

DEHUMANIZATION ISSUES DEPICTED IN MAIN CHARACTER IN MY SISTER KEEPER'S NOVEL

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Abstract

This study analyzes a story entitled *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult. This study is grounded in the exploration of dehumanization within literary works, focusing on how psychological theories can elucidate complex character dynamics and societal issues. By utilizing Haslam's Mechanistic Dehumanization theory, the research aims to highlight the psychological and emotional toll of being treated as less than human, particularly in contexts where individuals are instrumentalized or exploited. By analyzing the main character of the story, I explored the forms of dehumanization that occur through Haslam's Mechanistic Dehumanization theory. Using the qualitative method helped me to identify the forms of dehumanization and its effects in the story. An example of a form of dehumanization that occurs today clearly and is still widely circulated is the workers with very minimum wages, but their work is very heavy and many make a mismatch between work and pay. This indicates that occupational slavery is still widely practiced, by not doing human beings properly but exploiting their labor with very low wages. In my findings, I show some evidence of the forms of dehumanization and designer baby that occur to the main character in his own family, what effects this has on her, and how the character finally acts with all the forms of dehumanization that occur to him without having a value. The purpose of my research is to examine and reveal that all forms of dehumanization are wrong and disregard a human life as it happens in the novel I am discussing. The analysis which I made will show the forms of dehumanization that occur and the consequences when these things happen to a person or human being who lives in this world, focusing on a dehumanization that occurs in the main character in the novel and what consequences this behavior has on a human being.

Keywords: Mechanistic Dehumanization, Consequences, Designer Baby, Value

INTRODUCTION

Literature themes focus on the central idea, message, or underlying meaning of a literary work. Literary themes often explore universal truths or human experiences and are usually always expressed indirectly through the characters, events,

and narratives in the literary work. From a psychoanalytic perspective, themes in literature are analyzed to reveal unconscious desires, conflicts, or societal norms that resonate with the reader or reflect the author's psyche.

Haslam's concept of dehumaniza-

tion is central to understanding how individuals or groups are perceived as lacking fundamental human qualities. According to Haslam (2006), dehumanization occurs when individuals or groups are denied characteristics that are typically attributed to humans. Haslam distinguishes two primary forms of dehumanization: animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization.

Animalistic Dehumanization: This involves attributing individuals or groups with characteristics associated with animals, such as lack of civility, intelligence, or moral sensibility. It denies them traits like culture, refinement, and rationality. **Mechanistic Dehumanization:** This form occurs when individuals are viewed as objects or machines, stripping them of human traits such as warmth, individuality, and emotionality. It is often seen in contexts where people are treated impersonally, as tools or means to an end, ignoring their feelings and autonomy.

Haslam emphasizes that both forms reflect a denial of full humanness but in distinct ways, with animalistic dehumanization aligning with perceptions of savagery and mechanistic dehumanization aligning with perceptions of coldness and inanimateness. These concepts are widely applicable in various contexts, such as social relationships, healthcare, and literature, as they help explain dynamics where individuals are not treated as fully human.

Anna in *My Sister's Keeper* experiences mechanistic dehumanization, as described by Haslam, where she is treated as a mere tool to save her sister Kate's life. Her body is objectified for medical procedures, stripping her of autonomy and individuality, a hallmark of this type of dehumanization.

This mirrors Haslam's observation that dehumanization involves denying someone's agency and reducing them to

their functionality: "Dehumanization takes varied forms... to rejecting their individuality or agency". Anna's emotional turmoil, stemming from being valued solely for her physical utility, aligns with Haslam's assertion that such treatment can lead to feelings of exclusion and a diminished sense of self: "Being perceived as less than human increases people's feelings of social exclusion..." (Haslam, 2024).

Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*, which highlights the mechanistic dehumanization of Anna, has a significant impact in reflecting and influencing real life. In this novel, Anna is born not just as an individual with her own rights and personality, but as a "medical device" to save her sister Kate. This dehumanization, which views Anna's body as a biological resource without considering the value of her life, reflects some real challenges in medicine, ethics, and social relations.

Anna's case raises the important issue of designer babies, children created through assisted reproductive technology for a specific purpose, such as saving a sibling. In the real world, technologies such as preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) have enabled parents to select genetically compatible embryos to donate organs or tissues. While this technology brings great benefits, such as saving lives, it also raises ethical dilemmas. Is it fair to create a person for the sole purpose of meeting someone else's medical needs without thinking about the person being born. This issue often brings up debates about bodily autonomy, human dignity, and the limits of sacrifice.

In modern medical practice, especially in organ transplantation or medical research, there are often cases where individual rights are ignored in favor of group interests. For example, social pressure on family organ donors often leads to violations of

the right to bodily autonomy. This mirrors the experience of Anna, whose body was used without her full and free consent.

Anna, who was still a child, faced immense pressure to fulfill her family's expectations. In the real world, many children in large families are expected to sacrifice their happiness, time or even health for other family members. This is often the case in collective societies, where the interests of the family are often considered more important than the individual. This pressure can lead to long-term psychological trauma, internal conflict, and a sense of loss of identity.

There are some works which focus on dehumanization issues especially the novel entitled *My Sister's Keeper* which focuses on mechanistic dehumanization as described by Haslam's theory, to illustrate the moral, social and emotional dilemmas often faced in family relationships and the medical world. Mechanistic dehumanization occurs when individuals are viewed as objects, machines, or tools rather than as human beings (Nick Haslam, 2006). In this story, Anna Fitzgerald was born intentionally to be a suitable genetic donor for her sister, Kate, who suffers from leukemia.

Like the examples above, Picoult uses Anna's story to show how reproductive technologies, such as preimplantation genetic diagnosis (PGD), can blur the line between helping and exploiting. Anna was created with a specific purpose, not as an individual with intrinsic value, but as a medical tool for her sister. With this, Picoult challenges readers to reflect on the ethical impact of medical decisions that look good on the surface but have dehumanizing consequences on the individuals involved.

The novel also reflects the emotional and social distress often experienced by family members in critical medical situations. Anna feels her identity is only connected

to her role as Kate's savior, reflecting how in real life, individuals in families are often forced or feel guilty to sacrifice themselves for others.

My Sister's Keeper I assumed explore how mechanistic dehumanization can occur in medical and family contexts. The story forces readers to consider fundamental questions about ethics, human rights, and the emotional impact of seemingly altruistic decisions. In this way, Picoult not only tells stories, but also provides deep insights into moral challenges that are relevant in the modern world.

One form of mechanistic dehumanization that is relevant in Indonesia occurs in cases of medical malpractice and inhumane healthcare. For example, there are reports of patients being treated as mere objects of medical procedures without regard to their emotional state or human rights. The imbalance of communication between patients and medical personnel, even in cases of bullying or mental pressure on doctors, creates a situation where humanity is lost in the health system.

A well-known case of mechanistic dehumanization in Indonesia that is relevant to the mechanistic dehumanization of Anna in *My Sister's Keeper* is the case of organ trafficking without the consent of the victim's family in a human trafficking network. In Indonesia, such cases often involve the exploitation of human bodies, especially children or individuals from poor families, who are treated solely as a source of organs to be sold on the black market.

Victims are not seen as human beings with dignity, but merely as tools to fulfill the economic or medical needs of others. In *My Sister's Keeper*, Anna Fitzgerald also experiences similar mechanistic dehumanization. She is treated as an "obligatory donor" to save her sister Kate, so her bodily autonomy and individual rights are

disregarded for the sake of certain medical purposes.

Haslam's concept of mechanistic dehumanization is evident in both cases, where the value of the individual is reduced to a specific physical function or utility. If in Anna the dehumanization was done in the name of family love, in the case of organ trafficking victims it was done based on economic motives. Both cases highlight the importance of respecting bodily rights and individual autonomy, both in the context of the family and wider society.

Its relevance to *My Sister's Keeper* can be seen in the struggle of Anna, who is treated more as a source of medical donors for her sister than as an individual with rights and feelings. Both situations show how systems or relationships that do not focus on human dignity can give birth to traumatic experiences. In reality, this warns of the importance of an empathy-based approach within the healthcare sector to avoid negative repercussions as shown in the novel.

Through this lens, *My Sister's Keeper* reveals the damaging effects of mechanistic dehumanization within the family unit. Anna's journey serves as a powerful reminder that treating someone merely as a means to an end can fracture the foundational trust and empathy that hold relationships together. Ultimately, the novel raises significant ethical and emotional questions about the importance of recognizing each person's inherent value, not only in society but especially within family relationships, where each individual deserves respect, care, and acknowledgment as a whole person. (Haslam, 2006)

By analyzing these situations, the study will highlight how act of dehumanization not just as a medical theme, but as a way to explore the ethical sacrifices that sometimes come with family love and responsi-

lity. Examining how the characters interact and make decisions allows for a deeper understanding of the emotional and psychological impacts of dehumanization, especially in relation to Anna. This study aims to explore what dehumanization that Anna gets to helps her sister Kate to survive her disease that is leukimia.

In exploring dehumanization in *My Sister's Keeper*, this study aligns with broader analyses in literature that examine identity, autonomy, and psychosocial conflict through psychological frameworks, as seen in comparable studies like that of *Steinbeck's The Pearl* (Aziiz & Thohiriyah, 2024).

Both novels employ protagonists who grapple with restricted autonomy and identity under external pressures, yet differ in their thematic exploration. Where *The Pearl* utilizes Erikson's psychosocial stages to analyze Kino's shifting identity and autonomy in a society that devalues his dignity, *My Sister's Keeper* focuses on the mechanistic dehumanization of Anna, whose sense of self is subordinated to her function as a medical resource for her sister, as outlined in Haslam's theory.

Haslam's concept of mechanistic dehumanization, which addresses the reduction of individuals to mere tools, underscores Anna's identity conflict as she questions her humanity and self-worth amid a family dynamic that treats her body as a utility for her sister's survival.

The gap between my study lies in its specific focus on mechanistic dehumanization within the family context, as conceptualized by Haslam, and its application to *My Sister's Keeper*. While comparable studies, such as the analysis of *The Pearl* by Aziiz and Thohiriyah (2024), explore themes of identity and autonomy using Erikson's psychosocial theory, they concentrate on societal dehumanization and external pressures that shape the protagonist's iden-

tity.

Furthermore my research emphasizes familial dehumanization, examining how Anna's identity and autonomy are diminished within her immediate family structure, where she is instrumentalized as a "designer baby" for her sister's medical needs.

This unique lens not only highlights the specific form of mechanistic dehumanization Anna experiences but also extends the discourse on dehumanization by shifting the focus from external societal forces to intimate family dynamics.

By doing so, my study fills a critical gap in the literature by demonstrating how dehumanization can manifest in close relationships, particularly through imposed roles that disregard individual agency and intrinsic value. This different approach contributes to a deeper understanding of dehumanization's psychological and emotional effects, differentiating your work from existing analyses in the field.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on how dehumanization happens within a family, which is a less explored area in research. By applying Haslam's mechanistic dehumanization theory to the novel *My Sister's Keeper*, this study uniquely shows how Anna's identity and autonomy are reduced as she is treated as a tool for her sister's survival. Unlike other studies that look at dehumanization in society or culture, this research highlights how it can happen in close relationships, like within a family.

Additionally, this study combines psychological theories with literary analysis, offering a fresh way to understand how dehumanization affects individuals emotionally and psychologically. It also sheds light on the ethical issues of creating a child for medical purposes, showing how this practice can strip the child of their sense of self. By focusing on these ideas, this research

provides a new perspective on dehumanization and its effects, both in fiction and in real life.

METHOD

This study, uses a qualitative research approach to analyze *My Sister Keeper* by Jodi Picoult, focusing on how dehumanization is depicted in the Fitzgerald's complex family relationships. Qualitative research, as described by Johnson (2024), aims to interpret and understand people's experiences, behaviors, and beliefs through detailed exploration. Qualitative research captures the fine details of human experience, allowing for a deeper look into how people make sense of their reality. In analyzing *My Sister's Keeper*, this approach helped my research to examine in depth Anna's psychological journey and the larger ethical and relational issues surrounding dehumanization.

A qualitative approach with a psychoanalytic perspective allows for a more in-depth exploration of Anna's self defense mechanisms and internal conflict dynamics. In psychoanalysis, this method is often used to understand the psychological background of individuals experiencing emotional distress and inner conflict (Freud, 2001). Through this approach, it can be revealed how dehumanization affects the psychological development of characters, especially in the context of trauma and self-identity.

In this qualitative research, there are two types of data used, namely primary and secondary data. Primary data refers to the original subject under study, namely the novel *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult, the data is in the form of words, speech, and quotations. Meanwhile, secondary data uses additional information, articles, such as journals and electronic books. The data will be presented in an explanation to help analyze this research.

This research also refers to the mechanistic dehumanization theory proposed by Nick Haslam (2006), which defines dehumanization as the process of seeing individuals as objects or tools, which ignores human nature such as emotions and autonomy. In this novel, Anna is more often treated as a “medical device” rather than a human being. Using this method, the research will analyze how Anna’s character is positioned instrumentally in the family, and how this shows a form of dehumanization.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One modern example of mechanistic dehumanization that parallels Anna’s experience in *My Sister’s Keeper* is the growing prevalence of commercial surrogacy, where individuals’ bodies are treated as tools or resources to fulfill the needs of others. In some parts of the world, surrogates are often viewed primarily as vessels to carry and deliver a child for another family, with little regard for their personal identities, emotional needs, or well-being.

Similar to Anna’s role as a “designer baby” created to medically support her sister, commercial surrogates may experience a sense of being valued only for their biological functions, rather than as whole individuals with their own rights and personal aspirations. This dynamic can lead to feelings of being objectified, where their worth is tied solely to their physical capabilities.

Just as Anna feels her autonomy and identity are overshadowed by her role in her sister’s survival, surrogates may grapple with a loss of agency, feeling reduced to a biological purpose that serves others’ desires and needs. This example demonstrates how, in both cases, mechanistic dehumanization strips individuals of their personal identity and humanity, highlighting the ethical and psychological challenges that

arise when people are valued primarily for what their bodies can provide.

Another example of mechanistic dehumanization in modern times can be seen in the treatment of low-wage workers in certain manufacturing industries, where employees are often viewed merely as “hands” to complete tasks rather than as full individuals with needs and rights. In these settings, workers may experience long hours, repetitive tasks, and limited breaks, with little regard for their well-being or personal development.

Similar to Anna’s experience in *My Sister’s Keeper*, where her identity is reduced to her role as a “donor” for her sister, these workers can feel that they are valued only for their physical labor and productivity, rather than as people with thoughts, aspirations, and dignity. This environment can lead to a sense of being objectified, as if they are simply parts of a machine rather than unique individuals. In both cases, mechanistic dehumanization takes away personal identity and limits a person’s worth to their functional role, raising significant ethical concerns about the importance of respecting individual humanity.

In an effort to understand the dynamics of conflict and dehumanization in Jodi Picoult’s *My Sister’s Keeper*, various studies have been conducted to explore the complex themes contained in the story. One of the relevant studies is journal entitled *The Conflicts Faced by Sara Fitzgerald as Seen in Jody Picoult’s Novel My Sister’s Keeper* by Larassanti (2013), discusses in depth the conflicts faced by Sara Fitzgerald’s character in the novel *My Sister’s Keeper*.

This journal identifies four main conflicts experienced by Sara, namely the decision to have another child (Anna) as a genetic donor to save Kate, the sense of neglect felt by Jesse and Anna due to Sara’s excessive attention to Kate, the legal trial

she faces when Anna sues for the right to her own body, and Anna's death which becomes an emotional climax and makes Sara regret her excessive focus on Kate. The analysis in this journal uses internal and external conflict theory and frustration theory to illustrate how Sara grapples with difficult decisions and their impact on her family dynamics.

In comparison to my research on the mechanistic dehumanization of Anna using Nick Haslam's theory, there are some significant differences. Larassanti's journal focuses more on the conflict Sara experiences and how it develops, whereas my research focuses and emphasizes on how Anna is treated as a medical object that removes her autonomy. While the journal portrays Sara as a mother undergoing emotional distress and complex moral decisions, my research explores aspects of mechanistic dehumanization by highlighting how Anna is reduced to a donor tool without regard to her feelings and rights as an individual.

In addition, Larassanti's (2013) journal provides a thorough overview of Sara's internal and external conflicts, which can be a strong basis for comparing how the external conflict between Sara and Anna reflects the form of mechanistic dehumanization Anna experiences. Thus, these two studies complement each other in understanding the complex dynamics in the novel *My Sister's Keeper*, where one focuses on Sara's emotional and moral conflicts, while the other highlights Anna's dehumanization through the perspective of mechanistic dehumanization.

Another studies entitled "Moral Values Analysis on Main Characters as Seen on 'My Sister's Keeper' Film by Nick Cassavetes " by Restu Pitri, Asridayani, and Sufiyandi in the novel *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult. This journal aims to describe the moral values in the movie and their po-

sitive impact on the main character, using a descriptive qualitative method based on Linda and Eyre's (1997) theory. The research identified the values of courage, compassion, honesty, loyalty, and justice, which had an impact on improving relationships between characters, especially between Anna and her mother.

In comparison, both studies focus on Anna's emotional conflict and use qualitative methods, but differ in focus and perspective. This journal emphasizes moral values and their impact, while my study is more specific by exploring mechanistic dehumanization using Haslam's theory. With a more theoretical approach, my research provides a deeper perspective on how Anna experiences mechanistic dehumanization, going beyond the description of moral values to a more complex psychological analysis.

To support my findings I used uploaded journal discusses how death functions as an instrument of power in Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*, using Michel Foucault's genealogical approach. The journal highlights the concept of "forbidden death", where modern society views death as something taboo and frightening, which needs to be countered by medical and technological advances.

In this novel, power dynamics are seen through the relationships between medical professionals and patients, parents and children, and health insurance institutions and individuals. These power mechanisms work through bio-power, where the human body is used as a political object to regulate life, as well as through normalization that distinguishes actions that are considered "normal" (such as using technology to delay death) from those that are "abnormal" (such as accepting death).

In addition, this journal also highlights Anna's resistance through lawsuits

to obtain medical emancipation, which is a form of resistance to the exploitation of her body. This resistance, however, is met with negotiation strategies by agents of power to maintain control. The journal concludes that death in the novel is used to reinforce power through disciplinary mechanisms, population regulation, and normalization, which ultimately creates systemic inequality.

The comparison with my research is that both have in common the identification of the exploitation of Anna's body as a major theme. My research uses Nick Haslam's mechanistic dehumanization theory to analyze how Anna is treated as a tool or object that loses her autonomy and individuality.

Both also highlight the power dynamics within the family and medical institution and Anna's resistance as an attempt to reclaim her humanity. However, the difference lies in the theoretical focus and scope of analysis. This journal uses Foucault's framework to understand power in the broader context of society, while my research focuses more on the psychological analysis of Anna as a dehumanized individual.

Dehumanization Act

In this article, I discuss how Anna's journey reflects the damaging effects of mechanistic dehumanization within her family and her ongoing battle to assert her individuality. Her decision to sue her parents for medical emancipation is a pivotal moment that underscores her desire to reclaim control over her body and life choices. Through this lawsuit, Anna seeks to redefine her relationship with her family by asserting her right to be seen as more than just a caregiver for her sister. This bold step reflects her struggle for independence and her yearning to be acknowledged as a person with her own rights and dreams,

not merely as a "spare" created to ensure Kate's survival.

The discussion also addresses the ethical dimensions of Anna's parents' choices, exploring the moral implications of using one child to save another. By focusing on Anna's quest for autonomy, this article aims to shed light on the broader societal importance of recognizing and respecting each individual's intrinsic humanity, especially within family dynamics.

This exploration of Anna's struggle encourages reflection on the balance between love, responsibility, and the recognition of individual rights in families facing profound medical and ethical challenges. Through this analysis, the article seeks to highlight the crucial importance of respecting each person's inherent dignity and the psychological toll of failing to do so, illustrating how even well-intentioned actions can lead to unintended harm when personal identity is overshadowed by a mechanistic view of human worth.

Mechanistic dehumanization is when someone is treated more like an object or machine than as a person with emotions, individuality, and autonomy. Instead of being seen as a unique individual, a person is reduced to their function or utility like a tool to get a job done.

This can happen in workplaces, relationships, or even family, where people might be valued only for their productivity or for what they can provide, rather than for who they are as individuals. Mechanistic dehumanization overlooks personal feelings and humanity, focusing solely on what a person can "do" or "produce." Expanding on Haslam's theory of dehumanization, particularly mechanistic dehumanization, Anna's role as a "medical resource" for Kate in *My Sister's Keeper* embodies a fundamental loss of autonomy and individuality.

Haslam (2006) defines mechanistic

dehumanization as a process in which an individual is stripped of human qualities and reduced to a tool or object, valued solely for their functionality rather than their intrinsic personhood. In this light, Anna's family, especially her mother, consistently sees her not as an independent person but as a means to prolong Kate's life.

This discussion focuses on Anna, who experiences dehumanization from her own family, especially from her mother, Sara. One clear form of dehumanization experienced by Anna can be seen in the quote, "*I wasn't the result of a cheap bottle of wine or a full moon or the heat of the moment. I was born because a scientist managed to hook up my mother's eggs and my father's sperm to create a specific combination of precious genetic material*" (Picoult, p.4). This quote shows and explains that Anna was not born from a romantic moment, a honeymoon, or an intimate union between her parents with the intent of bringing a new child into the world.

Instead, Anna was created in a lab to produce the perfect genetic match for her older sister, Kate, who suffers from leukemia. Even before she was born, Anna was destined by her parents to serve as a helper for her sister, Kate. Mechanistic dehumanization, as defined by Haslam, was applied to Anna even before she was born. From the start, Anna was planned by her parents to be a donor and support for Kate's survival, designed to have cells and organs that perfectly matched Kate's needs.

Why was Anna intentionally created this way? It was to help Kate, who was fighting a life-or-death battle with leukemia. The genetics of Sara (the mother of Kate and Anna), Brian (their father), and Jesse (their brother) did not match or were unsuitable to donate what Kate needed, such as leukocytes, stem cells, and bone marrow. None of them were genetically compatible to provide these elements when Kate nee-

ded them. Meanwhile, Kate's condition was worsening, and she would die without the necessary donations to treat her leukemia. Anna, then, was a baby specifically designed by doctors, as the result of an intentional conversation between her parents and medical professionals, made to meet Kate's genetic requirements for her survival

When a child is born with a specific purpose or for a particular goal—even if that goal is not to be a member of a normal family—it already demonstrates a form of mechanistic dehumanization. Mechanistic dehumanization occurs when an individual is treated as a tool for a particular purpose rather than as a complete human being.

This dehumanization was done by Anna's parents, Brian and Sara, even before she was born. No one asks to be born into the world, yet, once a person is born, they have the right to live freely as a human being. Regardless of race, skin colours, or religion, every individual has the right to become who they want to be, to have full rights over themselves, and to enjoy the experiences and opportunities of life just like everyone else born into this world.

This concept is often known as Human Rights, which are fundamental rights that belong to every individual from birth. They are universal, cannot be reduced, ignored, or taken away, and apply to all people, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, beliefs, language, or any other identity status. Human rights are a gift that must be protected and respected by all societies, serving as a tool to protect people from violence and injustice.

In *My Sister's Keeper*, Anna's experience reflects a lack of these basic human rights. Her parents planned her conception, pregnancy, and birth specifically to help her sister, Kate, who has leukemia. As a result, Anna was denied the freedom to

live her own life even before she was born. She was destined and designed by her parents to serve as a donor and caretaker for Kate, who needed various donations to battle her illness. Since birth, without her realizing it, Anna's life was different from other children's until she reached the age of thirteen.

Her life was part of her parents' plan to serve as a donor whenever Kate needed help. Anna feels like she is the only one responsible for helping her sister Kate, while other family members, like Brian, Sara, and Jesse, have never had to be donors. This evident can be seen in the quote from *My Sister's Keeper* novel "When Kate needs leukocytes or stem cells or bone marrow to fool her body into thinking it's healthy, I'm the one who provides them" (Picoult, p.6). This is also a form of mechanistic dehumanization, as Anna is always forced to provide whatever Kate needs in terms of organ donations, even when she doesn't want to.

She is expected to go through with the procedures to help Kate survive and, hopefully, recover because her parents insist it's the right thing to do to help a family member.

Anna's situation in *My Sister's Keeper* is a strong example of Haslam's concept of "Mechanistic Dehumanization," where a person is viewed as a tool or object rather than a full human being with emotions, personal identity, and the freedom to make their own choices. In Anna's case, her parents treat her as a "donor machine," intended from the start to help her sister Kate, who suffers from leukemia.

Unlike most children, who are born from a place of love and desire to grow a family, Anna was conceived specifically to serve a purpose: to provide genetically compatible cells and organs that Kate might need throughout her life.

This dynamic takes a toll on Anna,

who grows up realizing that her existence seems tied to fulfilling Kate's medical needs. Her life is dictated by Kate's health, and any sense of personal identity and freedom is overshadowed by the fact that she was "designed" to meet someone else's requirements. Because of this, Anna loses her sense of self and starts to feel as if she's simply a "designer baby," created with one main purpose. She's not given the chance to live freely as her own person with hopes and dreams, and instead, she exists in a world where her primary value is linked to what she can provide for Kate.

Anna's parents unintentionally dehumanize her by reducing her role in the family to that of a tool. Mechanistic dehumanization, in this sense, means Anna is deprived of the freedom and basic human rights that allow her to be seen as a full, independent person. Her parents focus so heavily on Kate's survival that they overlook Anna's right to choose how she wants to live and what she wants to do with her body. She is treated as an object with a function, rather than a daughter with her own voice and individual needs.

This loss of personal agency deeply affects Anna, as she realizes her role in the family was predetermined and restrictive. Instead of being loved for who she is as an individual, Anna is valued for what she can give—her blood, her cells, and even her organs. This realization is painful because, at her core, Anna wants to be accepted and appreciated just for being herself. Her struggle to establish her own identity and autonomy is, in many ways, a fight against the mechanistic view her family has imposed on her.

In psychoanalysis, the concept of a "designer baby" involves ethical and psychological concerns surrounding the idea of creating a child primarily for specific genetic traits or purposes. Psychoana-

lysts argue that this can lead to complex issues in the child's sense of self-worth, identity, and autonomy, especially if they feel that their value lies only in meeting certain expectations or needs.

Erich Fromm, a renowned psychoanalyst, addressed concerns about human beings being treated as objects or tools in his discussions on modern society. Fromm argued that when individuals are valued only for what they provide—whether in productivity or biological traits—they may feel alienated from their own sense of self. He warned against a “mechanistic” view of humans, where people are reduced to their functions, which undermines their individuality and psychological health (Fromm, 1955).

Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, known for his theories on child development, also highlighted the psychological impact of such objectification. While he didn't discuss “designer babies” directly, his views on how children need to feel valued unconditionally are relevant. He argued that children must experience “unconditional acceptance” from caregivers to develop a healthy sense of self-worth. When a child is valued primarily for fulfilling a specific role, they may struggle with identity issues, as they perceive their worth as conditional, based on what they can provide or achieve (Winnicott, 1965).

Haslam's concept of mechanistic dehumanization parallels the ideas of Fromm and Winnicott in several ways:

Fromm's concern about individuals being reduced to their utility aligns with mechanistic dehumanization, which involves viewing people as tools or machines, devoid of individuality and emotional depth. Winnicott's emphasis on the psychological harm caused by valuing children conditionally connects to mechanistic dehumanization, as it reflects how objectification un-

dermines self-worth and identity.

Both psychoanalysts highlight the importance of recognizing individuals as complete human beings, which counters the dehumanizing tendency to reduce them to mere functions.

These perspectives suggest that the creation of a “designer baby” can present significant psychological challenges for the child, as they may begin to internalize a sense of being treated as an object rather than a fully autonomous person. This experience can deeply affect their self-esteem and sense of independence. A clear example of this can be seen in a quote from *My Sister's Keeper*: “From the moment I was born, I have been the girl with the sick sister” (Picoult, p.106). In this statement, Anna begins to recognize the dehumanization she has experienced, particularly in relation to being considered a “designer baby” is a clear manifestation of mechanistic dehumanization.

She realizes that her existence has always been shaped by the need to help another individual, her sister Kate, survive. This understanding reveals the profound impact that being born with such a predetermined purpose has on her identity and psychological well-being.

Anna reflects on the fact that her life has never been about her own personal growth or desires, but rather about supporting Kate in her battle with leukemia. It was not a mere coincidence that Anna was born into a family where her sister was seriously ill and required constant medical interventions, including organ donations. From the very beginning, Anna was designed, both biologically and emotionally, to be the donor the one who could help sustain Kate's life and assist in her fight against the illness.

This awareness of her role as a tool for Kate's survival leads Anna to question her own identity and worth. Her life was not shaped by her own wants or needs but

by a necessity tied to someone else's struggle for life. As Anna grapples with the reality that she was not born for the sake of being loved and cherished as an individual, but rather as a biological resource, she begins to internalize a deep sense of objectification. This realization reflects a significant psychological burden, as it challenges her understanding of herself as a person with rights and dreams beyond her role as a donor.

Another form of dehumanizing treatment that reduced value and control over Anna's life's can be seen in the quote *"And if Sara fits the psychological profile of a donor who has a close relationship with a donor who cannot make decisions independently, then why is she more capable of making this choice than Anna?"* (Picolet, p.294).

In the quote, there is a comparison between Sara and Anna's ability to make decisions regarding Anna's body as a donor. Sara is portrayed as someone who is not completely free in making decisions because she is emotionally and psychologically tied to the needs of her sick daughter, Kate. However, the narrative also underlines that Anna, who is still young, is positioned in a similar situation, where her autonomy and right to decide over her own body is disregarded.

Anna is treated not as an individual who has full control over her body, but rather as a "donor source" for Kate. Since her birth, Anna has been destined to be a medical savior for her sister, and this decision is not the result of her own will. Mechanistic dehumanization is seen in how Anna's body is treated like a machine that can be regulated and accessed at any time for the needs of others. Her right to say "no" or make her own decisions is ignored.

In her family, Anna is not only seen as a family member, but also as a "medical device" programmed to save Kate. This is

very much in line with Haslam's characteristics of mechanistic dehumanization, where humans are seen as objects that are useful for achieving a certain goal, in this case, prolonging Kate's life. This view reduces Anna to a mere biological function, rather than an individual with rights and emotions.

Anna's emotional life, including her inner conflict and pain, is ignored in family matters. When Anna asserts her legal rights over her body, this decision is seen as a form of defiance, not an expression of free will. This shows how the family, especially her mother, views Anna more as a medical solution than a child with her own feelings and rights.

Based on Nick Haslam's theory, the mechanistic dehumanization that Anna experiences happen through the reduction of herself to a medical tool without recognition of her full humanity. This quote underscores the injustice in the treatment of Anna, where her right to make independent decisions is taken away, and her body is treated as a tool for someone else's purposes. This quote shows a critique of family practices and systems that place medical needs above human dignity, thus removing the essential aspects of what makes Anna an individual.

Dehumanizing Impacts

For 13 years of her life, Anna became a tool and a machine used by her parents to help sustain the life of her sister Kate. She had no full control over her life and was constantly forced to obey her parents' demands in order to help Kate fight the leukemia she was suffering from. Anna did not have the freedom to live her life as she should have, as every child deserves.

She was denied her basic human rights and could not live as a normal child, like her peers. It can be shown from the

quote in *My Sister Keeper* novel “*My parents tried to make things normal, but that’s a relative term. The truth is, I was never really a kid.*” (Picoult, p.6), reflects Anna’s feelings of being treated more as an object or tool than as a child with her own needs and desires. From a young age, Anna was conceived specifically to be a genetic match for her sister Kate, which meant her life wasn’t focused on typical childhood experiences. Instead, she was subjected to constant medical procedures and was expected to be a donor for Kate.

This aligns with the concept of mechanistic dehumanization, where Anna is reduced to her biological function her ability to help Kate rather than being seen as a person with her own emotions and needs. Even though her parents tried to create a “normal” family environment, Anna’s life was far from typical, as her role in the family was defined by what she could give rather than who she was as an individual.

She never truly had the freedom to simply be a kid, because her existence was shaped by external expectations and medical interventions. This lack of autonomy and childhood experience reflects the emotional toll of being treated as a tool or function rather than a whole person.

The forms of dehumanization experienced by Anna align with Haslam’s theory of Mechanistic Dehumanization which is when a person is stripped of their human qualities and treated more like an object or a machine, lacking emotional depth, individual identity, and personal agency.

This, of course, affects Anna’s well-being as a child who does not have control over her own life within her family. It can be shown to the quote in *My Sister Keeper* novel “*I used to pretend I was just passing through this family on my way to my real one.*” (Picoult, p.38). Anna is expressing a deep

feeling of not belonging in her own family.

For Anna, her role in the family seems focussing around helping her sister, Kate, rather than being loved and valued for who she is. She often feels like she doesn’t have her own identity and that her worth is tied entirely to her ability to donate blood, marrow, and organs to Kate whenever necessary. By imagining that she’s only “passing through,” Anna is coping with the sadness and frustration of feeling like an outsider, as though her true family the one that would love her just for being herself is somewhere else.

This sense of alienation connects to a psychological idea called “mechanistic dehumanization,” introduced by psychologist Nick Haslam. In Anna’s case, she feels dehumanized because her family treats her as a means to an end, or a tool to keep Kate alive, rather than as a whole person with her own thoughts, feelings, and goals. Mechanistic dehumanization occurs when people are treated as if they lack individuality or emotion, reducing them to functions or roles.

For Anna, this means that instead of seeing her as a daughter or sister with her own value, her family often sees her primarily as a medical resource for Kate. This has a huge emotional impact on Anna because it makes her feel like she’s not important as a person but only as a spare part.

By pretending she’s only temporarily in this family and that her “real” family is somewhere else, Anna is trying to separate herself from the painful reality that she feels unwanted in her own home, except for her ability to help Kate. It’s a way to protect herself emotionally. She hopes for a different life where she would be loved unconditionally, for herself, rather than for what she can provide.

This conflict is painful for Anna because she loves her family but also feels

that, in their eyes, she exists mainly to serve a purpose, not to be an individual with her own life. This struggle ultimately leads Anna to question the authenticity of her family's love for her. She wonders if they would value her as much if she weren't able to help Kate or if her existence would mean anything to them if she weren't useful in this way. This internal battle between wanting her family's love and needing her own independence drives much of her journey, leading her to challenge the role she's been assigned and seek recognition as her own person.

In the end, all actions that happens to Anna, make's Anna sued her parents because she feels like her life is being controlled by her parents. And not having the rights of her own life. The quote can be shown in the *My Sister Keeper* novel.

"The STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS, it says right across the top, official as can be. FAMILY COURT FOR PROVIDENCE COUNTY. IN RE: ANNA FITZGERALD, A.K.A JANE DOE. PETITION FOR MEDICAL EMANCIPATION." (Picoult, p.40).

This means Anna is asking the court for the right to make her own medical decisions, separate from her parents' control. By using the term "A.K.A. JANE DOE," the document even removes her name, calling her "Jane Doe," a generic label often used in legal cases. This further emphasizes how Anna feels like she's not treated as a person with her own identity and rights, but rather as a case or a function.

Mechanistic dehumanization, a concept from psychology, can help explain why Anna feels the need to take such a drastic step. In her family, she's often viewed as a tool to help her sister Kate, who is sick, rather than as a unique individual. Anna is repeatedly asked to undergo me-

dical procedures from donating blood to giving bone marrow so Kate can survive.

Over time, Anna feels like her family sees her only as a "donor" for Kate, not as someone with her own thoughts, feelings, or future. This causes Anna to feel that her value to her family depends solely on her usefulness to Kate's treatment, which makes her feel dehumanized and objectified. Feeling trapped and powerless, Anna decides to take action and sue her parents for medical emancipation.

This legal request is her way of regaining control over her own body and decisions, a step toward reclaiming her own identity separate from her sister's needs. By filing for emancipation, Anna hopes to assert her right to be seen as her own person, rather than just an extension of Kate. This decision reflects her desire to escape the dehumanizing role she's been assigned within the family and be valued and respected for who she is, not just for what she can provide.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has explored the theme of dehumanization, particularly focusing on mechanistic dehumanization as experienced by Anna Fitzgerald in Jodi Picoult's *My Sister's Keeper*. Using Nick Haslam's theory of mechanistic dehumanization, the article has examined how Anna's life has been shaped by a treatment that reduced her to a mere biological tool, created with the sole purpose of saving her sister Kate from leukemia.

The continuous exploitation of Anna's body as a donor for Kate is before her birth and even after her birth has been the central conflict in the narrative. It has stripped Anna of her autonomy, turning her into a "designer baby," someone whose value is determined by her usefulness to others, rather than her own identity and

desires.

Anna's story raises crucial questions about individual rights, bodily autonomy, and the ethical implications of making decisions on behalf of others, particularly within the context of family. While human rights are inherent to every individual, including Anna, her parents' actions, driven by desperation to save Kate have violated Anna's basic right to control her body and make decisions about her own life.

In this way, Anna's experience encapsulates the dehumanizing effects of mechanistic dehumanization, a process by which a person is viewed not as a whole individual, but as an object or tool to be used for the benefit of others. Her internal conflict, born from this treatment, led to a legal fight for medical emancipation, where she sought to regain control over her own life, free from coercion and obligation to her sister.

Throughout the novel, Anna grapples with her purpose in life. She is forced to question whether she exists to serve her family's needs or whether she has the right to live as a person independent of those demands. As a result, her psychological well-being is profoundly affected, leading to feelings of anger, frustration, and isolation. The emotional toll of being reduced to a tool rather than a person with intrinsic value is evident in Anna's demand for emancipation is a step that symbolizes her fight to be seen and treated as an individual with her own rights and aspirations.

The resolution of Anna's legal case, where she wins the right to make her own medical decisions, represents a significant turning point. This victory, however, is short-lived. In an unexpected and tragic twist, Anna is involved in a car accident shortly after leaving the courthouse, leaving her brain-dead.

The family, now faced with the un-

bearable decision of how to handle Anna's death, chooses to donate her organs, including her kidney, to Kate. This final act, which fulfills the very purpose Anna had fought to avoid, creates a poignant and ironic conclusion. Despite her fight for autonomy and independence, Anna's body is ultimately used to prolong Kate's life, an act that underscores the tragic consequences of mechanistic dehumanization.

The tragic irony is not lost on the reader. While Anna's quest for autonomy ends in a way she could never have imagined, her struggle exposes the deep emotional and ethical complexities inherent in dehumanization. Anna's victory in court, her legal emancipation, is meant to restore her sense of selfworth and agency.

Yet, the ultimate sacrifice she makes the donation of her organs to Kate suggests that Anna's identity, in the end, is still defined by her role in Kate's life, even after her death. This ending serves as a powerful commentary on the complexities of family dynamics, medical ethics, and the struggle for personal agency. It reveals how deeply ingrained social and familial expectations can shape an individual's sense of self, even in the face of a desire to break free.

The novel's conclusion also highlights the lasting emotional effects of dehumanization on the surviving family members. Kate, who survives due to Anna's organ donation, is left to carry the heavy burden of guilt and grief, realizing that her survival comes at the cost of her sister's life. The tension between love and sacrifice, autonomy and duty, is palpable throughout the story, culminating in a final act that challenges readers to consider the moral and emotional implications of using human beings as means to an end.

Ultimately, *My Sister's Keeper* serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of recognizing and respecting each person's

inherent humanity. Anna's experience of mechanistic dehumanization and her subsequent fight for autonomy illustrate the devastating psychological consequences of reducing individuals to mere tools. The novel's tragic ending underscores the ethical dilemmas surrounding bodily autonomy and medical decisions, as well as the emotional cost of living in a system that fails to value individuals for who they truly are. By reflecting on Anna's story, this article contributes to the broader conversation about human rights, autonomy, and the importance of preserving the dignity and humanity of every individual, regardless of their role in the lives of others.

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