



## Internal Conflicts in Joe Penna's Stowaway

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### Abstract

This study investigates the internal conflicts experienced by the main characters in Joe Penna's *Stowaway*, focusing on Zoe Levenson, David, and Commander Bernadette. The research aims to identify the types of internal conflict and analyze how these conflicts influence character development and the narrative. Employing a qualitative method with observational techniques, the film was repeatedly viewed to record significant dialogues, expressions, and behaviors indicating inner struggles. Data were analyzed using Freud's psychoanalytic theory (1923), Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (1979), Kant's (1785) ethical perspectives from deontology and consequentialism. The findings reveal three main internal conflicts: Zoe's moral dilemma between saving a life and ensuring crew safety, David's struggle between personal research investment and collective survival, and Bernadette's leadership responsibility versus self-sacrifice. These conflicts reflect the tension between moral values, professional identity, and survival instincts in an isolated environment. The study concludes that internal conflicts shape individual decision-making and drive the film's emotional and ethical complexity.

**Keywords:** *ethics, internal conflict, psychoanalysis, stowaway*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji konflik internal yang dialami oleh tokoh utama dalam film *Stowaway* karya Joe Penna, dengan fokus pada Zoe Levenson, David, dan Komandan Bernadette. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis konflik internal dan menganalisis bagaimana konflik-konflik ini memengaruhi perkembangan karakter serta narasi. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan teknik observasi, film ini ditonton berulang kali untuk mencatat dialog, ekspresi, dan perilaku penting yang menunjukkan pergulatan batin. Data dianalisis menggunakan teori psikoanalisis Freud (1923), Teori Identitas Sosial Tajfel dan Turner (1979), serta perspektif etika Kant (1785) dari deontologi dan konsekuensialisme. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan tiga konflik internal utama: dilema moral Zoe antara menyelamatkan nyawa dan memastikan keselamatan kru, perjuangan David antara investasi penelitian pribadi dan keselamatan kolektif, serta tanggung jawab kepemimpinan Bernadette versus pengorbanan diri. Konflik-konflik ini mencerminkan ketegangan antara nilai-nilai moral, identitas profesional, dan insting bertahan hidup dalam lingkungan yang terisolasi. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa konflik internal membentuk pengambilan keputusan individu dan mendorong kompleksitas emosional serta etis dalam film tersebut.

**Kata kunci:** *etika, konflik internal, psikoanalisis, stowaway*

## Introduction

Literature's function is to portray the human condition and implicitly critique relationships among individuals, their surroundings, and their inventors (Wellek & Warren, 1994). As a socio-cultural phenomenon, literary works are closely related to their authors and the realities of human life. Literature takes various forms, such as novels, short stories, poetry, and films. Over time, film has become an increasingly popular and influential form of literature. According to [Arnheim](#) (2006), film and literature share a fundamental similarity in conveying narratives: literature through words and film through visuals and sound. Film is a manifestation of creativity, technology, and industry, designed to create an experience for the audience (Bordwell, 2013). Conflict is one key element that enriches narratives in both literature and film.

As an integral part of literature and film, conflict is central to advancing the plot, shaping character development, and generating emotional tension. A film's success often depends on how it introduces, develops, and resolves conflicts, leaving a lasting impact on audiences. Internal (within a character) and external (between a character and outside forces) conflicts are equally essential for constructing compelling narratives. This study focuses on internal conflicts in Joe Penna's *Stowaway*, analyzing the inner struggles of Zoe, David, and Bernadette through literary theory. While conflict can be internal or external, this research addresses only internal conflict.

Internal conflict is a critical aspect of literary analysis, reflecting the complexities of the human psyche. (Wellek and Warren, 1994) define conflict as a dramatic confrontation between opposing forces, encompassing action and relationships. From Freud's (1923) psychoanalytic perspective, internal conflict arises from tension among the id, ego, and superego, representing instinctual desires, rational judgment, and moral principles. This dynamic shapes characters' responses to extreme pressures, complex emotions, and ethical dilemmas. The ethical dimension influences decision-making when characters must choose between moral obligations and competing values. By portraying such conflicts, literature and film offer audiences external struggles and intimate insights into psychological turmoil.

*Stowaway* is a science fiction thriller directed by Joe Penna, with a runtime of 116 minutes. A United States-Germany co-production, the film was released globally on Netflix on April 22, 2021. Set during a high-risk mission to Mars, it follows three crew members confronted with an unforeseen crisis after discovering a stowaway aboard their spacecraft. The stowaway threatens the limited oxygen supply, heightening tension and forcing the crew to make difficult decisions. Under extreme physical and psychological strain, the narrative explores moral dilemmas and existential conflicts in survival situations.

This study examines the internal conflicts experienced by characters in *Stowaway*, analysing how these conflicts influence character development and plot progression. Previous research has explored internal and external conflicts in various films and literary works. First study (Mukhlas et al., 2023), "An Analysis of the Main Character Conflict of *The Roommate* Moviescript by Sonny Malhi", investigates Rebecca's internal conflicts, expressed through manipulative and possessive behavior, alongside her external conflicts with other characters. While insightful, the study focuses on one character and script, neglecting moral conflicts in extreme situations.

The second study, conducted by (Marzona & Bago, 2023) in “A Man's Struggle in Facing Life Conflicts as Depicted in John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*,” used the theory of (Wellek & Warren) to analyze the internal and external conflicts faced by Hazel and Augustus. They found that acceptance of terminal illness and the search for meaning in life form these conflicts. Wellek and Warren's conflict theory highlights how circumstances, relationships, and emotions influence character growth. However, this study is limited to the novel and does not address survival-based conflicts in isolated environments, such as the film *Stowaway*.

The third study (Masyhur et al., 2023), “An Analysis of the Conflict of the Main Character in *Whiplash* Movie”, identifies internal conflicts marked by psychological struggles and external conflicts with instructors, peers, family, and romantic partners. Positive outcomes include stronger relationships and personal growth, while adverse effects involve tension, resentment, and weakened social bonds. Psychologically, conflicts result in trauma, anxiety, and depression; sociologically, they generate disputes with authority and tension between competition and collaboration.

The fourth study (Bagtayan & Lantowa, 2022), in “Psychological Analysis of the Main Character in the Novel *Gitanjali* by Rabindranath R”, examines psychological conflicts arising from workplace injustice, romantic disappointment, childhood loneliness, and grief. Using literary psychology and Freud's structural model, they reveal subconscious motivations behind conflict resolution. However, the study relies on secondary data, limiting broader psychological validation and excluding narrative analysis.

The last study (Amnesia & Skolastika, 2023), “The Analysis of Psychological Aspect of the Main Character in the *Cruella* Movie,” investigates the protagonist's motivations using Bernhardt's (1953) theory. They identify 24 data points, with desire as the dominant factor (33.3%), influenced by prior conflicts and emotional drives. Their findings demonstrate psychological motivation's impact on behaviors, showing how conflicts shape emotions and actions.

This study presents a novelty approach with a focus distinct from the five previous studies. It analyzes the profound and complex internal conflicts experienced by the three main characters in the film, *Stowaway* Zoe Levenson, David, and Commander Bernadette, rather than focusing on a single character. The research highlights internal conflicts about survival limits, interpersonal relationships, and moral choices. These conflicts are classified using Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Social Identity Theory and examined from deontological and consequentialist ethical perspectives. Furthermore, this study investigates the impact of internal conflicts on character development and decision-making within an isolated setting.

## **Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach with observational methods to analyze internal conflicts in the film *Stowaway*. The research process began with a review of references and third-party critiques to select a film relevant to the theme of internal conflict. Subsequently, the researcher watched the film repeatedly to

understand the conflicts, character development, and narrative dynamics. Key dialogues and scenes that indicated internal conflict through characters' words, expressions, and behaviours were recorded during the viewing. Documentation was also conducted by capturing clips from significant scenes to support the analysis. The collected data were then analysed using a close reading technique following the film's presentation to identify and classify the types of internal conflict experienced by the characters Zoe, David, and Bernadette.

The study employed social psychology and ethics as its theoretical foundations for data analysis. Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory was applied to understand the formation of the characters' self-identity within their professional roles. Additionally, Freud's (1923) psychoanalytic theory of the id, ego, and superego was utilized to explore the characters' internal psychological dynamics. Deontological ethics (Kant, 1785) and consequentialist ethics were applied to examine the moral dimensions of the internal conflicts that emerged. The validity of the research findings was ensured by maintaining consistency between interpretations and textual evidence and by the consistent application of the theoretical framework. However, without incorporating visual analysis or external data, the study remained limited to the narrative aspects of the film.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Result**

The author identifies a single type of conflict, namely internal conflict. This section presents the main findings from analyzing three characters' internal dialogues in critical situations aboard the spacecraft. These findings illustrate the inner turmoil experienced by Zoe Levenson, David, and Commander Bernadette regarding decision-making under intense pressure and moral dilemmas. Internal conflict refers to the psychological struggle within an individual. It arises from the clash between opposing desires, values, emotions, or beliefs, often resulting in moral dilemmas, anxiety, or self-doubt. The results of this research are presented below, clearly distinguishing findings from their interpretations. Furthermore, the discussion section compares these findings with those from previous studies, thereby situating the current research within the broader scholarly context.

**Table 1. Analysis of Internal Character Conflicts in the Film Stowaway**

<b>Data</b>	<b>Characters</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Conflict Internal</b>	<b>Theory</b>	<b>Type of Ethics</b>
I	Zoe Levenson	Space ship-orbit station interior	Saving a person vs. crew safety.	Freud (Id, Ego, Superego), Identities Social	Deontological Ethics (Kant)
II	David	Commander Modul (MTS-42 spacecraft)	Personal research vs. mission safety	Freud, Social Identity	Ethics Consequentialism
III	Commander Bernadette	Interior Spacecraft	Leadership vs personal sacrifice	Freud, Social Identity	Mix (Deontology vs Consequentialism)

## Discussion

**Data I :** Zoe Levenson: Saving a person vs. crew safety.

Internal conflict : Zoe Levenson

Setting/Place : Space ship-orbit station interior



**Picture 1.** Zoe's Dilemma: A Difficult Decision for Survival

### Conversation

David : Worst – case scenario is he still does, but we die along with him.

Zoe : How?

David : What's worth hanging on by a thread as it is

Zoe : **So you're fine just giving up on a person because the risk--?**

Zoe : twenty days? Commander, I mean... if there's really nothing we can do, we have to take someone's life?

Zoe's internal conflict stems from a struggle between her moral values (superego) and the pragmatic demands of rational decision-making (ego). While she does not directly conflict with other characters, she grapples with her deeply held principle of the irreplaceable value of every life. Her statement, "**So you're fine just giving up on a person because of the risk?**", reveals the dominance of her superego (Freud), acting as her conscience and moral compass. Zoe's ego attempts to reconcile this idealism with the harsh reality threatening the crew's survival. Within Freud's framework, this exemplifies internal conflict: a clash between moral principles and rational considerations.

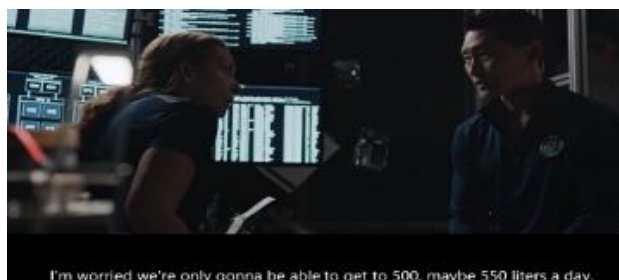
Based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner), Zoe's self-identification as a doctor creates a social and ethical imperative to save lives. This identity intensifies her internal conflict, as her role as a savior clashes with the potential necessity of sacrificing one life to ensure the group's safety. Ethically, Zoe embodies a deontological approach (Kant, 1785), prioritizing the inherent rightness of an action regardless of consequences. She rejects consequentialist reasoning that would justify sacrificing one individual for the greater good. This forms the core of her complex internal conflict: a tension between moral rectitude, professional duty, and survival demands.

### Data II: David: Personal research vs. mission safety

Internal conflict : David

Setting/Place : Commander

Modul (MTS-42 spacecraft)



**Picture 2.** Personal investment versus collective needs, David is requested to work harder

### Conversation

David : We're still warping up, but I'm worried we're only gonna be able to get to 500, maybe 550 liters a day.

David : Wait a minute, hold on, hold on the algae is far from thriving. It's cribbingonly only a faction of what I could get if I had the right equipment. Using the second half of the batch doesn't necessarily mean it'll double the output.

Bernadette : It's imperative that we try.

David : Commander, this can't be something we really on. These batches can die at any moment, and I could lose everything I need for Mars... Commander, **this reaserch is years of my life**, we, both know how important it is. Are we sure we want to throw it all away while was rill have a chance to fix the CDRA?

David's conflict is classified as internal because it stems from a struggle within himself: between the emotional drive to defend the outcomes of his research (id) and the ethical obligation to save the mission (ego). He does not debate with others but rather with his conscience and logic within himself. His statement, "**This research is the result of years of my life**," indicates that David's id urges him to defend his interests and the self-esteem tied to his scientific results. The ego emerges as a mediator when it begins to consider that the oxygen from the algae is more important for everyone's safety.

In a social context, David has an identity as a scientist, and according to Social Identity Theory, this role becomes a crucial part of his self-concept. Losing his research means losing a part of who he is. This causes a profound internal conflict, as he must choose between preserving his identity and saving the lives of others. The ethics that David initially holds tend to be individualistic. However, ultimately, he transitions to a consequentialist logic: that the best action is the one that yields the best outcome for the group, even if it is personally painful. This transformation illustrates resolving internal conflict, not due to external pressure, but because of a change in his awareness and moral priorities.



**Data III:** Commander Barnett: Leadership vs personal sacrifice

Internal conflict : Comander Bernadette

Setting/Place : Interior Spacecraft



**Picture 3.** Bernadett's tough decision

**Conversation**

Commander : Correct. Unfortunately, none of the second id batch survived.

Jim : [ Jim speaking indistinctly over earpiece]

Commander : That was my feat.

Jim : [ Jim speaking indistinctly over earpiece]

Commander : Are you sure?

Jim : [ Jim speaking indistinctly over earpiece]

Commander : and why I sthe climb up not an option again?

Jim : [ Jim speaking indistinctly over earpiece]

Commander : Okay, you've got to level whith me, Jim. Is there--? {in breaking voice} **is there any way I can take his place?** Because Hyperion can orbit the capsule around Mars and send up a pilot from the colony. But I ---- How can I--? How do you expect me to--? {Commander snuffles quietly, her voice cracking}

Jim : [ Jim speaking indistinctly over earpiece]

Commander : ( snuffles) yeah. Okay, well, I---

Jim : [ Jim speaking indistinctly over earpiece]

Commander : I need you to walk me through every option every single possibility



Commander Barnett's conflict is also classified as internal, stemming from the tension between his moral responsibilities as a leader (superego) and the tragic realities he confronts (ego). The conflict is entirely self-generated, arising from his values, feelings, and social position. His anguished question, **"Is there any way I can take his place?"**, reflects the dominance of his superego, highlighting his sense of responsibility for the crew's well-being and willingness to make sacrifices on their behalf. However, his ego must acknowledge the impossibility of such a sacrifice, necessitating difficult decisions.

Social Identity Theory suggests that Barnett's self-perception as a leader demands decisiveness, responsibility, and empathy. His internal conflict arises from the incompatibility between his leadership identity and the harsh realities of the situation. Ethically, he is caught between Kantian ethics, which preclude the sacrifice of any individual, and consequentialist ethics, which advocate for the action that saves the most lives. This tension causes significant emotional distress, evident in his facial expressions, trembling voice, and desperate search for solutions. This classic internal conflict forces a decision despite the lack of a satisfactory option.

## Conclusion

Analysis of the internal conflicts in "Stowaway" reveals the film's compelling portrayal of extreme situations' psychological and ethical complexities. Zoe Levenson, David, and Commander Barnett illustrate the interplay between moral values, professional identities, and survival instincts when confronted with life-threatening dilemmas. This study offers insights into how isolated environments exacerbate internal conflicts and how decisions made under such pressure reflect deep-seated psychological dynamics. Further research could explore group dynamics in isolated settings, comparing conflict resolution strategies across various space mission films. This would enhance our understanding of internal conflicts in science fiction narratives and provide new perspectives on human adaptation and interaction under extreme pressure. Future studies could also broaden their scope by considering the influence of social and cultural factors on decision-making during crises.

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