

## **RECLAIMING THE FEMALE PSYCHE: MATERNAL OBSESSION AND FAMILIAL DEFIANCE IN MEGAN ABBOTT'S YOU WILL KNOW ME**

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### **Abstract**

*In addition to having academic depth, the mother-daughter bond plays a significant role in forming psychological health, emotional growth, and personal identity. The daughter's self-esteem and social skills are impacted by the difficulties in the mother-daughter relationship, such as unsolved disputes or unfulfilled expectations. As a result, the mother-daughter bond serves as the cornerstone of emotional growth and is essential in influencing the daughter's path to self-awareness and tenacity. In relation to Megan Abbott's, You Will Know Me (2016), the study explores the internal struggle and interpersonal tension of a Consumed Mother and A Dreadful Daughter. It goes on to examine the psychoanalytic process by which trauma and outside conflict act as catalysts for the manifestation of the idea of high-stakes social expectations and unfulfilled parental aspirations. Through the prism of Freud's psychanalysis philosophy, the research examines the peculiar bond between the mother, Katie, and the daughter, Devon Knox, with the revelation of tension and anxiety. It looks at the*

mental strain caused by Katie's compulsive devotion to Devon's gymnastics career. Abbott examines psychological facets of the conflict between excessive parental demands and the potential to sever family ties, leading to the intricacies of the mother-daughter relationship. The necessity for balanced and mindful parenting - where parental love and support do not negate a child's individuality and self-determination - is brought to light via the examination of psychoanalytic theory. The need for balanced and mindful parenting - where parental love and support do not negate a child's individuality and self-determination is brought to light through the examination of psychoanalytic theory.

**Keywords:** *family, psychoanalysis, Inner tension and Interpersonal conflict, and mother-daughter relationship*

### **Introduction:**

Megan Abbott is an American author, especially an author of crime fiction. She was born on August 21, 1971, and non-fiction writer. She is also a producer of television, a journalist, and a screenwriter. Her fictional stories are surrounded by a detective situation featuring a tough, unsentimental protagonist and an act-of-fact would be towards attitude of violence. Her classic novels and short stories have been worked on the subgenre of writing from a female perspective.

Megan Abbott's one of the finest Novels, *You Will Know Me* (2016), is a breathless roller-coaster of Murder mystery. This novel follows a family of Knoxes, where the protagonist is a gymnastics prodigy. The parents of the protagonist, Katie and Eric Knox, have taken advantage of the excessive burdens on themselves to support their daughter emotionally and financially in this novel. The protagonist killed a young man who was their family friend. He was killed in a hit-and-run car crash shortly before a gymnastics competition.

### **Literature Review**

Elena Ferrante's *My Brilliant Friend* (2012) delves into female friendships and personal aspirations in the context of societal pressures, while Lionel

Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003) examines motherhood and the psychological burden of raising a child in the face of societal judgment. Both novels, like *You Will Know Me*, explore the intricate emotions tied to female identity and family dynamics, with a focus on the often-hidden costs of fulfilling societal roles. Similarly, Shirley Jackson's *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) offers a view into the secretive, often repressive emotional lives of its female protagonists, a theme mirrored in Abbott's work.

Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) introduces the notion of hidden emotions and repressed desires, themes echoed in Abbott's narrative. Woolf's exploration of a woman's internal world under societal pressure parallels Abbott's depiction of Katie, a mother struggling between her role as a caregiver and her own ambitions.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative literary analysis of *You Will Know Me*, employing feminist and psychological frameworks to analyze the key themes of Anxiety, Conflict, ambition, control, and secrecy. The primary focus is on the female characters particularly Katie and Devon and their relationships within the broader context of the competitive gymnastics world. Textual analysis is used to explore how Abbott reveals the psychological tensions and complexities of these characters through narrative structure, dialogue, and character development.

Additionally, this study uses the qualitative method of descriptive type in this research. The analysis involves close reading of the text, The research is about Anxiety and Conflict which describes and explores a deeper perspective of real-world problems that happen in and out of the family and society which is interconnected and thus frames a good or bad society.

This study employs a qualitative content analysis methodology to explore *You Will Know Me* through a psychological and thematic lens. The analysis focuses on the narrative structure, character development, and recurring motifs that shape the novel's exploration of Inner tension and Interpersonal conflicts. Particular attention is paid to the protagonist, daughter Devon and her Mother Katie's relationship.

## Discussion

A unique bond of relationship in this world is the a mother and daughter. Mother-daughter relationships have deep emotions. They are built on love, care, trust and understanding. They share unconditional love with each other and it is one of the strongest connections. Parents play a vital role in shaping the character of their child, especially the bond of mother and daughter holds the key, being a major part in changing women's rights, where the struggles and achievements from ancient times till present and therefore sharing their experiences worldwide.

As a healthy mother-daughter relationship, they are often supportive for lifelong and provide guidance to each other by facing different challenges in their life. Also, a challenging task mothers have certain important roles to set rules and boundaries to guide their children or daughters. Mothers are the best role models for their daughters.

The Journal of Neuroscience examined the mother-daughter relationship and found it holds the strongest bond when it comes to parent-child relationships, even greater than that of a father and son, apparently. "Mothers and daughters report deeper emotions, positive and negative, in their intergenerational relationships than fathers and sons." (Hanley)

Their relationship is so complicated for both also. Being a mother, she may feel a loss of identity and annoyance and the daughter always expects parental support as well as independence and self - self-determination. There are many writers who have shared their different perspectives of the mother-daughter relationship or parental relationship that address the sweet, beautiful parts and Conflicts between them.

Megan Abbott, an American author, is one of the best writers of crime novels and fiction and most of his writing is based on a female perspective. From one of his best crime thriller novels, *You Will Know Me* reflects the life of a 15-year-old young prodigy, who would do whatever to achieve her ambition towards the Olympics and elite competition and her family. who support and take care of their daughter and put themselves under excessive emotional and financial burdens. Thus, it examines the anxiety and conflict of a mother towards a daughter who was forced to achieve her ambition.

The work reflects the psychological battle of a young girl and extreme parental expectations, which would break the familial bonds and result in the complexity of the mother-daughter relationship.

This assignment compares and contrasts the mother's obsessive affection and reaction of the daughter which oscillates between adherence and rebellion. Therefore, the analysis highlights how the expectations of society complicate the conflict, which leads to a destructive cycle of anxiety, control and aggression.

This paper tries to explore the "Inner tension and Interpersonal conflict of a Consumed Mother and A Dreadful Daughter in Megan Abbott's *You Will Know Me*. It examines the two main Central female characters of Katie Knox was the obsessed mother and Devon Knox was the gifted young gymnastic prodigy daughter. This paper uses a qualitative approach with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Despite the analysis of the family dynamics that draws the understanding between the mother Katie's obsessive control over Devon and the daughter's resistance. It also emphasizes feminist theory that addresses the societal pressures that women or girls face in everyday life. Especially, mother and daughter.

Sigmund Freud is considered to be the founder of the psychoanalytic approach to psychology, which looks to unconscious drives to explain human behaviour. Freud believed that the mind is responsible for both conscious and unconscious decisions that it makes on the basis of psychological drives.

Freud believed people are "simply actors in the drama of their own minds, pushed by desire, pulled by coincidence. Underneath the surface, our personalities represent the power struggle going on deep within us. (Wikipedia contributors)

He believed the human's personality is divided into three aspects of the human mind - id, ego and superego. The id is the most primitive part of the personality that is the source of all our most basic urges. The id is entirely unconscious and serves as the source of all libidinal energy.

The ego is the component of personality that deals with reality and helps ensure that the demands of the id are satisfied in ways that are realistic, safe and socially acceptable. The superego is the part of the personality that holds

all of the internalized morals and standards that we acquire from our parents, family and society at large. (MSEd)

## **Defense Mechanisms**

Freud believed that the ego uses defense mechanisms to reduce anxiety when it can't mediate the conflict between the id and superego. Defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that are used unconsciously to protect a person from anxiety. (Traylor et al.)

The theory completely emphasizes the influence of unconsciousness of the human mind, one's earlier childhood days and internal conflicts on human behaviour and personality development. It also highlights the role of defense mechanisms in managing anxiety as well as suppressed memories and unconscious motivations that shape the thoughts and actions of a Suman.

### **An Obsessed Mother: Katie Knox, in applying Freud's theory**

#### **1. Id (instinctual desires)**

Katie's obsession was associated with Devon's success in gymnastics. She wanted to get recognition and accomplishments through her daughter's achievements. As an instinct, unconsciously, Katie imposes her own unfulfilled desires and ambitions on her daughter. Her identification was Devon's protection and her success in gymnastics competition at any cost, which reflects her first and foremost desire. In the world of competitive gymnastics, Katie's responsibility focused on securing Devon's discipline as well as societal morals. Katie felt jealous and over possessiveness of her daughter's focus and talent towards gymnastics. Also, Katie's Id was expressed through fear of losing in terms of control over Devon and seeing her fail, which expresses the compulsion action.

The ego works on the reality or consciousness principle. Katie's ego works as a mediator between her obsessive desires of the Id and the repression of reality. The ego is Katie's rationalism around the conscious reality, her psyche's part in decision-making, the Id's affinity and the guidance of the superego's morality. Hence, her ego rationalises her obsessive behaviour in indispensable and the most needful success of her daughter. Also, the ego

tries to manage her family dynamics in balancing both obsessive focus on Devon and the necessity of her husband and son. But it fails as id overpower her intellect. Katie's ego also tries to resolve the conflict of an external event where the sudden death of a rising man ruins in the gymnastic community, which confuses and upsets her sense of control. Here, ego struggles to intermediate between her id (obsessive reactions) and superego (anxiety).

Superego works on moral standards Superego reflects Katie's internal feelings and expectations of societal morality and parental. She was heavily influenced by societal pressures and the role of being a perfect mother. Katie's superego is being idealised perfect mother; she pushes herself to do whatever for her daughter's success at great personal cost. Here the superego triggers her guilt and pushes her into anxiety when her actions hurt others like ignoring to look after her son, Drew and the stakes of being tensed and pressurized in marriage.

Finally, the Superego pressures the parental sacrifices to satisfy societal expectations. This would accelerate Katie's obsession with Devon's success, which would supersize the reflection of her worth as the best mother.

### **Inner tension and Interpersonal conflict**

Katie focuses on some significant anxiety that is rooted in her inner conflict. The fear of failure that Katie was always worried about Devon's success and also, she fears that something might risk her daughter's life. This fear of success derived her to be more obsessed and hyper - alertness towards Devon. Her anxiety heightens the fear of losing control over everything, especially when secrets about her and her family come out. Katie felt immense pressure to support Devon's ambitions, where she neglected to look after her son Drew and the sacrifices on both emotional and financial terms she made to her family. Katie's anxiety deepens when there is a sudden, mysterious death of a young handsome boy, Ryan Beck, which shocks the gymnastic community and for Katie, it is a threat on exposing their hidden truth and making it unstable to live.

The major conflict for Katie was her identity as a mother and individual; Katie's struggles to reflect her identity completely in Devon's success. As a role of mother also becomes her entire identity, yet leaving some

part of her own needs and desires to be fulfilled by Devon. Based on the moral ambiguity, she protects Devon and her family. She acted in response to the right good thing for Devon and saved her from failure. Her obsession with Devon complicates her marriage and family relationship. Katie struggles to balance gymnastics and judgment as well as dealing with her inner doubts and keeping smooth and calm in society.

### **Defense Mechanism**

Katie's defense mechanism as a mother is obsessive in response to protect her family and daughter. Her actions and behaviors demonstrate some psychological aspects. Katie often justifies the sacrifices for her and her family as only for Devon's career and success. She projects her own fears, insecurities and desires on Devon. Katie highly focuses on protecting Devon. This overprotection roots her fear of losing the image of a perfect family and Devon's success. Katie's mechanisms highlight the psychological toll of living through her daughter and her actions serve as a central tension in the novel.

### **A Dreadful Daughter - Devon Knox**

Devon Knox is a 15-year-old hopeful gymnast. Using Freud's theory, Devon Knox was a complex psychological 'dreadful daughter'.

### **ID Instinctual desires**

Devon was a brilliant athlete. ID an unconscious desire of Devon's obsession was with achievement in gymnastics, with success and glory. This ambition manifests in Devon's thoughts, rebellion, anger and the tension that swirls between Devon's personal desires and external demands

"Devon becomes her high school's gymnastics prodigy, and soon her coach and the town's rich and influential parents start buying into her mystique. The town spends an inordinate amount of money upgrading the school gym to house state-of-the-art gymnastic equipment and facilities". Devon in her dream rumored relationship with Ryan Beck and her secret action that highlights her Id. Devon satisfies her personal desires and she doesn't care whether it risks her career or the peace of her family.

## **Ego**

Ego acts as an intermediate between Devon's Id and the suppression of reality. Devon's ego helps her maintain discipline which was very essential for gymnastic success. She understands the need of societal and parental expectations to achieve her goals. Devon's ego also balances her Id's desires in making decisions for her career and image. For instance, Devon hides certain actions and secrets to avoid disturbances in her path to success. The ego allows Devon to make a way of her individual goals and the sacrifices made by her family. And moreover, to maintain her family support, Devon was concerned her outward rebellion.

## **Superego**

Devon's superego of morality was shaped by her family, coaches and societal expectations. Devon's superego was determined by her perfection, where she learned those values from her parents and the gymnastics community. The perfectionism of Devon often brought chaos with ID's desire for freedom and personal satisfaction. Devon felt guilty over her career, which was imposed by her family, but her superego demanded for recognition. As an external morality, the superego compels Devon to a perfect daughter and athlete, even though her id desires drive Devon to threaten her image.

## **Inner tension and Interpersonal conflict**

Devon Knox was portrayed as a "dreadful daughter". Devon's anxiety and conflict are deeply constituted with her identity as the gymnastic prodigy. Her Anxiety was stemmed with both external pressures and internal struggles. As a central focus of her family's ambitions, Devon felt a continuous pressure to succeed in gymnastics. Her performance of anxiety reflects from the parental sacrifices, investments made by the community in her success and exposure by her rumored relationship with Ryan Beck. This fear added fuel to the anxiety that she wanted to maintain her image in public as a disciplined and focused athlete. Devon completely dedicated her life to gymnastics, which made her more isolated, even from her family and this

isolation never exposed her suppressed inner feelings and desires. Devon felt a loss of control in her life, which made her feel like being inside four walls. She was controlled by her parents, coaches and the gymnastics community. Thus, she was battling to her inner self of submissive expectations and the desire to be independent.

Devon Knox - a young gymnastic prodigy, symbolizes her repressed quiet war between inner self and outer behavior around her ambition, pressured to be perfect and the emotional burden of secrets that reflects her darkness under her success. A young teenage gymnastics prodigy insensibly employs with several concepts of Freud's defense mechanism like Repression, Displacement, Denial, Rationalization. Which mirrors and protects her from all the emotional distress and composed image in the gymnastic world that had been very essential for her athletic success.

Devon repressed the traumatic event of distressed memory and emotional involvement in Ryan's death, which suppressed her own desires, deep fear and frustrations and she stays very calm and stoicism. Devon never expresses remorse or panic. Her blankness is Katie's main clue that something is emotionally hidden. (Abbott)

After Ryan's death, the whole gymnastics community was shocked, yet Devon continues training and focuses on competition. Her cold detachment towards this incident, denying the emotional and moral weight, where suspicious questions arise and she remains emotionless.

Devon displaces her inner conflict and struggles into gymnastics. Her force routines in training and physical discipline made her socially acceptable in the community. She rationalises herself internally and justifies the tragic event to take care of her career and family stability. This Freudian defence mechanism figures out the complexity of Devon Knox, who unconsciously defended herself from unbearable anxiety and guilt. Freud's idea echoed that much of human behavior is shaped by what remains hidden.

Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Katie Knox's obsession with a doctor's gymnastic career and dreadful Devon Knox both manifested in unresolved internal conflicts, societal pressures, unconscious desires, and

repressed ambitions. Devon balances the struggles between her individuality and demands from parental obsession and societal pressures.

A family is built not on truth, but on emotional concealment. Freud's theory just doesn't protect the individual here, yet it symbolizes how the entire relationships are formed. Katie and Devon Knox's psychological portraits show the disturbing opinions of ambition. Secrecy and emotional Repression within a family. Katie symbolizes an entangled maternal figure that reveals how far a mother will go to protect her daughter, as well as the image of perfection she has built around her. Contrarily, Devon emerges as a cold and ambiguous figure who undergoes repression, displacement and denial; her silence and inner conflict make her as a gymnastics product and a reflection of her mother's obsessive drive.

Together, Katie and Devon represent the darker symbiosis of a mother's ambition and adolescent suppression, how the pursuit of excellence can distort emotional truth, erode moral clarity. It also expresses how far a young teenager can go to achieve her ambition. In this generation, parents should not be overly obsessed with incorporating their dreams into their children and pressuring them to achieve it. And that is not parenting. Also, young minds to set their goals of explain to their parents to go with desires under proper guidance.

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