



## **THE DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS OF THE CHARACTER NIC SHEFF IN THE FILM BEAUTIFUL BOY BY FELIX VAN GROENINGEN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The title of this research is Depression Symptoms of Nic Sheff in Beautiful Boy by Felix Van Groeningen. The research aims to find out the symptoms of Nic Sheff's depression in the film Beautiful Boy by Felix Van Groeningen. The problem in this study focused on the symptoms of depression of Nic's character, which analyzes the symptoms of depression through 6 aspects of depression according to Beck and Alford. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method in which presents the data in descriptive form. The approach used is a literary psychology approach while researchers use reading and note-taking techniques as data collection techniques. The data in this study used are dialog and scene cuts derived from primary data sources, namely the film Beautiful Boy by Felix Van Groeningen. Secondary data sources are obtained from reference books or documents related to the object of research. The data collection technique used is to collect data using reading and note-taking techniques. Based on the final results of the research conducted on the film Beautiful Boy shows that Nic there are symptoms of depression faced by the main character, namely emotional aspects, cognitive aspects, motivational aspects, physical aspects, delusions, and hallucinations.

***Keywords: depressive symptoms; drugs; film; main character; Rehabilitation.***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Narcotics, psychotropic drugs, and illegal drugs are a real threat that can destroy the lives of its users. The spread of drugs has now mushroomed throughout society, especially among teenagers. They are vulnerable to drugs because they are in the stage of self-discovery, so their curiosity is still relatively high. Drug abuse can make a person dependent and even die. The desire to try, lack of confidence, promiscuity are factors that lead a person to drug abuse. A person who is dependent on drugs usually experiences personality changes and can even cause depression



when their desire to use drugs cannot be fulfilled, sometimes they even hurt themselves and people around them.

Addiction to narcotics, psychotropic drugs, and illegal drugs often leads to depressive disorders in the sufferers. Depressive disorders usually occur due to certain life events or circumstances, but these circumstances are not always followed by depression. Someone who is experiencing depression usually feels sadness, loneliness, decreased self-concept, and distances themselves from the surrounding environment. The rise of addiction to drugs in Indonesia can cause depressive disorders for the addicts themselves. Reporting from an internet site [techno.okezone.com](http://techno.okezone.com) (Anggriawan, 2011), Mount Sinai School of Medicine (MSSM) scientist, Dr. Eric Nestler, said that substance abuse can increase an individual's risk of developing thought disorders or depression. Not a few people experience depression after drug addiction. This is supported by research by Rahmawati et al. (2019) in drug residents conducted at the Purbokayun Social Rehabilitation Institute, Blitar Regency in 2016. The results obtained from 17 drug residents based on the level of normal depression were 1 person, mild depression 8 people, moderate depression 5 and 3 had severe depression.

To date, many films have been produced about drug addiction in order to convey the message that drugs are very dangerous and can have an impact on the psychology of its users. Film is an influential medium to convey messages to its audience. films function as entertainment. However, films also have informative, educative, and persuasive functions if done well. so it is not uncommon in a film that there are things related to science.

One of the films that attracted attention by raising the case of drug addiction is the film *Beautiful Boy* by director Felix Van Groeningen. the film tells the story of the struggle of a father and his son who became drug addicts to recover from their addiction. The film *Beautiful Boy*, is a film based on a true story through a memoir entitled *Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction* by David Sheff, a New York Times writer and father of Nic Sheff, by describing addiction to drugs. The film *Beautiful Boy* tells the story of a character named Nic Sheff who is addicted to drugs. In the film *Beautiful Boy*, Nic is so difficult that his psyche is disturbed when trying to stop his addiction to drugs. Before becoming an addict, Nic was told as a good and talented boy. However, when he first inhaled methamphetamine, he began to feel his initially boring life turning into a colorful life. Nic felt comfortable and able to escape reality by taking drugs, which could destroy his life sooner or later. After realizing this, Nic struggled to escape the grip of drugs with the help of his father. However, Nic experienced symptoms of depression while he was trying to break his addiction to drugs by joining a rehabilitation program.

Based on the problems experienced by Nic Sheff's character, it arouses the author's curiosity to study depressive disorders and drug addiction in the *Beautiful Boy* film released in 2018 with the title "The Depression Symptoms of The Character Nic Sheff in The film *Beautiful Boy* by Felix Van Groeningen".

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Research on depressive disorders in literary works has been analyzed by several previous researchers. The research of Sonambela (2020) entitled "Depresi dalam Novel *The Lovely Bones* Karya Alice Sebold". In the research, Sonambela used Bhowmik's theory of depression to describe the symptoms of depression faced by the Salmon family. Based on the results of her research, Jack Salmon and Abigail Salmon felt symptoms of depression, namely, feeling very sad, loss of interest or potential in normal things, feeling very guilty, feeling very tired or tired, not being able to concentrate well, difficulty thinking, slow response, insomnia, physical problems. Jack Salmon tried to overcome his depression by involving himself in group activities and fun activities. In addition, Maemunah (2021) conducted a similar research entitled "Gejala Depresi Tokoh Utama dalam Novel *Represi* Karya Fakhrisna Amalia". Maemunah analyzed the symptoms of depression through 4 symptoms of depression according to Aaron Beck's theory. Based on the results of research on the symptoms of depression of the main character in the novel *Represi* by Fakhrisna Amalia, that the character named Shira who faced events or behavior carried out in the novel *Represi*, In this case, the main character tends to face more emotional symptoms, because the main character tends to experience a decrease in mood, and changes in behavior due to emotional state.

From the two previous studies, it can be seen that the differences and similarities with the research conducted by the author include, the three previous studies both raised the focus on depressive disorders in characters in literary works. The difference lies in the theory and type of object used by the researcher. None of the three previous studies used Beck and Alford's depression theory and also chose a novel as the object of research, in contrast to the author who used Beck and Alford's theory and took a film as the object of research with the title *Beautiful Boy* by Felix Van Groeningen.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Film**

Film is an influential medium for conveying messages and representing a culture. "Film diartikan sebagai hasil budaya dan alat ekspresi kesenian. Film sebagai komunikasi massa merupakan gabungan dari berbagai teknologi seperti fotografi dan rekamansuara, kesenian baik seni rupa dan seni teater sastra dan arsitektur serta seni musik" (Effendy, 1986, p. 239). As for Hendarsyah's opinion (Hendarsyah, 2020) which states that film is something that has the ability to play space and time and develop and shorten very freely following the times, this makes the reach of films expand over time and can be enjoyed by anyone without age limits. "Film dibagi menjadi dua unsur, yakni unsur naratif dan unsur sinematik" (Sibarani et al., 2018, p. 250). Narrative elements relate to the story aspect or theme of the film. The narrative elements are characters, problems and conflicts, goals, location, and time. Meanwhile, the cinematic element is an element that helps the



story idea become a film. There are four elements that support the artistic elements, namely Mise-en-scene (camera eye), cinematography, editing, and sound.

### **Characters and Characterizations**

In a literary work, of course, the character cannot be separated, the character is a creation and the result of the author's imagination, the character is the most important element in building a story. According to Nurgiyantoro (2002), the term character in the person, the actor of the story. Meanwhile, according to Abrams, a character is a person presented in a narrative work, or drama, who is interpreted by the reader as having certain moral qualities and tendencies as expressed in speech and what is done in action. This is supported by Abrams and Harpham who argue that:

*“Characters are the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as possessing particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it—the dialogue—and from what they do—the action”* (Abrams & Harpham, 2014, p. 48).

In addition, in literary works, characters are always followed by characterization. According to Nurgiyantoro, “Penokohan dan karakterisasi sering juga disamakan artinya dengan karakter dan perwatakan yang mana hal tersebut menunjukkan penempatan tokoh-tokoh tertentu dalam watak tertentu dalam sebuah cerita” (Nurgiyantoro, 2002, p. 165).

### **Depressive Disorder**

"Depression is a psychological disorder characterized by deviations in individual feelings, cognition, and behavior" (Beck & Alford, 2009, p. 324). There are six aspects or symptoms of depression according to Beck and Alford (2009), namely:

- (1) Emotional aspects, someone who is depressed will experience emotional changes. Emotional changes that occur are feelings of sadness, negative feelings towards oneself, feelings of dissatisfaction, loss of emotional attachment to others, increased crying intensity, and loss of sense of humor.
- (2) Cognitive Aspects, someone who has depressive disorders also shows symptoms of cognitive distortions or errors in thinking about themselves such as having low self-esteem, pessimism, self-blame, difficulty in making decisions, and errors in assessing their physical appearance.
- (3) Motivational Aspects, a person with depressive disorders has a low level of motivation such as, no desire, desire to get out of the routine, desire to commit suicide, and dependence on others.



- (4) Physical Aspects, individuals who experience depression will show symptoms related to physical and natural behavior. Individuals with depressive disorders may experience sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, loss of sexual desire, and fatigue.
- (5) Delusions, individuals who faces depressive disorders can also be characterized by the appearance of delusions or cognitive distortions about themselves or in relation to others. There are several categories of delusions, such as delusions that they are worthless, sinful, naive, somatic, and poverty.
- (6) Hallucinations, Hallucinations also sometimes appear as one of the symptoms of individuals experiencing depressive disorders. Individuals will see, hear, or feel something that does not actually exist or not happen.

## METHOD

This research methodology is categorized into four, namely research methods, data sources, data collection techniques and data analysis techniques. In this study, the authors used qualitative research methods that were descriptive in this research. According to Moleong (2017) qualitative research is a method that aims to understand the phenomenon of what is experienced by the research subject, for example behavior, perception, motivation, action. In addition, Ratna (2010) also said that qualitative research is a method whose presentation in the form of description or explanation. Qualitative research is used to understand an event that is seen based on the point of view of the person involved in the event directly. Meanwhile, Semi (2012) states that descriptive research means that the data is decomposed in the form of words or pictures and not in the form of numbers.

Primary data sources are taken from a film called Beautiful Boy accessed on Prime Video. The film was directed by Felix Van Groeningen and released in 2018 with a duration of 112 minutes. In addition, there are secondary data sources from reference books or documents related to the object of research. The data collection technique used is the documentation method, which is carried out by listening and recording techniques. There are several steps in collecting data: first, watching the Beautiful Boy film in its entirety and reading the film subtitles. Second, recording the dialog and taking screenshots of the film subtitles related to the problem to be research. Meanwhile, the analysis technique used is based on qualitative data analysis technique. "We see analysis as three concurrent flows of activity: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 8). There are three stages in analyzing data, namely, data condensation by selecting data that contains symptoms of depression faces by Nic Sheff, data presentation which is used to present data narratively, and drawing and verifying conclusions from the research results.

The steps taken are based on Beck and Alford's theory of depression with a psychological approach based on personality psychology. According Minderop

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(2016), literary psychology is one approach that can be used in analyzing literary works from their psychological aspects. The appeal of literary psychology is in human problems that paint a portrait of the soul. Not only does one's own soul appear in literature, but it can also represent the souls of others. Meanwhile, Sangidu (2005) say the application of literary psychology to literary works is often applied based on the characters, behavior, and actions of the characters. This can be studied when looking at the psychology of the characters in a literary work. The literary psychology approach in this study is used to explain the symptoms of depression experienced by the character Nic Sheff in the film Beautiful Boy by Felix Van Groeningen.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the research conducted, there are four symptoms of depression which Nic Sheff faces as the main character in Felix Van Groeningen's Beautiful Boy.

### 1. Emotional aspect

According Beck dan Alford (2009), the emotional aspect occurs when someone who experiences depressive disorders feels emotional changes in themselves. Emotional changes that occur are feelings of sadness, unable to control anger, negative feelings towards oneself, feelings of dissatisfaction, and increased crying intensity. As evidenced in the following data:

#### Data 1



**Figure 1. Nic argues with his father in the car.**  
(Source. Prime Video)

Nic : **Look I'm 18! You can't force me.**

David: Hey. This got out of hand, right? Don't you think? Come on.  
Nic : All right. Okay.Okay. I'm doing it for you.  
(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 0:10:06)

The scene and conversation from above takes place when Nic and his father, David, are in the car on the way from home to the rehabilitation center where Nic will receive a rehabilitation program to cure his addiction to drugs. However, when they arrived at the parking lot of the rehabilitation center, Nic had a change of emotion. He became angry because he felt forced by his father to join the rehabilitation program. At that time, Nic felt that at the age of 18, he was not given the right to choose what he wanted, so he vented his frustration by shouting and venting his anger, so Nic argued with his father in the car. This happened because of the emotional aspect produced by coercion from family, friends and the surrounding environment.

## Data 2



**Figure 2. David gets a call from the rehabilitation center.**  
(Source. Prime Video)

*[Woman on phone]*

Annie: Hi Mr. Sheff. This is Annie Goldblum from the Ohlhoff Center.

David: Oh, yes. Hi, hello.

Annie: Listen, I'm sorry to disturb you, but I need to inform you about Nic.

David: Okay.

Annie: He left the facility today, during some free time, and he has not returned since.

Annie: I'm sorry Mr. Sheff. But please don't despair, this happens.

(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 0:15:58)

From the brief conversation above, it can be seen that Annie, who is an employee at the rehabilitation center, called David to inform him that Nic had run away from the rehabilitation center since break time. Annie explains that this is normal and part of the rehabilitation program process, because relapse is part of recovery which is part of the learning process. However, Nic did this because of the emotional aspect of himself that arose due to his father's pressure to enter the rehabilitation center.

### Data 3



**Figure 3. Nic, David, and Karen are talking.**

(Source. Prime Video)

Nic : I don't know. Um...

When I tried it, I felt, I felt better than I ever had... So I kept on doing it.

David: I was worried that you were smoking too much pot meanwhile you're out doing every drug on the planet?

And hiding it and lying. Why?

Nic : I don't know. Um...

David: Why Nic? Tell me why!

Nic : I don't know. (Groeningen, 2018, pt. 0:20:55)

In the scene and conversation, Nic, David, and Karen are sitting on the bed in Nic's halfway house at the rehabilitation center, facing each other and talking. David watches Nic for a moment, then David asks if Nic is still using drugs. At first Nic lied, but David continued to ask until it made Nic upset and experienced a change of emotion to sadness because he was disappointed in what he had done. Nic also told his father the truth by expressing his sadness and shedding tears by crying a little and then he apologized to his father.

#### Data 4



**Figure 4. Nic leaves home.**  
(Source. Prime Video)

David: Please, try to help us understand.

Karen: Or just let us help you.

Nic : I don't want your fucking help. Don't you understand that?

Karen: No.

Nic : No, you don't? Jesus Christ, what the fuck is wrong with you then, huh? What the hell is wrong with you people?

David: Hey, Nic.

Nic : You people suffocate me.

David: Hey.

Nic : You fucking suffocate me!!

(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 0:37:05)

The scene and conversation above occurred when Nic was about to leave the house after a few days he was declared clean from drugs and allowed to go home. However, it turned out that not long afterward he had a relapse and returned to using drugs as usual. This was discovered by his father and Nic immediately

packed his things to leave the house. In a state of upset and anger Nic left the house and met his father and stepmother at home. When they persuaded Nic not to leave by helping him to solve the problem properly. Nic refused, and even did not hesitate to say harsh words to his parents. This happened because of the emotional aspect produced by fear which was released in the form of anger to protect himself.

#### Data 5



**Figure 5. Nic argues with his father in the car**  
(Source. Prime Video)

Nic : I'm sorry, Dad.  
Um... I just need some fucking money alright.  
So please just give me some fucking money.  
(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 0:49:25)

From the short conversation and cut scene above, Nic met his father at the café. Nic has an hidden intention when he meets his father after leaving home a few days ago, which is to ask for money that is used only to buy drugs, because he no longer has money to fulfill his drug needs. However, his father knew Nic's hidden intentions and his father always changed the subject every time Nic asked for money. This made Nic a little angry and anxious. He tried to calm himself down, but instead he switched between being the sweet Nic of old, and the unreasonable addict. This is caused by the emotional aspect of mood swings due to the emotional turmoil accumulated within him.

## Data 6



**Gambar 6.** Nic berbincang dengan ayahnya di toko donat.  
(Sumber. Prime Video)

Nic : Look, I've thought about it and I'm done with drugs. This is it.

I'm telling you dad, I'm done.

David: And how would that work? I mean, after what just happened.

(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 0:56:44)

In the scene and conversation, David enters a doughnut shop and he sees Nic sitting there inside, almost asleep, not realizing David is coming. There Nic looks very bad as if sadness is covering him. David watched him for a moment, then sat next to Nic, who started to open his eyes. Nic said that he was fed up with dealing drugs, because when he relapsed he felt so tortured that he found it difficult to quit the addiction. Nic had been to rehab several times but everything ended in failure and he became an addict for the umpteenth time until his father no longer believed Nic's words when he said he wanted to recover. Suddenly, in the middle of the conversation, tears began to fall down Nic's cheeks, he looked sad and vulnerable. This happens because of the emotional aspect that causes mood swings due to the emotional state within him.

### Cognitive Aspects

Beck dan Alford (2009) berpendapat bahwa aspek Kognitif terjadi ketika seseorang yang memiliki gangguan depresi menunjukkan gejala adanya kesalahan berpikir terhadap diri sendiri seperti, menyalahkan diri sendiri, memiliki harga diri yang rendah, pesimisme, dan kesulitan dalam mengambil keputusan. Seperti yang dibuktikan pada data-data berikut ini:

### Data 7

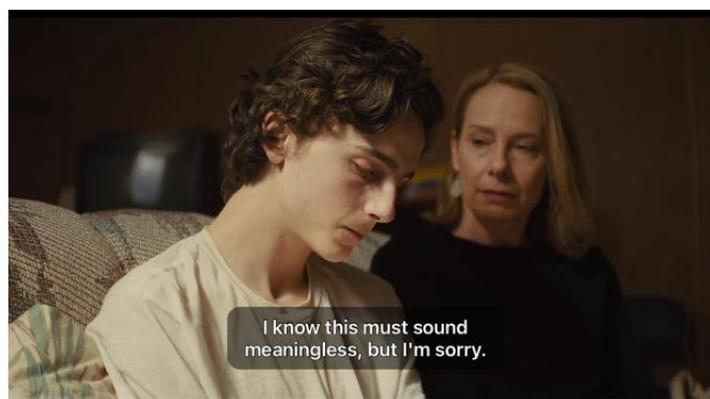


**Figure 7. Nic talking with his father and stepmother.**  
(Source. Prime Video)

Nic : Yeah, I feel like you're just always disappointed in me.  
You're disappointed I don't go to college, you're...  
(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 0:22:46)

In the scene above, Nic rated himself low because he always disappointed his parents since he used drugs, especially because he did not continue his studies because his rehabilitation program did not run smoothly. This is due to the cognitive aspects that arise in Nic because he blames and demeans himself in front of his parents.

### Data 8



**Figure 8. Nic talking with his biological mother.**  
(Sumber. Prime Video)

Nic : I know this must sound meaningless,  
but I'm sorry.  
I'm-I'm sorry.  
Vicky: Oh Nicky...  
(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 1:01:39)

In the scene and short conversation above, it can be seen that at that time Nic and a middle-aged woman who is his biological mother were talking in the room which was Nic's room at the rehabilitation center. Nic bowed his head because he felt guilty to his mother because he had become an addict. Words of apology came out of Nic's mouth, but he felt that the apology issued from his mouth did not mean anything at all because he had hurt his mother by being an addict for years. This feeling arises because of the cognitive aspect that exists in Nic where he feels very guilty to his biological mother because he has become an addict and his recovery program is not going well.

#### Data 9



**Nic calls his father on the roadside.**  
(Sumber. Prime Video)

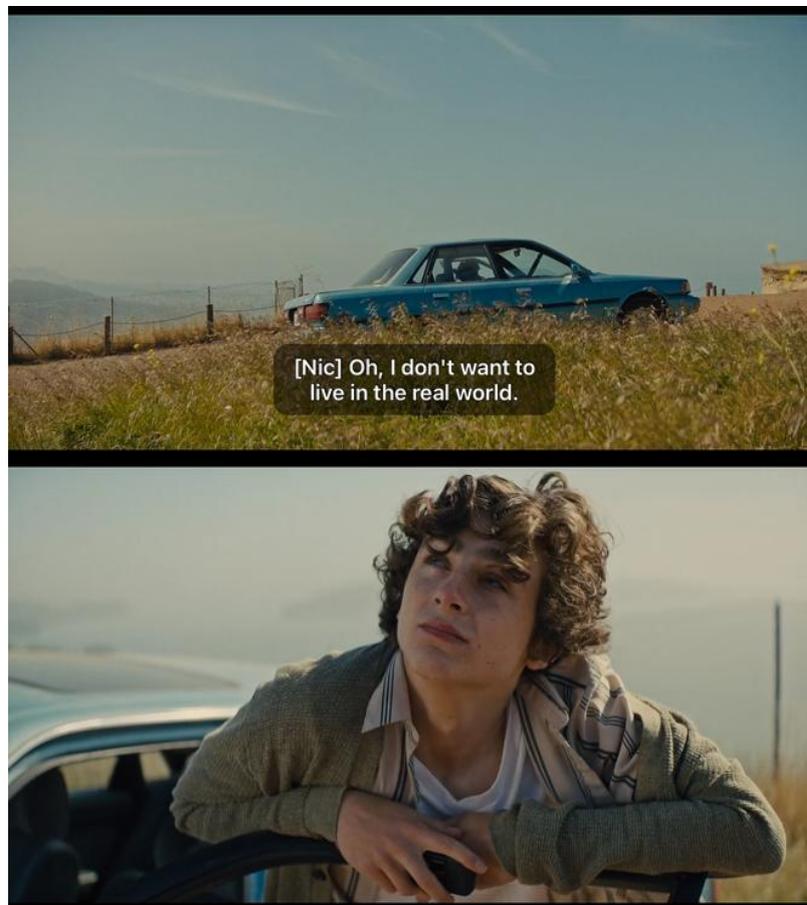
Nic : Hey dad. It's me.  
David: Nic. [on call]  
Nic : Please don't hate me, dad.  
I know what I did wrong.  
I... Listen, I want to stop. But please,  
please, please no rehab. Let me come  
home. I realized I actually need to be  
home. You guys will give me the strength  
to stop. Alright?  
(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 1:38:19)

From the conversations and cut scenes above, it can be seen that Nic's depression symptoms are starting to increase. Nic stood on the side of the road and called his father while crying and begging him to help him escape the shackles of drugs without going through the rehabilitation process. At that time Nic could no longer stand his addiction to drugs, because it tormented him when he could not fulfill his drug needs. Nic felt guilty especially to his family and did not know what else he should do. so, Nic cried and begged his father for help. This is due to the cognitive aspect of not being able to decide something on his own.

### Motivational Aspects

Beck dan Alford (2009) argue that a person with depressive disorders has a low level of motivation such as, no desire, desire to get out of the routine, suicidal ideation, and always depend on others. This can be seen in the following data:

#### Data 10



**Figure 10. Nic talking to Spenser over the phone.**  
(Sumber. Prime Video)

[On phone]

Nic : I don't want to live in the real world.  
I'm so sick of living in the real world.  
Spencer: Bullshit. That's your disease talking,  
man. Wanting to isolate you, so it can kill  
you.  
(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 1:16:35)

The scene and short conversation above shows that Nic is talking to Spencer (his sponsor) over the phone. Nic says that he is sick of living in the real world. The real world Nic is referring to is a world without the company of drugs, on the other hand he is also sick of living side by side with drugs. This shows that Nic's motivation to live began to decline due to his problems where he could not escape the shackles of drugs. This happened because of the motivational aspect where Nic experienced a decrease in motivation to live.

#### Data 11



**Figure 11. Nic attempted suicide by overdose.**  
(Sumber. Prime Video)

Based on the scene above, it can be seen that Nic is using drugs by injecting them into his hand. At that time, Nic looked very frustrated and was at the peak of his depression, so he tried to end his life using his enemy as a means of suicide, which was a drug. This was done so that he would get an overdose as the reason for his death. It can be seen from what Nic did, he showed that his motivation to live had disappeared because it was caused by his problem where he could not escape the shackles of drugs. This happens because of the motivational aspect where what Nic experienced was the loss of motivation to live.

### Physical Aspects

According to Beck and Alford (2009), someone experiencing depression will show physical symptoms such as sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, loss of sexual desire, and fatigue. As evidenced in the following data:

#### Data 12



**Figure 12. Nic is asleep**  
(Sumber. Prime Video)

David: Hey. Where have you been?

Nic : Yeah, I just need to sleep, alright?

David: What have you been doing?

Nic : I just need to sleep, alright? Leave me alone.

(Groeningen, 2018, pt. 0:08:49)

Based on the scene and conversation above, Nic was sleeping in his room because he had been out of the house for a while. At that time, Nic felt very tired so he fell asleep and did not want to be disturbed. This is in accordance with Beck and Alford's statement which states that one of the physical aspects is easy fatigue which is a symptom of depression.

### Data 13



**Figure 13. Nic is weak because he has overdosed.**  
(Sumber. Prime Video)

In the cut scene above, Nic is seen walking towards the hospital garden with the help of his father. Nic's whole body is weak and helpless because he overdosed in his suicide attempt, even to the point of having to be helped by his father to walk. This is due to the physical aspects experienced by Nic.

### CONCLUSION

The character is an important part of a literary work because the character is a description of the behavior in the story, which is seen in terms of his life. Meanwhile, literary psychology is the study of human psychology with images created and understood by the imaginative consciousness in the literary work itself. After analyzing the film *Beautiful Boy*, it can be concluded how the symptoms of depression experienced by Nic Sheff in the film. There are four aspects or symptoms of depression faced by Nic Sheff in *Beautiful Boy* based on Beck and Alford's theory which consist of; 1. Emotional aspects, 2. Cognitive aspects, 3. Motivational aspects, and 4. Physical aspects. The emotional aspect occurs when someone who is depressed gets emotional changes. In the film *Beautiful Boy*, Nic Sheff had not a few emotional changes, this happened because Nic's drug needs were not met. Furthermore, Nic Sheff faces cognitive aspects where he blames himself for being a drug addict. Then, Nic showed aspects of motivation, where someone who is depressed has a low level of motivation. Nic attempted suicide by overdosing because he lost the motivation to live. And the last is the physical aspect, where individuals who experience depression will show symptoms related to physical and natural behavior. Nic shows a physical aspect where his body is weak and helpless caused by drugs. The four aspects use Beck and Alford's depression theory, namely emotional aspects (6 data), cognitive aspects (3 data), motivational aspects (2 data) and physical aspects (2 data). In this case, Nic Sheff tends to have more of an emotional aspect, because he tends to develop behavioral changes in an emotional state with a background of drug addiction.



This research is not devoid of some limitations, one of which is the limited space and time in writing this analysis. There are some parts that are not explained in more depth in this paper, which might provide a better understanding of Nic's addiction. Therefore, I would like to recommend doing a more in-depth analysis by incorporating more variables into the analysis, such as personality changes and the impact of drug addiction on the addict's own life. It is also good to use other literary psychology theories to find the implied messages that might be contained in this film.

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