

**The Film "500 DAYS OF SUMMER" (2009) Movie by Marc Webb: AN Individual Psychological Approach of Friends with Benefits**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This research discusses the phenomenon of the FWB relationship depicted in the characters Tom and Summer in the movie 500 Days of Summer. Their relationship shows complex emotional conflicts due to differences in mindset, lifestyle, and emotional needs of the two characters. This research uses Adler's individual psychology approach including the principles of superiority, inferiority, lifestyle, creative self, fictional goals, and social interest. This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, using literature study techniques for data collection. The results of this study show that Tom's dependency based on inferiority contradicts Summer's lifestyle or principles. The incongruity created stems from Tom's constant need for external validation, but Summer chooses freedom in emotional relationships and life paths. This imbalance was a major source of conflict, as Tom expected a deeper commitment, while Summer felt the pressure threatened her freedom. This research contributes to the field of individual psychology. Through the approach of Adler's principles, it offers new insights into the cause and effect in a non-committal relationship or FWB (Friends With Benefit). The results of the study provide new insights into the psychological dynamics in relationships without commitment, particularly from the perspective of Adler's theory. The mismatch of lifestyles and goals between individuals in FWB relationships can trigger deep emotional conflict. This research not only contributes to understanding individual psychology, but also opens further discussion on how films and literary works portray the complexity of human relationships. By understanding FWB relationships through this theory, this research is expected to provide a new understanding of emotional conflict and expectations in romance relationships in the modern era.*

**Keywords:** *500 Days of Summer, Friends with Benefit, Individual Psychology*

**ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini membahas tentang fenomena hubungan FWB yang digambarkan pada karakter Tom dan Summer dalam film 500 Days of Summer. Hubungan keduanya menunjukkan konflik emosional yang kompleks akibat perbedaan pola pikir, gaya hidup, dan kebutuhan emosional kedua tokoh. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan individual psikologi dari Adler meliputi prinsip superioritas, inferioritas, lifestyle, creative self, fictional goals, dan social interest. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif, dengan menggunakan teknik literature study untuk pengumpulan data. Hasil dari penelitian ini memperlihatkan ketergantungan Tom yang didasari oleh inferioritas bertentangan dengan gaya hidup ataupun prinsip dari Summer. Ketidaksesuaian tersebut tercipta yang berakar dari Tom yang selalu butuh validasi eksternal, namun Summer memilih kebebasan dalam hubungan emosional dan jalan hidup. Ketidakeimbangan ini menjadi sumber utama konflik, karena Tom mengharapkan komitmen yang lebih mendalam, sedangkan Summer

merasa tekanan tersebut mengancam kebebasannya. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi dalam bidang psikologi individu. Melalui pendekatan prinsip-prinsip dari Adler menawarkan wawasan baru terkait sebab akibat dalam hubungan tanpa komitmen atau FWB (Friends With Benefit). Hasil dari penelitian tersebut memberikan wawasan baru terkait dinamika psikologis dalam hubungan tanpa komitmen, khususnya dari perspektif teori Adler. Ketidaksiharian gaya hidup dan tujuan antara individu dalam hubungan FWB dapat memicu konflik emosional yang mendalam. Penelitian ini tidak hanya berkontribusi dalam memahami psikologi individu, tetapi juga membuka diskusi lebih lanjut tentang bagaimana film dan karya sastra menggambarkan kompleksitas hubungan antar manusia. Dengan memahami hubungan FWB melalui teori ini, penelitian ini diharapkan mampu memberikan pemahaman baru tentang konflik emosional dan ekspektasi dalam hubungan romansa di era modern.

**Kata Kunci:** 500 Days of Summer, Friend With Benefit, Individual Psikologi

## INTRODUCTION

Literary works in the form of visual works including movies provide a reflection of the complexity of emotions or drama in the lives of individuals. Literary works in the form of films or visual works have an important role in depicting the complexity of human life in various aspects. In this case, the movie entitled "500 Days of Summer" by Marc Webb in 2009. The movie tells a love story between the two characters, Tom and Summer. Through the narratives between the characters in the movie, it gives an idea of how love has an impact on the lives of several individuals, whether negative or positive. The most highlighted relationship in this movie is the uncommitted relationship between Tom and Summer. Romantic relationships are often an interesting topic that can be explored.

The phenomenon of relationships without commitment in the current era is commonly referred to as FWB (Friends With Benefits). FWB is a form of relationship that involves physical or sexual involvement between two individuals in the absence of emotional involvement or deep and long-term commitment (Garcia et al. 2012). The phenomenon of FWB is currently growing in the modern era, especially in young people who involve more physical intimacy rather than following an exclusive and deep commitment. If this phenomenon is not faced, it will cause several things, including changing views of love in the midst of society. In line with the opinion of (Garcia et al. 2012) who said that FWB if not handled will become a disease in society, because it will lead to a lack of emotional sacredness of love relationships in each individual.

Researchers also found several previous studies that were almost similar regarding the phenomenon or topic of FWB including research conducted by (Fitriyani and Iswahyuningtyas 2020) which examined the process of FWB relationships in online dating applications. The study found that in the process of building relationships, FWB (Friends with Benefits) aims to seek pleasure, expand social networks, and build friendship ties. Then, research conducted by (Ryan et al. 2021) which examines the three innate psychology (relatedness, autonomy, &

competence) in the context of FWB relationships, the findings in this study are FWB relationships can fulfill the need for relatedness, but often lack the autonomy and competence that individuals seek in more committed relationships. Then, the third research conducted by (Prameswari et al. 2024) examined the impact of FWB relationships among teenagers. The research found that FWB behavior among teenagers today has a major impact on social norms and moral deviations. Although the interaction of men and women in the FWB environment definitely contains aspects of sexuality, many teenagers consider it a mere pleasure.

Although there are several studies on similar topics, namely FWB, researchers here are required to find a gap or renewal in their research. So, the novelty of research found by researchers is the object to be studied. Because previous research only still examines the impact or complexity of FWB relationships. This research will focus on the object, the characters of Tom and Summer in the movie *500 Days of Summer*. In other words, if previous research focused more on exploring certain aspects of FWB, then this research will integrative relate these dimensions in the study of fictional characters in the movie *500 Days of Summer*, on the twists and turns of the relationship between Tom and Summer. The research will utilize Adler's individual psychology approach, aiming to broaden the understanding of the dynamics of the FWB relationship in the movie.

The individual psychology approach developed by Alfred Adler emphasizes that human behavior is influenced by the need to overcome feelings of inferiority and achieve superiority (Adler 2013). Adler argues that individual behavior is based on several concepts, namely, superiority, inferiority, lifestyle, creative self, fictional goals, and social interest. In the movie *500 Days of Summer*, Tom and Summer's relationship can be understood through the lens of individual psychology theory. Tom, who seeks true love and commitment, may be influenced by the need to overcome his feelings of inferiority by finding someone who can provide validation and meaning in his life. On the other hand, Summer, who tends to avoid commitment, may feel more comfortable with less intense relationship dynamics, as a way to avoid potential failure or emotional discomfort.

From the existing phenomena and the approach used in this study, research questions were formed including: (1) What are the psychological dynamics of friends with benefits (FWB) relationships depicted in the movie "500 Days of Summer"? (2) How does the movie "500 Days of Summer" depict the emotional challenges faced by individuals in friends with benefits (FWB) relationships? (3) Why do the characters in the movie "500 Days of Summer" experience difficulties in maintaining friends with benefits (FWB) relationships, according to psychological theory? This study was conducted with the aim to investigate the mental processes of friends with benefits (FWB) relationships as depicted in the movie "500 Days of Summer", to analyze how the movie "500 Days of Summer" depicts the emotional difficulties faced by individuals in FWB relationships, and to examine, based on psychological theory, why the main characters in the movie "500 Days of Summer" have difficulties in

maintaining FWB relationships. This research is also expected to make a theoretical contribution to the study of individual psychology in interpersonal relationships, especially in the context of Friends with Benefits (FWB) relationships. By using Alfred Adler's theory of individual psychology, this study expands the understanding of the psychological dynamics that occur in FWB relationships. The findings of this study can be used as a reference for other studies that discuss similar themes, both in the fields of literature, film, and social psychology.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. According to (Sugiyono 2013), descriptive methods aim to describe ongoing phenomena and are not intended to test hypotheses, but rather to understand existing realities. In addition, (Creswell et al. 2017) explains that a qualitative approach helps researchers explore the meaning of individual experiences in a particular context. The main data of this research is the narration between the characters Tom and Summer in the movie 500 Days of Summer. And the secondary data is some previous research or books that relate to this research. Data collection techniques will use literature study techniques consisting of analyzing, marking or recording, reviewing, and synthesizing. While the data analysis technique will use a descriptive approach, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

## **RESULT and DISCUSSION**

This section will discuss the representation of FWB in 500 Days of Summer, the analysis of Alfred Adler's personality principles in the film, and the challenges of friends with benefits (FWB) relationships through the lens of Adler's theory displayed in the narrative between Tom and Summer's characters in 500 Days of Summer. Adler's concepts that will be used are superiority, inferiority, lifestyle, creative self, fictional goals, and social interest.

### **Representation of FWB in the Film 500 Days of Summer**

In the film 500 Days of Summer (2009), the relationship between Tom Hansen and Summer Finn portrays a very similar dynamic to the concept of friends with benefits (FWB). In the beginning, the two agreed to have a relationship without any long-term commitments or expectations. They are just friends who are also physically related without involving feelings of love or seriousness in their relationship. This description is in keeping with the hallmarks of FWBs, which often include sexual relationships without deep emotional attachment. However, even though their relationship started with that goal in mind, feelings begin to develop, especially on Tom's part. He begins to want more than just a physical relationship and wants to be in a more serious relationship, while Summer persists with her view that their relationship should remain light and non-committal. This incompatibility is at the heart of the emotional conflict in the film, which shows that FWB relationships can often cause tension and confusion, especially if there are different views on emotional

commitment.

In the film *500 Days of Summer*, the difference in emotional attraction between Tom and Summer can be analyzed with Adler's theory. Tom has an idealistic perspective on love and looks for a committed partnership to get over his emotional inferiority complex. His desire for a committed, romantic relationship is a reflection of his attempts to find fulfillment in life. Summer, on the other hand, is more pragmatic and does not believe in true love. She avoids emotional attachments and values more freedom and control over her life, which reflects her attempt to achieve self-fulfillment without relying on other. This difference creates tension, as Tom wants a deeper relationship, while Summer seeks only freedom. This illustrates their different ways of coping with feelings of inferiority, which ends in emotional incompatibility and sadness for Tom. Adler argued that individuals who feel inferior tend to attempt to overcome these feelings by seeking validation from others. In this context, Tom seeks to prove his worth through a relationship with Summer, while Summer, who appears to be more independent, does not feel the same need to prove herself (Thompson et al. 2021). This incompatibility creates tension that culminates in a breakup, where Tom feels abandoned and unappreciated, while Summer remains steadfast in her decision not to get attached. Thus, the film not only depicts an FWB relationship, but also highlights how differences in emotional goals can affect relationship dynamics.

### **Analysis of Alfred Adler's Personality Principles in the Film**

#### **a. Inferiority Principle**

This principle states that every individual naturally has feelings of inferiority or inadequacy from childhood. These feelings arise from experiences of physical, social, or emotional inadequacies or limitations.



**Figure 1 Minute Scene: 10:22**

Summer: *"I love The Smiths!"*

Tom: *"You... you like The Smiths?"*

In this scene, Tom becomes fascinated with Summer as soon as she mentions liking *The Smiths*. According to (Adler 2013) Inferiority Principle, people often feel inadequate and seek ways to overcome these feelings. Tom, who is shown as shy and unsure of himself, sees their shared interest in music as a way to connect with her. This small similarity makes him feel more confident and less inferior, as though it brings them closer. It shows how Tom uses this moment to make himself feel more comfortable in a situation where

he might usually feel insecure.



**Figure 2** Minute Scene: 19:37

Summer: *"I just don't feel comfortable being anyone's girlfriend."*

In this scene, Summer openly expresses her desire to avoid a serious relationship, emphasizing her need for independence and emotional freedom. Tom, on the other hand, downplays his true feelings and agrees to her terms, even though he wants something more meaningful. According to Adler's Inferiority Principle, Tom's willingness to accept a relationship that does not meet his emotional needs reflects his feelings of inadequacy. He fears that asking for more could lead to losing Summer entirely, so he settles for less in an attempt to keep her in his life. This behavior highlights how feelings of inferiority can drive individuals to compromise their desires to maintain a sense of connection. His choice reflects Adler's idea that inferiority feelings can motivate behavior, often leading people to make decisions that prioritize external validation over their internal well-being.

**b. Superiority Principle**

In response to low self-esteem, individuals seek to achieve superiority. Superiority in Adler's context does not mean being better than others, but refers to optimal self-achievement and the realization of individual potential.



**Figure 3** Minute Scene: 09:47

Tom: *"You know what? Screw her. I don't care."*

Tom's dialogue reflects his attempt to overcome feelings of inferiority and seek emotional superiority after experiencing heartbreak. Although this is a reaction that may not be entirely healthy, it shows Tom's attempt to take back control of his life and not let the negative experience define him. In Adler's context, this is an important step on the journey towards achieving self-potential and emotional recovery.



**Figure 4** Minute Scene: 10:30

Summer: *"You have... You have good taste in music."*

Tom: (Smiling)

In this scene they are in the same lift, and Summer notices that Tom is listening to her favorite music. This reflects elements of the Superiority Principle in the context of interpersonal relationships. This compliment provides validation and recognition of Tom's identity, helps build an emotional connection between them, and contributes to Tom's quest for self-confidence and superiority. In this context, their interaction demonstrates how social relationships can play a role in helping individuals overcome feelings of inferiority and find value in themselves.

### c. Lifestyle Principle

Lifestyle is the unique pattern it encompasses the beliefs, values, habits and strategies that individuals adopt to live life. A lifestyle is formed from childhood based on early experiences, environment, and how one overcomes low self-esteem. It reflects how individuals view the world and themselves.



**Figure 5** Minute Scene: 24:05

Summer: *"I think we should stop seeing each other."*

According to (Adler 2013), a lifestyle is a unique pattern of a person's beliefs, values and behaviors developed since childhood to achieve their life goals. It reflects the way individuals understand and respond to the world around them. Lifestyle includes the way a person makes decisions and interacts with others. In the context of the relationship with Tom, Summer's dialogue shows that she makes decisions based on her personal values. Summer is an individual who from the beginning of the relationship made it clear that she does not believe in traditional romantic love and does not want

a long-term commitment.



**Figure 6** Minute Scene: 29:45-29:46

Summer: *"I'm not really looking for anything serious. It's that okay?"*

Tom: *"...Yeah"*

In this scene, Summer's statement about not looking for anything serious reflects her lifestyle, which is shaped by her past experiences and personal beliefs. According to (Adler 2013)'s lifestyle principle, a person's way of thinking and acting is influenced by their early experiences and the beliefs they form as a result. Summer has likely encountered situations in her past that led her to adopt the belief that avoiding serious commitments is the best way to protect herself emotionally. Tom's response shows that he is attempting to adapt to Summer's lifestyle, even though it conflicts with his own emotional needs. Tom's willingness to say "I'm okay with that" indicates that he is trying to align with Summer's perspective, possibly in an effort to maintain the relationship or avoid conflict. However, this might be a sign of Tom compromising his own emotional needs.

#### **d. Creative Self Principle**

This principle emphasizes the active role of the individual in shaping their personality. Adler believed that everyone has the creative power to set life goals, make decisions, and overcome challenges.



**Figure 7** Minute Scene: 21:57



**Figure 8** Minute Scene: 22:03

Tom: (Singing) "*Here comes your man...*"

Summer: (Smiling) "*You're Good*"

Tom's decision to sing and showcase his creativity reflects Adler's principle of the creative self. According to (Adler 2013), individuals have the ability to shape their own actions and reactions, using creativity to navigate social situations and personal challenges. Tom, by singing "Here comes your man," is actively expressing his personality and attempting to create a special moment with Summer. Through this act of creativity, Tom is working to portray himself as a fun, interesting person, hoping that this will increase his appeal and strengthen his connection with Summer.

**e. Fictional Goal Principle**

Fictional goals refer to expectations or visions of the future that individuals create as a guide for their actions. While these goals may not be entirely realistic, they serve as powerful motivational tools. This principle explains how individuals can create personal stories or narratives to give their lives direction, such as dreams of being successful, happy or respected.



**Figure 9** Minute Scene: 05:07

Tom: (Narrating) "*Things were going so well.*"

Fictional finalism is Adler's concept that humans are motivated by self-created goals, which are often fictional or idealistic. Although these goals may be unrealistic, they guide one's behavior and decisions in life. In Tom's case the narrative "*Things were going so well*" shows that he holds the fictional hope that their relationship will continue to be perfect and eventually lead to idealized happiness.



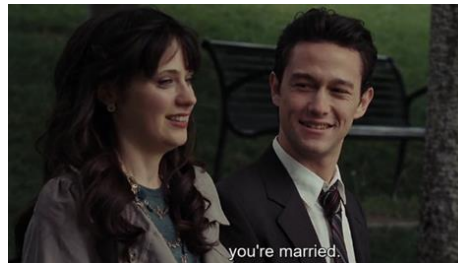
**Figure 10** Minute Scene: 14:06

Tom: *"I love how she makes me feel."*

Tom constructs an idealized narrative of love and happiness, which he projects onto his relationship with Summer. This dialogue reflects Tom's fictional belief that his personal happiness is entirely dependent on Summer's presence and influence in his life, even though the reality of their relationship does not always align with these expectations.

**f. Social Interest Principle**

This principle underlines the importance of social relationships and contribution to society. Adler believed that psychologically healthy individuals are those who have a strong social interest, which is the ability to empathize, cooperate, and be concerned for the welfare of others. Social interest reflects the human need to live harmoniously in community and give meaning to life through positive relationships.



**Figure 11** Minute Scene: 1:23:06

Tom: *"I quit the office."*

Summer: *"You did? I didn't know. That's great!"*

Tom: *"And you, um... you're married."*

Summer: *"Yeah, It's crazy, huh?"*

The manner that Tom and Summer handle significant life transitions in their conversation exemplifies the social interest concept. While Summer talks about the major life transition of marriage, Tom demonstrates his maturity by venturing outside of his comfort zone. According to Alfred Adler, this discourse exemplifies emotional maturity, acceptance, and support all crucial components of social interest.



**Figure 12** Minute Scene: 1:23:28

Tom: *"So why'd you dance with me?"*

Summer: *"Cause I wanted to."*

Tom: *"You never wanted to be anyone's girlfriend, and now you're somebody's wife."*

Summer: *"Surprised me to."*

Tom: *"I don't think I'll ever understand that. I mean, it doesn't make sense."*

Summer: *"It just happened".*

Tom: *"Right, but that's what I don't understand. What just happened?"*

Summer: *"I just... I just woke up one day, and I knew."*

Tom: *"Knew what?"*

Summer: *"What I was never sure of with you."*

Tom: *"You know what sucks? Realizing that everything you believe in is complete and utter bullshit. It sucks."*

The dialogue discusses how to search for meaning in relationships and how differences in perception can lead to emotional conflict. From Adler's perspective, Summer has found peace and clarity in her life, and Tom is still struggling to develop healthy social interests as he is still stuck in his own expectations and beliefs. As an important step towards a healthier and more meaningful relationship, this conversation emphasizes that self-acceptance, social awareness, and the ability to come to terms with reality are all very important.

### **The Challenges of a Friends with Benefits (FWB) Relationship Through the Lens of Adler's Theory**

Tom heavily relies on the relationship to validate his sense of self-worth, believing that Summer's affection can fulfill his idealistic notions of love and happiness. This dependence stems from his internal feelings of inadequacy and his need for external validation to overcome his perceived emotional shortcomings. Adler suggests that such reliance often leads to disappointment, as the individual projects unrealistic expectations onto others, which are difficult to meet. Summer's independence represents her ability to pursue self-fulfillment without depending on others. According to (Adler 2013), her lifestyle aligns with a creative self that chooses autonomy over emotional entanglements, reflecting her rejection of societal norms about love and commitment. Summer's perspective is shaped by her belief that

romantic relationships are not essential to her happiness. This divergence between Tom's dependency and Summer's independence underscores a core incompatibility.

The failure of Tom and Summer's relationship lies in the difference in goals. In accordance with Adler's statement about fictional goals, Tom sees love as a solution, by emotionally validating Summer. When Summer does not share the same vision, inferiority arises which frustrates Tom. Summer rejects a committed relationship because it aligns with superiority. Superiority is something that emphasizes independence and personal growth (Adler 2013). The misalignment between Tom's validation and Summer's creates tension between them. Where there is a difference in vision and mission that creates psychological tension between dependence and independence that causes Tom and Summer's relationship to break down.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the movie *500 Days of Summer*, the characters of Tom Hansen and Summer Finn show different emotional relationship patterns. Tom, an idealist when it comes to romance, shows his inferiority tendencies by always seeking emotional validation and Summer's commitment to fill his emotional void. Summer, on the other hand, chooses to remain free and avoid emotional relationships that may interfere with her independence. Because of this imbalance, Summer wants to keep her distance and Tom himself needs closeness between them. This difference in mindset stems from a difference in lifestyle and goals. Tom sees love as his source of happiness, while Summer chooses a more realistic and pragmatic approach to relationships.

Due to unmet expectations and conflicting emotional needs, the tension in this relationship increases. Summer created an increasingly difficult emotional distance, while Tom's attempt to turn the relationship into a more committed one showed his reliance on validation. This incompatibility demonstrates the conflicts that often occur in modern relationships, where different patterns of attachment and life goals are a major source of problems. The movie illustrates how relationship dynamics can be affected by a mismatch between emotional needs and expectations, and how important communication and understanding are to overcome problems in relationships without clear commitments such as FWBs.

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