

THE MELANCHOLIA, GUILT AND DENIAL OF JENNETTE MCCURDY IN HER MEMOIR *I'M GLAD MY MOM DIED*

Manar M. R. RAYYAN* / **Kanan AGHASİYEV

Abstract: One of the methods frequently employed to comprehend literary works is the psychological approach. Sigmund Freud, who is acclaimed as the father of psychology and as one of the most important psychologists in the 20th century, established psychoanalysis. Freud's concepts of melancholia and mourning, guilt and denial are some of the most profound notions in psychology that are studied thoroughly. This paper is an attempt to explore these notions and their main features. Jennette McCurdy's debut work is an ideal work that touches on such psychological ideas, making it a perfect literary piece to study those concepts. This paper deals with her memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, as it captures her grief, loss, denial and guilt in an intensified vivid detail. By the end of the paper, it is evident that Jennette's depiction of her childhood as a child actress assists the reader in understanding the psychological challenges she faced, particularly in regard to her relationship with her mother. Throughout her memoir, Freud's ideas are clearly seen as having shaped her identity, psyche, and adolescence.

Keywords: Freud, Jennette McCurdy, denial, grief, guilt, Melancholia, eating disorder, *I'm Glad My Mom Died*.

JENNETTE MCCURDY'NİN ANILARINDA MELANKOLİ, SUÇLULUK VE İNKÂR: I'M GLAD MY MOM DIED

Öz: Edebî eserleri anlamada sıkça kullanılan yöntemlerden biri psikolojik yaklaşımdır. Psikolojinin babası olarak kabul edilen ve 20. yüzyılın en önemli psikologlarından biri olan Sigmund Freud, psikanalizi kurmuştur. Freud'un melankoli ve yas, suçluluk ve inkâr kavramları, psikolojide kapsamlı bir şekilde incelenen en derin kavramlardan bazılarıdır. Jennette McCurdy'nin ilk eseri, bu tür psikolojik fikirleri ele alan ideal bir çalışmadır ve bu kavramları incelemek için mükemmel bir edebî parçadır. Bu makale, McCurdy'nin "I'm Glad My Mom Died" adlı anı kitabını ele alır ve kitabında yas, kayıp, inkâr ve suçluluğu yoğun ve canlı ayrıntılarla ele almasını inceler. Makalenin sonunda, Jennette'in çocuk oyuncu olarak yaşadığı çocukluk döneminin tasviri, okuyucunun özellikle annesiyle olan ilişkisi bağlamında karşılaştığı psikolojik zorlukları anlamasına yardımcı olur. Anı kitabı boyunca Freud'un fikirlerinin kimliğini, ruhunu ve ergenliğini şekillendirdiği açıkça görülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Freud, Jennette McCurdy, inkâr, yas, suçluluk, Melankoli, yeme bozukluğu, Annemin Ölmesine Sevindim.

ORCID ID : 0009-0005-2987-9746* / 0009-0001-3969-1879**

DOI : 10.31126/akrajournal.1530033

Geliş Tarihi : 08 Ağustos 2024 / Kabul Tarihi:

*Karabuk University.

**Karabuk Niversity, Faculty of Letters.

Introduction

I take a longer look at the words on her headstone.
Brave, kind, loyal, sweet, loving, graceful, strong, thoughtful, funny, genuine, hopeful,
playful, insightful, and on and on...
Was she, though? Was she any of those things? The words make me angry. I can't look at
them any longer.
Why do we romanticize the dead? Why can't we be honest about them?
— Jennette McCurdy, *I'm Glad My Mom Died*

The candid and perceptive Memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died* explores Jennette McCurdy's personal struggles as well as the more general impacts of child celebrity and parental control. From a young celebrity under her mother's control to a resilient adult seeking freedom and healing. Known as a child celebrity, Jennette Michelle Faye McCurdy is an American writer, filmmaker, podcaster, singer, and former actor, who won numerous accolades for her breakout performance as Sam Puckett in the Nickelodeon sitcom *iCarly* (2007–2012), including four Nickelodeon Kids' Choice Awards. Before leaving Nickelodeon, she returned to the role in the *iCarly* spin-off *Sam & Cat* (2013–2014). In 2020, Jennette performed a one woman show *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, and later started to host a podcast named *Empty Inside*. Eventually, she published *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, a best-selling memoir in 2022, detailing her professional life as a child star and her catastrophic mother's aggressive abusive behaviour.

Jennette described that her mother was abusive and indicated that she was the heartbeat of her life due to their complex bond (David, 2022). Her mother was first diagnosed with breast cancer when Jennette was only two years old. When she turned 21 years old, her mother's cancer resurfaced in 2010 and she passed away in 2013. In an interview with *People Magazine*, Jennette admitted that her mother subjected her to both mental and sexual abuse. She indicated that “her mom's emotions were so erratic that it was like walking a tightrope every day” (Nahas, 2021). When she was only six years old, her mother persuaded her to become a child actress in order to support her family financially. Furthermore, she revealed that her mother was a major contributor in her eating disorder, and that lasted until she reached adulthood.

Ultimately, *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, is the subject of this article as it vividly and intensely depicts her feelings of loss, mourning, guilt, and denial. Such psychological topics are touched upon in Jennette McCurdy's debut memoir, which makes it an appropriate literary work to examine them. The study starts as an investigation of Freud's theory of Mourning and Melancholia. The theorist spoke on the psychological responses to loss in a paper titled “Mourning and Melancholia” that he published

in 1917, just after World War I came to an end. Based on his paper's title, the author postulated two distinct responses to loss: melancholia and mourning. He discusses how each mood as expressions is comparable because they both deal with grief in the suggested study. However, from Freud's viewpoint, he demonstrates that melancholia is a persistent scenario that arises in the exterior of a person's coherent consciousness. Mourning, however, is a “finite and transformative process” (Tormod, 2020).

Likewise, this study navigates Freud's theory of guilt. He asserts that the idea forms the crux of the pained consciousness of neurosis. He famously stated that it was driven by the child's need to maintain his conflicted relationships with guardians along with the fear of discipline. Additionally, Freud first described denial as a coping mechanism in which a person refuses to recognise distressing elements of both exterior reality and the existence of distressing psychological events, such as disturbing memories, emotions, or sensations. Anna Freud conducted the initial thorough research into the denial concept. As a defence mechanism of the immature mind, she categorised denial as such because it interferes with one's capacity to understand and deal with reality. The objective of this paper is to acquaint readers with each of these concepts as they pertain to Jennette McCurdy's 2022 debut memoir, *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. Primarily by recounting the events that took place in the narrative throughout her youth and adolescence, regarding her career as a child actress and her relationship with her late mother, Debra McCurdy.

1. Brief Summary

Jennette McCurdy's debut memoir, *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, describes her life as a Nickelodeon child star and her complex bond with her mother. Jennette tackles her complicated experiences with how she views herself, her notions of affection, motherhood, family, religion, and the child acting industry. From her early years, Jennette's entire existence is focused on appeasing her domineering mother, Debra McCurdy, who is indicated to be her “Mom” throughout the novel. Jennette's mother forces her into acting and controls every part of her life. In the first hospital scene of the memoir, Jennette tries to wake Mom from a coma by telling her that she has achieved Mom's unreasonably low target weight. By emphasising the problematic aspect of the main mother-daughter connection and laying the groundwork for Jennette's battle to define herself outside of Mom's expectations, this introduces the major recurring theme of the book.

As a child, Jennette obediently goes to auditions to achieve Mom's dreams, despite the fact that she secretly despises performing. This shows how Jennette suppresses her actual personality for her mother from an early age. Moreover,

her mother's control over her grows stronger when Jennette's acting career takes off; this is shown throughout the development of the memoir; as Jennette illustrates that she wasn't even permitted to take a shower by herself, demonstrating the tyranny Mom has over Jennette by denying her even the most fundamental bodily autonomy. As Jennette grew up, she develops complexities towards her appearance and deems herself unworthy as a result of Mother's diligent efforts to improve her look through 'at-home' beauty treatments. Furthermore, it is indicated that her mother frequently exploits her survivor tale to get people to do what she wants, and she encourages Jennette to take advantage of the sob story as well. Her mother overcame cancer when Jennette was younger. Jennette's ability to cry spontaneously earns her a lot of jobs, and despite her child's genuine emotional suffering, it is understood that her mother remains indifferent to her daughter's mental struggle of recounting those phases of her life constantly.

Her mother, later, works on 'suppressing' Jennette's natural potential by encouraging her to postpone puberty by limiting her calorie intake, which keeps her little both literally and figuratively. Jennette's infantile body is another selling commodity. Ultimately, Jennette develops an eating disorder. The author navigates how she doesn't confront the fact that her eating disorder and most of her other issues stem from her mother's abuse until she eventually seeks treatment for her bulimia that she develops in adulthood. Jennette establishes that due to these physical struggles and eating disorders she does not only struggle with the opposing feelings of love, melancholy, guilt, and the need for independence towards her mother, but also the constraint on her body makes her unable to maintain the image that she had initially of her mother, thus, shuttering her wall of denial.

Eventually, Jennette starts to regain control over her life and eating habits with the aid of intense therapy. She showcases her process of healing through the small acts of her selling the house she despises, breaking up with her drug-addicted boyfriend, throwing out her bathroom scale, and meeting her biological father, whom she only recently found out about. She ultimately makes the decision to quit performing as a definite act of regaining control over her own life. The author then demonstrates how her road to recovery opens through the small detail of her enjoying a chocolate chip cookie without feeling the need to purge or binge. McCurdy decides to conclude her story by paying what she claims will be her final visit to Mom's grave. This encounter signifies a huge change in Jennette's viewpoint. Jennette acknowledges that her feelings have changed after first feeling guilty for not going to Mom's grave more often. She can now admit the mistreatment and exploitation she experienced and sees her previous, idealised view of Mom as erroneous. Even while Jennette still misses

Mom a lot in some areas, she understands that having Mom in her life would have just made her pain worse. As Jennette accepts the complexities of her connection with Mom and the truth of her grief and mourning, this realisation represents a critical turning point in her healing process.

2. Jennette McCurdy's Psyche in Her Memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*

It is critical to recognise that Jennette's life has been chaotic and distinctive from others ever since she was a little child. That serves as a recurring theme throughout her memoir. This primarily stemmed from her complicated relationship with her 'narcissistic' mother, Debra McCurdy, who projected her ambitions and visions onto her young daughter and persuaded her to enter the acting business under the guise of assisting her family in becoming financially secure. Jennette explores the pains of being early recognised as a child actress in a field she never desired to be part of by utilising dark humour. McCurdy's novel marks more than just her writing debut. It's coming to terms with guilt and grief following the untimely death of her mother. It involves digesting decades of trauma and recovering from many eating disorders. It's realising and achieving her goal of not acting for the first time, and finally becoming a writer (Ryu, 2022). In this sense, Freud's notions of guilt and melancholia are seen as identical and recurring in the process of Jennette's psyche journey.

Being one of Sigmund Freud's most significant psychological pieces, *Mourning and Melancholia* was first published in 1917, after several years of drafting. Freud's work was drawn based on his conversations with two of his colleagues; Sándor Ferenczi (1873–1933) and Karl Abraham (1877–1925) as he dealt with his own loss and grief during the time. Freud's essay touches on both mourning and melancholia as notions. On the basis of self-awareness, he separates these two concepts and identifies them. Freud explains that a melancholic may be aware of their losses in a reasonable way, but they may not be aware of the precise nature of them. This is known as an "object loss which is lost from awareness." He further indicates the mechanisms that underlie melancholy (depression). Although an external loss may have served as the catalyst, the identification of the it and its effects is frequently unconscious. Whereas nothing is lost about the loss in the consciousness when it comes to mourning. For the mourner the world shrinks and loses its purpose, with the eventual stage of acceptance. However, with melancholy, the ego becomes impoverished and undergoes a change.

Moreover, Guilt as a notion is defined as a negative emotion or an 'affective condition' that often defines an individual or a group. This emotion comes from internalised standards when one reflects on the behaviour in which they

bear responsibilities. This notion is characterised by a felt fixation with one's wrongdoing and a sense of need to make amends. Assessed by Tracy and Robin, guilt as a concept is viewed in traditional psychology as a self-conscious emotion that is unpleasant and negative. The subject of blame is the individual or group that has been "wronged," while the object of guilt is understood to be one's own acts, specifically how a person should have acted or if they could have made a better action (2004).

Jennette's acting career started at the age of six, after her mother insisted that she should become a child actress. Initially, as a young child, Jennette's desire to make her mother happy and content was her main priority. This is the stage in which guilt slowly comes into the picture. Jennette touches on how she wished for her mother to stay happy and healthy; thus, despite her indifference towards acting, she takes that step for her mother. Jennette's acting career started small and minor for a number of years. Due to the emotional stress and anxiety, she hallucinates a voice in her head that she credits to the 'Holy Spirit' after her auditions. This voice commands her to carry out specific routines that help Jennette defuse:

"Jennette, I, the spirit of the Holy Ghost, command you to cross your name out on the sign-in sheet, go to the restroom, touch your underwear band five times in a row, twirl on one foot, unlock and relock the bathroom door five times, come back, and re-sign in on the sign-in sheet." I'm elated. He has spoken. The Holy Ghost (McCurdy p.56).

In essence, Jennette's struggle with mental stress stems from her worry that she would let her mother down. A multitude of factors, including mental stress, might cause hearing voices, according to several studies. traumas including abandonment, neglect, abuse, and loneliness (Hood, 2017). Jennette asserts in her memoir that her mother ignored her daughter's growing anxiety during her auditions and early acting career despite these early warning flags. Jennette's mother-pleasing inclinations and the shame of never being able to live up to her expectations had a significant impact on how she developed as a child. She showcases that in two instances, firstly, being what her mother so-called 'a breast and 'front butt' exam:'

Mom gives me a breast and "front butt" exam, which is what she calls my private parts. She says she wants to make sure I don't have any mysterious lumps or bumps because those could be cancer. I say okay because I definitely don't want cancer, and since Mom's had it and all, she would know if I do (McCurdy p. 97).

As stated by Jennette, when she was a little child, her mother's behaviours came across as kind and caring. In these cases, it is important to recognise that Jennette's understanding of what a "mother" is like as a child was constrained

by the only role model she was exposed to. Her response to her mother's behaviour was therefore primarily based on her idealisation of what a mother ought to be like. Consequently, she recognised those “examinations” as an expression of love and concern, not being old enough to understand the strangeness of her mother’s actions. Instead, she felt compelled to give back and keep herself ‘healthy’ the way her mother desired.

That brings the reader to the second instance: as Jennette began to grow older, her physique faced changes. That made her panic and feel shame and humiliation. Her body maturing meant that she would not be able to please her mother anymore; thus, upon her confrontation with her mother; she explains that her mom took it upon herself to ‘educate’ her about calorie restriction, in order to stop her ‘growing’ body in an attempt to keep her as a child actress as long as she desired. Her mother fuelled her eating disorder and ignored the warnings she’s gotten from Jennette’s doctor; she actively was the major push into making her daughter become anorexic:

“What can I do to stop the boobies from coming?” I repeat, leaning further into my question now that I know it satisfies Mommy so much. [...] Well, sweetheart, if you really want to know how to stay small, there’s this secret thing you can do... it’s called calorie restriction” (McCurdy p. 88).

In Civilization and Its Discontents (1930/2002), Freud stated that guilt is the outcome of absorbed or internalised violence. The tension that results from the superego's harsh aggression towards the ego “is what we call a sense of guilt; this manifests itself as a need for punishment” (p. 61). As defined by Freud, guilt is a fear of being found, typically by society as a whole, that developed from a previous worry of losing love if one's wrong deeds came to light. Further research by the theorist led him to believe that many of his patients were unconscious of their own sense of guilt. He elaborated by deducing the existence of these unconscious guilt feelings from his observations of their need for agony and desire for retribution. It appeared as though the pain they endured could make up for certain wrongs, and that happiness could only be attained via such anguish. Therefore, Jennette’s actions can be said to come as a result of fear and anxiety of losing the other subject’s love and dependency on them, which leads to being exposed to a number of threats in case the said person abandons the person struggling with guilt.

Jennette claims in her novel that she mastered the concept of “calorie restriction” and picked it up quickly. She felt incredibly pressured to win her mother over. She asserted that because her mother would only have ‘steamed vegetables, salads,’ or ‘half a chocolate chip,’ she would make the perfect teacher for this endeavour. As a child, she was ready to halt her body from “growing”

because she was the ideal instructor for her. Jennette had one essential objective: she needed to make her mother happy and satisfied so that she wouldn't fall ill again. She struggled with guilt and anxiety on her own dime to make sure she would never let that happen. This scenario corresponds directly to Paul Hazard's theory of guilt or "social anxiety" in children; this emotion is often developed at the face of the risk that the other person is of authority, and that they will face a punishment to demonstrate their supremacy. Therefore, at first, everything that makes one feel as though they risk losing their love is negative. One must avoid it out of concern for that loss.

According to Paul A. Hazard (1969), This is another reason why it doesn't matter if one has already committed a wrongdoing or simply wants to do so. In either scenario, the threat only materialises if and when the relevant authority learns about it, and in both scenarios, the relevant authority would act in the same manner. Although this state of mind is referred to as having "bad conscience," it actually does not live up to this label because at this point, the guilt is evidently nothing more than "social" anxiety and a fear of losing a loved one, for young children, it can never be anything else, but for many adults as well, it has only altered to the extent that society as a whole has taken the position of the father or the two parents (p. 224). Consequently, it can be determined that Jennette's guilt is clearly a result of a fear of losing her mother's affection or attention.

Moreover, When Jennette finally lands a major role to play in the Nickelodeon series, portraying the character, Sam Puckett, she experiences a new change and gets to taste something beyond her mother's controlling bubble. Despite the huge differences between her and her co-star's nature of living, she was able to become friends with her and forge a close bond. This is seen as a turning point for Jennette, both in her career and her psychological development as a teenager. It is crucial to recognise that Jennette only utilised a few channels in her life to express her anxieties, insecurities, and guilt.

After she gained fame with *iCarly* over the years, Jennette's 'Holy Ghost' as a mental construct from her OCD eventually ceased to exist. Instead, her friendship with her co-star Miranda can be seen as a huge development in her emotional and mental state. As Jennette's life faced many drastic changes due to her success, the bubble Jennette's mother had created was ultimately to burst. This initially becomes apparent when Jennette is forced to embark on a solo tour to promote her music for the first time when her mother's disease recurs. She begins "overeating" through her struggle for independence, gets her first "kiss," and puts on weight:

I'm walking off the plane and tugging my shirt down, so it lies flat. I'm sucking in and trying to look as thin as possible. "Maybe Mom won't notice.

Maybe if I tug my shirt again, she won't notice; maybe if I hold my breath for ten seconds she won't notice," says my OCD voice, formerly known as my Still Small Voice, but which I've since accepted as the pounding voice of mental illness. It's more sporadic than it used to be, and almost exclusively related to food and my body, but it's still here (McCurdy p. 133).

It can be asserted that Jennette was able to leave her mother's domineering mental restraint for the first time during this phase. Nevertheless, Jennette's transition was a crucial step in her healing in the years that followed, despite the guilt and distress that preceded this process. Jennette carries on the narrative by highlighting her mother's attempts to keep her under her stringent rules; examples of this can be recognised through her persistent efforts to keep her on a strict diet and her relocation to Jennette's apartment. It is also important to underline the fact that Jennette's melancholia started at this stage. Her awareness of her mother's limited time alongside her struggle for independence created a crossing effect on her process of coping and dealing with reality, which caused her Anorexia and overeating habits to worsen as a response.

Nonetheless, throughout the narrative, Jennette also shows her attempts to remove herself from her mother throughout these scenes. This procedure appears as another action Jennette took in order to leave the bubble she had been confined in while dealing with her guilt and grief. However, External options for freedom, safety, and healing may not be able to release a person who has acquired a melancholy response to loss. This follows Freud's indication of "psychogenic" melancholia, he claims that the "distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (p. 243).

When Jennette starts dating her co-worker in a secretive manner. It is illustrated that her mother senses how Jennette is slipping from her control circle. As a response, she uses violence and insults to guilt trip her daughter. Furthermore, when she finds out about her relationship, she bombards her daughter with abusive emails that disparage Jennette's character and calls her 'unworthy', 'slut' and 'all used up' (p. 148). This incident causes Jennette's guilt and self-hatred to resurface. She explains how, at the age of eighteen she was unable to comprehend that her mother was abnormal and instead placed the blame on herself. This instance goes hand in hand with Freud's demonstration that the events that trigger melancholia typically go beyond the obvious scenario of a loss via death and encompass all those instances of being wronged, neglected, or disappointed, which might introduce opposing feelings of

love and hate into the relationship or intensify “an already present ambivalence.” He additionally adds that one of the prerequisites for melancholia is this internal battle brought on by ambivalence, which sometimes results more from actual experiences and other times more from temperamental characteristics. Hence, if the “object-love”, which cannot be abandoned even when the object is abandoned, finds solace in ‘narcissistic identification’, the hatred then turns to the substitute object, mistreating and demeaning it while inflicting agony on it and finding sadistic pleasure in the suffering. Like with the comparable occurrence in obsessional psychosis, the self-tormenting associated with melancholia indicates a fulfilment of tendencies of sadism and hate that relate to an object and have been turned around on the subject's own self (p. 251).

When her mother decides to put Jennette again on the hook for her cancer, the predicament gets worse. It is important to recognise that in this case, Debra and Jennette were both in a very advanced stage of denial. In Jennette's case, it was her inability to understand her mother's abusive and overbearing nature. Instead, she expresses that she more or less directed her confusion and suppressed emotions onto herself, displacing her emotions inward as her own substitute target, and those negative emotions further built more onto her guilt, anxieties, and grief. In this case, denial as a defence mechanism can be used as a coping method for difficult or painful situations, unpleasant feelings, or traumatic occurrences as well as an effort to escape uncomfortable realities (such as grief), anxieties, or truths. This goes hand in hand with Freud's definition of denial as a coping mechanism in terms of the reluctance to recognise distressing elements of both internal and external reality, such as disturbing memories, ideas, or sensations (1924).

According to Baumeister et al., a substantial amount of research in nonclinical data demonstrating that outside causes are more likely for unsuccessful attempts than achievements, possibly more so for those with an unsteady high self-confidence, highlights the widespread use of denial. This suggests that internal explanations for failures tend to be more frequently denied, especially by people who are self-conscious, (In Jennette's case she finds herself denying reality as her whole existence was built on the fact that her ‘mother’ is the ideal model of what a mother ought to be. In this matter, accepting reality would naturally lead to Jennette viewing her life as a failure). Likewise, denying personal responsibility for negative outcomes was linked to increased confidence and improved and stable mental satisfaction (1998). Nonetheless, a constant use of this defensive mode often leads to incapability to effectively solve problems in the long run.

This notion is often described as an immature defence pattern (Cramer, 1997; Feinberg 2010). Denial tends to decline as children become older from early to middle childhood, according to two-year longitudinal research (Cramer, 1997). Greater denial was associated with psychological instability as perceived by the kid and the parent in a group of elementary school students (Sandstrom & Cramer, 2003). Thus, it can be seen that long term research indicates that denial is a frequently employed and is an immature defence strategy linked to psychopathology. Nevertheless, it can serve a coping purpose, at least temporarily, in some really challenging situations. This is demonstrated in the subsequent narrative when her mother's health declined.

Jennette reaches a stage of both denial and melancholia. She was incapable of processing the factual elements and that none of what was happening was her fault. Further, she was unable to accept that her mother was slipping away. Therefore, to cope with these extreme stressors in her life, alongside her career, she turns to alcohol and binge eating; it can be said that the melancholic extends their melancholy into the past. This results in the belief that things were always dark. Assessed by Freud, the melancholic denigrates themselves, and refers to themselves with disdain, feels immoral and undeserving of another person's love. This feature showcases the divided personality of a melancholic; in which one-part functions independently of the other. The divided components then both play the role in the ego changes, one berates and demean the other. Making the individual feel miserable and responsible for this kind of grief and loss (Lear, 2015). This is demonstrated in Jennette's process of grief; until her mother's final moments, Jennette avoided her grief by excessively drinking and repressing her own emotions: "She's struggling to hang on. I hate this. Mom takes a sharp breath in, then out. The hospice nurse locks eyes with Dad, gives a slight nod. Dad looks at us. Mom's gone. We're all numb. We don't cry. We just sit. In silence" (McCurdy, p. 178).

Jennette's melancholic grief comprised three stages. It is noted that her initial grief started with the subconscious recognition of her mother dying in her final days. However, the grief that followed came with layers of denial, loss and self-destruction. This is where melancholia enters the picture. According to Freud, it occurs when a loss is so difficult to bear that it is consigned to the unconscious, where the grief is present but cannot be comprehended by the conscious mind (1917). Thereby, Jennette demonstrates more of her toxic coping mechanisms right after her mother's death. Her grieving process was repressed by her conscience. Ultimately, she returns to her profession rather than dealing with those feelings, combined with her developing body image problems and the ongoing guilt she concealed following her mother's passing. In mourning, the distorted ego does not exist. But the other features are the exact

same. When someone experiences loss, the normal response would be ‘profound’ mourning; Freud describes this process as the same painful mental state: Loss of interest in the outer world, inability to experience love, and turning away from anything that could trigger a memory to the lost object. Freud indicates that it is simple to see that this ego restraint and restriction are manifestations of an obsessive devotion to sorrow that leaves no room for other goals or interests. Consequently, this mood does not seem ‘pathological’ in the viewpoint of an outsider. Freud, therefore, indicates that one should consider the parallel that the mourning attitude is “painful” to be appropriate. And that is only achievable when “We are in a position to give a characterization of the economics of pain” (1978). This discrepancy is also discussed by Kristensen P. in relation to the addition of “prolonged mourning disorder” as a new diagnosis. According to the study, in lengthy or intricate mourning processes, the common responses to grief will last indefinitely with unaltered or even rising influence, typically in conjunction with self-reproach relating to the deceased person. There could also be a sense of losing part of oneself. Depression does not demonstrate as much awareness of loss as extended grief, which demonstrates a profound and ongoing yearning for the deceased. Despair, despondency, and desperation are some of the more universal and comprehensive signs of melancholia (Tormod, 2020).

Furthermore, Freud demonstrates the way melancholy transforms mourning into a pathological one. He indicates that melancholy draws on mourning for some of its characteristics while regressing from “narcissistic object-choice to narcissism” (p. 249). Although like grief it is a response to the actual loss of someone. It is distinguished by a determinant that is either missing from or, if present, which leads to the misplaced grieving process. Jennette’s case of melancholia reflects identical characteristics to prolonged/ pathological mourning, that is demonstrated through her pre-existing toxic coping mechanism, her immediate return to work in order to avoid the triggers of her loss, and the variety of eating disorders alongside her development of bulimia as a consequence of such internal repressed grief. Bulimia nervosa is a severe eating condition that may be life-threatening. Bulimics may covertly binge and purge, seeking to burn off the additional calories in an unhealthy way. The subsequent chapters’ detail Jennette’s battle with this novel type of eating disorder that she experiences. Further she paints the picture of the way she employs her eating disorder as an external problem that overshadows her internal struggle with the loss and guilt she was experiencing in her mother’s absence. Jennette’s denial, self-destruction and guilt can be identified as the reasons her melancholy affected her on the long term. As Freud indicates:

The loss of a love-object is an excellent opportunity for the ambivalence in love-relationships where there is a disposition to obsessional neurosis the conflict due to ambivalence gives a pathological cast to mourning and forces it to express itself in the form of self-reproaches to the effect that the mourner himself is to blame for the loss of the loved object, i.e. that he has willed it (p. 250).

Likewise, it should be highlighted that Jennette is eventually able to deal with her suppressed guilt and shame by employing such a harmful coping method, however momentarily. She also says that even though bulimia helped her attain her mother's "target weight for her," she later put the weight back on despite being dependent on her eating disorder constantly. This is showcased in her obsessiveness with those 'ten pounds' and how they tormented her in the following lines:

I don't understand. Why won't my body do what I want it to do? Why won't bulimia help me out anymore? I thought we were friends. I thought bulimia had my back. Clearly it doesn't. Clearly, I had this whole relationship wrong (McCurdy p. 212).

Jennette continues her account by describing how her unhealthy ways of coping had gotten the better of her to the point where her boyfriend, Steve, confronted her, and urged her to see a therapist since bulimia may be fatal. Jennette begins her first therapy session after heeding his advice, but it is short-lived, as it meant confronting the truths that she was incapable of accepting. She stated in an interview that the reason she got out of treatment with her first therapist was because her entire existence centred around the belief that her mother knew best, therefore she couldn't bear the idea that she was abusive. It would entail knocking her off of that temple; the notion that her mother understands better than she does, and without her, she'd be nothing, thus what her mother desires for her is more valuable than what she desires for herself (McCurdy, Marie, 2022).

It is critical to understand that at this stage, Jennette was forced to uncover the layers of her grief that were overshadowed by her unconscious coping methods. When confronted with the idea, Jennette's whole notion of her mother was meant to change, including her years of struggle with guilt, anxiety, and the things she experienced under the guise of receiving affection, such as the 'body examinations' she underwent or the 'calorie restriction' she was taught by her mother. This would have meant that she lived under a 'false foundation' all along as she describes. Therefore, right after being confronted, Jennette found it easier to be in denial rather than accept the reality of being exploited by her own abusive mother. Her denial was both her key to healing and losing her entire foundation and building one new from scratch, and that would mean viewing the world in an entirely different lens. Ultimately, the battle of her

psyche was impossible in her viewpoint. Additionally, as Jennette's entire life was of her adapting many coping and defence mechanisms to be able to deal with the unhealthy environment, relapsing was much of an easier solution. As perceived in the later chapters, Jennette resorts to avoidance instead of challenging her reality, and that meant her melancholia and grief were undealt with for a long period.

Despite the fact that pathological mourning can be a very damaging mental condition, according to Freud, it can also terminate quietly or with a short-lived manic episode. It is difficult to determine whether Jennette's mania episode occurred in its early or late phases in her situation. Nonetheless in her memoir, when Jennette is informed that her father is not her biological one, her denial reaches its breaking point. The author depicts how she became aware that she reached a serious level of mental instability at that point. She showcases that throughout that last act of realisation, she reached the stage of acceptance. Likewise, the end of her melancholia: "I look out the window and see the Sydney Opera House in the distance. I tongue my missing molar, deep in thought. Maybe Ariana's got a point. Maybe it's time to focus on me" (McCurdy p. 253).

With the help of her new therapist, Jennette focused on dealing her eating disorders in the last chapters, showing that her mental health had begun improving. For Jennette, accepting her guilt and her idealisation of her mother's love might be viewed as moving forward with this attempt. By the last chapter, she states that after her mother's death, she was left with multiple layers of grief, including the initial loss over her passing, the grief from accepting her neglect and plundering of the child version of her, and the grief that comes to the forefront whenever she yearns for her (p. 289). Through accepting that though her life purpose was her mother's happiness, dreams and love, Jennette finally recognised the factual truths of her being used, manipulated and exploited as a child by her own mother: "She wanted this [acting success]," McCurdy wrote. "And I wanted her to have it. I wanted her to be happy. But now that I have it, I realise that she's happy and I'm not. Her happiness came at the cost of mine. I feel robbed and exploited" (Vega, 2022).

Jennette thereby, was able to let go of her melancholy and reach the stage of acceptance through therapy, writing and solitude. The author walked away from the image that her mother created of her and whatever defined her in the public lens. This led to Jennette's capability to enter a typical mourning process. Consequently, her grief quietly reached its end when she was able to connect with the present version of herself.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it becomes evident that employing Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholy, denial and grief can be used in a very striking way to understand the human psyche in the face of loss better. These notions are based on the outmoded concepts of the mind, impulses, and sexuality, discussing the psychological reactions to loss as well the core of neurosis's painful consciousness based on the concept of guilt. For he notably claimed that the child's dread of punishment and his urge to preserve his tumultuous relationships with guardians were the key causes. Furthermore, denial was initially defined by Freud as a coping strategy whereby an individual rejects the presence of upsetting psychological events as well as unpleasant aspects of the outside world, such as unsettling memories, feelings, or sensations. The denial concept was first thoroughly investigated by Anna Freud. She classified denial as a defence strategy of the immature mind because it obstructs the ability to comprehend and cope with truth.

While Jennette McCurdy is a very famous actress that was and still is the inspiration for many young adults of her age, she took the public audience by shock with her recently debut memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. In the novel, McCurdy revisits her trauma and her early stages of life, exploring her relationship with her deceased mother and her life as a child actress. The paper argued that Jennette's account of her years as a child actor helps the reader comprehend the difficulties she encountered psychologically, particularly in respect to her relationship with her mother and the loss she experienced. In this sense, Freud's theories are explicitly perceived as having impacted her identity, psyche, and adolescence throughout her memoir.

The paper initially introduced the notion of melancholy and defined its differences to mourning. In accordance with the theory, the paper discusses Jennette's process of grief and examines the stages in which it reached the pathological/psychogenic aspects of melancholia. Thus, throughout the narrative, Jennette's physical dysmorphia, guilt, and denial were emphasized as the defining characteristics that reflected her suppressed melancholy and led to her experiencing severe depression. It is clear by the end of the paper that Freud's theory of mourning and melancholia applies not only to Jennette's grieving process but also highlights how melancholia can develop early on before the actual loss and extend to the past. This makes Freud's theory remarkably significant for understanding the process of pathological mourning and how it can extend and depend on various aspects, whether internally or externally, the love object or the subject themselves.

REFERENCES

- Baumeister, R. F., Dale, K., & Sommer, K. L. (1998). Freudian defence mechanisms and empirical findings in modern social psychology: Reaction formation, projection, displacement, undoing, isolation, sublimation, and denial. *Journal of Personality*, 66, 1081–1124.
- Bradbury, M. (2001). Freud's Mourning and Melancholia. *Mortality*, 6(2), 212–219.
- Bucksbaum, S. (2022). Jennette McCurdy details the dark side of getting cast in *iCarly* in *I'm Glad My Mom Died* excerpt. *Entertainment Weekly.Com*, N.PAG.
- Cramer, P. (1997). Evidence for change in children's use of defence mechanisms. *Journal of Personality*, 65, 233–247
- Feinberg, T. E. (2010). Neuropathologies of the self: A general theory. *Neuropsychoanalysis*, 12, 133–158.
- Freud S. Mourning and melancholia. I: Strachey J, red. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Bind XIV. London: Vintage, 1917/2001: 237–59.
- Freud, S. (1930/2002). *Civilization and its discontents* (D.McLintock, Trans.). London, England: Penguin. (First published 1930).
- Freud, S. (1924/1961). The loss of reality in neurosis and psychosis. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete works of Sigmund Freud* (Vol. 19, pp. 183-187). London: The Hogarth Press
- Freud, A. (1937). *The ego and the mechanisms of defence*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Hazard, P. A. (1969). Freud's Teaching on Shame. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 25(2), 234–267.
- Itzkoff, David (August 3, 2022). "Jennette McCurdy Is Ready to Move Forward, and to Look Back". *The New York Times*. Archived from the original on August 8, 2022. Retrieved August 8, 2022.
- Kristensen P. Grief as a diagnosis. *TidsskrNorLegeforen* 2013; 133: 856–8. [PubMed][CrossRef]
- Lear J. *Freud*. 2. utg. London and New York: Routledge, 2015.
- McCurdy, J. (2022). *I'm Glad My Mom Died*. Simon & Schuster Aug, 2022
- Michelle R. 2022 Jennette McCurdy on the Runaway Success of Her Fearless Memoir, *I'm Glad My Mom Died*.
- Nahas, Ali. "iCarly's Jennette McCurdy on Healing from 'Intense' Physical and Emotional Abuse by Her Mom". *People*.
- Sandstrom, M. J., & Cramer, P. (2003). Defense mechanisms and psychological adjustment in childhood. *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 191, 487–495.
- Tormod Knutsen *The dynamics of grief and melancholia*, 2020
- Tracy, J. L., & Robins, R. W. (2004). Putting the self into self-conscious emotions: A theoretical model. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15, 103–125.
- Vega E. 2022, McCurdy's novel centers on her complex relationship with her mom and her rise in the entertainment industry.
- Zeigler-Hill, Virgil; Shackelford, Todd K.; Hangen, Emily J.; and Elliot, Andrew J., "Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences" (2020). *Psychology Faculty Book Gallery*