

## Analysis Of Psychological Conflict Of The Main Character In The “The Rocking Horse Winner” Short Story

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### Abstract

*This research discusses psychological conflict using Anna Freud's Defense Mechanism theory in the short story “The Rocking Horse Winner”. This research has two objectives, namely to find out the defense mechanism and to find out the factors that cause the defense mechanism in the main character in the short story “The Rocking Horse Winner”. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. This relates to the description of the data in the form of the utterances of the main character Paul in the short story. The analysis in this study using Spradley's analysis. The results of this study show that of the ten defense mechanisms, six were found, namely rationalization, displacement, repression, projection, denial, and identification. Neurotic anxiety and moral anxiety were found as two of the three factors causing defense mechanisms. In this study, the most common type of defense mechanism found is rationalization and neurotic anxiety is the dominant factor that causes the use of this defense mechanism by the main character*

**Keyword:** *Psychological Conflict, Main Character, Short Story*

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### A. Introduction

Literary works use reality and creativity to reflect society and express ideas and experiences. There are different types of literary works, such as poetry, prose, drama, and fiction, which have aesthetic value and serve as depictions of social reality. Nurgiyantoro (2012) in (Novrianti, 2023) describes prose as a free and flexible type of writing. A popular type of prose, the short story focus on character and theme, using concise language to convey a certain effect.

The story "The Rocking Horse Winner" by D.H. Lawrence is about the devastating consequences of greed and materialism. The story follows a son Paul's struggle to fulfill his mother's materialistic desires, which ultimately leads to his death. The film emphasizes the importance of mental health over financial gain. In addition, the story also explores the concept of psychological conflict using Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis explains that our personalities are formed through conflicts that arise from the unconscious. Such internal conflicts can lead to mental disorders and anxiety. In the field of psychology, defense mechanisms are used by individuals to protect themselves from emotional harm in uncomfortable situations. These mechanisms function as unconscious responses to protect themselves from negative experiences.

There are five previous studies that analyze Defense Mechanisms. In the first study, researchers (Purwo & Andayani, 2022) analyzed Defense Mechanisms in the novel "Americanah" by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The results showed that Ifemelu's character has five defense

mechanisms, namely Repression, Denial, Projection, Displacement, and Sublimation. The second study, conducted by researchers (Rezeki et al., 2023), discussed defense mechanisms in the film "The Invisible Man". The results of the study that the character Cecilia experiences anxiety, namely neurotic anxiety and realistic anxiety and uses defense mechanisms such as repression, rationalization, fantasy, denial, and reaction formation. The theory used in this research is Sigmund Freud's theory.

The third study, conducted by (Andriana & Kasrabowo, 2020), discussed defense mechanisms in the short story "The Black Cat". Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory became the basis of this research. In this study, the main character shows neurotic anxiety, realistic anxiety, and shows various kinds of ego defenses used, namely displacement, denial, acting out defense mechanisms, symbolization, and projection. The fourth study, conducted by (Hasra & Zulfaisya, 2020) discusses defense mechanisms in Laurie Halse Anderson's novel *Speak*. This study uses Sigmund Freud's defense mechanism theory. The results of the study to overcome anxiety and psychological problems, the main character also uses defense techniques such as replacement projection, isolation, identification, and sublimation. Furthermore, the fifth study was conducted by (Devianti, 2021), discussing defense mechanisms in the *Season of You Series*. The results showed that Joe's bad past with his family was a low-level defense mechanism that occurred to him, causing him to commit physical aggression against the people around Beck by killing them. Anna Freud's Defense Mechanism Theory of Joe Goldberg is the theory used in this study.

This research draws on previous studies that used Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theory and Anna Freud's defense mechanism theory. The research subjects include novels, movies, and short stories. However, this study focuses on the main character's defense mechanism in the short story *Kuda Goyang Pemenang*. This research uses Anna Freud's defense mechanism theory, published in the book *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (A. Freud, 1936/1966) in (Kelland, n.d.) in 1936. According to Anna Freud, there are several types of defense mechanisms :

- a. Repression is a defense mechanism that involves blocking urges from conscious expression, which occurs when certain traumatic events or negative feelings are forgotten or unconscious. The impulse is submerged into the unconscious so that it does not interfere with the ego.
- b. Regression is a defense mechanism that involves the individual returning to an earlier stage of psychosexual development to avoid frustration and anxiety.
- c. Denial is the refusal to acknowledge an unpleasant reality, which allows an individual to calm themselves by not facing it.
- d. Projection is when we attribute negative impulses to others, to protect ourselves from guilt or low self-esteem. It allows us to project our unkind or aggressive thoughts onto others, making them the target of our negative feelings.
- e. Reaction-forming is a psychological defense mechanism in which the individual suppresses unacceptable urges and acts against them. It is used to protect the ego from harm and make the individual feel accepted by others.
- f. Identification defense mechanisms occur when we mimic the behavior of those we admire or adapt the behavior of those we fear.
- g. Displacement occurs when we shift our thoughts or emotions to another object or person that is considered safer or less threatening.
- h. Rationalization is a defense mechanism used to justify unacceptable actions or thoughts. It involves finding logical reasons to make the behavior seem more reasonable.
- i. Isolation is a strategy to avoid the anxiety-provoking aspects of one's thoughts and behavior. The goal is to suppress and not express unacceptable emotions.
- j. Sublimation is a way to reduce anxiety or stress resulting from unacceptable urges by transforming them into positive and morally acceptable behavior. It involves changing or replacing the drive itself, not the object of the drive.

Freud explained that anxiety is a threat to the human ego and is a feeling of discomfort created by the ego. Anxiety can originate from "external and internal nature" or from external and internal sources, according to Ahmadi (2015: 49) in (Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022). Anxiety serves as a warning and drives individuals to seek satisfaction. Individuals will try to avoid threatening situations and reduce potentially dangerous impulsive needs. If there is no rational way to do this, individuals may

resort to irrational defense mechanisms. Freud defined three types of anxiety based on their source from the id and ego. Based on sources from the id and ego, Freud (2021:71) defines three types of anxiety:

- a. Reality or Objective Anxiety, Freud (2021) describes anxiety as the ego's fear of threats in the real world and past trauma. This causes individuals to avoid dangerous situations to reduce tension.
- b. Neurotic anxiety is the fear of imminent or undetected danger, which stems from the ego's fear of instinct-dominated behavior. This anxiety is usually reinforced by fear of external danger.
- c. Moral anxiety is the fear of one's own conscience and violating norms. It arises from the conflict between ego and superego, causing shame and guilt.

Defense mechanisms are human systems that respond to levels of stress and anxiety to protect themselves. Factors that influence personality problems and anxiety can be found in literary works because literary works reflect reality. These defense mechanisms are unique to each individual in overcoming fear. Fear can also trigger defensive actions such as attacking or running away. By using literary works as research subjects, researchers can gain an understanding of the defense mechanisms that exist in the main character. In conclusion, this study examines defense mechanisms and the factors that cause them in the main character in the short story *The Rocking Horse Winner*.

## **B. Methods**

### **Research Instruments**

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative method. The purpose of using this method is to understand in depth about how phenomena or subjects are seen and experienced by certain individuals or groups according to Sugiyono (2017: 124) in (Novrianti, 2023). This research method has described and explained the complexity and variation in a context. This research was conducted using a descriptive method, which aims to reveal the factors behind the emergence of the psychological aspects of the main character in the short story. By using descriptive qualitative methods, researchers have obtained relevant and specific data for the purpose of this research.

### **Data Collection**

According to Riduwan (2010: 72) in (Noviyanti, 2022), data collection techniques were methods used by researcher to collect data. In collecting data, researcher use the following steps: 1. Downloading short stories and reading the entire short story 2. Understanding the story and conflict in the short story. 3. Sorting out utterances that belonged to defense mechanisms and their causative factors. 4. Marking utterances that showed defense mechanisms and their causing factors in the short story. 5. Analyzing the types of defense mechanisms and their causing factors in the short story. 6. Making a conclusion.

### **Data Analysis**

This study used Spradley's research model with qualitative data analysis discovered by James Spradley in 1980. James Spradley outlined four stages in analyzing qualitative research data, namely Domain, Taxonomy, Componential, and Cultural Themes. In this study, researchers used three stages of analysis which included domain analysis, taxonomy analysis, and componential analysis. Domain analysis is conducted to understand the object of research or the social situation being studied. The researcher read the short story "The Rocking Horse Winner" and collected data as the first step of the analysis. Furthermore, taxonomic analysis was conducted to break down the domain into more specialized parts and help researchers understand the relationship between domains. This analysis also focuses on specific domains that describe the phenomenon or problem that is the target of the research. Finally, componential analysis was conducted by looking for attributes associated with cultural symbols. The researcher collected all the data that had been collected and combined them in a table. The results of this analysis produced several topics related to the research title.

### C. Result

**Table 1. Table Componential Analysis**

Type DM / Factor	Neurotic Anxiety	Moral Anxiety	Total
<b>Rationalization</b>	5	2	7
<b>Displacement</b>	2	1	3
<b>Repression</b>	1	2	3
<b>Projection</b>	1	1	2
<b>Danial</b>	1	1	2
<b>Identification</b>	-	1	1

Based on the table 1 above shows a componential analysis where of the ten types of defense mechanisms there are six namely rationalization, displacement, repression, projection, denial, identification and the most dominant is used by the main character Paul rationalization defense mechanism. Then, from the three factors that cause defense mechanisms, there are two factors that cause defense mechanisms, namely neurotic anxiety and moral anxiety and the most dominant one that appears is neurotic anxiety.

This study found that Paul uses six defense mechanisms in *The Rocking Horse Winner*: rationalization, displacement, repression, projection, denial, and identification. In this short story, Paul is the main character who completely relies on defense mechanisms and eventually dies. Table 2 will display the taxonomic analysis of Paul's Defense Mechanism.

**Table 2 Table Taxonomic Domain Analysis of Paul's Defense Mechanism**

NO	Types of Defense Mechanisms	Number of Data	Percentage
1	Rationalization	7	39 %
2	Displacement	3	17 %
3	Repression	3	17 %
4	Projection	2	11 %
5	Denial	2	11 %
6	Identification	1	5 %
7	Reaction – Forming	-	0 %
8	Isolation	-	0 %
9	Sublimation	-	0 %
10	Regression	-	0 %

- a. Rationalization is a defense mechanism used by people to justify actions or thoughts that may be considered unacceptable. It occurs when a person feels guilty or anxious, so they look for logical reasons to make their behavior seem more rational and acceptable. In this short story Paul tries to use rationalization as an ego defense mechanism by helping him from defending against anxiety and guilt. In this situation Paul is trying to defend his ego when his mother tells him that he is unlucky because his father was unlucky and therefore not rich.

**"Well, anyhow,"** he said stoutly, **"I'm a lucky person."**

"Why?" said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn't even know why he had said it.

"God told me," he asserted, brazening it out. (Page 4)

Paul tried to rationalize his feelings of uncertainty and insecurity by stating that he was a lucky man. The child's statement is a form of rationalization because he tries to make sense of his

situation and his mother's unhappiness by convincing himself that he is lucky. This is an attempt to compensate for his feelings of uncertainty and insecurity by creating a positive self-image.

- b. Displacement is a defense mechanism used when a person channels their thoughts or emotions onto another object or person because they are unable to deal with them directly in a stressful situation. It helps reduce stress by redirecting feelings to a safer or non-threatening target. In this situation Paul is trying to defend his ego when his mother doesn't believe him that he's lucky so he vents his emotions by riding his rocking horse while slashing the horse's neck with a whip.

"Now!" he would silently command the snorting steed,

"Now, take me to where there is luck! Now take me!"

**And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for.** (Page 5)

Paul felt anxious and uncertain about his situation, and he transferred those feelings to the horse, seen as a way of transferring his own anxiety and uncertainty to the horse, as if he hoped to find a solution to his problem by relying on the horse.

- c. Repression is a defense mechanism that involves blocking the impulses of conscious expression. Negative impulses from the Id are submerged into the unconscious so as not to disturb the ego. Although repressed, the impulse can emerge unconsciously. Repression occurs when a person tries to eliminate anxiety that exists in the unconscious. In this situation Paul is trying to defend his ego when his uncle the boy's uncle asks him if he has ever put anything on a horse as if questioning or unsure of Paul.

"Say, Paul, old man, do you ever put anything on a horse?"  
the uncle asked.

The boy watched the handsome man closely.

**"Why, do you think I oughtn't to?"** he parried. (Page 7)

Paul's response demonstrates a repression defense mechanism, as he avoids answering the question directly and instead focuses on defending himself from possible judgment or criticism. By repressing his true thoughts and feelings, Paul was able to avoid dealing with the anxiety or discomfort associated with the question, thus allowing him to maintain a sense of control and emotional well-being.

- d. Projection is a defense mechanism in which a person attributes unacceptable thoughts, feelings, or urges to another person. This mechanism is used to protect oneself from guilt or low self-esteem. In projection, negative thoughts and feelings are directed to others so that they do not accumulate within oneself. This mechanism serves to reduce the moral and psychological burden arising from unacceptable thoughts or attachments. In this situation Paul shouting "It's Malabar!" projects his own feelings or impulses onto another person, namely Malabar.

"Paul!" she cried. "Whatever are you doing?"

**"It's Malabar!" he screamed, in a powerful, strange voice.**

**"It's Malabar!." (Page 20)**

Paul does this in order to distract from his own inner turmoil and emotions, and instead focuses on referring to his rocking horse to focus his anxiety on luck. In this sense, the line "It's Malabar!" can be seen as a form of projection, where Paul tries to avoid taking responsibility for their own feelings and emotions by attributing them to others.

- e. Denial is a common defense mechanism that people use to deny or avoid realities that are unpleasant or make them anxious. Denial can be conscious or unconscious, and often involves replaying thoughts and feelings after experiencing trauma. g is recommended. In this situation, Paul is trying to maintain his ego when he feels doubt about what will happen or the failure that will occur.

f.

**"We're all right when we're sure," said Paul. "It's when we're not quite so sure that we go down."**

"Oh, but we're careful then," said Bassett. (Page 11)

Paul shows denial in the sentence that when we are sure or confident in our beliefs or actions, we tend to feel comfortable and feel safe. However, when we are unsure or hesitant about something, our ego may become threatened, making us avoid or deny the situation.

- g. Identification occurs when we mimic the behavior of people we admire or adapt behaviors based on people we fear. How the superego develops, how we adopt the rules and guidelines of our culture and make them our own. In this situation, Paul's statement can be interpreted as him identifying with his mother's values and attitudes. By saying this, Paul is essentially saying that he would act similarly to his mother if he were in her shoes, he would be willing to spend money recklessly and indulge in luxuries.

"Now, son," he said, "I'm putting twenty on Mirza, and I'll put five for you on any horse you fancy. "What's your pick?"

"Daffodil, uncle." "No, not the fiver on Daffodil!"

**"I would if it was my own fiver,"** said the child.

"Good! Good! Right you are! A fiver for me and a fiver for you on Daffodil." (Page 9)

In the sentence Paul utters can be seen as a manifestation of Paul's unconscious mind, which tries to cope with the stress and anxiety associated with his talent by using defense mechanisms such as identification. By identifying with his mother's values, Paul is able to temporarily assuage his feelings of guilt and anxiety, but ultimately, this defense mechanism also contributes to his downfall and tragic fate.

After classifying the data on the types of Paul's defense mechanisms, the researcher also analyzed the factors causing Paul's defense mechanisms in The Rocking Horse Winner short story. The results of the analysis are as in the table below.

**Table 3 Table Taxonomy Analysis of Factor Causing Paul's Defense Mechanism**

No	Factor Causing Defense Mechanism	Number of Data	Percentage
1	Neurotic Anxiety	10	56 %
2	Moral Anxiety	8	44 %
3	Objective Anxiety	-	0%

- a. Neurotic anxiety is a type of fear that arises from fear of dangers that have not yet occurred or are undetectable. It is triggered by the fear that behavior influenced by the ego will be dominated by the id.

**"Well, anyhow," he said stoutly, "I'm a lucky person."**

"Why?" said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn't even know why he had said it.

"God told me," he asserted, brazening it out. (Page 4)

Paul's response may be an attempt to avoid or suppress his feelings of uncertainty and insecurity by creating a positive self-image. This could be a neurotic response as it is an attempt to avoid dealing with the underlying anxiety and uncertainty by creating a more optimistic illusion.

- b. Fear of the superego, known as moral anxiety, is a type of anxiety that arises from the fear of violating societal norms or moral codes. This moral anxiety arises from the conflict between the ego and the superego. A person who is forced to resist instinctual urges that conflict with the superego may feel shame, sin, or guilt.

“Now!” he would silently command the snorting steed,  
 “Now, take me to where there is luck! Now take me!”  
**And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little  
 whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for. (Page 4)**

Paul feels anxious and uncertain about his situation, and he uses the horse as a way to express his frustration and aggression. The child's desire to be taken to a place of good fortune is also an example of moral anxiety, as he seeks a sense of redemption or forgiveness from the horse. The child may feel guilty or ashamed of his situation, and he hopes that the horse will take him to a place where he can be forgiven or redeemed.

#### **D. Discussion**

In this short story, the main character uses defense mechanisms to protect himself, but his excessive obsession results in a tragic death. The results show that rationalization is the most frequently used type of defense mechanism. This is because the main character in the story tries to overcome his anxiety by finding reasons that can justify his actions and behaviors that actually want to prove to his mother that he is a lucky person. Of the ten types of defense mechanisms available, there are four types that are not found in the story. Regression is not found because the main character does not take actions that show that he wants to return to a more pleasant past. Formation reaction is also not found because the main character does not hide or suppress his anxiety. Isolation was not used because the main character openly expressed her anxiety. And sublimation was not found because the main character bet on horse racing, which is actually a behavior that is not accepted in society. This study concludes that defense mechanisms occur due to the presence of causative factors. In this story, neurotic anxiety is the dominant factor that triggers the use of defense mechanisms by the main character. The results of this study also support Freud's theory of types of anxiety, although objective anxiety is not seen in this story.

From the findings and analysis, researchers show that defense mechanisms occur because of the factors that cause this to happen, besides that defense mechanisms occur because of interference from the environment and community groups that cause stigma and harmful behavior patterns and cause anxiety that results in excessive fear. Researchers hope to pay more attention to psychological health rather than emphasizing or satisfying everything that we are not necessarily able to get. Especially for child psychology, a lot of this happens in the family environment and lack of awareness of the impact of the trauma they experience.

#### **E. Conclusion**

This research discusses the psychology of conflict and the defense mechanisms used in dealing with it. This research uses the theories of Anna Freud and Sigmund Freud and descriptive qualitative research methods using Spradley's qualitative data analysis techniques. The purpose of this study is to understand the factors that influence the use of defense mechanisms in family conflict situations.

The researcher found six types of defense mechanisms used by the main character in the short stories studied, namely: rationalization, diversion, repression, projection, denial, and identification. In addition, neurotic anxiety and moral anxiety were also found as factors causing the use of these defense mechanisms. The most dominant defense mechanism is rationalization, with neurotic anxiety as the main factor affecting it. However, each defense mechanism did not always have the same causal factors. Neurotic anxiety factors influenced defense mechanisms such as rationalization and diversion more, while moral anxiety factors influenced defense mechanisms such as repression and identification more. This research provides further understanding of defense mechanisms in family conflict situations and the factors that influence them.

The study concluded that conflict psychology research is very useful in helping to understand the mechanisms and impacts of conflict as well as finding solutions to reduce and resolve conflict. In everyday life, this research is useful in handling conflicts in personal relationships, managing stress, improving communication, developing mediation skills, increasing self-awareness, optimizing time management, and developing adaptability. This study encourages other researchers to expand it by exploring contextual factors, the influence of past experiences, correlation with psychological well-being, individual factors, the role of conflict types or defense mechanisms, analysis of gender differences, the influence of technology or social media, and the relationship of defense mechanisms with anxiety.

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