to the journey of finding their identities. In the process, they often faced many obstacles that eventually shaped them in the future. Many teenagers often engage in dangerous situations caused by their behaviors, such as juvenile delinquency. Family, parents, and how parents treat their children are regarded as the most significant microsocial setting that affects anyone's conduct (Rathinabalan & Naaraayan, 2017). Cassie is one of those teenagers who caught herself in a complex situation where students are making fun of her due to her revenge porn being spread. Instead of finding ways to save herself, she repeatedly engages in similar situations. Thus, this paper is intended to identify how her relationship with her parents is one of the reasons for her troubles. Similar to nowadays, the teenager problem is where people tend to forget that teenagers mirrored their parent's during their development.

The *Euphoria* series, directed by Sam Levinson, illustrates the lives of teenagers with conflicts. The movie is set in 21st century Los Angeles high school. *Euphoria* became the second best-selling HBO series soon after the second season was released on April 22, 2022. The season itself has won several awards and was nominated for several nominations. Cassie's father complex is identified in *Euphoria* season two from how she behaved, her longing for a male figure, her conflicted childhood, and many other tragedies that led her into trouble. She eventually grew confused about her identity; she sometimes appeared with soft feminine behavior but other times wanted herself to be seen as vile. After several times of watching the episodes of season two, it became clear that the fundamental of Cassie's complex behavior is the result of her unfulfilled Electra complex during childhood development.

Children perceive the separation between themselves and the outside world during the phallic period. Males and females will develop differently at this point. We have known for a while that leaving the initial principal genital zone, the clitoris, in favor of a new zone, the vagina complicates the development of sexuality in women (Freud, 1928, p. 1). Women undergo a process of

changing from one phase to another that men do not experience. (Freud, 1928, p. 2). Early on, when the clitoris serves as the genital center, the first stages of female sexual development take place. Because the clitoris "is comparable to the male organ," this stage is seen as masculine (Freud, 1928, p. 2).

The object of her adoration is her mother because the lady is masculine at this point. Similar to how males mature, his mother was "the object of his first love" (Freud, 1928, p. 1). Both boys and girls feel love for their mothers at this stage. The woman "changes in sex; therefore, the sex of her object of love must change" in the second stage (Freud, 1928, p. 3). The second stage of sexual development, the feminine stage, occurs when the female genital center in the vagina transforms. A woman's love at this point shifts from her mother to her father. One of the critical phases in female development is when "the initial object of the mother must be exchanged for the father" (Freud, 1931, p. 1). Women require a father figure to move through the initial stage of their sexual development. She will become aware she was castrated once he had a father with a penis. According to Freud in *Female Sexuality*, there are three possible scenarios when a woman becomes aware she is being castrated. The first is that she abandoned her phallic age as a result of being "unhappy with her clitoris" (Freud, 1931, p. 4). Her entire sexual life will be put on hold due to this. Additionally, it could result in "masculine characteristics in other areas." In the second scenario, she "holds on to a violent self-affirmation of her challenged masculinity," which results in partnerships with homosexual men. The final possibility is that "a regular Oedipus Complex in its feminine form" will manifest (Freud, 1931, p. 4).

Prior to this, several studies have initially carried out on the subject of Freud's Electra complex. Whereas in both Alfred Hitchcock's movies *Psycho* and *The Birds*, Erina Tandian depicts an interest in identifying both male main characters of two movies who grew up with absent fathers. Tandian also uses Freud's personality theory (1923) to identify the characters. The study reveals that both male characters exhibited fixation with the Oedipus complex and expressed their love for their mothers differently. One is mentally troubled, while the other is not (Tandian, 2021). Meanwhile, Neşe Şenel examined Electra complex in Sylvia Plath's poetry *Little Fugue* and discovered Plath's ambivalence of longing and hatred for her father are primarily due to her father's absence (Şenel, 2022). Şenel describes the results of Plath's unfulfilled Electra complex are mostly the love-hate relationship Plath expressed in her poetry. Unlike many other studies, this research aims to reveal Cassie's behavior of seeking male validation and sexually

exploiting herself through the lens of Electra complex in *Euphoria* season two (2022).

METHOD

The research method applied to this study is the Freudian psychoanalytic approach and the book created by Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1949). It focuses on the pattern and signs of Cassie Howard's behavior that shows her Electra Complex activated. In addition, the author also uses Louis Giannetti's *mise-en-scene* (2013) to identify the language of cinematography and how it correlates with other aspects of the research.

The primary source of this information is *Euphoria* season two (2022). The data were collected by watching the film and screenshotting it through the HBO premiere. The steps used for this study will be divided into four steps. The initial stage in this research is to watch the film several times in order to understand its substance fully. Second, the film's transcript is read to learn more about the narrator. Third, dialogues or chats, monologues, and narrations from the film were chosen to be used in the discussion part. These were obtained by identifying the shots of the scenes and classifying them in their episodes of the season [e.g., S2E03]. The method explained above was chosen to assess the character flows with the character of Cassie Howard, revealing the process of her psychosexual development that leads to her Electra complex. Fourth, the step is to decode and analyze the cinematography elements of shots, angles, locations, costumes, and lighting. Lastly, The data collection was evaluated, categorized, and discussed using Freud's Electra complex.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Cassie's Contradictory Personality

Cassie always claims herself as a good and sweet girl. She presented herself in such similar manner by dressing herself in a feminine way with pastel tone colors. By behavior, Cassie presented herself as a calm girl and a likable character, but also, at the same time, she appears to be reckless, stabbing her best friends behind their backs and putting everyone at blame. She also seems confused in herself as to why she switches from feminine to masculinity. There are days when she wants to be seen as a sweet female, but the other day she dresses as a liberated woman in a dominant character. Her subconscious way of presenting herself explains why she has a contradictory personality. It can be seen throughout the entire season two.



Scene 1: Cassie's breakdown in denial that she never betrayed her best friend. [S2E3]

Cassie: You two were broken up for three weeks and three days before we even had sex, so I didn't betray you! You guys can all judge me if you want, but I have NEVER ever been happier!

According to Freud (1957), women unable to control their phallic phase sexual difficulties would have phallic and egocentric personalities. It can be identified by impulsivity, egotism, narcissism, and pride. Additionally, the person will be unable to find solace in themselves as a result of this. That explains why Cassie denies her actions when she sleeps with her best friend's on-off boyfriend. She finds herself at fault but somehow seeks reasons to justify that her doings are right, and that does not change her as a good person. She always fails to validate her feelings and truth by finding someone to blame.

Freud (1957) explains that as women transition from the phallic stage to adulthood, they become more aware of their bodies and start to concentrate on their own needs, which causes an "intensification of true narcissism," especially if the woman is attractive. They will feel happier, more self-satisfied, and their love for themselves will grow as a result. According to Freud (1957), men who can show women love are more likely to win their affection. Cassie's confusion about her identity leads her to a certain point where she dresses herself to impress Nate Jacob. One day, it drives her crazy when students and her friend think she is auditioning for a play because she dresses so hilariously. Is seen in the scene above, starting with a close-up shot of Cassie as well as her outburst of emotions saying she never betrayed her best friend and always remains innocent. Close-up shots represent strong images that emphasize why the subject matter so that the viewer can also feel the emotions portrayed (Giannetti, 2013). In this portrayal, it can be seen that Cassie wants to convince everyone and herself that she is innocent.

2. Cassie's Fear of Abandonment

In *Euphoria* season two, episode seven, Cassie appears to give her all to Nate. She engages in a number of intercourse with guys just to be taken advantage of in an effort to address her phallic-oedipal struggle. She uses sexual and control to take care of herself from a bruised ego. To make up for the secure father figure she never had during the phallic stage. She tries hard to please Nate to assure herself that her father will no longer abandon him. One noticeable feature in Cassie's fear of loneliness and abandonment.



Scene 2: Cassie tells Nate to control her. [S2E07]

Cassie: You can control what I wear, who I talk to and I will never complain. You can never scare me, and at least I'm loved

Based on Freud's psychosexual stages theory (1953), the emotional impact of an Oedipal conflict is more significant on girls than on boys. Cassie feels unsafe as a child as a result of losing the phallic symbol. Therefore, the woman tries to rule over males by enticing them or acting as though she has much confidence. As a result of Cassie's fixation with phallic stages makes her a self-centered phallic woman who feels reckless by attracting many men. Cassie's sexual behavior also seeks assurance from a male figure whom she failed to see during her childhood. She is motivated by this unfulfilled love, validation, and assurance, and she fails to meet those needs in all males she meets, including her dad. She uses herself to play out sexual fantasies as a means of escaping reality, to ease the distress of her fear of being alone, and to be loved by someone. Cassie is dissatisfied with her life and finds no healthy way to deal with it. She runs away from the harsh truth by turning to making her life a fantasy, impulsive behavior, drinking, dating, and satisfying men's sexual needs in order to maintain her suspended animation.

As a result of Cassie's sexuality which she lets run wild since she feels ostracised and abandoned by her father, she gains power and a sense of worth by doing so. According to Malarvizhi (2013), Cassie's behavior results from her sense of worthlessness and unlovability in herself. She prostitutes herself because it makes her feel

foul, vile, and cruel. She utilizes her feminine, sweet girl charms to build her identity among the male circle as a sexually desirable female and feel validated by men. These are all the result of superiority over phallic power.

3. Cassie's Seeking Male Validation

The underlying issue of this is in her childhood. She is emotionally trapped in the history of her lonely childhood. Cassie fails to gain her father's affection out of the blue due to the separation. When she grows up, she feels disappointed and looks for her love object and role model in another man.

Nate came to her low point where she felt alone, and sadly, he decided to play with her. Cassie, on the other hand, who is also conflicted, did not see this warning and decided to give it a go. It can be seen from the scene below; the scene uses high-angle shots. A frame shot from this angle is often referred to as a representation of someone observing the characters. It can also suggest danger, warnings, and helplessness (Giannetti, 2013). It can be seen as Nate standing tall behind Cassie and looking at her. She stares back with the feeling of helplessness without knowing where she gets herself. This can also be seen as the feeling of domination.



Scene 3: Cassie contemplates her life alone and meets Nate. [S2E01]

4. Cassie's Childhood

A strict father who strives to shape his daughter into perfection may result in an Electra complex (Tariq, 2019). Cassie's loving father tried to shape her into a professional ice-skating athlete. She then grew up closest with her father as she always practiced skating and was accompanied by him. She then lost it too soon when her parents decided to divorce. Earlier, after the divorce, her father appeared to be remaining in contact with her, and even spent some time together. The tragedy happens soon after her father is hit by a truck and is hospitalized. During the time of recovery, her father became addicted to the fentanyl prescribed to him for the pain and became a drug

addict. Her father decided to stop contacting her ever since, while Cassie still longs for him.

In John Bowlby's attachment theory, it was stated that when a child's caregiver is taken away from the child, separation anxiety develops in the child and is more likely to affect the child's development during the teenage-young adult phase (McLeod, 2017).

In this scene, the *mise-en-scene* was depicted using the long shot with low-key lighting and dark hues surroundings. A long shot is often used to establish the idea of the surrounding of the movie, while lowkey lighting represents tragedies and mysteries (Giannetti, 2013). This portrayal shows that Cassie is in her own tragedy, feeling miserable losing her best friend and boyfriend.



Scene 4: Cassie defends herself after people know her wrongdoings. S2E05

Cassie: Rue's life is not harder than my life or Lexi's. Right! Her dad died, and ours just stopped calling?

The scene above also elaborates how Freud states that egocentricity is a product of the Electra complex. Cassie implies that it is not her fault to date her best friend's boyfriend because she has a traumatic life and uses it as an excuse. One noticeable thing that depicts her father complex is that she once mentions how miserable her life is without her father but also adores and longs for him the next minute. Those can strengthen the theory. Freud mentions that women with difficulties controlling their phallic phase lead to egocentric and conflicted personalities such as impulsiveness and narcissism (Freud, 1975). Cassie and her sister, Lexi, both went through traumatic experiences but processed them differently. Both are dissatisfied with the divorce of their parents and their father leaving. What stands out is that Cassie loses the man figure in her life, which she thought was a hero, and plays along as if everything is okay. Cassie kept that hero fantasy alive and projected it into Nate. On the other hand, her sister Lexi mourns the loss of their father as a hero and escapes into her head, believing now that heroes never exist in real life.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing Euphoria season two and identifying Cassie Howard's character, it can be concluded that she has the Electra complex characteristics throughout the entire season. The characteristics are explained and written in a separate and coherent part to illustrate Cassie's Electra complex. First is Cassie's contradictory personality, the second is her fear of abandonment, following to the third part is her seeking male validation, and lastly, the fundamental as to why she behaves that way, Cassie's childhood. To conclude everything that has been stated so far, following and analyzing those parts, this study found that the underlying root of Cassie's behavior and why she always tends to embarrass herself for male love is that she had troubled childhood development. Cassie became conflicted and depressed about why men exploit her and share her video as revenge porn when all she asks is love. The Electra complex happens because she has never resolved it, resulting in her as a troubled teenager expressing themselves. In order to resolve her Electra complex, she suppressed the libidinal desires of a father figure and continued to seek it in every other male she met just to get the validation of feelings she called love. Those also result in her having non-secure love life repeated so many times because she has not seen that yet and seeks help. The paper identifies how absent and non-secure parents can create conflicted people as they grow up.

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