

Antisocial personality disorder and pathological personality traits in Julian Slowik: A study of *The Menu* (2022)

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Abstract

Behavior that consistently violates the rights and disregards others is characteristic of individuals with antisocial personality disorder. Using the concepts of characteristic difficulties and pathological personality traits in individuals with antisocial personality disorder, this research focuses on Julian Slowik in the film The Menu (2022). A qualitative approach was used in this research, supported by the film and script as primary data, as well as books or journals related to Antisocial Personality Disorder as secondary data. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) theory was employed to address the research questions. Data obtained from the film and script of The Menu (2022) were then identified and classified according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA) theory. The results show that Julian Slowik meets the main indicators of antisocial personality disorder according to APA standards, which he exhibits characteristic difficulties in identity, self-direction, empathy, and intimacy. Julian Slowik is also portrayed as having pathological personality traits, where he is manipulative, callous, deceitful, hostile, a risk-taker, impulsive, and irresponsible.

Keywords: *American psychiatric association; antisocial personality disorder; character analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Aras (2015) explains that literature and psychology are closely related because both focus on human aspects, such as reactions and perceptions of the world. Literature represents psychological states, and psychology helps interpret the motivations of literary characters. Works of literature involving intense psychological and emotional conflicts are important for analyzing human psychology and personality disorders. Personality is defined as an organized mechanism of an individual expressed through actions that influence interactions and adaptation to the environment (Mayer, 2007).

Focusing on personality, an individual's failure to comply with social norms regarding legitimate behavior is defined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) as antisocial personality disorder. Those with this disorder tend to disregard the rights and feelings of others, repeatedly engaging in actions with high consequences such as illegal work, theft, destruction of public property, and disturbing others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

According to the APA, individuals with antisocial personality disorder exhibit at least two of the following four characteristics: identity, self-direction, empathy, and intimacy. These aspects include patterns of behavior that violate social norms, a lack of empathy, and a failure to fulfill responsibilities. Furthermore, the APA identifies individuals with this disorder as being manipulative, callous, deceitful, aggressive, risk-taking, impulsive, and irresponsible. Individuals are identified as having antisocial personality disorder if they repeatedly exhibit six or more of these characteristics. These characteristics contribute to an individual's inability to form healthy relationships and adapt to others and prevailing norms (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

In films, characters with antisocial personality disorder tend to behave in extreme and unpredictable ways that attract attention. An example of this is the character Julian Slowik in the film *The Menu* (2022). Written by Seth Reiss and Will Tracy and directed by Mark Mylod, this psychological thriller tells the story of Margot and Tyler, who visit an exclusive restaurant called Hawthorn run by the famous, highly reputable chef Julian Slowik. The restaurant is intended for special guests invited by Slowik and starts by presenting menus with aesthetic value and artistic concepts. Slowik slowly reveals his hidden intention to kill all his guests as a form of protest against the destruction of the meaning of the art of cooking.

Previous studies support this research. For example, Nasya (2024) analyzed Howard Howe's psychopathic traits in the film *Tuske* (2014) using APA theory, and Jadut *et al.* (2023) discussed the characteristics of Adrian Griffin's antisocial personality disorder in the film *The Invisible Man* (2020) using Theodore Millon's personality disorder theory. To emphasize the novelty, this research focuses on identifying antisocial personality disorder and pathological personality in the character Julian Slowik.

Based on the background described above, this research formulates two questions: 1) What personality functioning difficulties of individuals with antisocial personality disorder are depicted in Julian Slowik in *The Menu* (2022)? and 2) What pathological personality traits of antisocial personality disorder are seen in Julian Slowik in *The Menu* (2022)? The analysis focuses on identifying four significant difficulties and pathological signs of antisocial personality disorder in Julian Slowik based on the APA theoretical framework and is limited to the film and script of *The Menu* (2022). This research aims to analyze significant difficulties and pathological signs of antisocial personality disorder reflected in Julian Slowik in *The Menu* (2022), based on the APA theoretical framework. Additionally, this research aims to serve as a reference for readers and future researchers analyzing the psychology of a character in a literary work, particularly in the context of antisocial personality disorder.

Review of literature

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the term antisocial personality disorder is given to individuals who repeatedly violate the rights of others without remorse (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This includes behavior that violates laws and social norms, as well as involvement in criminal activities, such as fraud, theft, and physical violence. Individuals with antisocial personality disorder often behave irresponsibly and engage in high-risk activities, such as substance abuse and drunk driving. This pattern indicates an inability and lack of self-control over their actions in the long term. This aligns with Arteaga's (2016) view that they manipulate and hurt others in ways that are not criminal but considered irresponsible by society.

Impulsiveness and a lack of concern for the suffering they cause are characteristics of individuals with antisocial personality disorder. They find it difficult to build good social and personal relationships in the long term (Chang & Li, 2021). They have difficulty adjusting to social norms and rules, considering them obstacles if they interfere with their goals. Antisocial behavior negatively impacts society and the individual's personal life.

Antisocial personality disorder (ASPD) is a complex mental health condition that affects aspects of an individual's sense of identity, independence, empathy, and ability to form intimate relationships. Those with this disorder often display egocentrism closely related to power and personal gain. Their goals are usually driven by momentary desires and do not align with societal norms, often resulting in persistently irresponsible and unlawful behavior. A lack of concern and remorse after treating others badly is also characteristic of individuals with this disorder in terms of empathy. They frequently seek intense thrills and excitement without considering the negative impact on themselves or others. They have a parasitic lifestyle due to the strong needs for stimulation. Additionally, those with this disorder tend to have difficulty forming intimate relationships with

others. Instead, they exploit others through manipulation, intimidation, coercion, and lies. They seem to easily build relationships with others, but find it difficult to maintain them (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Lykken, 1995; Farias *et al.*, 2013).

Pathological personality traits describe the patterns and motivations of individuals with antisocial personality disorder in manipulative and exploitative contexts. Manipulation involves lying, flattery, or friendly behavior to control others, and is strategic in nature, serving as a tool for exploitation. Callousness is also evident in individuals with this disorder, characterized by a lack of concern for others. Individuals tend to exhibit aggressive and unempathetic behavior, and tend not to show guilt. Traits such as dishonesty and self-deception reinforce the manipulation and exploitation that individuals with this disorder use to gain material or social advantages (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Callousness can be divided into several categories, including anger, vengeful behavior in response to insults, and irritability. These reactions tend to involve disproportionate aggression for the situation, resulting in reckless behavior that disregards the safety of oneself and others and fails to consider long-term consequences. Impulsivity, or acting spontaneously without prior planning or consideration, often occurs in individuals with this disorder. They tend to make poor decisions and lead erratic lifestyles, reducing their sense of responsibility. This lack of responsibility results in a failure to fulfill obligations and neglect the commitments, such as financial and social contracts. These further distances them from accepted norms (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

These characteristics suggest that those with this disorder not only have behavioral problems that can be addressed through external control, but are also related to an internal disruption in the individual's personality structure. Their manipulative behavior is not merely impulsive; it is a strategy for personal gain and satisfaction. Their inability to form and maintain healthy relationships stems from their indifference towards others. Additionally, their careless decisions and the negative consequences that follow worsen the situation because their impulsive actions and risky decisions impact themselves and others.

METHOD

Qualitative methods were used in this study. Bryman (2008) states that this method places greater emphasis on words in data collection and analysis. This research identifies significant difficulties in personality functioning and analyzes the pathological signs of Julian Slowik's antisocial personality disorder in the film *The Menu* (2022) according to the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Representative data, including narratives and dialogues, were obtained from the film and script as primary data and form the basis of the analysis. Meanwhile, relevant books and journals to the research focus serve as secondary data to support the analysis. The collected data were then interpreted according to categories of significant personality functioning difficulties: identify, self-direction, empathy, and intimacy, as well as pathological signs of antisocial personality disorder: manipulative, callous, deceitful, hostile, risk-taking, impulsive, and irresponsible characteristics of Julian Slowik in the film *The Menu* (2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Julian Slowik's Personality Functioning Difficulties

Individuals with antisocial personality disorder experience significant difficulties in personality functioning, as reflected in at least two of the four main aspects: identity, self-direction, empathy, and intimacy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These difficulties are evident in Julian Slowik in the film *The Menu* (2022), who consistently exhibits these traits. Slowik's egocentrism is evident in his prioritization of power and personal satisfaction over norms and ethics. He is indifferent to the

suffering of others and takes hurtful actions without guilt. He also uses dominance in his interactions to manipulate and control his guests.

Identity

Frequent displays of egocentrism are characteristic of individuals with antisocial personality disorder in terms of identity. Their self-esteem is not tied to prosocial values, but rather to power and personal gain. This is illustrated by Julian Slowik, who shows a dependence on others' validation to maintain his identity.

CHEF SLOWIK: **"You loved that I texted you an invitation for this evening. Me yearning for your attendance."**

Lilian might nod her head. Sure. Fine. He's right.

CHEF SLOWIK: **"Your ego was fed. But that is to be expected. And, no, you've fed my ego as well."**

(50:43–50:54/pp. 63–64)

Slowik's self-esteem is influenced by others' responses to him. His identity is not built from within, but rather from the praise and recognition of others and their perception of his power. In accordance with the definition of identity disorder, an individual's self-esteem comes from power and personal gain (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Slowik implies that his ego is reinforced by people who praise him. His identity is distorted because it depends on others' validation, which shows the characteristics of identity disorder in terms of egocentrism. This is also seen when Slowik asserts his superiority over Jeremy.

CHEF SLOWIK: **"Jeremy is talented. He's good. He's very good. But he's not great. He'll never be great."** He desperately wants my prestige, my job, my talent. He aspires to greatness, but he'll never achieve it. Correct, Jeremy?"

JEREMY: "Yes, chef."

(39:34–40:03/p. 52)

Slowik emphasizes that even though Jeremy is good, he will never be great. His words describe an egocentric identity because his criticism only affirms his dominance and belittles Jeremy. This is a characteristic of identity disorder where individuals gain self-esteem through power over others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Slowik's belittling of Jeremy reflects his lack of empathy, consistent with the tendency of individuals with antisocial personality disorder to be unable to appreciate the emotional experiences of others. Disguised as high standards, Slowik's egocentrism is also destructive to others' dignity.

Self-Direction

In this regard, individuals tend to set goals that are not aligned with societal norms because they are based solely on personal satisfaction and are often unethical and illegal. This is seen in Julian Slowik's comparison of Jeremy's life to his past.

CHEF SLOWIK: **"Like me at his age, Jeremy has forsaken everything to achieve his goals. Like mine, his life is pressure. Pressure to put out the best food in the world. And even when all goes right, and the food is perfect, and the customers are happy, and the critics are, too, there is no way to avoid the mess. The mess you make of your life, of your body, of your sanity, by giving everything you have to pleasing people you will never know. Jeremy... Do you like this life? This life that you dreamed about?"**

JEREMY: **"No, chef."**

(40:04–40:52/p. 53)

The scene depicts them both sacrificing everything for perfection and ambition in the culinary world. Although Jeremy worked long hours and lived under pressure to satisfy his chef and customers, Slowik says the emotional, physical, and mental damage resulting from this ambition is inevitable. His words illustrate a distorted sense of self, with goals based solely on personal satisfaction and external validation, without considering ethics and prosocial standards (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Slowik and Jeremy are caught in a cycle of pursuing perfection, resulting in their neglect of their lives and responsibilities, such as maintaining relationships and leading healthy lifestyles. By justifying suffering as part of his profession, Slowik shows that he fails to provide positive direction. This is reinforced by Jeremy's admission that he does not like the life he dreamed of, reflecting the emotional emptiness behind their achievements.

Lack of Empathy

Indifference to the feelings and suffering of others, as well as a lack of remorse after treating others badly, is reflected in individuals with antisocial personality disorder in terms of empathy. This is evident when Slowik shows a lack of empathy while observing Doug Verrick's death.

SOREN: "No, no. This is fuckin' insane."

CHEF SLOWIK: **"No, I said, 'listen!' Just listen!"**

They watch, pained, as Verrick is slowly lowered into the water, down, down, down, until finally he goes under.

CHEF SLOWIK: "Yeah. Do you hear? And... And... Under he goes, and..."

He waits for total, serene silence.

CHEF SLOWIK: "Quiet. Do you hear it?"

Eyes closed, Chef listens a few more seconds. Nothing.

CHEF SLOWIK: **"Do you hear that silence? Listen, can you hear it? That silence means... I'm free."**

(54:08–54:42/pp. 67–68)

Instead of reacting to the man drowning, Slowik focuses on the silence as a moment of peace. His visible reaction illustrates his emotional detachment from the suffering of others, making the situation meaningful only to himself. By prioritizing his own internal relief, Slowik demonstrates his lack of concern for others' emotional state. His indifferent and cold response is a key indicator of a lack of empathy (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Intimacy

The inability to build intimate relationships and instead using manipulation, intimidation, coercion, and lies are used by individuals with antisocial personality disorder to dominate and exploit others.

This is seen when Slowik is in complete control, even though an incident has just occurred and disturbed the guests.

Chef sees everyone shocked, not eating.

CHEF SLOWIK: **"Eat! Enjoy. Fifth course on order."**

ENTIRE KITCHEN: **"Yes, chef!"**

Margot and Tyler haven't moved. In fact, Tyler is now eating.

MARGOT: "Tyler, what the hell is going on?"

(42:52–43:13/p. 55)

Slowik forces his guests to continue eating, showing no concern for the incident that occurred in the restaurant and revealing his authoritarian side. He uses domination to control others and treat them as show participants in his restaurant. His psychological manipulation is evident in the contrasting responses of Margot and Tyler, who follows his coercion without question. Slowik's behavior reflects an inability to form close relationships because he interacts with others through coercion and intimidation, as well as a lack of empathy when building relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Julian Slowik's Pathological Personality Traits

The APA identifies pathological personality traits as those that reflect an individual's manipulative, callous, deceitful, hostile, risk-taking, impulsive, and irresponsible actions. Six or more of these traits are repeatedly and persistently reflected in individuals with antisocial personality disorder. These traits reflect antagonism and disinhibition, which impact an individual's ability to adapt to social norms and form healthy relationships. Julian Slowik in the film *The Menu* (2022) illustrates this. He uses his power to control others through cruel means without regard for their suffering. He hides his intentions, making his guests believe they are enjoying an exclusive dinner until he traps and treats them aggressively. Slowik impulsively takes risks without considering the consequences for himself or others. This disregard for moral and ethical values is evident in his pursuit of his extreme vision. Not only does Slowik showcase the aesthetic value of his restaurant and cuisine, he also exhibits a lack of empathy and aggressive and manipulative behavior.

Manipulativeness

Manipulation involves using lies and pleasant behavior to control others for personal gain. In the film, there is a scene where Slowik strictly controls the situation and the people around him.

MOVIE STAR: **"Hi, sorry. Chef I don't know if you remember, we've met before, and—"**

CHEF SLOWIK: **"Leave my kitchen at once."**

MOVIE STAR: "Got it! Yes, absolutely, sir."

He immediately leaves.

CHEF SLOWIK: "I don't want to rush you."

He sets a kitchen timer.

CHEF SLOWIK: **"These decisions are important, and, uh, our menu is strictly timed. In 15 minutes, I'll take a break between courses, and that is how long you have to decide. It's our side or theirs. In the meantime, please return to your seat. The next dish is exquisite. Plating in five!"**

ENTIRE KITCHEN: "Yes, chef!"

CHEF SLOWIK: "I love you all!"

ENTIRE KITCHEN: "We love you, too, chef!"

(47:17–47:46/p. 60)

Slowik firmly stops someone from talking to him, showing his dominance. He shows this dominance again through urgent orders and pressuring guests to make serious decisions under emotional pressure. He uses kind words, and the kitchen staff automatically respond to him; however, their responses are seen as fearful because they have been emotionally manipulated by him. The use of charm and control to influence others is reflective of manipulative individuals (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Slowik's restaurant and kitchen design makes people feel pressured yet emotionally attached to him.

Callousness

A lack of concern for others' feelings, as well as a high level of callousness, is seen in individuals with pathological personality traits. They show no remorse or guilt after hurting others and tend to behave aggressively. This is evident when Slowik shows a lack of empathy towards Jeremy.

Chef gently touches Jeremy's head and kisses his cheek.

CHEF SLOWIK: "Ladies and gentlemen, your fourth course. Sous-chef Jeremy's Mess."

Chef takes a step back. Jeremy removes a pistol from the back waistband of his apron and blows his brains out.

The kitchen staff all look for a second, then return to work.

CHEF SLOWIK: "Please. Please. Sit. Make yourselves at home. Everything's fine. All part of the menu. All just part of the show."

(41:11–41:53/pp. 53–54)

Slowik seems to trivialize Jeremy's suffering by not offering understanding and support. His performative nature is evident when he gives a kiss just before Jeremy commits suicide. Rather than showing empathy, Slowik indifferently and casually treats his death as part of the evening's show and menu, asking the guests to remain calm. The kitchen staff and waiters reinforce Slowik's lack of guilt by returning to work as if nothing had happened. This is in line with the characteristics of callousness, which involve a lack of remorse for the damage caused and a lack of concern for the feelings of others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Deceitfulness

Deceitfulness involves dishonesty, falsification of identity, and exaggerating things (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In the film, this trait is evident in the conversation between Bryce and Slowik.

BRYCE: "You said it's your restaurant. But if we're all just bein' honest tonight, it's not."

CHEF SLOWIK: "You're right. Doug Verrick is my angel investor. He owns this island and this restaurant. And since Hawthorn is my entire life, I would have to say that Doug Verrick owns me. Except now things are a little more complicated, and I own Doug Verrick."

(52:30 – 52:52/p. 66)

This conversation reveals Slowik's dishonesty when he claims that Hawthorn is his restaurant, even though it actually belongs to Doug Verrick. This moment exposes Slowik's previous statements

as distortions of the facts. His behavior is consistent with the definition of deceit as falsifying events and being dishonest. He uses contradictory statements and twisted facts to his own benefit, namely to maintain control and his image of authority.

Hostility

Persistent antagonism often manifests as anger, irritability, vindictiveness, and responses to insults or trivial treatment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Slowik demonstrates this hostility through his treatment of Tyler.

CHEF SLOWIK: "You are why the mystery has been drained from our art. You see that now, don't you?"

TYLER: "Sorry, chef."

CHEF SLOWIK: "Come here, son. Come. Come here."

Chef begins whispering into Tyler's ear. We don't hear it. But Tyler nods along as he whispers. When chef is done, he looks at Tyler, warmly smiles, and waits for an answer.

TYLER: "Yes, chef."

Tyler removes his chef whites, hands them to Elsa, and exits in the direction of Chef's office.

Chef Slowik turns to Margot with a serene look.

CHEF SLOWIK: "And now you're free too."

(01:11:30–01:12:27/p. 86)

Slowik's words imply a message filled with anger even though his tone of voice sounds calm and controlled. He blames Tyler and accuses him of destroying the mystery and beauty of culinary art. Although subtle, his behavior reflects hostility expressed through psychological pressure and emotional manipulation of Tyler. This causes Tyler to have an emotional breakdown and take off his uniform. Slowik's passive-aggressive behavior indicates his hostility toward Tyler.

Risk-Taking

In this aspect, individuals often act recklessly and disregard their own safety and that of others. Their decisions are often based on boredom and the desire for momentary thrills without considering the long-term consequences (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This can be seen in Slowik, who orchestrates the situation without considering the risks, leading to mass deaths, including his own.

CHEF SLOWIK: "But that's our culture, isn't it? And my restaurant is part of the problem. So it's time to die."

(52:25–52:29/p. 66)

This scene implies that Slowik exhibits psychological distress because he responds impulsively to systemic problems in his profession with violence and even death instead of reflecting on them. His behavior reflects his boredom because he views his actions as artistic statements. His emotional detachment and indifference to the consequences of his actions are part of disinhibition, which includes acting without moral consideration and exerting power over others.

Impulsivity

Impulsivity includes spontaneous actions without considering the consequences or prior planning, resulting in frequent poor decisions and an unstable lifestyle where individuals have a low sense of responsibility. This is evidenced by Slowik's impulsive behavior.

MARGOT: "You know what I'd really like?"

CHEF SLOWIK: "Tell me."

MARGOT: "A cheeseburger."

The word gives him a moment of real pause. Chef Slowik thinks about this. He nods.

CHEF SLOWIK: "Yeah, we can do a cheeseburger."

(01:30:12–01:30:27/p. 104)

Margot asks Slowik to make her a simple cheeseburger, and he impulsively agrees. However, this decision is not in line with the menu he has prepared, which is supposed to result in the death of all the restaurant's guests. His reaction here is emotional because it lacks logical and careful consideration. He acts based on his feelings and his relationship with something simple from the past. Margot's words cause him to lose control of his plan, revealing his impulsive personality. His serious and dangerous plan changes because of his impulsive emotional response to her.

Irresponsibility

Irresponsibility means a lack of accountability in individuals, failure to fulfill obligations, and neglect of commitments (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Those who are irresponsible tend to neglect financial obligations and social promises or contracts, which distances them further from prevailing norms. This aspect is demonstrated by Slowik ending the night by burning down the restaurant with people inside.

CHEF SLOWIK: "We must embrace the flame. We must be cleansed. Made clean. Like martyrs or heretics. We can be subsumed and made anew. I love you all!"

ENTIRE KITCHEN: "We love you, chef!"

Chef strikes a match and tosses it in the flammable pool. A watery curtain of blue flame billows across the floor.

A warm, metamorphic glow illuminates the faces of our diners.

Close on Chef Slowik's serene, smiling face in the firelight.

(01:38:07–01:38:59/pp. 109–110)

Slowik completely disregards his responsibilities as the restaurant's leader, chef, and guardian of the staff and guests he has invited. By destroying trust in him, he chooses to take aggressive and dangerous actions for himself and others. He represents the planned arson as a ritual of cleansing or rebirth, even though what is actually seen is his failure to face the reality of his life. As a chef, Slowik violates his responsibility to serve his guests with integrity. Slowik uses the promise of an exclusive dining experience to vent his emotional burdens. His actions show indifference towards others, and are consistent with the characteristics of an individual with antisocial personality disorder.

CONCLUSION

Individuals with antisocial personality disorder have significant difficulties and pathological personality traits. Both concepts are used in this research to analyze the character of Julian Slowik in the film *The Menu* (2022). Slowik exhibits difficulties through four indicators: frequent displays of egocentrism where his self-esteem is based on power and control over others; goals set in the Hawthorn restaurant solely for personal satisfaction that violate morality; a lack of empathy for his guests; and the use of exploitation and intimidation, demonstrating his inability to build healthy relationships. He also exhibits signs of a pathological personality: he is manipulative and uses his control to exploit others; he lacks remorse for the violence he commits; and he is constantly

dishonest. His interactions with guests are frequently marked by anger and aggression, and his spontaneous, risky actions that disregard consequences emphasize that the character Julian Slowik in the film *The Menu* (2022) suffers from antisocial personality disorder.

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