

The Animated Psyche: Analyzing *Inside Out 2* (2024) Through Freudian Psychoanalysis

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes *Inside Out 2* (2024), directed by Kelsey Mann and produced by Pixar, through Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic concepts of the Id, Ego, and Superego. Focusing on Riley's emotional journey through adolescence, the film explores how it conveys complex psychological ideas through animation. Using a Freudian lens, the study examines narrative elements, character dynamics, and emotional interactions. While previous research has explored symbolism and emotional expression in the film, few studies have directly linked them to Freudian theory. This study fills that gap by analyzing selected scenes and character relationships through a psychoanalytic literary lens. By viewing emotions like Joy and Anxiety as representations of the mind's structure, the thesis argues that the film effectively adapts Freudian theory for modern audiences. Ultimately, it contributes to discussions on the intersection of psychology, media, highlighting the film's value in illustrating emotional and cognitive development.

Keywords: Adolescence, Animation, Emotional Development, Freudian Theory, Psychoanalysis

INTRODUCTION

The "dark" psychology that is frequently shown in films results from a spotlight on the more challenging or mysterious elements of human nature, including moral ambiguity, trauma, and internal conflict. The complexity and potential evil in human nature are highlighted by filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock, who famously employed Freudian psychoanalysis to create individuals whose sickening acts and inner conflicts mirror the tension between unconscious urges and social rules (Chen, 2023). According to Kjeldgaard-Christiansen et al. (2020), this suggests that audience connection with darkness in film can be both psychological and personal. In general, dark psychology is frequently used in films to examine the boundaries of human experience, challenge social taboos, and captivate viewers with gripping, if scary, stories.

Inside Out 2, a film created by Pixar Animation Studios and directed by Kelsey Mann, continues the distinctive perspective of emotions as living entities. *Inside Out 2* carries on the studio's legacy of merging entertainment with profound psychological understanding. Following the highly praised *Inside Out* (2015), which showcased personified emotions within a young girl's mind, this film transitions to Riley's teenage years. Riley, a young girl experiencing puberty, is the central character of the film, which explores the evolving nature of her emotions that live inside of her head, including Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and the newly introduced Anxiety, Envy, Ennui, and Embarrassment. These emotions act as a character and

the main focus of the movie; their interaction and behaviour would eventually shape Riley's actions in the real world during her teenage years.

The emphasis on Riley's adolescence in *Inside Out 2* is consistent with psychological studies that highlight adolescence as a period of increased emotional complexity, identity discovery, and inner conflict (Guyer, Silk, & Nelson, 2016). Neurobiological abnormalities in the brain during this developmental stage heighten emotional experiences and impact teenagers' ability to control their emotions and negotiate social interactions (Guyer, Silk, & Nelson, 2016). The movie offers a clear framework for comprehending emotional complexity, particularly for kids and teenagers, by illustrating emotions and demonstrating how they affect thoughts and behavior. This helps them identify and better control their emotions (Ju, 2024).

By portraying emotions as separate characters, viewers—particularly kids and teenagers—are better able to appreciate the complexity of human emotions and realize that they are all valuable, which can lessen the stigma associated with mental health conditions (Ginn, 2010). By drawing audiences into the inner lives and struggles of people, films can be effective teaching tools that promote tolerance and psychological understanding (Shimamura, 2013). Additionally, by using humor and familiar scenarios, these films enhance audience engagement and make psychological concepts more accessible to understand. Psychological concepts are simpler to understand and retain when humor and familiar, everyday scenarios are used to increase engagement (Shimamura, 2013). In contrast with typical psychological films that frequently employ gloomy or scary stories to illustrate how the mind works (Ginn, 2010), *Inside Out 2* takes a lively, humorous approach to examining the human psyche.

The film breaks the stereotype that psychological content must be unpleasant or unapproachable by personifying basic emotions in an eye-catching, family-friendly animation (Shimamura, 2013). In addition to being entertaining, its vibrant color scheme, lighthearted conversation, and focus on friendship make it a powerful teaching tool. Through sympathetic character arcs, viewers of all ages can understand complex concepts such as emotional control, memory formation, and identity development (Ju, 2024). *Inside Out 2* simplifies psychological information in this way, making fundamental theories understandable while maintaining their nuance.

Numerous studies have examined psychoanalytic theories in cinema and literature. For example, Rofiq et al. (2024) investigate color symbolism in *Inside Out 2*, exploring how various colors depict emotional states. Although their research provides an understanding of the film's visual language, it does not interact with Freudian psychoanalysis. Through the psychoanalytic lens of Freud, Damayanti (2023) examines Antonio Sandoval in *The Big 4*, demonstrating that his actions are primarily motivated by the id and represent impetuous and ethically unbridled behavior. Another study by Pratama and Rullyanti (2021) examines Kevin's ego in the "Split" movie. Kevin in *Split* displays eight different ego personalities based on Freudian defensive mechanisms, with the "weak lady" ego showing up the least and the "childish" ego showing up the most, revealing his internal trauma and psychological regression. The deficiencies in current research highlight the necessity for a more thorough examination using Freudian theory to enhance our comprehension.

This research seeks to bridge these gaps by analyzing *Inside Out 2* through Freud's Id, Ego, and Superego framework. This thesis seeks to show how the film contributes to depicting psychological development in contemporary animated movies by exploring how these psychological models appear in Riley's emotional experiences. The central thesis of this work suggests that *Inside Out 2* illustrates the fundamental framework of Freudian psychoanalysis, offering a powerful representation of emotional and psychological growth.

METHOD

This study employs Freudian psychoanalytic theory as its analytical framework to examine the depiction of Id, Ego, and Superego in the animated film *Inside Out 2* (2024). The analysis centers on character interactions, dialogue, and visual elements that demonstrate the manifestation of Freudian concepts within the narrative structure. The research object is *Inside Out 2* (2024), an animated feature produced by Pixar Animation Studios and directed by Kelsey Mann. Primary data consists of textual elements including character dialogue and verbal interactions, while secondary data comprises visual elements extracted from key film scenes. Data collection involves systematic close viewing of the film to identify significant moments where character behavior, dialogue, and narrative development illustrate the psychological dynamics central to Freudian theory. Scenes demonstrating interactions and conflicts representative of Id, Ego, and Superego dynamics are systematically selected and documented through screenshots and dialogue transcription. The analytical procedure involves detailed scene-by-scene observation and categorical organization of evidence according to the three core Freudian constructs: Id, Ego, and Superego. Each emotion's actions and dialogue are mapped onto corresponding Freudian concepts to illuminate the psychological dynamics at play and to understand how the interplay among these components influences the protagonist's behavioral patterns and decision-making processes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The sequel to the critically acclaimed animated film "*Inside Out*," titled "*Inside Out 2*," continues to explore the complex emotional landscape of its protagonist, Riley. In this film, emotions such as Joy, Anger, Disgust, and the newly introduced emotions play pivotal roles in shaping her experiences and choices. Analyzing these emotions through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic theory, particularly the concepts of Id, Ego, and Superego, provides a deeper understanding of their behavior and actions within the narrative framework.

The Dynamics of Personification of Emotions In *Inside Out 2*

In *Inside Out 2* (2024), Pixar advances its exploration of Riley's inner life by introducing five new emotions—Anxiety, Envy, Embarrassment, Ennui, and Ennervation—alongside the original five (Joy, Sadness, Anger, Disgust, Fear). This rich emotional ensemble allows for an in-depth mapping of Freud's tripartite psyche: Id, Ego, and Superego. The following discussion demonstrates how each emotion exemplifies one of these structural components, drawing on key scenes and dialogue to illustrate their psychological functions.

THE ID

Freud's Id embodies the instinctual, pleasure-seeking drives of the psyche, unconstrained by logic or morality (Freud, 1923). Anger in *Inside Out 2* most visibly manifests these characteristics. At the film's outset, Riley oversleeps on her first day at summer camp. Her mother's frustrated admonition—"Riley, you aren't packed yet?"—triggers Anger's immediate takeover of the console. Under his control, Riley snaps, "Ugh, you're always on me! Can't you just lay off, for like one second?!" (13:30). This outburst illustrates the Id's dominance:

instinctual gratification of the impulse to lash out, with no regard for consequences (Freud, 1923).



Figure 1. Anger is Mad at Riley's Mom, 13:30

Beyond that opening, Anger's pyro-like reaction repeatedly demonstrates that unchecked impulses disrupt interpersonal harmony. For instance, when Riley's new teammates critique her play style, Anger ignites, urging a harsh retort—an instant desire to assert dominance rather than to reflect on feedback. Only after his exile does Riley learn the costs of unmoderated anger: fractured friendships and self-alienation. Thus, Anger's early scenes concretize the Id's "pleasure principle," demonstrating Freud's assertion that the psyche's first task is to discharge tension, regardless of social norms (Freud, 1923).

While less explosive than Anger, Disgust embodies another facet of the Id: avoidance of unpleasant stimuli to maximize comfort (Freud, 1923). Immediately after Anger's scolding scene, Riley wakes, sniffs herself, and—guided by Disgust—declares, "I'm too gross to go to camp or anywhere ever again!" (14:15). Disgust's hasty command, "Let the professionals handle this," prompts Riley to shower, a literal "pleasure restoration" after perceived contamination.



Figure 2. Disgust Reacting to the Looks from Riley's Friend, 15:40

Later, in the car, a fleeting glance from Riley's old friends evokes Disgust's sudden control: "We got a look! I don't like this" (15:40). Without pausing to interpret the glance's intent, Disgust pressures Riley to interrogate her friends—prioritizing the Id's desire for emotional clarity over social nuance. This scene reveals how Disgust's avoidance reflexes can impede authentic connection: by overemphasizing immediate comfort and safety, Disgust sacrifices empathy and hinders deeper bonding (Freud, 1923).

Envy, introduced when Riley meets Val Ortiz, illustrates the Id's social-comparison drive. Envy's first words—"Whoa, look at her hair! We need hair like that!" (18:00)—are followed by Riley grabbing Val's locks. This impulse reflects the adolescent Id's fixation on external validation: a primal urge to appropriate desirable traits in others. Contemporary

research on social comparison supports this portrayal, linking envy with impulsive imitation and self-esteem fluctuations in teens (Smith & Kim, 2007).



Figure 3. Envy Met Val Ortiz for the First Time, 18:00

Envy's takeover is brief but potent: Riley gushes, "My gosh, I love the red in your hair," and momentarily loses self-possession. By foregrounding Envy's immediate pursuit of self-enhancement, the film dramatizes the Id's relentless quest for pleasure and status, regardless of social etiquette (Freud, 1923). As Envy recedes, Riley must reconcile her idealized self-image with reality, signaling the necessity of Ego mediation.

THE EGO

Where the Id demands instinctual expression, the Ego negotiates between internal drives and external constraints. It governs realistic decision-making and impulse control (Freud, 1923). In *Inside Out 2*, Joy, Fear, and Sadness assume this mediating role at different junctures. At film-start, Joy still leans toward the Id's "happiness at all costs" approach. After Riley's successful hockey match, Sadness cautions, "Riley is so hard on herself." Joy responds by unveiling her "super high-tech Riley protection system" to eject "bad" memories (07:55). By attempting to erase distress rather than process it, Joy exhibits the Ego's early developmental stage, where it is immature and conflates reality with idealization (Freud, 1923).



Figure 4. Joy Reflecting on Her Mistakes and Starting to Act as the Ego 49:50

However, Joy's exile catalyzes her maturation. Stranded in the Memory Dump, she confronts her fallibility. In a pivotal 49:50 scene, she concedes, "Anxiety is right. Riley doesn't need us as much as she needs them." Here, Joy accepts that happiness must coexist with other emotions. Her internal monologue, acknowledging "I don't have all the answers," marks the Ego's growth: an embrace of reality's complexity, and a willingness to integrate distressing emotions rather than exclude them (Freud, 1923).



Figure 5. Fear Taking Control of the Console, 18:40

Fear consistently operates on the reality principle. In Riley's encounter with Val Ortiz, Riley's unbridled excitement propels her to rattle off trivia: "You set the record as a junior, your favorite color is red, and your skates..." (18:35). Fear interrupts: "Why are we still holding her hand?" (18:40), steering Riley toward appropriate social conduct. Rather than repressing delight, Fear tempers it, ensuring Riley's behavior aligns with social norms and personal safety. By voicing caution, Fear exemplifies the Ego's ongoing task: to mitigate risks without impeding adaptive functioning (Freud, 1923).

Although originally framed as an obstacle to Joy, Sadness emerges as a central Ego agent. When Anger's outburst drives a rift between Riley and her mother, Sadness intervenes, guiding Riley to admit guilt and longing (13:50). This moment of vulnerability fosters empathy, mends relationships, and underscores Freud's insight that healthy Ego development requires acknowledging—not avoiding—pain (Lapsley & Stey, 2011).



Figure 6. Sadness Expresses Riley's True Feelings after the Control of the Id, 13:50

Furthermore, Sadness's later collaboration with Joy to heal Riley's core memories illustrates the mature Ego's integrative function. By combining Joy's optimism with Sadness's depth, the film portrays a psyche capable of complex, balanced responses—truly reflecting Freud's notion of an Ego that harmonizes conflicting internal demands and external realities (Freud, 1923).

THE SUPEREGO

The Superego enforces moral standards and societal rules through guilt and inhibition (Freud, 1923). In this sequel, Anxiety, Embarrassment, and Ennui personify overactive Superego functions, often at the expense of Riley's well-being. Anxiety dominates as the Superego's most forceful manifestation. After Riley leaves her hometown, Anxiety declares, "We need new friends or else we'll be alone in high school" (21:30), immediately discarding Riley's old friendships. This decision does not stem from genuine social need but from fear-based internalized standards: the belief that only "the right" peers can secure future success.



Figure 7. Anxiety's Excessive Caution, and Fear at its Peak, 1:15:35

Anxiety's future-scenario montage (22:20) concretizes her Superego drive. She forecasts Riley's potential social failures—"she eats alone, no one knows her name"—and uses guilt and shame as behavioral levers (Freud, 1923). Ultimately, her attempt to "build a better Riley" by jettisoning self-esteem (27:40) precipitates Riley's mental collapse in the final game (1:15:35). The film thereby dramatizes Freud's warning: an overbearing Superego can stifle the Id and Ego, resulting in paralysis, depression, or psychosomatic crisis (Freud, 1923).

Embarrassment functions as the Superego's swift shame detector. In the locker room, after Riley ignores Coach Roberts, Embarrassment seizes control: the coach confiscates her phone, and Embarrassment quietly ensures compliance (24:35). Rather than an explosive Id impulse, Embarrassment's approach is subtle, prompting Riley to adhere to social norms through instantaneous shame.



Figure 8. Embarrassment Took Control, 25:50

When team members whisper criticisms—"That Michigan girl is off to a rough start"—Embarrassment again intervenes (25:50), internalizing peer judgment and steering Riley away from further faux pas. This mechanism illustrates how the Superego employs guilt and shame micro-adjustments to enforce social conformity (Freud, 1923). Although less prominent, Ennui represents the Superego's demand for normative coolness. At Val Ortiz's invitation, Ennui doubts Riley's excitement—"This is exciting, but we can't let her know we're excited" (20:33)—and prompts Riley to respond with apathetic "Yeah, sounds good." Ennui thus suppresses genuine affect to maintain an ideal of detached sophistication.



Figure 9. Ennui Took Control to Help Riley Act Cool, 44:50

Later, when faced with the Fire Hawks' disdain for Riley's taste in music, Ennui sarcastically endorses their preference—"Oh yeah. I love Get Up and Glow" (44:55). By forcing Riley to conform her likes to group norms, Ennui dramatizes the Superego's role in policing self-expression to uphold an internalized "cool ideal" (Freud, 1923; Lazarus, 1991).

The Influence of the New Emotions During Puberty



Figure 10. Riley in High School, 1:23:35

Puberty brings Riley a tidal wave of social and emotional challenges, and *Inside Out 2* introduces four new emotions—Envy, Anxiety, Embarrassment, and Ennui—to dramatize how adolescence reshapes her inner world. As these voices assert themselves, Riley experiences the identity search and distress characteristic of adolescence, and her original emotions must recalibrate: Joy and Sadness increasingly enact the Ego's mediating role between the Id's drives and the Superego's moral constraints (Guyer, Silk, & Nelson, 2016).

Envy bursts onto the scene the moment Riley spies Val Ortiz's fiery-red hair and instantly seizes control of the console, exclaiming, "My gosh, I love the red in your hair!" This unfiltered impulse captures the adolescent urge to measure up against seemingly flawless peers, illustrating the social-comparison trap in which the desire for external approval eclipses authenticity (Meier & Schäfer, 2018).

By contrast, Anxiety hovers over every decision like a storm cloud. When Riley learns her childhood friends will attend different high schools, Anxiety warns, "We need new friends or else we'll be alone in high school...the next three days could determine the next four years of our lives!" This relentless worst-case forecasting mirrors teens' fear of rejection and demonstrates the Superego's moral vigilance, as Riley overthinks every choice to avoid social missteps (Harper et al., 2006; Freud, 1923).

Meanwhile, Ennui enforces a façade of cool detachment, suppressing genuine excitement. When Val invites Riley to meet her teammates, Riley—under Ennui's influence—responds with a blasé "Yeah, sounds good." By dampening pleasure to fit in, Ennui exemplifies

how an overbearing Superego can stifle the Id's natural impulses and diminish emotional richness (Freud, 1923).

Embarrassment then strikes at the first hint of social misstep. After the Red Hawks coach punishes Riley for goofing off and a teammate mutters, "That Michigan girl is off to a rough start," Embarrassment floods the console and triggers Riley's reflexive face-palm. This "shame-freeze" captures how, during puberty, even minor mistakes can feel catastrophic, inhibiting risk-taking and authentic self-expression (Guyer et al., 2016).



Figure 11. All the Emotions Working Together, 1:25:20

In the film's climax, Anxiety's Superego-driven rigidity culminates in a breakdown, and Joy—now fully embracing her Ego role—intervenes to mediate between the Id's desires and the Superego's demands. By guiding all emotions to collaborate, Joy helps Riley face and integrate these conflicting urges, underscoring Freud's insight that psychological health in puberty depends on a flexible Ego capable of harmonizing instinct, morality, and reality to forge a more stable, complex sense of self (Freud, 1923; Guyer et al., 2016).

This study reveals that *Inside Out 2* (2024) effectively translates Freudian psychoanalytic theory into an accessible narrative framework by personifying psychological constructs as distinct emotional characters. The Id is manifested through Anger, Disgust, and Envy, whose impulsive actions exemplify the pleasure principle as they pursue immediate gratification without regard for consequences. Anger responds violently to stressors, Disgust rejects uncomfortable experiences, and Envy drives Riley toward social comparison, collectively demonstrating the instinctual nature of the Id (Freud, 1923). In contrast, the Ego emerges through Joy, Fear, and Sadness, who function as mediators between Riley's desires and reality. Joy evolves from seeking constant happiness to acknowledging uncertainty and balancing impulses with practical constraints, while Fear implements protective measures based on the reality principle, and Sadness facilitates emotional depth and growth. The Superego becomes evident through the newly introduced emotions of Anxiety, Embarrassment, and Ennui, which embody internalized social and moral standards. These emotions act as conscience and ego-ideal, imposing guilt, shame, and cynical detachment to regulate Riley's behavior according to perceived social norms.

The introduction of adolescent-specific emotions significantly enriches the psychoanalytic framework by illustrating the heightened complexity of puberty. Envy intensifies social comparison and conformity pressure, Anxiety amplifies fear of rejection and over-cautious decision-making, Embarrassment triggers immediate shame that inhibits spontaneity, and Ennui represents protective emotional withdrawal under stress. These emotions collectively strengthen the Superego's influence during adolescence, forcing Joy as the Ego to mediate increasingly complex internal conflicts beyond Riley's core childhood impulses (Guyer, Silk, & Nelson, 2016). The film's narrative arc demonstrates the psychological consequences of imbalance among these three psychic structures: Id-driven

impulses lead to social missteps, Superego dominance results in anxiety and repression, while a strengthened Ego facilitating collaboration among all emotions ultimately restores psychological equilibrium. This progression aligns with Freud's developmental theory, wherein psychological health depends on the Ego's capacity to negotiate between primal urges and moral demands within the constraints of reality.

CONCLUSION

This research confirms that *Inside Out 2* faithfully adapts Freud's tripartite model of Id, Ego, and Superego by aligning discrete emotional characters with pleasure-seeking, reality-negotiating, and moral-regulating functions respectively. The film's dramatization of living emotions not only makes psychoanalytic theory accessible to diverse audiences but also demonstrates how this framework can be extended to encompass developmental transitions, specifically the shift from childhood's simpler emotional landscape to the complex social dynamics of adolescence. Rather than depicting these psychic structures as perpetually antagonistic, the film ultimately illustrates their collaborative potential in achieving psychological well-being.

However, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The analysis focuses exclusively on one film within a specific genre, which may limit the generalizability of findings regarding how contemporary media adapts psychoanalytic theory. Future research could expand this investigation by examining other animated or live-action films that incorporate psychological frameworks, comparing Freudian interpretations with alternative psychological theories such as Jungian archetypes or cognitive-behavioral models, or exploring audience reception to understand how viewers of different ages perceive and internalize these psychoanalytic representations. Such studies would further illuminate the ongoing relevance and evolution of psychoanalytic concepts in modern storytelling.

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