



Constructing Courage: A Psychoanalytic Analysis of Disability in Joni: An Unforgettable Story

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of courage within the lived experience of disability through a psychoanalytic analysis of Joni: An Unforgettable Story (Tada, 1976). Drawing on Freud's (1923/1961) structural model of the psyche, the research investigates how the interaction between the id, ego, and superego shapes responses to trauma, adaptation, and identity reconstruction. Rather than conceptualizing disability solely as a physical limitation, the study approaches it as a complex psychological and interpretive experience. Using qualitative narrative analysis, the study argues that courage is not an inherent trait but a dynamic psychological construct that emerges through the negotiation of instinctual drives, adaptive mediation, and moral interpretation. The findings demonstrate that autobiographical narration functions as a critical mechanism for integrating trauma into identity, enabling suffering to be reinterpreted as meaningful. The study contributes to psychoanalytic literary criticism by offering a nuanced understanding of courage as an evolving psychological process.

Keywords: *Freudian Psychoanalysis; Disability and Identity; Courage as Process; Trauma and Adaptation; Narrative Analysis; Autobiographical Narrative; Resilience*

Introduction

Autobiographical narratives provide a critical framework for examining complex human experiences, particularly those involving trauma and transformation. Rather than merely documenting events, such narratives actively construct meaning by organizing memory, emotion, and interpretation into coherent structures (Smith & Watson, 2001). *Joni: An Unforgettable Story* (Tada, 1976) presents a reflective account of life before and after a traumatic spinal cord injury, offering insight into the psychological processes that shape identity.

Historically, disability has been framed within a medical model emphasizing limitation and loss. However, contemporary scholarship reconceptualizes disability as a multidimensional experience encompassing psychological, social, and interpretive dimensions (Goodley, 2016; Shakespeare, 2014). Within this framework, disability becomes a transformative condition that disrupts established identity structures and necessitates psychological adaptation.

This study argues that courage is not a fixed or inherent trait but a dynamic psychological construct that emerges through the interaction of the id, ego, and superego. By applying Freud's (1923/1961) structural model, the research demonstrates how internal conflict, adaptation, and meaning-making collectively contribute to the development of resilience.

Literature review

Freudian Psychoanalysis and the Structure of the Psyche

Freud's (1923/1961) structural model remains foundational for understanding psychological conflict and adaptation. The id, governed by the pleasure principle, represents instinctual drives that seek immediate gratification. In contrast, the ego operates according to the reality principle, mediating between internal desires and external constraints. The superego

introduces moral and ethical considerations, functioning as an internalized authority shaped by cultural and social norms.

Crucially, these components are not static but exist in dynamic interaction. Psychological equilibrium depends on the ego's capacity to negotiate the competing demands of the id and superego while responding to external reality. Trauma disrupts this balance, generating conflict that must be resolved through processes of adaptation.

Freud's (1920/1955) theory of trauma further elaborates this disruption, describing trauma as an experience that overwhelms the psyche's capacity for integration. The repetition compulsion reflects the mind's attempt to process unresolved experience, highlighting the temporal dimension of psychological adaptation.

Post-Freudian Developments and Adaptation

Subsequent psychoanalytic theorists extend Freud's framework. Anna Freud (1936/1966) identifies defense mechanisms as crucial tools employed by the ego to manage anxiety, while Hartmann (1958) emphasizes the adaptive capacities of the ego in negotiating environmental demands. Erikson (1968) introduces a developmental perspective, situating identity formation within a series of crises that contribute to psychological growth.

These developments collectively underscore the importance of adaptation as an ongoing process rather than a fixed outcome. They also highlight the role of internal conflict in shaping identity, reinforcing the relevance of psychoanalytic theory for understanding resilience.

Trauma Theory and the Temporality of Experience

Trauma theory provides additional insight into the psychological dynamics of disruption and recovery. Caruth (1996) conceptualizes trauma as a delayed and fragmented experience that resists immediate representation. LaCapra (2001) distinguishes between acting out and working through, emphasizing the importance of narrative in processing trauma. Van der Kolk (2014) further demonstrates the embodied nature of trauma, illustrating how it affects both mind and body.

These perspectives align with Freud's emphasis on repetition and integration, suggesting that recovery involves a gradual process of reinterpretation rather than immediate resolution.

Narrative Identity and Meaning-Making

Narrative theory offers a complementary framework for understanding how individuals construct identity through storytelling. Smith and Watson (2001) argue that autobiographical narratives actively produce meaning, while McAdams (2008) conceptualizes identity as an evolving life story shaped by interpretation. Ricoeur (1984) emphasizes the hermeneutic nature of narrative, highlighting the role of interpretation in transforming experience into coherent identity.

Together, these perspectives suggest that narrative is not merely reflective but constitutive of identity, providing a mechanism through which trauma can be integrated and reinterpreted.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, theory-driven research design grounded in narrative and textual analysis. The primary objective is to examine how the psychological construction of courage is represented in *Joni: An Unforgettable Story* (Tada, 1976) through the lens of Freud's (1923/1961; 1920/1955) psychoanalytic framework.

Autobiographical texts are treated not as transparent reflections of reality but as constructed narratives in which meaning is actively produced (Smith & Watson, 2001). The analysis focuses on both content and form, examining how experiences are narrated, framed, and interpreted.

A systematic analytical process is employed. First, key narrative episodes are identified, including the immediate aftermath of trauma, the period of adjustment, and the development

of a stabilized identity. Second, these episodes are coded according to psychoanalytic categories, including expressions of instinctual desire (id), adaptive mediation (ego), and moral interpretation (superego). Finally, the findings are interpreted within the broader framework of psychoanalytic theory to explain how courage emerges as a psychological construct.

Analysis and Discussion

Trauma and Psychological Disruption

Freud (1920/1955) argues that trauma overwhelms the psyche's capacity for integration, producing fragmentation and instability. In the narrative, the accident represents a profound rupture that disrupts psychological equilibrium. The subject is confronted with a reality that contradicts her prior sense of autonomy, resulting in a crisis of identity.

The Id: Persistence of Instinctual Conflict

The id generates intense emotional responses characterized by resistance to suffering and a desire for escape. This reflects the pleasure principle's inability to accept imposed limitation. Importantly, the persistence of these impulses throughout the narrative demonstrates that adaptation does not eliminate instinctual conflict but requires its ongoing management.

The Ego: Adaptation and Mediation

The ego functions as the central mechanism of adaptation, mediating between internal drives and external constraints (Freud, 1923/1961). Through strategies such as creative expression, the subject channels emotional energy into meaningful activity. This process of sublimation enables the redefinition of agency, transforming limitation into capability.

The Superego: Moral Interpretation

The superego provides a framework through which suffering is reinterpreted as meaningful. However, its role is complex, as it imposes both structure and pressure. The subject must negotiate moral expectations alongside instinctual desires, highlighting the dynamic interplay of psychic forces.

Defense Mechanisms and Psychological Integration

Anna Freud (1936/1966) identifies defense mechanisms as essential tools for managing anxiety. In the narrative, mechanisms such as denial, sublimation, and rationalization facilitate psychological adaptation. These strategies evolve over time, reflecting the increasing strength of the ego and its capacity for integration.

Narrative Identity and Meaning-Making

Narrative reconstruction plays a crucial role in psychological adaptation. As McAdams (2008) suggests, identity is formed through the construction of a life story. Through narration, the subject reinterprets trauma, transforming it into a coherent and meaningful experience. This process aligns with Ricoeur's (1984) emphasis on interpretation as central to identity formation.

Stability, Identity, and the Ongoing Nature of Courage.

Courage as a Continuous Psychological Process

The analysis of the subject's experience demonstrates that courage is not a fixed achievement but an ongoing process that requires continuous effort and adjustment. From a Freudian perspective, the psyche remains dynamic, with the id, ego, and superego constantly interacting and renegotiating their relationships (Freud, 1923/1961).

Ultimately, Joni's journey illustrates that courage is constructed through the ongoing interplay of internal forces. It is not a static quality that can be possessed once and for all but a dynamic process that evolves over time. This understanding provides a more nuanced and realistic account of resilience, emphasizing the complexity of human psychological experience.

Lived Experience and the Construction of Courage: The Case of Khadim Hussain

While literary and autobiographical texts provide valuable insight into the psychological construction of courage, the inclusion of lived experience further substantiates the argument that courage is not an abstract or purely textual construct but a tangible psychological process enacted in real life. The experience of Khadim Hussain, a man who became paralyzed in his legs following his marriage and subsequently raised eight children through sustained effort and resilience, offers a compelling parallel to the psychoanalytic framework developed in this study. The long-term nature of Khadim Hussain's struggle highlights the temporal dimension of courage emphasized throughout this study. Courage is not a singular act but a sustained process that unfolds over time. The successful upbringing of eight children in the face of disability reflects repeated engagement with adversity, consistent with Freud's (1920/1955) concept of "working through." Each challenge encountered and addressed contributes to the gradual construction of resilience.

Khadim Hussain's life illustrates that courage is embedded in routine acts of persistence, responsibility, and care.

Importantly, this lived example also reinforces the argument that courage is constructed through action rather than merely internal reflection. While autobiographical narration, as seen in *Joni: An Unforgettable Story* (Tada, 1976), provides a space for reinterpretation and meaning-making, real-life experience demonstrates how these psychological processes manifest in everyday practices.

Conclusion

This study reconceptualizes courage as a dynamic psychological process rather than a fixed trait. By applying Freud's (1923/1961; 1920/1955) structural model, the research demonstrates that courage emerges through the ongoing negotiation of instinctual drives, adaptive mediation, and moral interpretation.

The findings highlight the importance of narrative in psychological integration, showing how autobiographical storytelling enables individuals to reinterpret trauma and construct meaning. Courage, in this context, is not defined by the absence of struggle but by the capacity to engage with and transform it over time.

Ultimately, this study contributes to psychoanalytic literary criticism by offering a nuanced understanding of resilience as a complex, evolving process shaped by internal conflict and interpretive meaning-making.

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