

## **Effects of depression on the life of the main character in *Her* movie by Spike Jonze**

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### **Abstract**

*People are coping with various problems in life that may influence their mental health if they fail to manage them. One kind of mental illness is depression that is frequently marked by the feeling of helplessness, disliking oneself, and shame for being weak. Being aware of depression signs by learning from any kind of media including movie will help people to control their mental and emotional condition. This study attempts to find out the effects of depression on the main character in *Her*, a two-hour-five-minute movie that is said to be a romance narrative about the relationship between Theodore, a sensitive, depressed and lonely guy with his computer operating system (OS) called Samantha. This study applied a qualitative descriptive method that was realized through observation and content analysis technique. To reveal the psychological exploration focusing on Theodore's depression, the obtained data were classified based on the relevant categories describing effects of depression. The results show that there are five effects of depression taking place on the life of the main character, Theodore, namely (1) self-blame (2) low self-esteem, (3) loss of appetite, (4) trouble concentrating and (5) trouble sleeping. These five effects are triggered by Theodore's helplessness due to his divorce that he makes him difficult to move on and the surrounding environment that frequently mocks him.*

**Keywords:** *depression; effects of depression; main character; Spike Jonze*

### **INTRODUCTION**

As both individuals and social creatures, humans are dealing with obstacles, ups and downs and challenges that may trigger issues on mental health if they cannot cope the emerging problems in life. Then mental health becomes a condition that needs to get a serious attention to avoid depression, one kind of mental health disorder. Depression is more than just a low mood (Alshawwa et al., 2019; Dowd, 2004; Kumar et al., 2012). According to Rosenström et al. (2014), depression is a prevalent mental illness with a significant risk of recurrence over time. World Health Organization (2020) announces that depression still becomes one of the mental illnesses suffered by a lot number

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of people in developing countries. Depression can strike anyone, any group of people, at any age, and in any socio-economic situation (Gholipour, 2017). The term depression is used to express a wide range of negative emotions, including frustration, sadness, mourning, and so on. As a psychopathological word, depression refers to the sensation of helplessness that is connected with hating oneself, helpless anger directed against oneself and others, and feeling guilty for being weak (Wolman, 1990). Sometimes people, especially teenagers forget this kind of mental issue. They underestimate depression due to the lack of understanding of the condition. People may oblivious to the fact that they are depressed. Most people may just be aware of depression after they see the bad effects of depression in their surrounding environment. For example, in the incident of suicide, many people appear to be in good health before but abruptly end their life.

Many media are significantly contributive to widely share and raise the awareness on the effects of depression, including through literary work, which can be used to study human beings and all things happen by means of various language expression to convey values and messages (Nurlinda, 2018; Septiawan, 2019; Widyawati, 2014). Here, literature that depicts human life plays a significant role to make people dive into certain phenomena (Pangestu & Sunardi, 2016). It frequently reflects the authors' experience of real life that is then combined with deep contemplation, wild imagination and close observation (Anjelia & Moelier, 2021; Diansari Artawan et al., 2020). Since literary work discusses human beings and their life, psychological perspective is often used to reveal the values and meaning reflected in the work. The psychological point of view is applicable because it has a strong connection with human behavior, expression, thought, and motivation. As the reflection of life and its values, literary work transferred in the form of a movie may attract the audience's attention in an easier way. It is because movie is a motion picture that involves the expressions that resemble the real life events and communication (Widyawati, 2014). In addition, movie is often made as an adaptation of a novel that is creatively developed to achieve new objectives with a new target audience (Anggraeni et al., 2021).

Phenomenon of life captured in a movie may inspire people to know and manage their problems. Many digital movies are available on television and the internet nowadays, without a doubt people require entertainment, and watching movies has long been a convenient way to unwind after a long day of work or other duties (Ismail & Moriyanti, 2019). The exploration on how the character with their attitudes characterized in a movie is a worth doing study. Character has an important role in a story, thus it is fascinating to examine him/her (Wijaya, 2013). The key persons played as the major characters often reveal the authors' thoughts that they wish to convey through the story. In a piece of art like literary work, the character's personality is inextricably linked to the writer's and reader's psychology (Raharto & Permatasari, 2019). In a movie, interpretation of the director will establish psychological connection that attracts the viewers to be more curious to follow the story, to learn from what happens to the characters and to dig into the values they could catch and learn.

This study analyzes the effects of depression on the main character in *Her* movie. The movie is a crazy and strange romance narrative about the relationship among Theodore, a sensitive and lonely guy with his computer operating system. Theodore determines that the system should have a female voice. He gives the name of his operating system, Samantha. *Her* is a representative medium to learn about the effects of depression. It is because this movie describes the main character, i.e. Theodore who suffers depression and struggle to manage its effects. One of the triggering factors to Theodore's depression is his divorce from his childhood sweetheart, Catherine. Theodore and Catherine had been together since childhood. He was still mourning the loss of their relationship, and he was struggling to adjust to his new life as a single man. Theodore had no confidence, liked to blame himself, and hard to do daily activities. Theodore felt depressed and lonely, which affected him to do a relationship with the operating system. This relationship was an interesting focus and had contributed much to the emerging depression felt by Theodore.

### **Effects of depression**

Depression develops when a person believes he or she is to blame for their pessimism in achieving their goals. People who are suffering depression can feel sad and lonely. They may also experience decreased self-concept, and show withdrawal behavior from their surroundings. Depression is a real disease that can be diagnosed and of course can be treated with the right treatment from psychiatric guidance. Combining the effects of depression as identified by Beck & Alford (2009) and Judith & Casey (2000), the impacts of depression that show how they may occur are respectively explained in the following terms.

#### **Self-blame**

Self-blame is especially prone to attribute negative events to some flaw in themselves and then chastise themselves for this perceived flaw. In the most severe situations, patients may blame themselves for events that are unrelated to them and may abuse themselves severely. They are prone to blaming themselves for events that are clearly not their fault. Their self-criticism becomes increasingly harsh. Increased stress in adulthood causes a sense of loss that is linked to earlier deprivation (Beck & Alford, 2009).

#### **Low self-esteem**

A person suffering from depression may have a low sense of self-worth. They think they are unimportant and spend more time thinking about real or imagined concerns. People who are depressed typically lack energy and are unable to enjoy usual joys. Self-devaluation appears to be a common tendency among depressive patients, who see themselves as lacking in the abilities, performance, intelligence, health, strength, physical attractiveness, popularity, or financial resources that are significant to them. They make comparisons with others and come to the conclusion that they are inferior (Judith & Casey, 2000).

#### **Loss of appetite**

Loss of appetite is such a common occurrence in depressives that many patients consider it to be the main symptom of their illness. People with

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depression may lose their appetite or lose their portion. This was the most common symptom among all depressed people. Loss of enjoyment appears to begin with a few activities and spreads to almost everything the patient performs as the depression deepens. Other people may eat all the time to make themselves feel better (Judith & Casey, 2000).

**Trouble concentrating**

Depression can impair a person's capacity to operate in daily life. They may be unable to focus on schoolwork or other tasks. Depression is so severe that the person is unable to get out of bed and may even be unable to dress (Judith & Casey, 2000).

**Trouble sleeping**

Depression can make people have sleep problems. It can be a sleep easily, but then wake up too early and some people hard to sleep and still wake up early. People with depression may also lose their appetite or lose their version. Others people may eat all the time to make themselves feel better (Judith & Casey, 2000).

**Frequent thoughts of death**

A persistent sense of despondency can lead to death thoughts. Suicide is the most common risk of depression if left untreated, and suicide is the only method for those with depression to stop their mental agony. They see a bleak and terrible future ahead of them. They claim that they will never be able to overcome their problems and that things will never get better. They believe that none of their issues can be solved. They say things like this are the end of the road (Judith & Casey, 2000).

**METHOD**

This study applied qualitative descriptive method to give comprehensive description on the effects of depression as the focus of investigation. The data of this study were collected from two different sources, namely primary and secondary data sources. *Her* movie by Spike Jonze was the primary data source. The secondary data source was gathered from internet sources, i.e. the synopsis of the movie from [www.theatlactic.com](http://www.theatlactic.com) and the movie script retrieved from [www.screenplaydb.com](http://www.screenplaydb.com). *Her* was directed by Spike Jonze with the duration of 2 hours and 5 minutes. Successfully made, the movie was appreciated in numerous movie awards especially for the director's screenplay.

As this method was also applied in similar studies researching psychological disorder of the characters in the movie, i.e. depression (Sulistiyana & Widiarti, 2015) and bipolar (Setiawan, 2020) and using movie as data source, the two techniques, namely observation and content analysis were adopted. Here, observation method was meant as a way of collecting the data which focuses on observing an object with all human sense (Baker, 2006) Meanwhile, content analysis was a method utilized to interpret meaning. The interpretation was derived from the content of text data and, thus, adhere to the naturalistic paradigm (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this study, the combination was to gain the validity of the data collected by observing the characters' attitudes, every incident and action, conversations among the characters in the movie as well as taking notes on the key information that

was relevant to support the interpretation when undertaking the close reading to the movie script and synopsis.

In analyzing the data, several steps were taken ranging from identifying the effects of depression to finding the evidence in the movie to support the identification and to make the description clear. First, the collected data were identified carefully in accordance with the effects of depression from psychodynamic and psychological theory by Beck & Alford (2009) completed with the impacts of depression by Judith & Casey (2000). Second, the analysis was conducted by highlighting the significant information in the form of expressions, statements, incidents as well as situations that show whether or not the main character feels one of the effects of depression. Third, ensuring the validity of the analysis by observing the compilation of the evidence like the screenshots, the scenes that support the interpretation and the relevant conversations. Finally, the analysis was informally presented through a descriptive representation in words.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study deals with the issue of mental illness in human life and its impacts. Beck & Alford (2009) in their psychodynamic and psychological theory gave a comprehensive discussion on depression. One important effect of depression is self-blame (Beck & Alford, 2009). Depression is like heart disease or cancer that is a medical condition. In addition, depression is produced by a mix of causes (Judith & Casey, 2000). If a person's medical history includes relatives who have suffered from depression, they are more likely to suffer from depression themselves. The effects of depression for each person are different. It can be thoughts and behavior. With regard to the movie analyzed in this study, *Her*, the main character, Theodore who suffered depression was the focus of analysis.

Theodore was characterized as a lonely, introverted man. He spent his time much on writing personal letters for people with difficulties expressing their feelings. The major attention of the movie was on Theodore who got depressed because of his impending divorce from his childhood sweetheart Catherine. Catherine was a lawyer. Theodore and Catherine had been together since childhood, and he was still mourning the loss of their relationship, and he was struggling to adjust to his new life as a single man. Theodore felt depressed and lonely, which affected him to do a relationship with the operating system.

Since his intimate relationship with Samantha, indirectly, technology has its own way of separating life between humans as social beings. Learning from the life of Theodore with his OS, people must continue to build awareness and limit our dependence on technology and continue to have social interactions with humans. The power of Samantha to learn and grow psychologically captivated Theodore. They become closer as they talk about love and life. As closely and carefully observed in the movie, there were five effects of depression experienced by Theodore, namely self-blame, low self-esteem, loss of appetite, trouble concentrating, and trouble sleeping.

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**Self-blame**

Self-blame affecting Theodore is one of the effects that is shown obviously in *Her*. Depression develops when a person believes he or she is to blame for their pessimism in achieving their goals. They chastise themselves for the perceived flaw. Sometimes patients may blame themselves for events that are unrelated to them and may abuse themselves severely (Beck & Alford, 2009). Theodore often looked resigned. Theodore's depression was self-blame because he lost someone he loved. Theodore blamed himself. He showed how much he loved Catherine because they grew up together. He was depressed about the reality that he had divorced Catherine.



Figure 1. Theodore apologizes to Catherine

As shown in figure 1, at night in his apartment, Theodore was sitting while looking at the window. He picked up his devices and apologized to Catherine. In this scene Samantha left Theodore, then he wrote a letter to Catherine. Theodore apologized to Catherine for all the pain that they caused each other. *“Dear Catherine. I’ve been sitting here thinking about all the things I wanted to apologize to you for all the pain we caused each other, everything I put on you - everything I needed you to be or needed you to say. I’m sorry for that. I will always love you because we grew up together. And you helped make me who I am. I just wanted you to know there will be a piece of you in me always, and I’m grateful for that. Whatever someone you become, and wherever you are in the world, I’m sending you love. You’re my friend til the end. Love, Theodore.”* Theodore always loved Catherine. They grew up together and he said they were friends until the end. Theodore apologized to Catherine for all the mistakes that they made when they still lived together.

**Low self-esteem**

Depression can cause a person to have a low sense of self-worth. They believe they are unimportant and devote more time to real or imagined concerns. Self-devaluation appears to be a common trait among depressed patients, who believe they lack important abilities, performance, intelligence, health, strength, physical attractiveness, popularity, or financial resources.

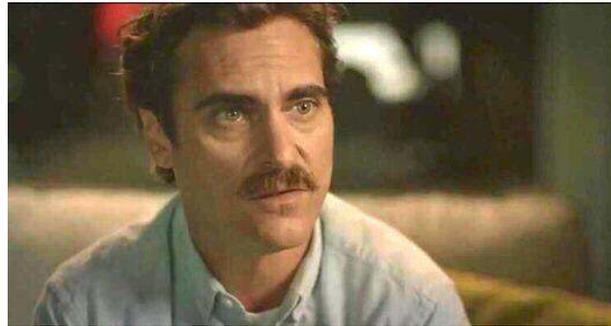


Figure 2. Theodore felt not strong enough for a real relationship

Figure 2 shows how weak Theodore is. Theodore felt weak at Amy's office in the night when he was sitting and thinking about Catherine for a minute and not convinced. He did not feel strong enough for a real relationship. In this scene Theodore felt upset after meeting with Catherine who taunted him to have a relationship with OS. He shared his feelings with Amy, he asked Amy "Yeah, but... Am I in this because I'm not strong enough for a real relationship?" "Amy was surprised, she said "Oh, you don't think it's a real relationship? Theodore said "I don't know. What do you think? ". With an upset expression, they were both confused. Theodore had low self-esteem because of other perceptions of him. He had no confidence he was thinking that he did not have abilities to have a real relationship.

Judith & Casey (2000) stated that people with depression believe they are unimportant and devote more time to real or imagined concerns. Self-devaluation appears to be a common trait among depressed patients, who believe they lack important abilities, performance, intelligence, health, strength, physical attractiveness, popularity, or financial resources. Based on the statement posed above Theodore looked confused with a sharp gaze. This was the sign that the impact of Theodore's depression was low self-esteem. He was depressed about the divorce which made him believe that he had a lack of ability in a relationship. His divorce made him have a relationship with OS. The impact of depression and low self-esteem can be shown when Theodore said "Yeah, but... Am I in this because I'm not strong enough for a real relationship?" This was an indication that Theodore was not confident with himself.

### **Loss of appetite**

A main symptom of depression is loss of appetite. People with depression may lose their appetite or lose their portion. Loss of enjoyment appears to begin with a few activities and spreads to almost everything the patient performs as the depression deepens. Other people may eat all the time to make themselves feel better.

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Figure 3. Theodore was unable to eat

Figure 3 shows when Theodore is in his apartment. Here, Theodore was seen leaning slightly on his kitchen table while lowering his head and blankly holding a cup of glass after not being able to eat. Theodore lost his appetite; he did not want to eat. His only focus was the problems that made him oppressed. He was unable to eat. This condition is in line with the symptoms of stress (Judith & Casey, 2000). It is stated that depression affects a person's appetite. People with depression may lose their portions. Depression makes people lose their interest in food. As a result, they will be unable to eat.

Several scenes in the movie support the delineation of Theodore's loss of interest in eating. Before arriving at his apartment, Theodore was in the office just finishing his call with Samantha. This time their discussion was not as usual. It looked different. Theodore did not seem to focus. He felt that nobody was with him. Theodore walked through the empty office heading to the reception area. He scanned and dropped his letters into the outgoing mailbox. His friend, Paul, was at his reception desk. Theodore saw Paul was with her girlfriend. She was a young, pretty, sophisticated girl sitting on his lap. Paul introduced her to Theodore. Paul asked Theodore to hang out on a double date. Paul said, "Hey, I talked to your girlfriend, Samantha. She called earlier to make sure your papers were picked up. She's funny, man. She was cracking me up. She's hilarious. I had no idea." At first Theodore did not say anything. He looked distracted. Then he said that his girlfriend was an operating system. Theodore walked to the elevator, pressed the button and left his office.

The scene moved to Theodore's home. He slept on the bed and daydreamed that he was moving to his kitchen. He tried to eat. However, he lost his appetite. He tried to drink water to be a little tense, but he still found himself feeling upset. Theodore remembered when Catherine mocked him because he was dating the operating system. Theodore was upset and unfocused after the altercation. He could not do anything and always remembered what Catherine had said. All the things that Catherine said to Theodore made him feel depressed. Being burdened by all those feelings, Theodore did not want to eat. He lost his interest in food.

### **Trouble concentrating**

Depression can impair a person's capacity to operate in daily life. They may be unable to focus on schoolwork or other tasks. They may find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork or other tasks. The person is unable to get out of bed and may even be unable to dress because of their depression.



Figure 4. Theodore could not concentrate

Figure 4 demonstrates how Theodore felt when he is in the afternoon. He was staring at the device, close on the word and could not concentrate. In this scene Theodore just came from a restaurant and met Catherine to have lunch. They had both quarreled because Theodore was dating the operating system. Theodore was sitting at his desk, not working while Samantha was calling him. He took a moment, then answered. Samantha was thinking there was something wrong with their discussion. Theodore seemed unfocused he said "Yeah, yeah, of course. That's great" with a doubtful tone. His response was really short and out of the topic. Then Samantha said "Alright well, you sound distracted so... we'll talk later?" Theodore accepted it then the both ended their conversation.

Judith & Casey (2000) stated that depression can impair a person's capacity to operate in daily life. They may find it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork or other tasks. He had difficulty concentrating on, or focuses on what Samantha talked about. He was pressured with the condition. He harbored feelings, tried to hide from others, but it made him look distracted and trouble concentrating. Having a conversation with Samantha, as shown in figure 4, Theodore lowered his head with a confused look. The impact of pressure caused by his problems with Catherine was part of his depression. Theodore had trouble concentrating and it was also hard for him to talk to anyone.

### **Trouble sleeping**

Depression can make people have sleep problems. It can be easy to go to sleep but then wake up too early and some people find it hard to sleep and still wake up early. People with depression may also lose their appetite or lose their portions. Other people may eat all the time to make themselves feel better.

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Figure 5. Theodore woke up from a dream

Figure 5 shows when Theodore is in his bedroom at night. He awoke from a dream, groggy and uneasy. He looked around, catching his breath. After a beat, he knew he was not able to go back to sleep, so he put his earpiece in and tapped a button. Theodore talked with Samantha about what she was doing. Samantha said she was reading advice columns. She wanted to be as complicated as all of these people. Theodore praised Samantha but he was still sad. Samantha asked what happened to him and he said he has a lot of dreams about his ex-wife, imagining that they are still together, loved each other, and Catherine was not angry with him. In the dialogue above shows that since Theodore's divorce process, almost all of the night he was unable to sleep because he was still thinking about Catherine. He seemed not ready to be single. Pressured by his anxiety of being single, Theodore had trouble sleeping he always remembered about the past and his memories with Catherine.

Judith & Casey (2000) stated that depression can make people have sleep problems. Theodore could not accept the reality. Always remembering the memories made Theodore had pressure in his life. Figure 5 showed when Theodore was woken up. It could be concluded that Theodore was not ready to be single, always remembered his ex-wife, but this made him depressed and had trouble sleeping. He hardly slept and woke up early. He was still hopeful that they both would get back together. Trouble sleeping just came when he was always thinking about Catherine or remembering about the divorce process.

Theodore got depressed because of his impending divorce from his childhood sweetheart Catherine. Theodore experienced depression during the divorce process and he was antisocial which made him limit himself to others. It was due to his sadness. Theodore lost faith in the existence of the people around him. He was disappointed that his mother did not care about him, he was upset because Catherine sued for divorce, and at the end of the movie he was also disappointed of losing Samantha, his OS girlfriend. Theodore was stressed because of the divorce, he became confused and not focused on doing his job, unable to eat, had trouble sleeping, had low self-esteem, was not confident with himself, and blamed himself because of his divorce.

## CONCLUSION

*Her* is a movie that is basically conceives the effects of depression on the main character, Theodore. Depression influences his mental and mood. The effects of depression were identified through series of attitudes shown by Theodore. He liked to blame himself and had low self-esteem. He also shows loss of his appetite, trouble concentrating, and trouble sleeping. All of the effects of depression on the main character came from different causes. It could come from his surrounding environments like Theodore's relationship with his mother who was not cared about him, Catherine's behavior who always blamed Theodore because of their divorce, and Samantha who forced Theodore to divorce Catherine. There were also emotional shocks that cause depression on the main character. Theodore was not ready and blamed himself because of his divorce. Other aspects that caused Theodore depression were his stress that led him to have trouble in doing his activities. He could not concentrate. He lost of his appetite and was unable to eat. Theodore still liked to remember Catherine, tried to not care about her that ended up with trouble sleeping.

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