



Binge Eating Disorder as Seen in the Whale (2022) Movie

Bagas Kurniawan¹, Dina Amelia²

¹English Literature, Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia, Bandar Lampung, Lampung

²Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia, Bandar Lampung, Lampung

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Corresponding Author:

Bagas Kurniawan
bagaskurniawan.email@gmail.com
English Literature, Universitas
Teknokrat Indonesia, Bandar
Lampung, Lampung

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the portrayal of Binge Eating Disorder (BED) in the film The Whale (2022) through a literary psychology approach and cinematic narrative theory. The study focuses on the main character, Charlie, by identifying behaviors that reflect BED symptoms based on DSM-5 diagnostic criteria. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with narrative analysis techniques and visual observation of key scenes that represent the character's psychological condition. The findings show that the linear narrative structure and the use of emotional devices in the film succeed in building audience empathy and strengthening understanding of the psychological symptoms of BED sufferers. Thus, this film is not only a cinematic work, but also serves as an effective educational medium in raising public awareness of mental health issues, especially eating disorders.

1. Introduction

This study analyzes the portrayal of Binge Eating Disorder (BED) in the film *The Whale* (2022) using literary psychology and cinematic narrative theory. The main focus of this research is to examine how the main character, Charlie, shows symptoms of BED based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition (DSM-5) criteria, as well as how the narrative structure of the film affects the audience's perception of this psychological condition.

BED is a mental disorder characterized by episodes of rapid and uncontrollable eating, despite not feeling hungry, and usually followed by feelings of guilt or shame (Davis, Graham, & Wildes, 2020). According to the A. P. Association (2015), BED is classified as a disorder that affects both physical and emotional health. The literary psychology approach allows writers to analyze both the conscious behaviors and subconscious motivations of fictional characters. As explained by Noermanzah (2020), psychological theories can be applied both deductively (predetermined) and inductively based on the findings in the works under study.

In addition to psychological approaches, cinematic narrative theory is used to understand how story structure, character development, dialogue, and visual elements shape the audience's emotional engagement. Jahn (2021) introduced the concept of Filmic Composition Devices (FCDs), which are visual and narrative devices that determine what the audience sees, how it is presented, and the order in which it is revealed. The movie *The Whale* uses a linear narrative structure and intense emotional pacing to portray Charlie's inner struggle deeply and empathetically. In line with this, Shannon (2024) asserts that narrative form, whether linear or circular, plays an important role in shaping the audience's interpretation of a character's psychological journey.

The movie *The Whale*, directed by Darren Aronofsky and written by Samuel D. Hunter, tells the story of Charlie, a reclusive English teacher with BED, who tries to fix his relationship with his daughter. Unlike previous studies that have often addressed eating disorders such as anorexia or bulimia from a sociocultural or body image perspective (Athiyarini, 2022; Kaur & Gaur, 2021; Haart, 2020), this study specifically examines BED through a psychological and narrative film approach.

This study aims to answer two main problems:

1. How is BED disorder portrayed in the movie *The Whale* (2022)?
2. How does cinematic narrative influence public understanding of the disorder?

Theoretically, this study combines an interdisciplinary approach between literary psychology, cinematic narrative theory, and film studies. Practically, this research supports efforts to raise awareness about mental health through visual media. Ryan (2003) and Puspawarni (2023) state that narrative functions as a

mental framework that helps the audience understand the emotional and psychological context of the characters in the story.

Previous research has provided an important conceptual basis. Sulistiyana and Widiarti (2019) analyzed depression in David Levithan's *Every Day* through character observation, while Gaur and Sran (2021) examined anorexia in *To the Bone* using psychological theory and DSM-5. Kartika (2020) and Sutrisno and Yuliana (2019) also explored PTSD in movies based on the DSM-5 framework. However, these studies have not specifically addressed how cinematic narrative techniques shape audience perceptions of mental disorders. Therefore, this study fills this gap by combining psychological and narrative analysis to present a realistic and empathetic portrayal of BED in *The Whale*.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to analyze how the film *The Whale (2022)* portrays Binge Eating Disorder (BED) through narrative and cinematic elements. The qualitative approach was chosen because the data analyzed is non-numerical, including dialogue, character expressions, visual scenes, and narrative structure (Puspawarni, 2023).

The primary data in this study is the movie *The Whale (2022)* directed by Darren Aronofsky and written by Samuel D. Hunter. This film was chosen because it presents strong emotional portrayals and in-depth character development, thus supporting the psychological and narrative analysis. Secondary data included relevant scholarly articles and critical reviews, such as those by Syed (2022) and the Obesity Action Coalition (Oac, 2023), which provided additional context on public perceptions of BED and the impact of the film's narrative on audiences.

The data collection process was conducted through repeated viewings of the film to identify key scenes that reflect the symptoms of BED based on the criteria in the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2015), such as eating very quickly, eating large amounts without hunger, hiding eating behavior, and the appearance of shame and guilt after eating. The scenes were selected based on their suitability to the symptom indicators as well as their relevance in the context of character development and emotional narrative.

The analysis was conducted by classifying scenes that reflect BED symptoms, then interpreting them using psychological theories, especially psychoanalysis and behavioral theory (Noermanzah, 2020), to reveal the internal conflict of the main character. Cinematic narrative theory was used to examine how the story structure, visual devices, and emotional pacing shape the empathic viewing experience and convey psychological messages to the audience. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the characters' inner struggles and how cinema can represent mental illness realistically and movingly.

3. Result and Discussion

This study analyzes the representation of binge eating disorder (BED) in the film *The Whale* (2022) through literary psychology and cinematic narrative approaches. Charlie, the main character, is portrayed as having extreme obesity and exhibits typical symptoms of BED identified through DSM-5 criteria. Shan (2023) explains that BED is often triggered by emotional trauma, shame, and social isolation.

From a cinematic aspect, Boggs and Petrie (2008) mentioned that visual elements such as mise-en-scène, lighting, and sound can build a psychological atmosphere that describes the character's inner state. Shannon (2024) also emphasizes the importance of narrative structure, and *The Whale* uses a linear, chronological plot structure, allowing the audience to follow Charlie's physical and emotional decline gradually and touchingly.

With a strong cinematic narrative, the film portrays BED not only as an eating disorder but also as a manifestation of deep emotional suffering, such as loss and guilt. Insights from Syed (2022) and OAC (2023) also show that movies can influence public perceptions of BED and obesity.


I. Representation of BED Symptom in Movies


A. Emotional Wounds and Past Trauma

The scene when Ellie finds the photo of Charlie with Alan is a key moment that reveals the emotional source of Charlie's suffering. Ellie looks at the photo on the bookshelf, turns it to face the right way, and then examines it seriously. She then asks Charlie, *"Why did you gain all that weight?"*, which is asked twice in a serious and pressing tone. Ellie's face shows earnestness, while Charlie looks anxious and unprepared to answer. Before speaking, Charlie inhales deeply, corrects his sitting position, and crosses his fingers on his stomach as a form of self-soothing.

Charlie replied, *"Someone close to me passed away, and it... had an effect on me."* Ellie then looked at the photo again and said, *"Your boyfriend,"* which Charlie immediately corrected, *"My partner."* When Ellie added, *"Your student,"* Charlie responded No further. Charlie's evasive response and use of more neutral terms suggest a sense of discomfort and reluctance to talk about such personal matters in front of his daughter.

Table 1. Emotional Wounds and Past Trauma

Time	Description/Dialogue	Scene
01:27:47 - 01:29:25	Ellie looks at a bookshelf, spots the framed photo of Alan and Charlie from before. She turns it right side up, examining it. Ellie: <i>"Why did you gain all that weight?"</i> Ellie takes the framed photo in her hands, studying it.	

	<p>Charlie: "Oh, I don't--"</p> <p>Ellie: "If you're gonna interrogate me I'm gonna do the same thing. Why did you gain all that weight?"</p> <p>Pause.</p> <p>Charlie: "Someone close to me passed away, and it... It had an effect on me."</p> <p>Ellie turns to Charlie, holds up the framed photo. Charlie looks at the photo, nodding slightly.</p> <p>Charlie continues to play with the loose thread on the couch, his heartbeat rising a bit.</p> <p>Ellie looks at the photo again.</p> <p>Ellie: "Your boyfriend."</p> <p>Charlie: "My partner."</p> <p>Ellie: "Your student."</p>	<p>Figure 1</p>  <p>Figure 2</p>
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According to Shan (2023), trauma due to the loss of a loved one can be a major trigger for compulsive behaviors such as BED. In this context, Charlie's avoidance of discussing Alan in front of Ellie suggests that his emotional wounds remain. The scene is enhanced by the soft but slightly intense background music and shooting techniques that focus on facial expressions and body language, which support the tension and tell us what the characters are feeling (Boggs & Petrie, 2008).





B. Binge Eating as an Emotional Escape

Another important scene that shows binge eating behavior occurs at 01:30:47 - 01:34:13. The tension begins when Charlie hears the sound of the pizza delivery man's steps that seem to have moved away, he wants to take his pizza order, but it turns out that the pizza delivery man is still standing on the stairs and watching Charlie from a distance. Silently staring and saying, "Jesus..." makes Charlie feel very embarrassed and upset. This moment is the emotional trigger for Charlie to do extreme binge eating.

Charlie eats the pizza in a hurry. The camera moves from the living room where Charlie is eating on the sofa, to the front of the refrigerator, and then to the kitchen area. He doesn't stop eating, even though he is sweating and exhausted. The zoom-in technique highlights Charlie's face as he devours the food with emotional urgency, while the zoom-out is used to show the mess of the room filled with food, giving the visual image that Charlie has eaten a lot. In between, Charlie writes emotional messages to all his students, which are shown through snippets of sentences such as "fuck these ridiculous essays" and "JUST WRITE SOMETHING FUCKING HONEST."

The background music became increasingly intense, with chewing sounds, gasping breaths, and the sound of rain from outside the house reinforcing the atmosphere of emotional distress. After eating so much, Charlie experiences severe chest pains and vomits into the trash can. He then sits down crying and looks around the messy room.

Table 2. Binge Eating as an Emotional Escape

Time	Description/Dialogue	Scene
01:30:47 - 01:34:13	<p><i>Charlie listens for a moment, we hear the sound of the delivery boy walking away.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie waits one more moment, then starts wheeling himself over to the front door, the reaching claw in his lap.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie maneuvers the claw toward the pizza boxes, trying to grab an edge of the box.</i></p> <p><i>As he's struggling to get a grip on the pizza boxes, he glances up. The delivery boy is standing in the stairwell, having only descended a step or two, staring at Charlie.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie stops. He slowly lifts his head up, looking back at him. There is a very long silence as they look at one another in silence.</i></p> <p><i>Delivery Boy: "Jesus..."</i></p> <p><i>The delivery boy averts his eyes, staring at the floor. Charlie continues to stare at him as the delivery boy finally descends the stairway.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie remains in the doorway for a moment, motionless.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie is ravenously eating the pizza, chewing and swallowing dangerously fast. Sweat pours down his face.</i></p> <p><i>Still eating the pizza, Charlie opens up his laptop. He logs on to his teaching software, then begins to write a post to all of his students in all of his classes.</i></p> <p><i>We see only bits and pieces of what he's writing: "fuck these ridiculous essays," "fuck the readings," and most notably, "JUST WRITE SOMETHING FUCKING HONEST."</i></p> <p><i>He slams his laptop shut.</i></p> <p><i>He searches around the kitchen, finds a few</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Figure 3</i></p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Figure 4</i></p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Figure 5</i></p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Figure 6</i></p>

	<i>more bits of food: some cereal bars, potato chips, various junk food.</i>	
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This scene illustrates very clearly how shame and deep emotional wounds suddenly trigger uncontrollable compulsive eating behavior. Shan (2023) explains that individuals with BED often turn to food as an escape from unbearable inner distress. The use of location-shifting shooting techniques, compositional changes, music, sound intensity, and Charlie's uncontrollable gestures provides a concrete picture of emotional disorientation. The integration of sound elements, camera movements, character expressions, and actions successfully builds tension and audience empathy for the character's emotional experience (Boggs & Petrie, 2008).


II. Psychological, Physical, and Social Impacts of BED





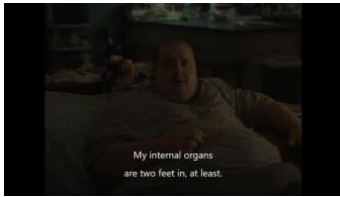
1. Physical Impact

The physical symptoms of BED are evident in Charlie's enormous body, which is introduced to the audience right from the beginning of the movie. In scenes 00:06:31 - 00:11:48, Charlie complains of chest pain, difficulty breathing, and difficulty sleeping. When examined by Liz, the blood pressure result is 238/134, which is very high, indicating a critical health condition. A serious and emotional Liz immediately warned that if Charlie was not hospitalized immediately, he would die soon. Her sharp statement, *"You. Will. Die,"* was delivered with a stern expression and a tone of voice full of worry.

However, Charlie refused to go to the hospital. He argues that he doesn't have the money to cover the expensive hospital fees. In this scene, Charlie's attitude looks resigned, and he apologizes repeatedly, until finally saying in a sarcastic tone, *"Go ahead, what's it gonna do? My internal organs are two feet in at least,"* as a form of irony towards his extreme body condition. Liz, who was emotionally exhausted from watching Charlie's condition deteriorate, also vented her anger at feeling overwhelmed by the situation.

Table 3. Physical Impact

Time	Description/Dialogue	Scene
00:06:31 - 00:11:48	<p><i>Liz (cont'd): "Tell me what you felt."</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "Pain, in my chest. It was hard to breathe, I couldn't intake air."</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "How are you sleeping?"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "I'm not, really."</i></p> <p><i>Liz takes out a stethoscope, threading it down the back of Charlie's shirt. Charlie bends forward as best as he can, Liz listens to his breathing.</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "You're wheezing."</i></p>	 <p><i>Figure 7</i></p>

	<p><i>Charlie: "I always wheeze, Liz."</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "You're wheezing more. Deep breath."</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "Deep breath."</i></p> <p><i>Charlie takes a deep breath. He winces.</i></p> <p><i>Liz (cont'd): "That hurt?"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "What was my blood pressure?"</i></p> <p><i>Liz takes the stethoscope out of her ears, Charlie leans back onto the couch.</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "238 over 134."</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "You have to go to the hospital, Charlie, this has gone way too far--"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "And rack up tens of thousands of dollars of hospital bills, that I'll never be able to pay back, ever--"</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "This affects me too, you know? You're my friend."</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "I know. I'm sorry."</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "You say you're sorry one more time I'm gonna shove a knife right into you, I swear to God--"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "Go ahead, what's it gonna do? My internal organs are two feet in at least."</i></p> <p><i>Liz smiles despite herself. Charlie laughs.</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "You have to go to the hospital, Charlie, this has gone way too far--"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "And rack up tens of thousands of dollars of hospital bills, that I'll never be able to pay back, ever--"</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "This affects me too, you know? You're my friend."</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "I know. I'm sorry."</i></p> <p><i>Liz: "You say you're sorry one more time I'm gonna shove a knife right into you, I swear to God--"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "Go ahead, what's it gonna do? My internal organs are two feet in at least."</i></p> <p><i>Liz smiles despite herself. Charlie laughs.</i></p>	 <p><i>Figure 8</i></p>  <p><i>Figure 9</i></p>  <p><i>Figure 10</i></p>  <p><i>Figure 11</i></p>  <p><i>Figure 12</i></p>
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Towards the end of the movie, it is revealed that Charlie's main reason for refusing treatment is not only because of the cost, but because he is saving the money from his online teaching to fund his daughter Ellie's future. This choice reinforces Charlie's image as a figure who feels unworthy of living, but wants to make amends for his past mistakes by giving something meaningful to the people he loves.

This scene shows strong emotional tension through close-ups of Charlie's face as he endures all the pain, accompanied by the sound of heavy breathing and emotionally charged dialogue. The facial expressions and dialogue interactions are portrayed very effectively, building strong emotional tension (Boggs & Petrie, 2008).


2. Social Impact

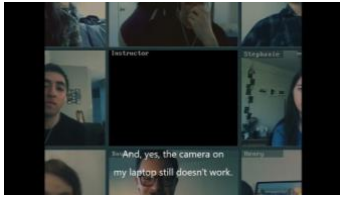
In the initial scene, 00:00:59 - 00:01:51, Charlie teaches online with the camera intentionally turned off. Boxes appear on the virtual classroom screen, featuring college-age students who mostly look disinterested and bored. One of the most striking boxes is the center box labeled "Instructor," whose video is inactive.

In the dull classroom setting, Charlie instructs his students on paragraph structure and the importance of persuasive writing. One student sent a chat message that the whole class could read, "why can't he get his camera fixed?" Charlie responded with a sarcastic chuckle, "Chris, I imagine that was supposed to be a private chat that you sent to the whole class, well done," then added, "And yes, the camera on my laptop still doesn't work. Believe me, you're not missing much."

This sarcastic statement reflects Charlie's shame of his physical condition and how he deliberately hides himself from the view of others. Behind his humor lies a rejection of his existence. Visually, the camera slowly zooms in on the empty "Instructor" box, and at the culminating point, the entire screen turns black. The sound of loud waves is heard, and then the title of the movie "The Whale" appears on the screen.

Table 4. Social Impact

Time	Description/Dialogue	Scene
00:00:59 - 00:01:51	<p>We see fifteen or so squares in a virtual classroom. The Students are all college-aged, most of them look distant and bored. A couple of them, on mute, are obviously having conversations with people outside of the shot. The center square conspicuously has its video turned off. The name on the square reads "Instructor."</p> <p>Charlie (v.o.): "Like we discussed yesterday, I really want you all to focus on topic sentences more. Too many of you are rushing into</p>	 <p>Figure 13</p>

	<p><i>examples in your body paragraphs. It'd be good for everyone to review the paragraph structure PDF I sent you a few weeks ago."</i></p> <p><i>A few students shake their heads, clearly a bit overwhelmed.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie (v.o.): "I know these rules can feel constraining. But remember, the point of this course is to learn how to write clearly and persuasively. That's how you can effectively communicate your ideas."</i></p> <p><i>A chat dialogue to the whole class comes up: "why can't he get his camera fixed".</i></p> <p><i>Charlie (v.o.): (chuckles) "Chris, I imagine that was supposed to be a private chat that you sent to the whole class, well done."</i></p> <p><i>Everyone laughs vaguely. The shot begins to pull in to the instructor square.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie (v.o.): "And yes, the camera on my laptop still doesn't work. Believe me, you're not missing much. Oh, and for those of you who still haven't given me paper three, I need it by Wednesday, no exceptions."</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Figure 14</i></p>
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Somber background music also accompanies the beginning of this conversation, further emphasizing the atmosphere of isolation and loneliness. This scene clearly shows how Charlie lives in social isolation, both physically and emotionally. Visual symbolism, such as the black box without a picture, the sound of the waves, and the somber musical tones, reinforces the meaning that Charlie is a large figure drowning in the solitude of his life, like a beached whale. Through visual symbolism and sound design, it can convey the character's inner conflict at the beginning of the movie (Boggs & Petrie, 2008).



3. Psychological Impact

In the emotional conversation between Charlie and his ex-wife Mary, 01:27:47 - 01:29:25, the two are shown sitting close together on a sofa, leaning against each other. Charlie puts his hand on Mary's back, then they embrace each other for a moment, accompanied by the sound of crashing waves and sad, dramatic music. They reminisce about the happy times they had on vacation at the beach. This creates a strong emotional contrast between the pleasant past and the harsh reality they are facing. Flashbacks are also briefly shown, showing Charlie's feet being swept away by the waves and his little daughter Ellie playing in the sand and looking back at him.

During the conversation, Charlie chuckled despite holding back tears and wheezing. Mary, who could not contain her emotions, cried, especially when Charlie said softly, *"I'm dying, Mary."* Emotions run high as Mary expresses her frustration and pain. Charlie kept pleading in a desperate voice for Mary not to give up on Ellie: *"I need to make sure that she's going to be okay."* But Mary replied in an angry tone, *"You already gave up on her. You gave up on her when she was eight years old!"*

This exchange is the emotional high point for Charlie, who then admits his regret: *"I wish I would have been a part of her life, Mary, both of your lives."* Mary angrily encourages Charlie to go to the hospital: *"Go to the hospital! You have money, go to the hospital!"* Charlie then replies in an increasingly soft and sad tone, *"We both know that money is for Ellie... She doesn't have anyone else, Mary"*.

Table 5. Psychological Impact

Time	Description/Dialogue	Scene
01:27:47 - 01:29:25	<p><i>Charlie lowers his arm, putting it on Mary's back. They hold one another for a moment as the sound of waves subsides.</i></p> <p><i>Mary: "You sound awful."</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "I'm dying, Mary."</i></p> <p><i>Mary remains for a moment longer before pushing herself off of him, holding back tears.</i></p> <p><i>Mary: "Fuck you."</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "I'm sorry."</i></p> <p><i>Mary: "Fuck you."</i></p> <p><i>Mary backs away, not looking at Charlie.</i></p> <p><i>Pause.</i></p> <p><i>Mary (cont'd): "For sure?"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "Yeah. For sure."</i></p> <p><i>Charlie wheels himself over to Mary.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie (cont'd): "Listen to me. I need to make certain that she's going to be okay. We can't give up on her."</i></p> <p><i>Pause. Mary looks at Charlie, her anger growing.</i></p> <p><i>Mary: "You already gave up on her. You gave up on her when she was eight years old!"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "I wish I would have been a part of her life, Mary, both of your lives--"</i></p> <p><i>Mary: "Go to the hospital! You have money, go to the hospital!"</i></p> <p><i>Charlie: "We both know that money is for</i></p>	 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Figure 15</i></p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Figure 16</i></p>

	<p><i>Ellie. But beyond that, I have to make sure that she's going to be alright, that she's going to have a decent life, where people care for her and she cares for other people... She doesn't have anyone else, Mary."</i></p> <p><i>Mary: "I need to-. I have to go."</i></p> <p><i>Mary grabs her purse, heading toward the front door.</i></p> <p><i>Charlie (desperate): "I need to know I did one thing right in my life."</i></p> <p><i>Mary stops at the door. She waits for a moment, not looking at Charlie.</i></p> <p><i>Mary: "We both did our parts. I raised her, you're giving her the money. It's the best we could do."</i></p>	
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This scene is packed with close-ups on the faces of the two characters, showing expressions full of emotional distress. The sound of the waves in the background, combined with the melancholic music, creates a reflective and sorrowful atmosphere. Charlie's last sentence, *"I need to know I did one thing right in my life,"* is spoken in a desperate and sobbing voice. This technique creates an inner closeness between the audience and the character (Boggs & Petrie, 2008).

III. Narrative Structure and Cinematic Techniques in Forming Empathy

The movie *The Whale* (2022) uses a linear narrative structure, which runs chronologically from beginning to end (Shannon, 2024). This approach allows the audience to follow the gradual decline of Charlie's physical and emotional condition from day to day. From the beginning of the movie, Charlie is shown teaching an online class with his camera turned off. He states that his laptop camera is broken, but through the dialogue and tone of voice used, it can be seen that he is embarrassed to show himself in person. This is a narrative introduction that subtly hints at Charlie's inner conflict and inferiority complex.

As the story progresses, the audience is shown that Charlie's condition is getting worse physically and mentally. At the beginning of the movie, serious physical symptoms such as extreme obesity, chest pain, shortness of breath, sleep disorders, and potential heart failure are shown. In another scene, Charlie is seen overeating to the point of nausea and vomiting. He devours pizza and various snacks very quickly, then experiences chest pains and vomits into the trash. This scene shows one of the serious effects of BED disorder in his daily life.

Towards the end of the movie, there is a scene where Charlie slowly gets up from his seat and walks towards Ellie. The camera shows that Charlie's steps seem to float, accompanied by very dramatic and emotional background music. After that,

a flashback shows him standing on the beach. Charlie's feet are swept away by the waves, and we see little Ellie playing in the sand and looking back at him. Although not explicitly explained, this scene gives the impression that Charlie has reached the end of his life. The closing of the movie with a calm and poetic atmosphere gives a very strong emotional impact.

The linear structure of the narrative helps the audience understand and feel how BED slowly affects Charlie's life from a physical, psychological, and social perspective. Cinematic techniques such as tight framing, dominant lighting from inside the house, ambient sounds such as heavy breathing and floor creaks, as well as visual compositions that limit the character's movement space, reinforce the pressing psychological atmosphere. These elements can create a cinematic experience that not only communicates suffering but also leads the audience to feel it personally (Boggs & Petrie, 2008).

IV. Public Criticism and Ethics of Representation

The movie *The Whale* sparked widespread discussion about the representation of obesity and eating disorders in the media. One of the main criticisms was the use of large prosthetics to portray Charlie. Some argue that this decision has the potential to reinforce negative stereotypes of obese individuals, such as images of them as weak, pathetic, or unworthy of sympathy. Syed (2022) argues that the use of such costumes can create an emotional distance between the audience and the reality faced by people with obesity, even reinforcing existing discriminatory views in society.

This critique reflects a broader tension in the ethics of visual representation. On the one hand, there is a view that extreme representations can give rise to covert forms of fat-shaming. On the other hand, if presented with empathy and narrative depth, such representations can raise public awareness and encourage critical discussion. In this context, *The Whale* attempts to strike a balance between emotional authenticity and representational responsibility, although challenges remain.

Amidst the criticism, the movie also received support from various parties, one of which was the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC). This organization was directly involved in the film production process and provided input in the development of Charlie's character. OAC also facilitated dialogue between the filmmaking team and individuals living with extreme obesity, so that their real-life experiences could enrich the emotional and psychological representation of Charlie's character (Oac, 2023).

Through this approach, the character of Charlie is not simply shaped by visual imagination but rather reflects a deeper social and psychological reality. To understand this context more broadly, it is important to review how contemporary visual culture represents the body. Visual culture today highlights the body about trauma, gender, and local cultural awareness. Trauma in contemporary art is

explored through physical and psychological aspects with various media, reflecting the complexity of human experience (Kulasekara, 2016). The body is seen as a symbol of individual identity, where social norms shape perceptions of the ideal body (Irianto, Sanjaya, & Adriati, 2018). This framework suggests that representations in films have ethical weight, as the images shown on screen have a direct effect on how society assesses the value and dignity of individuals.

Against this backdrop, *The Whale* is a film that makes an important contribution to the discourse on mental health and body representation. Although not free from flaws such as the use of visuals that may be considered disturbing for some viewers, this film is still able to invite deep reflection on the boundaries between empathy and exploitation in the visualization of suffering. Charlie is not portrayed solely as a BED sufferer, but as a complex human figure, full of guilt, love, and a desire to redeem his past.

The emotional impact that the movie builds does not come from superficial pity, but from a deep exploration of the inner conflicts and emotional vulnerabilities of its characters. This representation opens a space for reflection for the audience to question how society perceives the body, suffering, and humanity in an ever-evolving visual culture. In an era where visual media heavily influences social attitudes, cinematic efforts like this play a vital role in shaping a more empathetic and insightful cultural awareness.

4. Conclusion

This study explores how the movie *The Whale* (2022) represents binge eating disorder (BED) through narrative and main character development. Based on DSM-5 guidelines, Charlie, the main character in the film, exhibits compulsive eating behavior rooted in emotional trauma, rather than an eating disorder. The symptoms of BED in the movie are not conveyed explicitly, but are constructed through a series of scenes, emotional expressions, and the use of cinematic techniques that can build audience empathy. More than just a representation of a clinical condition, the film shows that eating disorders are often a response to loss, shame, and the inability to manage life's pressures.

The use of a linear narrative structure allows the audience to follow Charlie's psychological development gradually and in depth, making her emotional experience easier to relate to. This structure also emphasizes that BED is part of a complex and serious mental health disorder.

Despite the criticism of the film, including debates on the use of body prosthetics and potential fat-shaming, *The Whale* still managed to open a space for public discussion on eating disorders. The response from health and community organizations such as the OAC shows that cinema can be an important tool in shaping empathy and increasing mental health literacy in society. The findings of this study contribute not only to film studies and literary psychology but also to the clinical understanding of the representation of mental disorders in popular media.

In the future, this cinematic narrative approach can be applied more broadly, both in the analysis of other films that raise psychological issues, as well as in the practice of education and clinical counseling. This approach has the potential to increase public awareness of psychological disorders, as well as strengthen educational methods based on visual and emotional experiences.

By showing the human side of BED, *The Whale* is a clear example of how film can serve as a powerful educational and reflective tool. This research confirms the important role of cinema in building narratives that not only entertain but also educate and encourage critical dialogue on mental health in the public sphere.

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