

**The Symbolic Stage of Desire: An Exploration of Lacan's Theory in the Context of
We Need to Talk About Kevin (2011)**

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Abstrak

Saat ini, banyak sekali masalah mental yang muncul dalam diri seseorang, terutama anak-anak. Hal ini disebabkan oleh trauma yang dirasakan oleh individu tersebut. Kasus yang paling sering terjadi adalah hubungan yang tidak harmonis antara orang tua dan anak. Padahal, keluarga merupakan salah satu pendidik atau pembentuk karakter pertama sebelum seorang individu mengenal dunia luar. Melalui pembahasan mengenai sistem simbolik yang mempengaruhi munculnya hasrat dalam film *We Need to Talk About Kevin* yang dirilis pada tahun 2011 oleh Lynne Ramsay, menunjukkan bagaimana tahap simbolik mempengaruhi pembentukan mental dan interaksi individu dengan orang lain. Dengan melakukan pembacaan teks film secara seksama dan menganalisa film tersebut, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membuktikan pengaruh tahap simbolik dalam membentuk karakter individu. Hal ini dibuktikan dengan terbentuknya kepribadian psikopat pada tokoh utama akibat perlakuan kasar orang tuanya. Pengaruh terhadap hubungannya dengan orang lain terlihat dari kurangnya interaksi yang berkualitas yang ditunjukkan oleh tokoh tersebut. Tahap simbolik juga mempengaruhi kesehatan mental karakter. Ia dicirikan sebagai orang yang manipulatif, mendua, dan antisosial atau terasing dari dunia luar. Menunjukkan bahwa hal tersebut menimbulkan trauma pada individu.

Kata Kunci: Simbolik, Keinginan, Hubungan, Kesehatan Mental, Psikopat

Abstract

Nowadays, a lot of mental problems arise in an individual, especially a child. This is due to the trauma felt by the individual. The most common case is the disharmonious relationship between parents and children. In fact, the family is one of the first educators or character builders before an individual knows the outside world. Through the discussion of the symbolic system that influences the emergence of desire in the *We Need to Talk About Kevin* movie released in 2011 by Lynne Ramsay, it shows how the symbolic stage influences the mental formation and interaction of individuals with others. By doing a careful reading of the subtitles and analyzing the film, this research aims to prove the influence of the symbolic stage in shaping individual characters. It is evidenced by the formation of a psychopathic personality in the main character due to the harsh treatment of his parents. The influence on his relationship with others is evident in the lack of quality interaction shown by the character. Symbolic stage also affects the character's mental health. It is characterized as manipulative, two-sided, and antisocial or alienated from the outside world. Indicating that it traumatizes the individual.

Keywords: Symbolic, Desire, Relationship, Mental Health, Psychopaths

A. INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become a widely discussed topic on social media recently, particularly in relation to

individuals. Many people claim that their mental health is disturbed, leading to negative impacts on themselves. There are various factors that contribute to this, one of which is the role of parents, which can influence mental

health issues. This is evident in the film *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, which is adapted from the novel of the same name. In the film, Kevin, the main character, experiences mental health disturbances that affect his psychology. The primary cause is the lack of parental involvement and the violence perpetrated by his parents. When comparing Kevin's case to similar situations in society, researchers have found many children in the surrounding community who also experience violence, which negatively impacts their mental health and can lead to psychopathic traits. Kevin's motivations are complex and often contradictory, with desires for attention, acceptance, and closeness with his mother mixed with darker impulses like control and vengeance (Campbell et al., 2011). This paradox is also evident in psychological research, as individuals often have conflicting desires that can drive harmful behaviour. The film also explores the idea that an individual's desires can be influenced by social and cultural factors, such as his mother's cold and emotionally unavailable personality, which supports attachment theory and the impact of early childhood experiences on an individual's desires and actions.

The selection of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* as the focus of this film analysis is not only due to the conflict between Kevin and Eva, but also because of the admiration for Lynne Ramsay's directing. Ramsay successfully captivates viewers through strong performances and the intense tension conveyed throughout the story. Her ability to present the narrative in a way that feels real allows the audience to immerse themselves in the events, sparking their imagination (Sholihah, 2021). This research aims to explore the root causes of the issues Kevin faces. Kevin's antisocial behaviour is a manifestation of mental illness, and by applying a Lacanian psychoanalysis approach, we can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying themes in the film.

Personality is a complex concept that plays a significant role in shaping human behaviour. It is not only an intrinsic aspect of human nature but also the result of a dynamic process that involves constant interaction between the individual and their social surroundings. This process is marked by an ongoing exchange of causes and effects that shape the development of one's personality. One example of this dynamic is the influence of physical disability on personality development. A person born with a physical disability might develop shyness as a way to cope with the challenges they face in their social environment. This illustrates how the social context can profoundly affect the formation of personality. Another example is the impact of bullying on an individual's personality. If someone is constantly bullied at school, they may develop traits such as timidity due to the stress and fear they endure. This demonstrates the powerful role

the social environment plays in shaping an individual's personality through the conflicts and difficulties they encounter (Tampubolon et al., 2022).

The concept of individual behaviour, as outlined in the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory, suggests that behaviour is shaped by mental processes that occur after an individual encounters a stimulus and evaluates it. According to this theory, an individual's decision-making is influenced by various factors such as beliefs, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control over behaviour. However, some scholars have pointed out the limitations of this model, arguing that it oversimplifies the decision-making process by overlooking the role of internal motivation in shaping choices. These critics believe that the influence of beliefs, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control alone does not fully capture the complexity of human decision-making. They assert that internal motivational factors, such as personal values, emotions, and self-efficacy, play a critical role in shaping how individuals make rational decisions (Purwanto et al., 2022).

Several experts, including Hegel, have defined desire as the intentional relationship one forms with an object in life, often expressed as dependence (Hegel et al., 1996). In Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, desire is a central concept. Rather than viewing desire as an inherent or instinctual drive, Lacan argues that it is shaped by the social and cultural environment in which we exist. Our perception of both ourselves and others in relation to each other plays a key role in forming our desires. This idea is captured in Lacan's well-known assertion that "desire is the desire of the Other," highlighting the profound impact external factors have on our desires.

This thesis will examine the film *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, directed by Lynne Ramsay and released in 2011. The film is an adaptation of Lionel Shriver's 2003 novel of the same title. The main focus of this research is to explore the underlying causes of Kevin's antisocial behaviour, which stems from the childhood trauma he endured. The research will employ Jacques Lacan's Psychoanalytic theory as the foundation for analyzing various phenomena depicted in the film. By closely examining the many scenes, the research will concentrate on discussing Kevin's desire. Desire, as a phenomenon in phenomenology, plays a key role in the development of self-consciousness or self-awareness (Jenkins, 2009).

In this study, psychoanalytic theory, particularly Lacan's concept of desire (1901-1981), is the primary approach to analyze the characters' desires and their developmental stages in the film. Lacan's assertion that "unconscious desire is the desire of the Other" is central to this analysis. Lacan's psychoanalytic theory begins with a

rethinking of Freud's notion of the unconscious. As mentioned earlier, Lacan argues that the psyche is governed by the desires of the Other, and that societal laws are dictated by this influence. The symbolic realm, according to Lacan, establishes a system of order that governs what humans desire and what they avoid. This symbolic structure is a regulated universe ruled by language and law (Yoon et al., 2023). Through this symbolic framework, society is organized by rules that dictate divisions, relationships, and naming. The language system, which exists before the birth of a child, imposes limitations on human impulses and establishes societal standards, thereby shaping human desires based on the influence of others.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the perspective of Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyze the film *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011). The research method aims to explore the underlying causes of Kevin's antisocial behavior, with a particular focus on Lacan's theory of desire and his three key concepts: the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic. The first step involved a detailed examination of the film, identifying key scenes that reflect Kevin's character and the narrative's progression. The next phase centers on Lacan's theory of desire, with the goal of identifying unmet needs and desires within Kevin's character.

Building on the theory of desire, this research further explores the "symbolic stage" in the film, seeking insights into Kevin's traumatic experiences and the aspects of his life that remain unspoken. Kevin's childhood trauma can be understood as a desire influenced by the linguistic or symbolic system present within him. This analysis aids in understanding the foundational causes of desire in Lacan's framework of real-world relationships. Lacan's symbolic theory is then used to investigate how language and societal norms shape Kevin's behavior, focusing on the tension between personal desires and societal expectations.

The study also explores the connections between Lacan's domains, examining how unfulfilled desires in the realm of the desired might be reflected in the imaginary domain or expressed through the symbolic. This examination aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of the complexities within the subject's structure. The conclusions drawn from the analysis will be corroborated with relevant texts and existing research in Lacanian psychoanalysis. These verification steps are essential to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations and the consistency of the findings with established theoretical frameworks.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and analysis of the psychoanalytic study of *We Need to Talk About Kevin* with a focus on the main characters. The findings, derived from the film, address the research questions outlined in the first chapter. These results examine how the symbolic phase contributes to the development of desires in Kevin's character. It also explores the role of the symbolic in shaping his relationships with others and the influence of family in his character formation. Furthermore, the chapter delves into how the symbolic stages experienced by Kevin affect his mental state. The discussion will also include how trauma contributes to the formation of desires, impacting the psychological development of his character.

3.1. Kevin's Desire Influence His Relationships With His Family

This section contains how one of the orders of needs put forward by Lacan, namely the desire, influences relationships or interactions with other people. In discussing this research, we will also discuss how symbiotic relationships form a desire felt by Kevin. Apart from that, symbolism is also a basis that becomes a facilitator so that an individual knows the meaning of something. So it determines how an individual will develop his personality, and knows how to respond to this. In the film *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, we will discuss the role of symbolic stages in creating desire and character formation.

Background Personality of Kevin

Kevin Katchadourian is the main character in the film *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, directed by Lynne Ramsay, which is based on Lionel Shriver's novel of the same name. He is a complex and multi-dimensional character, displaying intelligence above the average. At the start of the film, it is shown that Kevin was born like any typical baby. He is a relatively innocent infant who, like most babies, cries frequently, which irritates his mother, Eva Katchadourian. Eva visibly expresses her frustration and displeasure at her child's behavior. From the moment of Kevin's birth, it is clear that Eva did not anticipate having this child.



Figure 1. Eva's disliking face when Kevin was born (20.44)

In Figure 1, it is evident that the onset of Kevin's mental issues stems from Eva's aversion, which is reflected in her somber expression shortly after Kevin's birth. Eva's dissatisfaction began even before she had children; she enjoyed her freedom, frequently going on trips and attending festivals, among other activities. Although not explicitly stated, this is subtly indicated by Eva's unhappy and gloomy demeanor right after giving birth to Kevin. There is a scene where Eva is walking while pushing Kevin in a stroller, visibly restraining her frustration to avoid losing her temper over her crying child. These instances demonstrate that Eva never truly expected Kevin, and although she had no choice, she eventually tried to be a good parent. At that point, Kevin was still an infant and unaware that his mother didn't actually want him. In this phase, Kevin experienced a sense of alienation and a loss of the maternal figure from the moment he was born. This alienation represents the symbolic stage Kevin underwent during his early development, as described by Lacan (1996).

Kevin grew up with a different attitude from children his age. He displayed unusual behavior from a young age. He does not play with toys like a normal child and receives less external stimulation and rarely has social interactions. His mother, Eva, had difficulty identifying what was wrong with him, and they ultimately ruled out a serious developmental disorder. His mother thought that this was just Kevin's innate, quiet nature after he went to the doctor.

Kevin's Desire Through Symbolic Stage

According to Lacan's theory, the Symbolic stage develops as a result of absence. In Kevin's case, this stage emerges because he lacks the presence of a mother figure in his life, which is evident in his troubled relationship with Eva. Kevin's situation is particularly complex, as he is a central character with multiple personalities. One of the key factors contributing to Kevin's personality issues is his family, particularly his parents. From the moment of his birth, his mother harbored a dislike for him, and as he grew older, especially during his toddler years, Kevin began to sense this animosity. This was clearly demonstrated when Eva attempted to engage with him by playing ball, but Kevin completely ignored her efforts to interact.



Figure 2 Kevin made an angry face (26.40)

Eva: "I'll roll it towards you, then roll it back to Mommy. Roll it back to Mommy"

Figure 2 depicts Kevin playing with Eva, but their interaction is unsuccessful. When Eva attempts to engage with him, Kevin rejects her by not responding. His slightly disdainful expression reflects his dislike for Eva. Eventually, Eva becomes frustrated, and Kevin finally responds to the ball she offers, but only once. This highlights the poor quality of their interactions and the strained relationship between them. In this scene, Kevin's desire starts to surface as he enters the symbolic phase. He perceives his mother's disapproval of him, which is evident in his expression.

Eva: "As a baby, she never stopped crying. Maybe it damaged her hearing."

Doctor: "Her hearing is fine."

Eva: "But he should have spoken up, right? I read somewhere that not speaking is an early sign of autism."

Doctor: "But he didn't show any other signs of autism. I wouldn't have thought that far ahead, he's just quiet, there's no need to worry about that." (27.06)

Kevin is taken to the doctor because Eva suspects that he has hearing problems, as he rarely engages with her. Eva also considers the possibility that Kevin may have autism, based on the traits she recognizes. However, the doctor disagrees, stating that Kevin is simply a quiet child. This scene illustrates how Eva is unable to comprehend what Kevin is going through. She does not realize that Kevin is struggling mentally, which contributes to the desires emerging from the symbolic process he is experiencing.

In the following scene, Eva attempts to engage with Kevin by encouraging him to say the word "Momi" to her. Kevin refuses, and when Eva asks him to come back, he still does not comply. This moment reflects how the symbolic stage influences Kevin's perception of his mother's responses, allowing him to form his understanding of her personality and reactions.

In another scene, Eva discusses with her husband Franklin the issue of where to live. During this conversation, Kevin appears to mock his father, but Franklin responds calmly, as seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Franklin's subtle response when Kevin mocking him (33.03)



Figure 4. Eva's harsh response when Kevin mocking her (33.22)

In contrast to Eva's reaction in Figure 6, when Eva spoke, Kevin mocked her persistently, leading Eva to strike his hand. This moment highlights the strained relationship between Kevin and his mother, which plays a significant role in the development of Kevin's psychopathic behavior due to the childhood trauma he endured. Despite the harsh treatment, Kevin sought affection from his mother but was unable to receive it. As a result, Kevin's symbolic role becomes crucial in shaping and intensifying his desires.

In another scene, Eva has a room filled with maps that she decorated. However, outside the room, Kevin insults the maps, calling them stupid. On one occasion, when Eva is not around, Kevin destroys the room by spraying ink on the walls. This act can be seen as Kevin's attempt to gain attention from his mother. Additionally, it also demonstrates Kevin's hatred towards her, as he destroys something that brings her joy. In response, Eva reacts emotionally by crushing the water gun toy Kevin had been playing with, stepping on it in frustration.

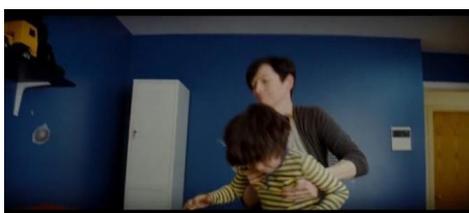


Figure 5&6. Eva slams Kevin, breaking his arm (44.46 - 44.53)

In Figure 5&6, we see that the response from Eva creates a symbolic stage for Kevin, where he stores these actions to later express his emotions. Kevin also endured harsh treatment from Eva, who slammed him in

frustration, injuring his hand because he had been defecating. As Kevin grew older, he gained a younger sister. In one scene, Kevin observes his mother's happiness after giving birth to his sister. The scene then shifts to a moment where his father attempts to teach Kevin archery, and Kevin shows great joy and appreciation for his father's efforts in teaching him this skill. Archery as depicted as his curiosity and ambition. Bow and arrow can also be connected to the themes of security and power, as well as Kevin's desire to master and control his surrounding environment.

Kevin's Relationship Influenced By His Desire

According to Lacan, desire serves as a defense or a prohibition to prevent one from exceeding certain boundaries. Kevin's desires impact those around him, including his family and friends. His longing to be accepted, respected, and free from pain influences how he interacts with others and how he perceives himself. Kevin's desire emerges from his feeling of not receiving what he should have as a child, acting as a defense mechanism for his unmet needs. However, the film does not delve into Kevin's relationships with his friends and teachers.

Kevin acts out in ways that distance him from his family because he yearns to be accepted and respected. His aggressive behavior, especially against Celia, is frequently a result of his desire to be perceived as strong and in charge. It is possible to interpret this anger as a projection of his inner conflicts; Kevin sees Celia as both a competitor for their mother's love and a representation of the love he believes he has been denied. In this way, Kevin uses Celia as a target for his unfulfilled needs and frustrations, demonstrating Lacan's theory that desire frequently takes the form of rivalry and conflict.

Furthermore, the effects of Kevin's wants are further highlighted by his relationships with peers and authoritative officials. His incapacity to establish intimate bonds with teachers or friends is indicative of a more serious psychological issue. According to the movie, Kevin's protective strategies keep him from interacting with people in a genuine way, which stifles his need for connection. This discrepancy supports Lacan's claim that desire is inescapably connected to the Other; Kevin's inability to manage these connections shows how unmet his desires are.

By looking at "Kevin's Relationship Influenced By His Desire," it is evident that Kevin's behaviors are not only acts of hate but rather reflect a deeper desire for approval and recognition. In a world where he feels helpless, his violent outbursts may be seen as desperate attempts to establish authority. The movie powerfully

illustrates how unmet wants can turn into destructive behaviors that finally result in disaster.

A. Kevin's Relationship With Eva

As previously mentioned, Kevin's interactions with Eva, who plays the role of his mother in the film, are shown in an indirect manner. Throughout the movie, Eva repeatedly expresses that she never wanted Kevin, and this sentiment influences how she treats him, as well as her ability to communicate and interact with others. The lack of effective communication between them from childhood onwards has negatively impacted Kevin's mental health. As a result, Kevin struggles to fully understand or receive Eva's messages. According to Lacan's theory of psychoanalytic communication, communication is a fundamental process in which a sender transmits a message to a receiver. Lacan suggests that communication is an act in which the sender receives an inverted version of their own message from the recipient.

Indirectly, Kevin's poor communication with his mother highlights how his desires were expressed in subtle ways. He longs for attention from her, and this longing grows unconsciously due to the unfulfilled needs he experiences during the symbolic phase. Lacan views subconscious desire as essential, believing it surpasses conscious desire. Kevin's yearning contributes to his behavior as a troubled child in Eva's eyes, which drives him to seek more attention. This also strains Eva's patience, leading her to frequently resort to violence, further disturbing Kevin's mental state and fostering his psychopathic tendencies.

In addition to the lack of communication, the relationship between Kevin and Eva is weak. This is reflected in Kevin's personality and behavior. He often expresses his negative traits towards Eva, but his dominant side is directed towards his father. Kevin also presents himself as a deceptive individual, which causes Franklin, his father, to doubt Eva's complaints. This is because Kevin typically shows his best behavior when he is with his father.

B. Kevin's Relationship With Celia

The phenomenal imbalance in Kevin's connection with his younger sister, Celia, in "We Need to Talk About Kevin" illustrates the intricacies of family dynamics as well as the psychological effects of favoritism and neglect. It is clear from the time Celia is born that Kevin's sentiments of alienation and anger are made worse by the love and care their mother, Eva, shows for Celia. This partiality causes tension between Kevin and Eva as well as between Kevin and Celia, who unintentionally becomes the object of his violence.

The film doesn't really show how Kevin interacts with his younger sister, Celia. But there is a scene where when Celia was just born, she splashed her sister with water until she cried. Kevin's relationships with Celia become more harsh and manipulative as he gets older. His actions, which include tying her up and intimidating her with a vacuum cleaner, range from taunting to downright assault. These behaviors reveal Kevin's underlying problems with authority and control, which might be brought on by his rejection by Eva and feelings of inadequacy. Celia, on the other hand, is presented as naive and innocent, frequently loving her brother in spite of his abuse. This interplay highlights the tragic nature of their relationship; Kevin is harsh and emotionally unavailable while Celia tries to win his acceptance and affection.



Figure 7. Kevin splashes newborn Celia with water (53.43)

It can be seen that Kevin wants to dominate and wants to be respected by his younger sister in the future. In this way, maybe Kevin wants to be considered by his younger sister and wants to be accepted. Apart from that, maybe this was Kevin's way of covering up the pain he felt at that time.

C. Kevin's Relationship With Franklin

From the beginning, it seemed that only Franklin was genuinely happy about Kevin's birth. He was always patient with Kevin, who, as a child, often displayed troublesome behavior. However, it appears that Kevin may have a split personality or the ability to manipulate. He presented himself as a good child in front of his father to win his affection. Yet, when he was alone with his mother, he behaved differently, becoming mischievous and hard to control. Kevin consistently behaved well with his father, to the point where Franklin even tried to teach him archery to keep him engaged in new activities.



Figure 8. Franklin's interaction with Kevin (59.17)

Figure 8 shows that Franklin is training Kevin in archery, and Kevin is happy about it. This shows that their

interaction is going well. While in the right figure, Franklin is concerned about Kevin's broken hand by asking about Kevin's condition.

3.2. The Implications of Kevin's Symbolic Stage On His Mental Health

Lacan's theories of desire and the symbolic order shape Kevin's interactions with others and his self-understanding. Unfulfilled desires impact how he relates to those around him and how he perceives himself. At the same time, the symbolic stage influences the way he interacts with others, shaping his personality and mental state. The symbolic also contributes to the formation of trauma within an individual's subconscious, which in turn drives the creation of desire on a conscious level.

Indicators of Mental Health Problems Caused by Symbolic Development

This chapter will discuss the relationship between children's symbolic development and its impact on mental health. Symbolic development, which is an important part of the early childhood cognitive stage, not only serves to recognize objects and concepts, but also plays a role in the formation of their identity and social interactions. An inability to think symbolically may indicate mental health issues, such as difficulties in adapting to social environments or experiencing emotional disturbances. Therefore, it is important to identify indicators that can help detect mental health problems that may arise from stunted symbolic development. By understanding this relationship, we can better provide appropriate support for children in this critical phase of their development.

In the film, Kevin indirectly shows that he has mental problems caused by the symbolic stage process. Here are some signs:

B. Persona and Shadow

Lacan in his theory of "Persona and Shadow", invites us to understand the complex dynamics between the displayed identity and the hidden aspects of the individual self. In Lacan's theory, the concept of persona can be seen as a representation of the self that is formed through social interactions and external expectations, while the shadow reflects the part of the self that is repressed or unrecognized, often containing desires and emotions that are deemed incompatible with social norms. Both play an important role in the formation of an individual's identity and how they interact with the world around them.

Lacan emphasizes that the process of ego formation occurs through the mirror stage, where individuals begin to recognize themselves in the reflection of others. In this case, the persona functions as a "mask" worn to meet social expectations, while the shadow becomes an

overlooked aspect that nonetheless influences behavior and interpersonal relationships. By understanding the interaction between persona and shadow, we can more deeply explore how individuals struggle to strike a balance between the self-image they wish to present and the parts of themselves that are often hidden.

In the film, Kevin is portrayed as a child with two distinct personalities. His persona and shadow represent two opposing aspects of his character. The persona reflects his good side, while the shadow reveals his darker side. Kevin's persona is evident when he interacts with Franklin and Celia. He strives to appear well-behaved in front of others, aiming to maintain positive relationships with the rest of the family and avoid raising suspicion. In contrast, Kevin's shadow is displayed in his relationship with Eva, his mother. He constantly misbehaves and seems to harbor hatred towards her, creating chaos in an attempt to manipulate and control her.



Figure 9. Kevin's persona (1.04.25)

Franklin: "Kev, come on, give me a hand."

Kevin: "Sure, dad!"

In figure 9 and the dialog above, it shows that Kevin is trying to show his persona or good side to his father and sister. Kevin did this so that his father and sister are confident in him.



Figure 10 Kevin's shadow (53.36)

Figure 10 is the opposite, as she shows her shadow or bad side to her mother, Eva. Kevin does this only to Eva, because he is not happy when his mother is happy and tends to want more attention from his mother.

B. Manipulation and Aggressiveness

Aggressiveness (*agressivité*) refers to actions that reflect a desire to harm, damage, or irritate others. This type of behavior can manifest in physical, verbal, or psychological forms. In the context of mental health

disorders, aggressiveness is commonly linked to conditions such as psychopathy, antisocial behavior, and narcissism. Manipulative behavior, on the other hand, involves using deceptive tactics to control or influence others. This can include lying, gaslighting, or making judgmental remarks. Like aggressiveness, manipulative behavior is often associated with the same mental health conditions.



Figure 11. Kevin manipulates his family (1.29.49)

Eva: "What's the point for? You never ride your bike."
Kevin: "I bought it cheap on the internet, I'll sell it expensive at school."

Kevin, being an intelligent child, used his smarts to manipulate his family. One example of this is when he purchased a padlock, or bike lock, at a low price online. He then told his family that he planned to sell it at a higher price at school.



Figure 12&13. Kevin kills his school friends, show his aggressiveness (1.37.17 & 1.37.25)

Figure 12&13 illustrates Kevin's aggressive behavior when it was revealed that his primary intention for practicing archery was to kill his friends at school, as well as his father and younger brother. Another instance of Kevin's aggression occurs when he destroys the room his mother had just decorated with paint. This act demonstrates Kevin's desire to control his surroundings. This also reinforces Lacan's theory, which is rooted in

Freud's ideas about the connection between love and hate. In the film, Kevin kills his father and sister because they are the two people his mother loves, while Kevin harbors hatred for anything that brings his mother happiness. Lacan also suggested that this dynamic is fundamental to understanding human psychology.

C. Alienation

The exploration of alienation in "We Need to Talk About Kevin" is intricately tied to Kevin's relationship with his mother, Eva, particularly after the birth of his sister, Celia. This shift in attention from Kevin to Celia creates a palpable sense of neglect that exacerbates Kevin's feelings of isolation. Lacan's theory of alienation posits that individuals often experience a disconnect from their desires and identities, which is vividly illustrated in Kevin's life. As Eva directs more affection towards Celia, Kevin's emotional needs remain unmet, leading to a profound sense of alienation not only from his mother but also from society at large.

From an early age, Kevin exhibits signs of social withdrawal, refusing to engage with peers and showing no interest in forming friendships. His negative response when Eva suggests he play with friends underscores his disconnection. This lack of social interaction is not limited to his external relationships; within the family unit, Kevin is similarly isolated. The film portrays him as a deeply introverted child who struggles with the fundamental aspects of socialization, which ultimately contributes to his troubling mental state.

In the context of Lacan's theory, Kevin's alienation can be viewed as a failure to navigate the symbolic order, a stage where individuals learn to relate to others through shared symbols and language. His inability to connect reflects a disruption in this development, suggesting that the emotional neglect he experiences at home may have stunted his ability to form healthy relationships. The culmination of these factors leads to Kevin's violent outburst, illustrating how early experiences of alienation can manifest in destructive behaviors.

"We Need to Talk About Kevin" serves as a poignant examination of how emotional neglect and alienation during critical developmental stages can lead to severe consequences. The film invites viewers to reflect on the complexities of motherhood, societal expectations, and the psychological ramifications of alienation as seen through the lens of Lacanian theory.

The Mother

Anxiety is commonly linked to feelings of loss. In Kevin's case, the absence of a maternal figure deeply traumatizes him, leading him to inadvertently traumatize

himself (Lacan, 1956). In the film *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, Kevin's experience from birth demonstrates that he was never wanted or considered by his mother, Eva. Throughout his childhood, Kevin consistently faced harsh punishment from her, which left a lasting impact on his mind, triggering a subconscious trauma. Lacan's theory explains that trauma originates from the subconscious mind, which can, in turn, fuel human desires. Kevin's experiences with his mother made him feel disrespected and unloved, causing him to recognize the absence of the motherly affection he should have received.

When his sister Celia was born, Kevin was confronted with a situation that mirrored his own past. Seeing his mother happy and attentive to Celia, as opposed to her reaction when he was born, reminded Kevin of the neglect he endured. This triggered his past trauma, and he began to ignore Celia, possibly as a way to cope with the unresolved feelings of rejection. Kevin's behavior reflects his desire to make others experience the same emotional pain he felt. According to Lacan, the absence of a mother figure is perceived as a rejection trauma, akin to the loss of maternal love. Freud illustrated how a child deals with this loss by symbolizing the mother's presence and absence through play and language, which forms part of the symbolic stage.



Figure 14. Kevin acts like he's in the show (1.40.39)

In figure 14, Kevin is depicted standing on stage as if he is performing, which suggests that his goal in killing his friend was to gain attention and recognition, something he had never truly experienced before.

The conclusion drawn from the discussion above is that Kevin undergoes a symbolic stage that significantly shapes his transition from childhood to adolescence. This symbolic stage also plays a critical role in influencing the desires that emerge in his conscious mind, which in turn triggers the trauma he experienced during his upbringing. As a result, this trauma profoundly affects how Kevin responds to it, shaping his attitude and actions. The impact of this trauma on his mental health is substantial enough to lead Kevin down the path of psychopathy, also influencing his ability to interact with others socially.

CONCLUSION

The symbolic stage of desire in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* plays a crucial role in understanding Kevin's mental health and behavior. Lacan's theory suggests that the symbolic stage is the phase where an individual's desires are shaped by the symbolic order—the system of signs and symbols that govern human communication and interactions. In Kevin's case, his desires are influenced by the symbolic order of his family and society, which is marked by a lack of emotional support and empathy.

Kevin's experiences of emotional neglect and misunderstanding led to trauma and isolation, compounded by his mother's harsh treatment and his father's absence. As a result, Kevin's desires became distorted and unhealthy, leading him to seek attention and validation through destructive behaviors. The symbolic stage also affects Kevin's identity and shadow. His identity is shaped by his need to be accepted and noticed, while his shadow is defined by his desire to manipulate and control. Furthermore, the symbolic stage significantly influences Kevin's interactions with others, particularly within his family. This stage creates a duality in Kevin's character, a contrast between his Persona and Shadow, which stems from the conflicting desires and expectations shaped by the symbolic order in his family and society.

The symbolic order also affects how Kevin interprets the world around him, determining the development of his personality. The lack of affection and the harsh treatment he received from his mother made him more aggressive and manipulative. Additionally, Kevin feels alienated from the world outside his family. This is reflected in the absence of scenes showing Kevin with friends or interacting with classmates, which highlights his antisocial tendencies. Mentally disturbed by the trauma of being unwanted and neglected during his childhood, Kevin, in his adolescence, seeks an identity in an attempt to be understood and to gain attention. The mistreatment he endured shaped his behavior, which he then directed towards those closest to him.

In conclusion, the symbolic stage of desire in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is a multifaceted concept deeply rooted in Lacanian theory. The film illustrates how the symbolic order influences individual desires, resulting in both positive and negative consequences. By applying Lacan's theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of Kevin's mental health and behavior, and how his desires are shaped by the symbolic structures of family and society.

SUGGESTION

Based on the research findings, the author offers recommendations regarding psychoanalysis, particularly on topics related to symbolic stages and desires. The

author also suggests areas for future research on the same subject.

The author encourages other researchers to delve deeper into the influence of family dynamics in shaping the personality and mentality of the main character. Given the rise in children growing up in incomplete families, many of whom struggle to adhere to societal norms, there is a growing need to explore how the absence of proper familial support, education, and presence of family members contributes to mental health issues in children. The author recommends that future research focus on the role of family in shaping children's character, which could be expanded beyond films to real-life situations and literature.

Additionally, the author suggests that future studies examine Kevin's psychological development through different lenses, such as exploring other stages of needs like the real or imaginary, to gain further insights into his behavior.

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