

Love and Dependence: Social Relationships in the Age of Social Media Depicted in Normal People by Sally Rooney

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Abstract. Sally Rooney's *Normal People* is a series that intimately chronicles the evolution of Marianne and Connell's relationship, depicting the disjointed evolution of the relationship, underscoring the complexities and dynamics that characterize their relationship. This research aims to understand more deeply and provide a comprehensive exploration of how characters' emotional and psychological experiences can reinforce or reduce anxiety and uncertainty due to the influence of social media. The problem studied is how the character's behavior from the impact of social media in the character's social relationship. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method involving literary sociology and Freud Sigmund's defense mechanism approach. The primary data of the research is visual and verbal data from the *Normal People* series, while secondary data is from literature relevant to the topic. The results of the study emphasize the role of communication in the maintenance of healthy relationships, and the presence of tensions and misunderstandings in the interactions between Connell and Marianne. The research concludes that *Normal People* shows the importance of a diverse approach to understanding human relationships today.

Keywords: Complicated relationship, Freud's defense mechanism, *Normal People*, Social Media.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

In today's modern era, social media plays an important role in influencing our culture, economy, and outlook on things. This platform serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas, the formation of connections, and the mobilization of individuals to support a cause. It also functions as a resource, offering advice and guidance. While there are many advantages to this approach, it is also important to acknowledge the potential disadvantages. It has the potential to diminish the trust and comfort that people once gave to each other, replacing human fellowship and physical and emotional support (Amedie, 2015). Social media has also been shown to weaken our self-control and independent thinking, leading us to join groups that spread misleading content without considering the implications. It is noteworthy that social media has the potential to significantly impact our social skills and contribute to a shift in our behavior, potentially leading to a more antisocial generation (Amedie, 2015). The pervasive use of social media has transformed the landscape of interpersonal communication, introducing novel dynamics that can both enrich and complicate relationships. While social media platforms offer opportunities for connection and expression, they also contribute to feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and misunderstanding. This duality gives rise to significant questions regarding how individuals, especially young adults, navigate their emotional and psychological experiences in digital interaction environments.

The characters of Marianne and Connell provide a valuable case study to examine these themes. The relationship between these two subjects is characterized by periods of closeness and separation, influenced by their respective social environments and personal challenges. As the characters navigate their feelings for each other, the role of social media becomes increasingly significant, shaping their perceptions and interactions. The role of self-defense mechanisms is also very prominent in this study, showing the different resistance of the two characters in each situation they

face. Self-defense mechanisms are individual coping strategies that can be used to reduce distressing feelings, such as stress and anxiety. These mechanisms can be active either consciously or unconsciously. This is related to changes in behavior that are intended to reduce discomfort and threaten the individual. Generally, the methods employed are not solely intended to alter the objective conditions of the threat; they are also designed to modify the perception of the conditions faced. In personality theory, defense mechanisms refer to characteristics that tend to be strong within each individual. This defense mechanism does not generally reflect personality, but it can also affect personality development. The failure of the defense mechanism to fulfill its protective functions can result in mental disorders. In the context of psychological defense mechanisms, the ego functions as a balancer, mediating between the demands of the id and the moral standards of the superego as they pertain to external reality. Furthermore, defense mechanisms help individuals reject unwanted instinctive impulses and protect them from excessive anxiety. (Monica et al., 2020)

The impact of self defense on emotional relationships and social influences has been a focal point in the literature. Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018) is a noteworthy contemporary narrative that delves into the intricacies of intimacy, communication, and the impact of external factors on personal relationships. Set in contemporary Ireland, the series chronicles the evolving relationship between Marianne and Connell, two people navigating the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Discussing self-defense, the *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* also has a connection with the *Normal People* series which also related. In the movie *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Charlie uses self- defense mechanisms to deal with his anxiety. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a deeply moving story that explores the complex tapestry of adolescence, mental health, self-defense and the profound impact of relationships. Through the lens of the main character, Charlie Kelmeckis, the movie delves into the intricacies of trauma and the journey towards self-acceptance as he navigates a tumultuous high school life. This research examines Charlie's character self-defense, exploring how his experiences shape his identity and influence his interactions with the world around him and will be analyzed using self-defense mechanism theory, specifically the theory proposed by Sigmund Freud.

Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities of modern relationships, highlighting the importance of communication and the influence of social media on emotional well-being. Through the lens of Marianne and Connell's experiences, the study will illuminate the challenges and opportunities that arise in the pursuit of meaningful connections in today's interconnected world.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research on (Ningrum, 2022) delves into the thematic representation of power dynamics in Sally Rooney's novel *Normal People*. This research study analyzes the portrayal of power dynamics and the protagonist's resistance to these relations depicted in the novel *Normal People* (2018). The research from (Fauzi, 2025) analyzes the impact of social class on romantic relationships in Sally Rooney's novel *Normal People* through a Marxist critical lens. From a Marxist vantage point, this thesis employs the concept of classism as articulated by Lois Tyson and the theory of the working class as developed by Raymond Williams to explore the various social classes. The objective of this study of (Rahayu & Suprayogi, 2023) is to identify and analyze the archetypes of Persona and Shadow in the characters of the novel *Normal People*, as written by Sally Rooney. Meanwhile, the characters utilized as research subjects comprised three individuals: Connell, Marianne, and Alan. This study focuses on the persona

and shadow as the primary objects within the three characters.

Next study analyzes the notion of silence and the use of silence in Sally Rooney's novel *Normal*

People, focuses on the role of silence as a form of resistance for women experiencing trauma. It also explores the concept of silence as a means of opposition to neoliberal Ireland and its individualistic culture. (Pacana, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative descriptive method that included a literary sociological approach according to Swingewood and Freud's Sigmund defense mechanism. Sociology is the objective study of human beings in society, institutions, and social processes that are carried out to determine their existence and work patterns. Literary works, like sociology, also talk about human life, how to adapt and their desire to change (Wahyudi, 2013). In psychoanalysis based on Freud's theory, explains that self-defense mechanisms arise in a person to suppress direct sexual and aggressive outbursts. Self-defense mechanisms are built by the ego to defend itself from anxiety due to sexual urges and aggression. (Zahrah, n.d.). The primary data source used in this study is the series called *Normal People* by Sally Rooney, while the secondary data sources are sources that contain theories about self-defense mechanisms, personality, as well as about the main characters.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Forms of Self-defense Mechanism As illustrated in the film.

a. Repression

Excerpt 1

Rob : What's Marianne like in her natural habitat?

Connell : I don't know, don't see much of her, so...

"I don't know, eh," said Connell. The subject's unwillingness to face his actual feelings for Marianne is shown in his statement, "Don't see much of her, so..." This reveals a complicated interplay between emotional avoidance and fear of vulnerability. The person in question aims to downplay the significance of their relationship with the other party by claiming ignorance, which could be interpreted as unsettling or frightening. By using this avoidance as a psychological defense mechanism, the person is able to shield themselves from the emotional pain that comes with facing the seriousness of their relationship. In addition, Connell's recognition of social norms and the potential for peer criticism exacerbates his difficulties expressing his feelings, leading to an internal struggle in which he tries to maintain a certain image while struggling with his feelings. In summary, the subject's statement demonstrates how he uses repression to control his emotions, erecting a wall that prevents him from confronting the truth of his connection with Marianne.

The most significant aspect of Freud's theory is repression. He explains that when an individual experiences an instinctual impulse to behave in a manner that the super-ego deems reprehensible (e.g., a strong erotic impulse on the part of a child toward the parent of the opposite sex), the mind has the ability to push this impulse away, repressing it into the unconscious. In order to reconcile the demands of the id and super-ego with reality, the ego uses repression as one of its primary defensive mechanisms to try to reduce internal conflict and discomfort. (Colledge, 2002)

b. Intellectualization

Excerpt 2

Connell : You look really well ,

Marianne : I know, it's classic me, came to college and got pretty.

Marianne's comment, "I know, it's classic me, came to college and got pretty," serves as a perfect example of the defensive strategy known as intellectualization in the conversation between Connell and Marianne. She successfully separates herself from the emotional ramifications of her newfound beauty and confidence by presenting her metamorphosis in an objective and dispassionate way. Because of this intellectualization, she may have conversations about how she looks without having to face the underlying feelings of insecurity, vulnerability, and self-doubt that might still be present because of her past experiences. Marianne uses her predisposition to take a broad viewpoint in her approach to self-image as a psychological defense against the complexity of her emotional experiences. She is challenged to embrace the emotional meaning of Connell's comment by his insistence that she is lovely, which stands in contradiction to her intellectualization. In addition to confirming her metamorphosis, the validation of her identity pushes her to face the sentiments of worthiness she has battled. This conversation sheds light on the intricate relationship that exists between how people view themselves, their emotional development, and the defense mechanisms they use to manage their emotions. The article concludes by emphasizing the value of vulnerability in interpersonal relationships. Marianne's intellectualized self-perception gives way to a more genuine and emotionally linked self-image as a result of Connell's support.

c. Dissociation

Excerpt 3

Marianne : I feel so not myself at the moment, not in a bad way. I just feel outside of my own life somehow. Sometime someone will make eye contact with me, like a bus conductor or a person looking for change and i'll feel chocked that anyone can actually see me, and there's something comforting about it, something good about feeling sort of numb. Detached from it all.

Marianne, a character in *Normal People*, exemplifies dissociation as a coping mechanism through her emotional numbness and feelings of separation. The subject often feels disconnected from her own life throughout the series, noting times when she feels "outside of my own life," which is a reflection of her inability to manage intense emotions and her anxiety of showing too much vulnerability. She is able to protect herself from the hurt of criticism and rejection because of her dissociative condition, especially in her relationships, such as her complicated friendship with Connell. Although this detachment temporarily eases her insecurities, it also

makes it difficult for her to form genuine emotional bonds, which makes her feel alone and prevents her from forming deep connections with other people. The difficulty Marianne has managing her identity and self-worth in a world where she regularly feels misunderstood are reflected in her use of dissociation.

d. Projection

Excerpt 4

Marianne : I know you... probably hate me. But you're the only person who actually talks to me.

Connell : I never said that I hated you.

Marianne's claim that Connell hates her in this passage from *Normal People* exemplifies the psychological idea of projection, which is the process by which a person externalizes their own fears of rejection and insecurity and attributes them to someone else. It is clear that the subject has a strong belief that Connell has a bad attitude toward her, which is a reflection of her deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and isolation. Her prior experiences have caused her to feel marginalization and mistreatment, which has resulted in her ideas. She tries to express her fragility without facing her own feelings head-on by projecting her inner turmoil onto Connell.

Connell's remark, which refutes any hate, emphasizes the discrepancy between Marianne's perspective and reality and exposes her propensity to misunderstand the motives of those in her immediate vicinity. This scene perfectly captures the complexities of their relationship as Marianne struggles with her need for connection and her fear of being unloved. This demonstrates how a person's self-image and interpersonal dynamics can be distorted by past trauma.

e. Denial

Excerpt 6

Connell: I don't want you to think, like, I'm rejecting you or anything. Connell: Look, I, I'm just getting anxious now.

Connell employs denial as a coping strategy in the context of his actions, refusing to acknowledge the unpleasant emotions connected to his emotional intimacy with Marianne. Connell tries to shield himself from the possible hurt and vulnerability that could result from a deeper relationship by declaring that he does not reject Marianne. His capacity to build wholesome connections is eventually hampered by this denial, which causes internal conflict as he struggles between his need to connect and his dread of intimacy. This demonstrates how interpersonal dynamics and one's understanding of emotional reality can be distorted by fears of rejection and past trauma. As a self-defense method, denial eliminates external danger by adopting a demanding mindset and treating it as nonexistent. Usually, the denials arise because the truths are too painful and upsetting. After that, the person brainwashes themselves to rid themselves of terrible things (Agita Br Tarigan et al., 2022).

f. Reaction Formation

Excerpt 7

Connell: I think it's pretty obvious I don't want you to leave.

Marianne: I don't find it obvious what you want.

This is a condition where a person reacts completely the opposite of what he intends in order to not offend the superego's regulations. This is frequently due to a tendency that runs contrary to a desire to repress: reaction formation. Reaction formation has the capacity to maintain an individual from intervening in an anxious or aggression manner (Agita Br Tarigan et al., 2022). Reaction formation is demonstrated by Connell's seeming indifference to Marianne departing; he conceals his actual emotions to shield himself from vulnerability, most likely out of fear of rejection or emotional trauma. His disinterest prevents him from facing the awkwardness of emotional transparency, causing a gap between his actual wishes and his behavior. This illustrates his general difficulty expressing feelings, especially when interacting with someone as passionate as Marianne. Marianne's assumption that

Connell feels bad about her is an example of projection, in which she externalizes her own fears of rejection and anxieties that result from past mistreatment and solitude. She transfers these emotions onto Connell, mistaking his emotional detachment for hatred when, in reality, it is a protective strategy against vulnerability.

g. Repression

Excerpt 8

Repression 1 Eric : You doing it for the laugh, or what?

Connell: Sure, you know me.

Repression is the act of someone who feels that a certain situation or conflict is out of his control and then does something so that he no longer feels the pressure (Agita Br Tarigan et al., 2022). Connell's actions show that he is trying to suppress his emotions. This is a way of protecting himself from emotional pain or vulnerability. To avoid criticism or embarrassment, he makes his relationship with Marianne seem trivial in front of his friends. But when he's alone, he feels his true emotions again, like when he calls Marianne and says he misses her. This pattern shows that Connell has a hard time being emotionally close to other people. He tries to hide his true feelings when he is alone, but he can't do that when other people are around.

h. Rationalization

Excerpt 9

Connell: And would you be embarrassed if they found out that we were together in school, or whatever?

Marianne: Yeah. Because it was humiliating.

An example of rationalization is Marianne's remark, "Because it was humiliating," in which she uses reason to cover up her emotional suffering. Although she was willing to be seen with Connell and was never ashamed of their relationship, she was offended when Connell kept their relationship a secret out of concern about criticism. She defines the experience as "humiliating" rather than openly expressing that grief in order to shield herself from vulnerability and avoid facing how invisible and rejected she felt. In fact, she felt terrible, as if she didn't deserve love. Her greatest loved one was embarrassed to be seen with her in public, which is why she did this. When the real motives of individuals are intolerable to the ego, they are replaced by a kind of substitute motive in order to validate the behavior. Rationalization serves two main purposes. The first is to relieve disappointment when individuals fail to achieve a goal (Agita Br Tarigan et al., 2022).

i. Displacement

Excerpt 10

Marianne : I just pretend to feel a certain way, like I'm in his power. But with you, I actually had those feelings. I'd have done anything you wanted me to.

Marianne shifted her emotional needs from Connell to other men (like Jamie), including the need for power and love. However, she simply "pretends" to be in their control because she doesn't actually

feel an emotional connection with other males. She turns to other relationships that are more emotionally "safe" while being emotionally empty since she is unable to express her genuine feelings of love for Connell due to their unstable relationship. This is a type of emotional escapism. She would never be able to feel the same way about Connell. She merely wanted someone to take my place, but she couldn't find anyone else with whom she could share that type of connection, so she settled for Connell.

a. Sublimation

Connell: I'll go.

Marianne : And I'll stay, and we'll be okay.

Sublimation is exemplified by Marianne's declaration, "And I'll stay, and we'll be okay," in which she transforms her emotional grief and pain into a more logical and encouraging position. She chose to support Connell's chance to pursue his writing career in New York, even if it meant being apart, rather than coping with the hurt of their separation. Instead of addressing the emotional anguish of the split head-on, this helped her to deal with the problem in a selfless way by channeling her feelings into something beneficial for both of them. Since they were dependent on one another, they were both aware of the difficulties they would face, but they chose to face them head-on rather than continually worrying about the worst that might not occur.

2. The Impact of Social Media on 2 Their Social Relationships

Adolescence is the time period during which social relationships take on increased importance in shaping self-esteem, well-being, and identity. For example, adolescents tend to engage in greater levels of interpersonal feedback-seeking and social comparison as peer feedback and experiences serves a primary role in their identity development and

self-esteem (Lee, 2021). Presence is the felt sense of being-with and being there. We usually identify these things by looking at a number of objective, material conditions. Things like being in the same place, looking at each other, and talking at the same time. When the World Wide Web was still new, we often feared that it would take away our sense of presence because of the decline of material conditions. That narrative still lurks in the background, very much alive. But the Internet and social media are growing up, and we are now learning that there are many ways to feel presence, anonymity, and alienation. The word "presence" describes the feeling of being there and being with other people. It also describes the effects of being connected to other people, feeling intimate with them, and feeling like you belong. It operates at the level of intuitive feelings, the immediate reactions to one's environment that shape our typical feelings and perceptions (Hong, 2015).

In Normal People, social media and digital communication, like emails and Skype, play a key role in helping Connell and Marianne stay connected despite physical distance. These tools allow them to express their feelings more openly, offering emotional support, especially during tough times. For Connell, they help him cope with grief and mental health struggles after his friend Rob's suicide. While physical separation often creates emotional distance, digital communication provides a way for them to maintain intimacy and support each other, highlighting how technology can both strengthen and complicate relationships.

Presents the results of the analysis.

Table 1 Result of Discussion

The Data	Number	%
Denial	1	9%
Repression	2	18%
Intellectuallization	1	9%
Diasociation	1	9%
Projection	1	9%
Reaction Formation	1	9%
Rationalization	1	9%
Displacement	1	9%
Sublimation	1	9%
Total	10	100%

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how *Normal People* by Sally Rooney provides a thorough examination of Freud's defense mechanisms in contemporary relationships. The in-depth depiction of Marianne and Connell makes this particularly evident. Examining their actions closely reveals that they cope with anxiety, rejection anxieties, and deep-seated emotional weaknesses by using unconscious psychological techniques including denial, repression, projection, rationalization, sublimation, and others. Characters' self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and communication style are all impacted by these systems, which also determine how they handle their internal conflicts. For instance, Connell frequently feels imprisoned and keeps his actual emotions from Marianne. They feel emotionally cut off from one another as a result. Marianne's displacement and projection, however, demonstrate her continuous battle with her prior traumas. She misinterprets Connell's actions as a result, and she starts looking for other people's praise.

Social media and digital communication have a dual role in fostering emotional support and connection during times of physical separation, but they also make real communication more difficult and exacerbate emotional alienation. The show highlights that openness and honest communication are essential components of good relationships, yet they are frequently impeded by social expectations and personal psychological problems. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that social media and digital communication have both advantages and disadvantages for *Normal People*. It provides emotional support during difficult times and keeps Marianne and Connell linked even though they live far apart. This conflict draws attention to the intricate interrelationships between technology, interpersonal interactions, and stress management in contemporary partnerships.

Normal People is an engaging examination of the psychological complexities of communication, reliance, and love in the digital age. The series offers important insights into how people deal with emotional difficulties and social constraints by fusing literary sociological with Freudian self-defense mechanism. In addition to improving the reader's comprehension of the characters' inner lives, this integration offers a more comprehensive analysis of how contemporary society influences interpersonal interactions. In light of social media and changing communication norms, the study highlights the ongoing significance of Freud's defensive mechanisms as a theoretical framework for comprehending the complexities of contemporary interpersonal relationships.

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