



Hidden Strings: The Art of Manipulation in Freida McFadden's 'The Housemaid' through Psychoanalytic Study

Fakiha Arain^{1*}, Waqar Hussain²

Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Department of English, Science and Technology, Nawabshah

Corresponding Author: Fakiha Arain fakihaarain23@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the motif of manipulation in Freida McFadden's novel, *The Housemaid*, using a psychoanalytic framework. Employing a qualitative approach centered on textual analysis, the study examines the psychological dynamics between the protagonist, Millie Calloway, and the affluent Winchester family. It reveals the psychological tensions and unconscious reasons underlying the characters' actions, illuminating the negative aspects of emotional intelligence and how they affect identity and self-worth. The study promotes increased awareness and ethical issues in interpersonal relationships and advances our understanding of manipulation in both literary and real-world circumstances. This research demonstrates how manipulative strategies can result in significant psychological suffering and emphasizes the significance of ethical norms in the application of emotional intelligence. In the final stages, the study adds to the conversation on psychological health, moral behavior, and emotional manipulation by highlighting the necessity of a nuanced understanding of emotional intelligence in both literature and society. The study shows how manipulation can undermine one's sense of self and identity by delving into the unconscious motivations and psychological conflicts of McFadden's characters. This reflects the novel's larger critique of society power structures and disparities.

INTRODUCTION

Manipulation, a subtle interplay of power and deception, saturates the pages of Freida McFadden's novel *The Housemaid*, casting a pervasive shadow over the lives of its characters. In the same way that silence in literature stands for unsaid stories and pain, manipulation serves as a complex and mysterious language that permeates the narrative to reveal and hide varying degrees of control and dishonesty. In order to investigate the fundamental dynamics of manipulation that serve as the basis for the story, this study conducts a psychoanalytic investigation that goes beyond superficial interactions. The relationships between its characters, especially that of protagonist Millie Calloway and the wealthy Winchester family, demonstrate emotional manipulation, which is the art of taking advantage of other people's emotions within a self-serving framework. This manipulation which is sometimes referred to as the "dark side" of emotional intelligence (EI) fits with the basic definitions of EI by Austin, which include the assessment, expression, and control of emotions as well as the calculated use of emotional intelligence. Within *The Housemaid*, Characters like the Winchesters in *The Housemaid* are adept in controlling Millie and one another through emotional manipulation, weaving a complicated web of psychological warfare and covert objectives. The characters' skill in interpreting and controlling emotions is highlighted by this behavior, which raises moral concerns about the limits of emotional intelligence when applied to one's own benefit. The Winchester family's cunning use of high emotional intelligence (EI) to control Millie is consistent with ideas that imply EI has a "dark side" when used unethically. Their deeply ingrained unconscious desires for manipulating others serve as protective measures for their psychological weaknesses.

The study emphasizes how Millie is subjected to a psychologically abusive setting as a result of the Winchesters' manipulation techniques, which uphold and reinforce their control and domination. Millie's responses to this manipulation reveal the deep psychological toll it has had on her, as her feelings of uncertainty and bewilderment highlight the long-term emotional fallout from such activities. This emphasizes how crucial ethical issues are when using emotional intelligence and how deceptive strategies can cause serious psychological anguish. The study shows how Millie's identity and sense of self are steadily undermined by ongoing psychological manipulation. Millie's sense of self is eroding due to the Winchesters' use of emotional blackmail, lying, and gaslighting, which is manifested in her growing internal struggle and uncertainty about her judgement and choices. The book also illustrates how systems of privilege and power are intertwined with manipulation, reflecting larger societal power structures. The dynamics of the Winchester family reflect larger social injustices, indicating that manipulation is a systemic problem as much as a personal one. Power disparities are inherently present, and the Winchesters' ability to manipulate and dominate Millie demonstrates how privileged people can take advantage of their emotional intelligence for their own benefit. The interactions between Millie and her employers highlight this dynamic in particular, since manipulation keeps Millie obedient and subordinate while bolstering the social order that already exists. This study

attempts to shed light on the deeper psychological motivations behind the manipulative behaviors of the characters in *The Housemaid* using a psychoanalytic lens informed by EI theory. By doing this, it aims to further conversations on emotional psychology and the moral complexity of human interactions in literature, as well as to provide light on McFadden's representation of manipulation.

The aim of this research, "Hidden Strings: The Art of Manipulation in Freida McFadden's 'The Housemaid' through Psychoanalytic Study," is to accomplish the objectives:

1. To analyze the depiction of emotional manipulation in *The Housemaid* and identify the psychological mechanisms behind the characters' behaviors.
2. To explore the role of emotional intelligence in the characters' manipulation tactics and evaluate the ethical implications of their actions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychoanalysis, also referred to as psychological criticism, is a literary theory that investigates the psyche of characters in literary works through analytical and interpretive critique. The idea of psychoanalyzing literary creativity was put out by Sigmund Freud, who claimed that it was indistinguishable from dream interpretation. Psychoanalytic literary theory holds the unconscious drives and motivations that define real people and fictional characters alike have an impact on their relationships, actions, and thoughts. It seeks to make these obscure psychological details visible and examine how they impact the text.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is widely recognized for its beneficial impact on individuals and their interactions. (EI) is defined as the capacity to recognize, evaluate, and control one's own emotions as well as those of others. It includes both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Positive outcomes like better stress management, psychological health, and social interactions are frequently linked to high EI. EI has also been linked positively to life satisfaction, happiness, and the quality of social networks; conversely, it has been linked negatively to stress, sadness, and loneliness. But there are certain difficulties to the idea of emotional intelligence. Austin draw attention to the possibility that emotional intelligence (EI) is linked to unfavorable consequences. Emotional manipulation is the practice of influencing others for one's own benefit by understanding and controlling their emotions. This part of emotional intelligence, sometimes known as the "dark side," raises the possibility that people with high EI may use their emotional intelligence to control other people's actions in a framework that serves their own interests.

This viewpoint is supported by De Raad who contend that the moral purposes that EI serves determine its worth. He observes that there is "emotional cleverness or cunning," implying that EI may be manipulated a perspective that positive psychology frequently ignores. This contradiction brings up significant ethical issues, especially in literary settings where characters' deceitful behavior might allude to deeper psychological problems. When talking about emotional manipulation, the Machiavellian attribute

(Mach) is relevant. In addition to frequently displaying emotional detachment and a cognitive, as opposed to an emotional, interpersonal orientation, high Mach persons are distinguished by their manipulative behaviors intended to further their own interests. Research has demonstrated that Mach has a positive correlation with alexithymia, a condition characterized by difficulties describing and identifying emotions, and a negative correlation with empathy and the capacity to read emotions. The manipulative aspect of Machiavellianism is further shown by its negative connections with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. It's interesting to note that Mach does not seem to have a high correlation with EI, despite its manipulative characteristics. This suggests that manipulative behaviors may originate from various psychological factors.

Psychopathy, narcissism, and Machiavellianism, together known as the "Dark Triad" of personality, offer a thorough framework for comprehending manipulation of emotions. The Dark Triad is defined as socially aversive characteristics that appear in the population at subclinical levels. Deception, manipulation, impulsivity, callousness, and empathy deficits are characteristics of these traits they are also characterized by strategic and emotional manipulation. An exaggerated sense of entitlement and self-worth. The Dark Triad qualities have been shown to predict emotional manipulation by Jones. For instance, it has been discovered that people with high degrees of narcissism and psychopathy use their socio-emotional intelligence to influence people, especially in relationships. This is consistent with the findings of Grieve who observed that emotional manipulation is more common among those who adhere to hegemonic masculinity, a term that reflects a tendency to marginalize and dominate others. The mechanics of manipulation are further clarified by hegemonic masculinity, which is defined by a lack of empathy and a desire for control. Kupers contends that this need for dominance is consistent with emotional manipulation, implying that manipulative behaviors are more common among those who identify as hegemonic masculine. It is worthwhile to look at the Dark Triad's greater influence on emotional manipulation than hegemonic masculinity Nagler found that trait narcissism and psychopathy moderate the relationship between socio-emotional intelligence and emotional manipulation. It has also been demonstrated that people with high psychopathy use coercive tactics, including emotionally blackmailing a partner, to achieve their own goals. Given that antisocial behavior and reduced empathy are two characteristics that characterize psychopathy, research has shown that those with high trait psychopathy are prepared to emotionally manipulate others. By examining emotional manipulation in contemporary fiction, incorporating psychological theories like emotional intelligence and the Dark Triad traits into literary analysis, and applying psychoanalytic theory to contemporary psychological themes, this research, "Hidden Strings: The Art of Manipulation in Freida McFadden's 'The Housemaid' through Psychoanalytic Study," fills important gaps. It also explores at the influence of gender roles and the ethical ramifications of deceptive behavior, which adds to our knowledge of the motivations of characters and the dynamics of narrative in modern literature.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach within the framework of the psychoanalytic paradigm to explore the themes of manipulation in the novel *The Housemaid* by Freida McFadden. The primary data source is the novel itself, supported by secondary sources such as critical books, journals, and online references. The research is anchored in the psychoanalytic perspective, emphasizing the intricate interplay of psychological elements within the narrative.

Research Design

For this research study, a qualitative research approach is adopted for an in-depth exploration of the psychoanalytic themes of manipulation. The primary focus of the research design is textual analysis, which employs a qualitative approach to assess the text of the book critically and derive and interpret interpretations pertaining to psychological control and manipulation.

McKee defines textual analysis as a method that scholars employ to assess a text critically and derive well-informed interpretations of its implicit meanings. Through the identification and analysis of numerous literary motifs woven throughout the story, this study uses textual analysis to extract and analyze the meaning of *The Housemaid*. This method offers a rich basis for the psychoanalytic investigation of manipulation by enabling a thorough examination of the psychological, social, and power dynamics present in the book.

Data Collection Tool

The primary data collection tool for this research is textual analysis, a qualitative method that involves a detailed and systematic examination of the text within Freida McFadden's novel *The Housemaid*. This approach enables the researcher to delve deeply into the narrative, identifying and interpreting themes related to psychological manipulation and control. The novel itself serves as the primary source of data. Every interaction, dialogue, and narrative description within *The Housemaid* is scrutinized to uncover instances and patterns of manipulation, particularly focusing on the dynamics between the protagonist Millie Calloway and the Winchester family. To support the primary analysis, secondary sources such as critical books, academic journals, and reputable online references are utilized. These sources provide additional context and scholarly interpretations that enhance the understanding of the themes and character dynamics in the novel. The secondary data helps to situate the findings within broader discussions of emotional intelligence, manipulation, and psychoanalytic theory.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this research involves a comprehensive and systematic examination of the text from Freida McFadden's *The Housemaid* using psychoanalytic theory and qualitative textual analysis techniques. The primary method of data analysis is textual analysis, which entails a detailed and interpretative reading of the novel. Finding significant dialogues, passages, and story components that highlight themes of psychological control, power

relations, and manipulation is part of this approach. Every case that has been found is analyzed to learn more about the manipulative behaviors that the characters especially Millie Calloway and the Winchester family engage in and how these interactions impact their relationships and personal psychologies. Themes pertaining to manipulation are classified and coded. This entails labelling the text with terms that stand for various manipulation techniques, like coercion, deception, and emotional manipulation. Then, in order to find patterns and connections across the story, these codes are categorized into more general themes. The method of thematic coding aids in data organization and makes it easier to examine manipulation in the story in greater detail. Psychoanalytic theory is used to further analyze the coded themes. This entails examining the characters' unconscious motivations and psychological tensions. The underlying psychological factors propelling the characters' deceptive behaviors are interpreted through the application of Freudian ideas, including repression, transference, and defense mechanisms. The text's deeper meaning levels are illuminated by this psychoanalytic viewpoint, which shows how manipulation is both a symptom and a weapon of psychological dynamics. Theory of emotional intelligence and manipulation as well as pertinent psychoanalytic literature are contrasted with *The Housemaid's* results to strengthen the study. This comparative analysis highlights the parallels and variations in how manipulation is portrayed in various circumstances, helping to place the novel's issues within larger psychological and literary frameworks. Putting all of the data analysis together into a cohesive story that answers the goals and research questions is the last stage. To provide readers a thorough grasp of manipulation in *The Housemaid*, the synthesis combines the thematic and psychoanalytic interpretations. The results are then examined in light of previous research, emphasizing the novel's contribution to the conversation on emotional intelligence and psychological manipulation.

RESULTS

The result of this research reveals several key insights into the dynamics of manipulation within the narrative, emphasizing the psychological intricacies and power plays among the characters. The novel prominently features emotional manipulation as a recurring theme. Characters, particularly the Winchesters, employ various manipulative tactics to control and influence Millie Calloway. These tactics include gaslighting, deceit, emotional blackmail, and strategic withholding of information. The analysis shows that these behaviors serve to maintain power dynamics and control within the household. For example, when Millie begins to question the intentions of her employers, she is met with subtle yet potent manipulative responses designed to undermine her confidence and sense of reality. This is exemplified in the line, "I didn't say that, Millie. You must have misunderstood," which serves to make her doubt her own perceptions. This research uncovers the ways in which the Winchesters' manipulation tactics create a psychologically oppressive environment for Millie. The power dynamics within the Winchester family are characterized by a continuous struggle for dominance, with each member engaging in manipulative behaviors to secure their position and control over

others. This dynamic is especially evident in the interactions between Millie and her employers, where manipulation serves to keep Millie subservient and compliant. The line, "You don't need to worry about that, Millie. Just do as you're told," underscores the constant exertion of control and authority. Applying psychoanalytic theory reveals that the characters' manipulative behaviors are driven by unconscious motivations and psychological conflicts. For instance, the Winchesters' need to manipulate others can be seen as a defense mechanism to protect their fragile egos and maintain a sense of superiority. Similarly, Millie's responses to manipulation are influenced by her own psychological history and vulnerabilities, which the Winchesters exploit to their advantage. This is reflected in Millie's internal monologue, "Why do I always end up in situations like this? Is it something about me?" highlighting her deep-seated insecurities.

The findings highlight the profound impact of manipulation on Millie's identity and self-perception. As Millie navigates the manipulative environment, she experiences confusion, self-doubt, and a gradual erosion of her sense of self. This psychological turmoil is indicative of the broader effects of manipulation, which can lead to long-term emotional and mental health issues. The novel illustrates this through Millie's gradual loss of confidence, exemplified in her thoughts, "Maybe they're right. Maybe I'm not cut out for this." The research corroborates the notion that high emotional intelligence can be used for both positive and negative purposes. In *The Housemaid*, characters with high levels of emotional intelligence, particularly the Winchesters, use their ability to understand and manipulate emotions to achieve their self-serving goals. This duality underscores the ethical complexities associated with emotional intelligence and its potential for misuse. This is vividly portrayed in the line, "She knows exactly what to say to make me feel small," which demonstrates the deliberate use of emotional insight for manipulation. The analysis raises important ethical questions about the use of emotional manipulation and the moral responsibilities of individuals who possess the ability to influence others' emotions. The novel serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the potential harm that can arise from the unethical use of emotional intelligence and manipulative behaviors. The line, "People like them, they don't see us as real people," reflects the dehumanizing aspect of manipulation and the lack of moral consideration. *The Housemaid* offers a broader commentary on societal power structures and the ways in which manipulation is embedded in social relationships. The novel reflects real-world dynamics where individuals in positions of power exploit their influence to control and manipulate others, mirroring broader societal issues of inequality and abuse of power. This is encapsulated in the line, "The rich always get what they want," which underscores the systemic nature of manipulation and power imbalance.

The study looks at how characters use emotional intelligence to exert control, providing important new insights on the complex nature of manipulation in the book. Theories that claim emotional intelligence might have a "dark side" when used unethically are consistent with the Winchesters'

cunning manipulation of Millie through their high emotional intelligence. According to Freudian theory, these deceptive actions, which have their roots in unconscious desires, serve as protective mechanisms that conceal the characters' psychological weaknesses. The study emphasizes how Millie is subjected to a psychologically abusive setting as a result of the Winchesters' manipulation techniques, which uphold and reinforce their control and domination. Millie's responses to this manipulation reveal the deep psychological toll it has had on her, as her feelings of uncertainty and bewilderment highlight the long-term emotional fallout from such activities. This emphasizes how crucial ethical issues are when using emotional intelligence and how deceptive strategies can cause serious psychological anguish. The study shows how Millie's identity and sense of self are steadily undermined by ongoing psychological manipulation. For instance, Millie's sense of self is eroding due to the Winchesters' use of emotional blackmail, lying, and gaslighting, which is manifested in her growing internal struggle and uncertainty about her own judgement and choices. The book also examines larger social power structures, demonstrating how privilege and power structures are rife with deception. The dynamics of the Winchester family reflect larger social injustices, indicating that manipulation is a systemic problem as much as a personal one. The power disparities that naturally exist are highlighted by the Winchesters' ability to manipulate and control Millie. It also shows how people in privileged positions can take use of emotional intelligence for their own benefit. The interactions between Millie and her employers highlight this dynamic in particular, since manipulation keeps Millie obedient and subordinate while bolstering the social order that already exists. The study emphasizes the dual character of emotional intelligence, the moral implications of its application, and the damaging effects of manipulation on the mind. By utilizing psychoanalytic theory, the study reveals the psychological tensions and hidden impulses that underlie the characters' actions, showing how manipulation is both a symptom and an instrument of psychological dynamics. The book acts as a warning, stressing the need of ethical standards in interpersonal relationships and the perils of manipulating emotions. This study adds a nuanced viewpoint on the difficulties of interpersonal relationships and the moral ramifications of using emotional intelligence for one's own benefit to larger conversations on emotional intelligence, moral behavior, and psychological well-being in literature and society. By examining how literary themes can offer insightful perspectives into actual psychological and social issues, the analysis not only advances our understanding of the motivations of characters and the dynamics of narratives in contemporary literature, but it also promotes greater awareness and ethical considerations in interpersonal relationships.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of this research on *Hidden Strings: The Art of Manipulation in Freida McFadden's 'The Housemaid'* through Psychoanalytic Study delves into the broader implications of the findings, integrating

psychoanalytic theory and concepts of emotional intelligence to understand the pervasive manipulation within the novel. One of the critical insights from this study is the multifaceted nature of manipulation as depicted in the novel. McFadden's portrayal of the Winchesters highlights how individuals with high emotional intelligence can strategically employ manipulation to achieve their goals. This aligns with the theoretical perspective that emotional intelligence, while generally considered a positive trait, can have a "dark side" when used unethically. The Winchesters' ability to read, understand, and influence Millie's emotions demonstrates how emotional intelligence can be weaponized to maintain control and power. The psychoanalytic lens reveals that the manipulative behaviors exhibited by the Winchesters are deeply rooted in unconscious motivations. For instance, their need for control and dominance can be interpreted as a defense mechanism to shield their own psychological vulnerabilities and insecurities. This is consistent with Freudian theory, which posits that individuals often engage in defensive behaviors to protect their ego from perceived threats. In the novel, this is evident in the way the Winchesters constantly undermine Millie's sense of reality and self-worth to assert their superiority.

Millie's reactions to the manipulation she experiences highlight the psychological impact of such behavior. Her growing self-doubt and confusion reflect the erosive effect of sustained manipulation on one's identity and mental health. This finding is particularly significant as it underscores the long-term emotional consequences of being subjected to manipulative tactics. The novel poignantly illustrates this through Millie's internal struggles and declining self-esteem, providing a narrative example of how manipulation can lead to severe psychological distress. The ethical implications of the use of emotional intelligence for manipulation are a central theme in the novel and this research. The Winchesters' actions raise important questions about the moral responsibilities of individuals who possess the ability to influence others' emotions. This discussion contributes to the broader debate on the ethical use of psychological skills and the potential for abuse in interpersonal relationships. The novel serves as a cautionary tale, warning of the dangers of emotional manipulation and the need for ethical guidelines in the application of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, *The Housemaid* offers a reflection on societal power structures, illustrating how manipulation is not only a personal but also a systemic issue. The power dynamics within the Winchester household mirror broader social inequalities, where those in positions of power exploit their influence to control and manipulate others. This aspect of the novel highlights the intersection between personal psychological behavior and larger social and cultural dynamics, suggesting that manipulation is embedded in societal structures of power and privilege.

The discussion also emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing manipulative behaviors in various contexts. By examining the characters' actions through a psychoanalytic framework, the research provides insights into the underlying psychological mechanisms driving manipulation. This understanding can inform interventions aimed at mitigating the impact of

manipulation in both personal and professional settings. The study of Freida McFadden's *The Housemaid* through a psychoanalytic lens offers a comprehensive exploration of the complexities of manipulation. The findings highlight the dual nature of emotional intelligence, the psychological impact of manipulation, and the ethical considerations surrounding its use. The novel not only provides a compelling narrative of psychological control but also serves as a springboard for broader discussions on the role of manipulation in human interactions and societal structures. By bringing these issues to the forefront, the research contributes to the ongoing discourse on emotional intelligence, ethical behavior, and psychological well-being in literature and beyond.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this research on "Hidden Strings: The Art of Manipulation in Freida McFadden's *The Housemaid*" through a psychoanalytic study unveils the intricate ways emotional manipulation is woven into the narrative. The Winchesters' abuse of Millie Calloway highlights the negative aspects of emotional intelligence by showing how these deceptive strategies damage a person's sense of self and identity. The Winchesters maintain control and power by using strategies including gaslighting, lying, and emotional blackmail, which puts Millie in an atmosphere that is psychologically abusive. The characters' underlying motivations and psychological difficulties are the basis for this manipulation, which acts as a coping technique to safeguard their brittle egos and sense of superiority.

The study shows how manipulation had a significant negative effect on Millie's psychological health by showing how her self-esteem and confidence gradually declined. Given that manipulative strategies can result in significant psychological discomfort and long-term emotional repercussions, this emphasizes how crucial ethical considerations are when applying emotional intelligence. The study highlights the need for increased awareness and ethical rules in interpersonal relationships by demonstrating the negative effects that might result from the unethical use of emotional abilities. The book also highlights larger social power dynamics, showing how privilege and power structures are rife with deception. The Winchesters' capacity to influence and dominate Millie highlights concerns of inequality and power abuse by reflecting real-world dynamics in which people in positions of power take use of their influence to control and manipulate others. Because manipulation is systemic, it is critical to address these issues in larger social contexts in addition to on a personal level.

Ultimately, this research advocates for increased awareness and ethical considerations in interpersonal interactions and advances our understanding of manipulation in both literary and real-world contexts. The study offers important insights into the complexities of human behavior and the potential misuse of emotional intelligence by analyzing the psychological dynamics and ethical implications of manipulation in *The Housemaid*. It also encourages readers to think about the ethical aspects of their own interactions and the effects of their actions on others.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so further research needs to be done on the topic "Hidden Strings: The Art of Manipulation in Freida McFadden's 'The Housemaid' through Psychoanalytic Study."

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