

## The Portrayal of Yoo Ah-rin as Mother-like Figure in Webtoon *Cewekku Galak*

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### ABSTRACT

What happens when a character exemplifies the essence of nurturing, protection, and unconditional love? In the webtoon *Cewekku Galak*, Yoo Ah-rin emerges as a mother-like figure whose defining traits such as nurturing, protecting, and unconditionally loving profoundly shape the lives of people around her. This study will be using Carl Jung's mother archetype theory, John Bowlby's attachment theory, and Melanie Klein's object relations theory to explore how these qualities foster emotional security, stability, safety, trust, and a sense of acceptance in other characters. At the same time, it reveals the unintended consequences of her care, such as emotional dependency and obsession. By analyzing the dual impact of her role, this research highlights the complexity of maternal figures in fiction and the enduring significance of unconditional love in storytelling.

**Keywords:** maternal figure, nurturing, protecting, unconditional loving, webtoon.

### INTRODUCTION

The digital era has fundamentally altered the landscape of visual narrative consumption, particularly within the comic book industry. Originally confined to printed formats, comics have evolved into a powerful medium that combines visual imagery with textual storytelling to convey information in an accessible and engaging manner (Andryanto, 2015). With the advent of digital platforms and devices, such as Webtoon originating from South Korea, comics have undergone a significant transformation. Webtoons, characterized by their vertical scrolling format optimized for smartphones and computers, have revolutionized both the creation and distribution of comics globally.

Webtoons differ from traditional comics by their simplicity and accessibility, employing concise dialogues and clear visuals to communicate complex narratives effectively. These digital comics not only entertain but also address contemporary social issues, making them relevant and relatable to diverse audiences worldwide. For instance, works like *True Beauty* and *Let's Play* tackle themes ranging from beauty standards to gender equality, resonating deeply with readers navigating modern societal pressures.

One standout example of this digital revolution is *Cewekku Galak*, authored by Yoo Jong-Pyo, which explores the character of Yoo Ah-rin. Set in a South Korean high school, the webtoon portrays Ah-rin as a strong, assertive figure who challenges societal norms with her fearless demeanor. Despite her tough exterior, Ah-rin embodies maternal qualities, offering nurturing support and protection to those around her, thereby redefining traditional perceptions of maternal roles in contemporary society.

This study aims to explore how digital comics, particularly through characters like Yoo Ah-rin in *Cewekku Galak*, utilize visual storytelling to convey profound messages about identity, social dynamics, and the evolving roles of women in modern culture. By examining narrative techniques and thematic

representations within digital comics, this research seeks to illuminate the broader implications of visual narratives in shaping contemporary popular culture.

The study examines the portrayal of Yoo Ah-rin as a mother-like figure in the webtoon *Cewekku Galak*, focusing on her nurturing, protective, and unconditional loving traits. It also explores the effects of Yoo Ah-rin's behavior on other characters, analyzing both positive and negative outcomes such as emotional stability, trust, security, obsession, and dependence.

The study is significant as it expands the understanding of maternal figures in fiction, highlighting the influence of non-biological maternal figures on the emotional and psychological development of characters. Yoo Ah-rin's traits foster emotional security and growth, but they also create challenges like dependency and unrealistic expectations, reflecting the complexity of maternal care in fictional relationships.

The theoretical framework is based on Carl Jung's concept of the Mother Archetype, focusing on nurturing, protection, and unconditional love. These traits are essential for emotional and psychological development, and the study applies Jung's theory to analyze Yoo Ah-rin's impact on characters like Gyuyeon and Min Seollan. Additionally, John Bowlby's attachment theory and Melanie Klein's object relations theory are used to further explore the psychological effects of Yoo Ah-rin's caregiving behaviors. Bowlby's theory emphasizes the positive effects of nurturing and unconditional love, illustrating how Yoo Ah-rin's support helps characters heal and develop emotionally. Klein's theory highlights both the positive and negative aspects of protection, revealing how excessive caregiving can lead to dependency or unrealistic expectations, as seen in Seosoul's attachment to Yoo Ah-rin.

In conclusion, the study integrates Jung's archetype with Bowlby's and Klein's theories to offer a comprehensive understanding of how Yoo Ah-rin's maternal traits influence the characters and their relationships. It emphasizes the lasting impact of caregiving behaviors on emotional growth and interpersonal dynamics, showcasing the complexity of maternal figures in modern narratives.

## **YOO AH-RIN'S PORTRAYAL AS MOTHER-LIKE FIGURE**

In the webtoon *Cewekku Galak*, Yoo Ah-rin stands out as a maternal figure, embodying key aspects of Carl Jung's Good Mother archetype. This chapter delves into the portrayal of her maternal figure characteristics, focusing on how her nurturing, protective, and unconditional love traits impact the characters around her.

### **Yoo Ah-rin's Maternal Traits**

Yoo Ah-rin's character displays the core attributes of the mother archetype as described by Carl Jung: nurturing, protection, and unconditional love. These traits are prominently reflected in her relationships with several characters, particularly Gyuyeon, Min Seollan, and others. Through her interactions with the characters, Yoo Ah-rin offers a deeper exploration of how non-biological maternal figures can influence emotional growth and well-being.

#### **a. Yoo Ah-Rin's Nurturing Trait**

A key element of the mother archetype is nurturing, which, according to Jung, involves providing a safe, emotionally supportive environment where others can confront their fears and vulnerabilities (Jung, 1964, p. 87). Yoo Ah-rin's nurturing qualities are best exemplified in her relationship with Gyuyeon. In Episode 14, after witnessing Gyuyeon being bullied, Yoo Ah-rin steps in to help, reflecting her nurturing nature. She shows genuine care by asking if Gyuyeon is okay, where her empathy and warmth come through.

The nurturing aspect of Yoo Ah-rin's character aligns with Jung's description of the Good Mother, who provides emotional security and comfort to others. Her actions create a safe space for Gyuyeon, helping him cope with the emotional distress caused by bullying. In this sense, Yoo Ah-rin plays a pivotal role in fostering Gyuyeon's emotional growth and stability. Another example of her nurturing behavior occurs in Episode 15 when Yoo Ah-rin offers to give Gyuyeon a ride to school instead of letting him walk. This small yet significant gesture illustrates her attentiveness to his well-being. As Jung notes, nurturing figures provide not only protection but also small acts of care that enhance the lives of those they nurture (Jung, 1954, pp. 22–24). By insisting on this act of kindness, Yoo Ah-rin reinforces the emotional connection and trust between herself and Gyuyeon, highlighting her role as a reliable and caring figure in his life.

#### b. Yoo Ah-Rin's Protective Trait

Yoo Ah-Rin's protective nature in *Cewekku Galak* aligns with Carl Jung's concept of the mother archetype, which encompasses both nurturing and fierce protection. Jung emphasizes that the mother figure instinctively prioritizes the safety of those under her care, even at the risk of personal harm. Yoo Ah-Rin demonstrates this protective trait in several instances, particularly when intervening in physical and emotional threats against those she cares for, such as Gyuyeon, Min Seollan, and others. For example, when Gyuyeon is bullied by Han Taegu, Yoo Ah-Rin's immediate reaction is to physically intervene, reflecting her instinctive drive to protect. Jung's theory suggests that a protective mother will act boldly in the face of danger, a trait that Yoo Ah-Rin exemplifies when she tackles Han Taegu to stop the abuse. This action shows her willingness to take risks to ensure Gyuyeon's safety.

Yoo Ah-Rin's protection extends beyond physical actions. When Seonghun bullies Gyuyeon, Yoo Ah-Rin reacts with both emotional concern and physical action, embodying the maternal archetype's protective instincts. She steps in aggressively, not only to stop the bullying but also to set boundaries and demonstrate that such behavior is unacceptable. Her protective behavior also includes defending Min Seollan. In a conversation with Seollan about harassment, Yoo Ah-Rin shows both empathy and anger, reflecting the dual nature of the mother archetype—caring and fiercely protective. She expresses outrage when learning of Seonghun's actions and is determined to intervene. Yoo Ah-Rin's readiness to physically confront those who harm her friends further underscores her protective instincts, aligning with Jung's notion of the "Terrible Mother," a force willing to act decisively in the face of danger.

Not only to Gyuyeon and Seollan, but Yoo Ah-Rin's protective trait is also shown through her past interactions with an old friend from middle school, Seosoul (Eps 67). Yoo Ah-Rin's actions in standing up to bullies who harass Seosoul demonstrate her instinctive need to protect. In one instance, Yoo Ah-Rin physically intervenes to stop male classmates from bullying Seosoul, emphasizing her role as a fierce protector. Her words, "I told you to leave her alone," reflect her authority and commitment to setting boundaries, which is a key aspect of Jung's mother archetype. Her continued protection of Seosoul in various situations reinforces the idea that a mother figure is both a nurturer and a defender of her loved ones. Yoo Ah-Rin's actions not only provide Seosoul with physical safety but also assert a moral boundary, preventing further harm. These traits align with Jung's belief that the mother archetype is a moral force, ensuring that harmful influences are kept at bay.

In conclusion, Yoo Ah-Rin's protective behavior perfectly embodies the traits of the mother archetype as described by Jung. Through her courageous actions, Yoo Ah-Rin serves as both a strong guardian and an emotional support system, demonstrating the balance of care, authority, and fierce protection that defines the maternal role.

### c. Yoo Ah-Rin's Unconditional Love Trait

Yoo Ah-Rin's decision to stay in Korea instead of moving to America, as depicted in Episode 81, exemplifies Carl Jung's concept of the Mother Archetype's unconditional love. Her choice to remain with Gyuyeon, despite her family's expectations and the challenges their relationship faces, highlights her selflessness and deep emotional connection with him. Jung (1959) describes maternal love as unconditional and enduring, often requiring personal sacrifice. Yoo Ah-Rin's actions reflect this, as she prioritizes Gyuyeon's well-being over her own desires, showing the depth of her love. When Yoo Ah-Rin's mother questions her decision, asking if it was due to Gyuyeon, it becomes clear that her commitment to him outweighs her family's wishes. Her mother's anger and desire for her to leave for a fresh start emphasize the familial pressure Yoo Ah-Rin faces, yet she chooses to stay, demonstrating her loyalty and willingness to sacrifice for Gyuyeon. This self-sacrifice aligns with Jung's idea that unconditional love often involves putting someone else's needs above one's own, even when faced with difficulties.

Jung further asserts that unconditional love provides emotional stability and comfort. By staying, Yoo Ah-Rin offers Gyuyeon not only her protection but also her unwavering emotional support, ensuring he does not face the consequences of their relationship alone. Despite the risks, Yoo Ah-Rin's commitment underscores her maternal instinct to care and nurture.

In conclusion, Yoo Ah-Rin's unconditional love for Gyuyeon mirrors Jung's Mother Archetype, emphasizing selflessness, loyalty, and the emotional depth of maternal love. Her choice to stay, even against her family's wishes, exemplifies the unconditional and sacrificial nature of this archetype.

## **The Effects of Yoo Ah-rin's Maternal Traits on Other Characters**

Yoo Ah-Rin's nurturing and motherly nature has a significant influence on those around her, particularly Gyuyeon, Min Seollan, Seosoul, and Yoon Jimin. Her acts of kindness and support create an environment where others feel safe and emotionally understood, impacting their behavior and emotional well-being.

### a. Effect of Nurturing Traits: Security and Emotional Stability

Yoo Ah-Rin's nurturing behavior towards Gyuyeon aligns with John Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which highlights the importance of consistent emotional support in developing healthy relationships and emotional stability. Bowlby (1969) suggests that a reliable caregiver provides a secure base, allowing the individual to feel safe, explore their world, and trust others. Yoo Ah-Rin provides this secure base for Gyuyeon, helping him overcome his past traumas and social insecurities. Before meeting Yoo Ah-Rin, Gyuyeon struggled with feelings of isolation and low self-esteem. However, through her consistent support, he begins to develop self-worth and trust in others, as demonstrated when he forms a friendship with Yoon Jimin. Yoo Ah-Rin's nurturing helps Gyuyeon manage his emotions, build confidence, and form lasting relationships. Her ability to reassure him enables him to face challenges with greater resilience and emotional stability, as he learns to trust others and navigate social situations with confidence.

Bowlby (1969) emphasizes the importance of emotional responsiveness in regulating emotions. Yoo Ah-Rin's steady presence helps Gyuyeon calm his anxieties, giving him the courage to be open to others and form new connections. This process is exemplified by Gyuyeon's growing friendship with Yoon Jimin, which is a direct result of the emotional safety provided by Yoo Ah-Rin.

In conclusion, Yoo Ah-Rin's nurturing behavior aligns with Bowlby's Attachment Theory, demonstrating how consistent emotional support fosters confidence, trust, and emotional growth.

Through her care, Gyuyeon can overcome insecurities and build meaningful relationships, reflecting the core principles of Bowlby's theory.

b. Effects of Protection Traits: Safety, Trust, Obsession

Yoo Ah-rin's protective nature has a significant emotional impact on the characters around her, fostering safety, trust, and emotional resilience while also presenting risks of emotional dependency. Melanie Klein's Object Relations Theory (1946) helps explain these dynamics, emphasizing how protection influences an individual's psychological development and self-perception.

Yoo Ah-rin's protection creates a sense of emotional security for Seosoul, Min Seollan, and Gyuyeon, allowing them to feel valued and safe. For Seosoul, witnessing Yoo Ah-rin defend her from bullies offers emotional comfort, reinforcing her sense of self-worth. This consistent care fosters trust and confidence, essential for emotional growth. However, excessive protection can lead to dependency, as seen in Seosoul's intense emotional attachment to Yoo Ah-rin, which borders on obsession. Seosoul's fear of losing Yoo Ah-rin's support leads her to drastic actions, such as transferring schools, reflecting how overprotective relationships can impair independence and emotional resilience. Seosoul's obsession with Yoo Ah-rin, as shown in Figure 1, reflects a deep emotional attachment.



Figure 1. Seosoul's Collection of Yoo Ah-rin's Photographs.

The photos of Yoo Ah-rin displayed on the wall and desk are clear signs of this obsession, showing an attempt to keep her presence constant in his life. This behavior can be explained by the psychological mechanism of fixation, where Seosoul becomes overly focused on Yoo Ah-rin as an ideal figure. The obsession reveals a strong need to feel connected to someone he sees as a symbol of emotional comfort or security, even though the relationship is one-sided and imagined.

For Min Seollan and Yoon Jimin, Yoo Ah-rin's protection provides them with the emotional stability to trust and form lasting relationships. This stability enables them to handle future emotional challenges and internalize the lessons of courage and resilience from Ah-rin. While

Klein acknowledges that overprotection can lead to dependency, she also highlights the positive effects of protection, such as fostering emotional strength, trust, and the capacity to face challenges with confidence.

c. Effects of Unconditional Love Trait: Feeling of Acceptance

Yoo Ah-rin's capacity for unconditional love plays a pivotal role in Gyuyeon's emotional development, especially in shaping his self-esteem and his relationships with others. Initially, their relationship begins with a misunderstanding when Gyuyeon accidentally brushes against Ah-rin, which leads to her anger and suspicion. For Gyuyeon, this moment is anxiety-inducing, as he fears rejection and believes this incident will define their relationship. This reflects John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969), which highlights the anxiety that arises from the fear of losing the approval of an attachment figure, especially when one's behavior is misunderstood.

However, the dynamic shifts when Ah-rin realizes the incident is accidental and tries to understand Gyuyeon's perspective. By forgiving him and moving beyond the misunderstanding, she demonstrates unconditional love, accepting him despite the conflict. This aligns with Bowlby's idea that being accepted despite faults fosters a sense of security and emotional healing, enabling trust to develop.

This moment of acceptance has a transformative effect on Gyuyeon. Ah-rin's willingness to trust his intentions reassures him that he is not defined by a mistake, boosting his self-worth. This interaction supports Bowlby's assertion that a secure attachment figure helps individuals overcome self-doubt and believe in their goodness even in adversity. Ah-rin's forgiveness and kindness provide Gyuyeon with the emotional safety needed to open and build trust, both in her and in himself. Additionally, this experience teaches Gyuyeon the value of grace and understanding in relationships. Ah-rin's ability to look beyond his mistakes and focus on his intentions influences how Gyuyeon handles future conflicts, internalizing the lessons of empathy and forgiveness.

In conclusion, Yoo Ah-rin's unconditional love profoundly impacts Gyuyeon's emotional growth. By offering him acceptance despite initial misunderstandings, Ah-rin provides Gyuyeon with a secure base, fostering his self-confidence and emotional resilience. This experience aligns with Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which emphasizes the role of unconditional acceptance in building trust and emotional strength, allowing Gyuyeon to embrace his identity and form healthier relationships moving forward.

## CONCLUSION

This study explores the critical role of Yoo Ah-rin as a mother-like figure in *Cewekku Galak*, examining how her nurturing, protective, and unconditional love impacts the emotional development of the characters around her. Ah-rin's emotional support provides a sense of security, allowing characters like Gyuyeon to feel safe, cared for, and accepted. Her kindness fosters personal growth, helping individuals like Gyuyeon become more emotionally stable and confident. Through her actions, Ah-rin offers a sense of belonging, reminding others that they are not alone, especially during difficult moments.

However, the study also highlights the potential drawbacks of Ah-rin's deep care. While her support is invaluable, it can create over-reliance on others, particularly Gyuyeon and Seosoul. This dependence leads to unhealthy attachment, where characters struggle to cope independently or experience anxiety when Ah-rin is absent. These negative effects underscore the importance of balancing unconditional love to prevent unhealthy dependency or obsession.

The research also deepens our understanding of attachment theory and its role in shaping emotional growth. Yoo Ah-rin, as a mother-like figure, plays a pivotal role in helping others feel valued and supported, fostering trust and a stronger sense of self. Yet, it is crucial to recognize the risks associated with such deep emotional bonds, as they can lead to over-dependence if not carefully managed. Moreover, this study reveals the broader influence of unconditional love and acceptance in fictional narratives. These themes impact not only on the main characters but also on the formation and maintenance of relationships throughout the story. Ah-rin's presence emphasizes that while love and support are vital for growth, they must be balanced with independence to avoid the negative consequences of excessive dependence.

In conclusion, this study highlights the complex role of Yoo Ah-rin in *Cewekku Galak* and the profound effects her unconditional love has on the emotional development of those around her. It provides valuable insights into how maternal-like figures shape relationships, personal growth, and emotional resilience. Furthermore, it underscores the need for balance between security and independence, demonstrating that while unconditional love is a powerful force, it must be navigated carefully to ensure healthy emotional development and relationships.

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