

Proceeding

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**The Ego Defense Mechanism of The Main Character Charlie in
The Perks Of Being a Wallflower By Stephen Chbosky**

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Abstract

The research is about the ego defense mechanism as one of the ways or methods for traumatized person to solve and or handle their anxiety, fear, stress, or depression. This research discusses the ego defense mechanism that happens in the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, especially in the main character, Charlie. The theory used in this research is the ego defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud. The data research uses a qualitative method to describe the phenomenon of the ego defense mechanism, where the data is taken from the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky. The findings show the main character taking on all of the id, ego, and superego activities throughout his life. In addition, he utilizes the types of ego defense mechanisms such as regression and sublimation to cope with or handle his trauma, anxiety, and fear. Also, there are causes that the main character doing the ego defense mechanism because of trauma from his best friend's suicide, trauma and depression from his aunt's death, and trauma of sexual abuse by his aunt.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Ego defense mechanism, Trauma, Anxiety, Fear.

INTRODUCTION

Human must have stress, guilt, fear, and anxiety which can lead a person to experience trauma. Some people may never experience trauma. Others, though, may have had the same experience. The ego defense mechanisms are a kind of strategy for dealing with and or handling a traumatized person's fear, anxiety, depression, and stress. Trauma is something that many people experience in their life. Trauma is a medical condition caused by a traumatic incident. This is frequently the result of something horrible that happened in the past that made a person to be afraid, anxious, stressed, and concerned about doing something in the future.

Trauma has the potential to affect someone's behavior or perception of anything, such as family, friends, or the environment. A lot of them are about people's conduct or have a substantial influence on someone's life since they deal with a psychological condition. Fear, stress, and anxiety by trauma show that the traumatized person is struggling to cope with the trauma itself. People tend to adopt ego defense mechanisms while dealing with the impacts of trauma. The ego defense mechanisms are a kind of strategy used by traumatized people to cope with their anxiety or fear.

Proceeding

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Ego defense mechanisms are generally found in human society. However, ego defense mechanisms may be seen not just in society but also in literary works, such as novels. For example, in the one of the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* showed the ego defense mechanism of the main character, Charlie. In analyzing the ego defense mechanism of the main character in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, this study will employ the ego defense mechanism theory by Sigmund Freud.

METHODOLOGY

This research used the theory of the ego defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud to analyzing and identifying the main character, Charlie in the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Qualitative research is a study method utilized to analyze and interpret the meaning that certain people or groups that consider to derive from social or human problems (Martin, 2013). The research employed a qualitative method, with data sourced from Stephen Chbosky's novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. To collect the data, first by reading, second understands the contents, third identify and classify the data, then fourth transferred and interpreted to do more analysis by using Sigmund Freud theory.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this research, the researcher describe the id, ego, and superego of the main character, the types of ego defense mechanisms does the main character apply in his life that is Regression and Sublimation, and the causes the main character does the ego defense mechanism.

1) The Id, Ego, and Superego of the Main Character

It has been shown when the story begins what is Charlie's ego defense mechanism that is he always writing letters to someone whose name he has never revealed. He never told its boy or girl. Writing a letter to someone is like a necessity for him and he really needs it. He tells the anonymous all he knows about his school, family, friends, daily life, and himself. In his first letter, he expressed he feels afraid, anxious and traumatized about starting his first day of high school. As a result, he was terrified to do anything, meet new people, or be in a new environment.

a) The Id

The finding that shows Charlie's id strong that is, he needs and always writes letters to someone unknown. Writing letters to someone is like a necessity for him and he really needs it. In the citation as follows: I should probably go to sleep now. It's very late. I don't know why I wrote a lot of this down for you to read. The reason I wrote this letter is because I start high school tomorrow and I am really afraid of going. (Chbosky, 1999: 14)

In the citation above, a basic need or Charlie's id is to always write letters to someone unknown. He continuously poured everything he experienced and told it in his letters. Writing letters is Charlie's way of escaping, coping, and reducing his

Proceeding

The 3rd International Student Conference

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August 26, 2023

fears, trauma, and anxiety. So that finally, he will feel overcome his ego defense mechanism and feel relieved and satisfied.

Based on the citations above, it is proved that according to Charlie's id strong, he wrote letters about things that happened in his daily life. Charlie believes that by writing letters, which he does frequently, he may lighten up or reduce his feelings and thoughts. So he felt pleased, relieved, and satisfied because he expressed it in letters after which he felt better.

b) The Ego

Because Charlie's id is weak to control his actions and let his ego control him. Charlie always writes letters to someone unknown, so Charlie's ego is continuing to write letters and he even sends letters to the post office after that he will feel calm and peaceful within himself.

The finding that shows in the citation below:

... All I remember from the rest of that night was looking all over the house for an envelope and a stamp. When I finally found them, I wrote your address and walked down the hill past the tress to the post office because I knew that if I didn't put it in a mailbox that I couldn't get it back from, I would never mail the letter... Once I got to the post office. I dropped the letter into the mailbox. And I felt final. And calm.

(Chbosky, 1999: 94)

From the citation above, that shows Charlie's ego is the activity of writing letters and after completing the letter then continuing to send the letter to the post office. The action of writing letters and sending these letters to the post office is simply able to calm Charlie in handling with his anxiety, trauma, and fear.

Charlie's id is too weak to control his actions so Charlie's ego is strong enough, when he wrote the letters to person that unknown, not only did he write them down but he also sent the letters to the post office, so he will feel relieved and calm within himself. The relief that he feels is the feeling when a person is successful in coping or dealing with his anxiety, trauma and fear.

c) The Superego

Charlie's superego is stronger than his id that he must work hard to study. Because Charlie's id is he always writes letters to someone unknown, it is his way of handling or reducing his fear, trauma and anxiety.

So, he avoids negative actions and thoughts because his superego is strong to control him to always do good things. The first finding shows that how hard Charlie studied to achieve an 'A' score in the class. In the following citation: ... I would write a little more today, but I have to learn my math formulas for the final on Thursday. Wish me luck! ... Incidentally, I got a perfect on my math final last week. (Chbosky, 1999: 156-160)

Based on the citation above, Charlie's id is writes letters to an unknown someone regarding his problems or daily life. But his id and ego is not strong enough to drive him. Charlie wants to finish his letters but he should do his first job

Proceeding

The 3rd International Student Conference

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August 26, 2023

as a student that he wants to get the highest math score. Charlie is slightly sad and disappointed and also feels so regretful that he must take a break from writing letters. However, Charlie's superego is stronger than his id and ego that he must work hard in studies and learns about formulas for his math.

Finally, Charlie gets a perfect score in mathematics by studying some formulas. According to psychoanalysis, it shows that Charlie's superego is stronger than his id to hardworking and studying diligently. It can be proved that his superego is stronger and controlling him to do the right way, how he avoided cheating and did his best on the final test. Charlie has proven to be a hardworking young man, especially in his education.

2) The Type of Ego Defense Mechanism does the Main Character Apply in his Life

The ego defense mechanism is an unconscious psychological mechanism that works to relieve anxiety, trauma, fear, stress and others. It is one of the methods to solve the problems.

The ego defense mechanism cover against anxiety, trauma, stress, or guilt resulting from feeling threatened or when the id or superego becomes too demanding. There are several types in the ego defense mechanism that is denial, displacement, sublimation, regression, projection, fixation, repression, reaction formation, and others. In the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the main character, Charlie did two types of the ego defense mechanism, what are types of ego defense mechanisms that Charlie did, in the below:

a) Regression

Because Charlie's ego defense mechanism is he must always write letters to someone unknown, and tell all the problems and things that happen in his life in those letters. Charlie was shocked and cried because he knew about the problem that happened to his close friend, and he felt trauma and anxiety because lost his friend, whenever Charlie feels threatened by stressful situations, he will cry like a child who is only able to show their feelings by crying. The finding in the citation below:

The counselor said that he suspected that Michael had "problem at home" and didn't feel like he had anyone to talk to. That's maybe why he felt all alone and killed himself.

... And I started crying even harder. He tried to calm me down by saying that he meant an adult like a teacher or a guidance counselor. But it didn't work and eventually my brother came by the middle school in his Camaro to pick me up...

(Chbosky, 1999: 12-13)

In the citation above, according to psychoanalysis it shows that Charlie's regression is shocked and cried and he felt trauma and anxiety because lost his friend. Charlie yells and sobs after finding the reason why his friend killed himself. He is concerned about his friend, Michael. Michael is his closest and best friend. Michael had difficulty problem in his family and did not have someone to talk to. It

Proceeding

The 3rd International Student Conference

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August 26, 2023

is the reason why Charlie tears uncontrollably when he finds out the reason about Michael's suddenly doing suicide.

b) Sublimation

In the story, Charlie's ego defense mechanism that is he always and continuously writes letters for someone unknown. Charlie has difficulties in expressing his feeling and to share his problem, not only problem about his friend, family but also his environment. Moreover, Charlie cannot believe if he trusts to tell and share his problem to the others.

The finding that shows Charlie's sublimation is writing letters to someone and also sending the letters to the post office then he will feel relieved, this is his way to coping or dealing from his trauma, anxiety and fear, in the citation below:

... All I remember from the rest of that night was looking all over the house for an envelope and a stamp. When I finally found them, I wrote your address and walked down the hill past the tress to the post office because I knew that if I didn't put it in a mailbox that I couldn't get it back from, I would never mail the letter.

It's weird how important it seemed at the time.

Once I got to the post office. I dropped the letter into the mailbox. And I felt final. And calm.

(Chbosky, 1999: 94)

From the citation in above, that shows Charlie's ego defense mechanism is sublimation which considered as the most appropriate defense mechanism done by Charlie. According to psychoanalysis, it shows that Charlie's sublimation is the activity of writing letters that he applies in his life. The activity of writing letters is simply can calm Charlie in coping with his problem.

When, Charlie wrote the letters to person that unknown, he tells all that he knows about his school, family, friends, daily life, and himself and his problem, so he will felt relieved. The relief that he felt is the feeling when a person is successful in coping or dealing with his anxiety.

For someone who has something in common with Charlie, who is socially awkward, the presence of a figure or someone for him to share with is really important. Not only because he did not really good at starting a friendship, but he tends to be passive and he did not even think he needs to participate, although his teacher encouraged him.

3) The Causes of the Main Character does the Ego Defense Mechanism

When someone used ego defense mechanisms, that are a way to handle or solve problems such as trauma, fear, anxiety, and others, there must be causes why that person is using ego defense mechanisms in his or her life. In the novel, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, what causes the main character, Charlie, finally used ego defense mechanisms in his life, are stated below:

Proceeding

The 3rd International Student Conference

Held by The Faculty of Law and Language of Universitas Stikubank

August 26, 2023

a) Trauma Caused by Charlie's Best Friend Suicide

Charlie has a close friend since middle high school, he is called Michael. But something happened to Michael, this made him traumatized by the loss of a close friend, which then made Charlie's life even more changed than before because of this.

The finding in the following citation: ... Michael had "problem at home" and didn't feel like he had anyone to talk to. That's maybe why he felt all alone and killed himself. (Chbosky, 1999: 12)

In the citation above, Charlie lost a friend while he was in middle school. Michael was a closest friend of Charlie; he committed suicide due to family problems. He had no one to tell about himself so he felt alone; he finally ended his own life by killing himself. Charlie had truly lost his closest friend.

The other finding as stated following citation: ... The reason I wrote this letter is because I start high school tomorrow and I am really afraid of going. (Chbosky, 1999: 14)

From the citation above, after the incident of his friend, Michael's suicide, Charlie felt the loss of his closest friend very much. One of the reasons Charlie wrote the letter was because he felt traumatized and afraid the day before he went to his first day of high school. He felt anxious and afraid to face his first day when he would meet new people and be in an unfamiliar environment after his friend died. So that makes it is difficult to deal with the trauma. It influenced Charlie's ability to socialize and not easily trust others which resulted in him being ex-communicated. It proves, based on his trauma experienced was abandoned by his close friend.

b) Trauma and Depression Caused by Charlie's Aunt Death

Charlie has an aunt called Helen, she is his mother's sister. Charlie was very close since childhood and he also really liked her.

The finding in the citation as follows: ... policeman came to the door. My aunt Helen was in a terrible car accident. It was very snowy. The policeman told my mom that my aunt Helen had passed away... it was a very bad accident, and my Aunt Helen was definitely killed instantly... (Chbosky, 1999: 87)

From the citation in above, on Charlie's seventh birthday, while Aunt Helen would buy Charlie a present, but on the way he gets into a car accident and died. So Charlie blames himself for the death of his aunt Helen because of him, because it was his birthday, and had to buy him present which was the cause of Aunt Helen's death.

The others finding in the following citation: ... So, they brought me to the hospital where I stayed when I was seven after my aunt Helen died. They told me I didn't speak or acknowledge anyone for a week... And I remembered my aunt Helen. And I started to cry... (Chbosky, 1999: 191)

From the citation above, after his aunt died, Charlie felt down, guilty, and also felt extremely lost from his aunt, Helen, every time he remembered her he felt sad and cried. Charlie's feelings were very mixed at that time. Charlie felt very

Proceeding

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August 26, 2023

traumatized, depressed, and shocked by the incident. As a result, after his aunt Helen died, Charlie must be treated at a hospital mental health center. He did not speak and seemed to know nothing or had lost his memory for a while. It showed that Charlie became traumatized by being sad and abandoned by the closest and dearest person in his life.

c) Trauma Caused by Charlie's Aunt doing Sexual Abuse to Charlie

Charlie is very close and often spends time with his aunt Helen. Memories from his childhood are still vivid in Charlie's memory. Because he was too young, Charlie did not know and did not realize what his aunt Helen was actually doing to him.

When Charlie starts to be friends with Patrick and Sam, Charlie starts to feel comfortable being friends with them, then he notices that he seems to like Sam. In the citation as follows: ... And we lay down on the floor and kept kissing. And it was soft... We went over to the bed and lay down on all the things that weren't put in suitcases... That's when I stopped her. (Chbosky, 1999: 185)

In the citation above, it shows that Charlie and Sam, they both almost had sex until Charlie stopped it because he feel uncomfortable doing it with Sam but he do not know why.

The finding in the following citation:

When I fell asleep, I had this dream. My brother and my sister and I were watching television with my Aunt Helen. Everything was in slow motion. The sound was thick. And she was doing what Sam was doing... And I remembered my aunt Helen. And I started to cry... I don't really want to talk about the questions and the answers. But I kind of figured out that everything I dreamt about my aunt Helen was true. And after a while, I realized that it happened every Saturday when we would watch television.

(Chbosky, 1999: 186-191)

From the citation in above, showed Charlie saw his past moment while with his aunt Helen at a glimpse. After what Sam and Charlie did, he remembered and realized what his aunt Helen had done to him. When Charlie was a child, his aunt sexually abused him. His aunt Helen palpated against him and harassed him. He was a child at the time and had no idea what his aunt had done, but it made him traumatized. After remembering it, he confirmed everything that happened was true. His aunt often sexually abused him every Saturday while with his brother and sister while watching television. Charlie was strongly traumatized by the incident since he was quite close to and loved his aunt.

CONCLUSION

In the summary, the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* written by Stephen Chbosky which relates to mental health showed the ego defense mechanism of the main character Charlie. The ego defense mechanisms that happened to the main character, Charlie in the novel *The Perks*

Proceeding

The 3rd International Student Conference

Held by The Faculty of Law and Language of Universitas Stikubank

August 26, 2023

of *Being a Wallflower* are Charlie doing all of the id, ego, and superego. Charlie's defense mechanism is writing letters to someone unknown. He tells the anonymous all about his school, family, friends, daily life, and himself, he always tells everything that happened to the letter. The reason why he wrote letters because he was terrified to do anything, meet new people, or be in a new environment, so he feels fear, traumatized and anxious. To reduce feelings of anxiety, fear, and trauma finally the ego defense mechanism is done in Charlie's daily life. Charlie also does two types of ego defense mechanisms there is regression and sublimation in his life. From the ego defense mechanism that Charlie has done above, there are causes why he finally did the ego defense mechanism, all that happened because of Charlie's trauma of losing his best friend, Michael because of suicide, another reason is that he was traumatized and depression by his loved one his aunt, Helen death, and lastly, caused him to become traumatized because of his favorite and loved aunt, Helen did sexual abuse when he was a child, which he was not realize of all this time.

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