

## Research Article

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# Psychoanalytical Conflicts, Anxiety, and Ego Defense Mechanisms of The Main Character in Karin Slaughter's *The Good Daughter*

Jihan Syahidah<sup>a</sup>, Arido Laksono<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 50274, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup>English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 50274, Indonesia

[jihansyahidah@students.undip.ac.id](mailto:jihansyahidah@students.undip.ac.id)

[arido@live.undip.ac.id](mailto:arido@live.undip.ac.id)

## Abstract

This study is aimed to observe the factors of defense mechanisms applied by the main character, Charlie Quinn in *The Good Daughter's* novel by Karin Slaughter. *The Good Daughter* tells the story of Charlie Quinn who undergoes certain unfortunate situations in Pikeville, Georgia, United States. Library research is conducted to gather the data. The primary data were collected from the novel whilst the secondary data were collected from journals, books, and articles. Character and characterization, conflicts, and settings are observed for the intrinsic aspects whilst the psychology of literature approach that includes the factors of Sigmund Freud's defense mechanisms is observed for the extrinsic aspects. It is determined that from the analysis, defense mechanisms are applied to redeem objective and neurotic anxiety. Objective and neurotic anxiety are the factors that trigger the use of defense mechanisms. Finally, the kinds of defense mechanisms employed by the main character to redeem anxiety are intellectualization, repression, denial, regression, and displacement.

**Keywords:** *The Good Daughter*; defense mechanisms; objective anxiety; neurotic anxiety

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## 1. Background of the Study

Obstacles inevitably occur in everyday life including anxiety. Anxiety is a mixture of feelings that includes pain from dreadful events [1]. The dreadful events induce the person to experience tension as anxiety's trait. It then triggers defense mechanisms to deal with certain threats [2]. Hence, defense mechanisms are methods to overcome danger by distorting disturbing events [3]. In this way, solutions are initiated so that anxiety can be repressed and eliminated from consciousness.

*The Good Daughter's* novel represents defense mechanisms and their factors. Charlie Quinn, the main character of the novel, employs defense mechanisms to eliminate objective and neurotic anxiety. Since the main character lives in Georgia, criminal cases

from murders to sexual abuse are rampant. Women's sexual abuse depicts an idea of a patriarchal society and radical feminism, an idea that in a patriarchal society, women are exposed to exploitation [4]. Thus, this novel is observed as a psychological phenomenon reflected in the cultural matter since sexual abuse is a part of the cultural matter.

## 2. Methods

To gather the data, library research is applied. According to George, library research is a portrayal of the researcher's ideas that are combined with external sources [5]. The data in this study are text-based documents collected from primary and secondary data. Primary data include written documents, statements, or individual experiences [6]. In this study, the primary data were collected from the novel. Besides, secondary data are collected from the preceding data by other people aside from the researcher [6]. Journals, articles, and books are used for the secondary data. For the analysis, the psychology of literature approach is applied. Psychology of literature includes "the study of the psychological types and laws present within works of literature" [4].

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1. *Intrinsic Aspects*

#### 3.1.1. Character and Characterization

Charlie Quinn is the main character of the story. She is a delightful, clever, and likable person, "The kind of person people just like" [7] (327) However, she turns into "an almost palpable melancholy..." [7] (327) after her mother's death which defines her utmost emotion, a somewhat sorrowful, desolate person. She tends to offer help to others although it will jeopardize her. Thus, it indicates her morals, the amiable one. Despite being kind, she is also a compassionate person, as proven by her interest to have children, "Charlie deserved to...have children—lots of children" [7] 263).

#### 3.1.2. Conflicts

##### 3.1.2.1. Internal Conflict: Man Against Self

Charlie Quinn's internal conflict comes from insincerity as she is unable to neglect her past. As a consequence, she is unhappy, "She knew that you could put it all in a little box...if you didn't...live too much" [7] (62). Because of the past, she is unable to live a normal life and psychological disturbances occur.

##### 3.1.2.2. External Conflict: Man Against Man

Charlie, the protagonist is interfered with by Zachariah. In this situation, she is assaulted, "...he raped her behind" [7] (207). The antagonist's mischievous act then results in an external conflict between the main character and the antagonist since Charlie's life is turned into a disgrace.

### 3.1.3. Settings

#### 3.1.3.1. Settings of Place

The novel's setting revolves around Pikeville, Georgia, "There was not one low-life alleged criminal in Pikeville, Georgia." [7] (327). Another setting of the place is the "Pikeville Forest" [7] where Charlie is sexually abused. The Farmhouse is also one of the settings that lead to Charlie's objective anxiety and regression as a consequence of the murder of a mother. At last, "Pikeville middle school" [7] is the place for the school shooting that causes objective anxiety and repression.

#### 3.1.3.2 Setting of Time

The novel revolves around the years 1989 and 2017. One of the proofs that describe the time setting of the novel is the use of a Chevette car that was made in 1989, "Her father's Chevette was caked" [7] (8). Thereafter, the time setting alters into "28 years later" that is 2017 with the use of Netflix and Hulu.

#### 3.1.3.3 Setting of Social Environment

Pikeville is the place where criminal activities such as rape and sexual abuse occur. Sexual abuse interweaves the idea of radical feminism in which women's oppression by men is an indication of male dominance [8]. In the story, a man rapes a girl but the man is proven to be innocent. Since the rapist is defended but the girl does not, it indicates male dominance as a consequence of a patriarchal society. A patriarchal society indicates a social issue. The rape is continuing to Charlie and leads her to experience objective anxiety, intellectualization, and denial.

### 3.2 *Extrinsic Aspects*

#### 3.2.1 The Id, The Ego, and The Superego of Charlie Quinn

##### 3.2.1.1 The Id

The first id is exposed when Charlie is about to be abused by Zachariah, "Charlie ran" [7] (246). The second id is revealed when Charlie hears a gunshot, "Blood misting from Sam's head. Charlie, run!" [7] (61). The third id is exposed when Charlie is sexually abused by Zachariah, "She tried to bring up her knee into his crotch..." (Slaughter, 2017:507) [7] which leads her to be numb, "She was finally numb" [7] (507) [7]. The fourth id is shown when Charlie screams as she sees her mother being shot with a gun, "Charlotte's screams..." [7] (25). The fifth id emerges when expressing anger to Zachariah, "...he was going to be electrocuted to death" [7] (251). At last, the sixth id occurs when Charlie's instinct to give birth to a baby remains pungent, "...we couldn't give up. It's our baby, right?" [7] (502) as a result of the id's instinctual gratification to produce.

##### 3.2.1.2 The Ego

The first ego emerges when Charlie's instinct to survive, "Charlie ran" [7] (246) is redeemed, "Wait for the pain to pass [7] (246). The second ego emerges when Charlie attempts to escape from the gunpoint. Her ego then pacifies her mind, "You won't die [7] (63). The third ego emerges when her ego believes that she is not being abused, "...this wasn't happening" [7] (507). The fourth ego emerges when Charlie's fear of her mother's murder is regulated, "Mama..." She could only stare at Gamma" [7] (27). The fifth ego arises when Charlie's ego develops a solution to reduce the will to murder Zachariah, "I still need to figure out what I'm going to do with my...life..." [7] (486). The sixth ego appears when the ego prompts her that it is normal to not have a child since she has already too old to have a child, "I'm too old now." [7] (2017: 524).

### 3.2.1.3 The Superego

The first superego arises when Charlie resists leaving her sister, "Charlie needed her sister...to tell her what to do" [7] (246). The second superego ascends when Charlie intends to help another person at the school shooting, "Charlie reached out her hands" [7] (63). The third superego arises when Charlie experiences disgust and guilt, "He grunted like a pig as he raped her behind" [7] (507). The fourth superego emerges when Charlie develops conscience towards her mother, "Don't be dead, Mama...I love you" [7] (29). The fifth superego arises when Charlie's superego develops guilt towards Zachariah when reading his letters, "Sam,...we don't have a right to read any of these" [7] (432). The last superego appears when Charlie limits her wish to have a child, "It wasn't like a dog, where you could get a new one a few months later" [7] (525).

## 3.2.2 Psychoanalytical Conflicts of Charlie Quinn

### 3.2.2.1 Internal Psychoanalytical Conflicts

The first conflict emerges when the id tells Charlie to run, "Charlie ran" [7] (246) but the superego resists her to do so since the id encourages her to leave her sister, "She wasn't moving" [7] (246). The guilt then leads to objective anxiety, "she couldn't breathe" [7] (246), and intellectualization. Another conflict occurs when Charlie runs away from the gunshot. The id's instinct tells her to run but the superego tells her to save another person, "Charlie reached out her hands" [7] (63) which causes objective anxiety and repression. The third conflict occurs when Charlie's id causes her to be numb but the superego rejects it. The superego encourages her to escape with the reason that rape is disgraceful which is inherited from parents' teaching, "It's a private thing..." [7] (518) which leads to objective anxiety and denial. The fourth conflict occurs when the id's instinct tells her to scream. Although the ego has tried to limit the shock by pacifying her mind, Charlie remains startled which leads to objective anxiety, "A trembling hand reached down to hold their mother's" [7] (29) and regression. The fifth conflict occurs when the ego is unable to pacify the id's will to take revenge on Zachariah. The ego tells her to move on, "I still need to figure out what I'm going to do" [7] (486) but the id always wants revenge that leads her to even develop more anger and grief, "Charlie, this is grief" [7] (491) which leads to

neurotic anxiety, regression, and displacement. The last conflict occurs when the superego's attempt to regulate the id's instinct to have a kid has failed. Although the superego has tried to limit the id's will to not have a baby, the id manages to dominate her personality which results in neurotic anxiety, "Like the Gift of the Magi, but with a toxic uterus" [7] (525) and displacement.

### 3.2.2.2 External Psychoanalytical Conflicts

The first conflict occurs when Charlie's superego wants to help her sister, "Charlie needed her sister to...tell her what to do" [7] (246) but Zachariah's id tells her to stay, "Stay right there for me" [7] (246) causing Charlie to ignore her superego's conscience to save her sister which leads to objective anxiety and intellectualization. The second conflict occurs when Charlie's ego to control her id, "Picture the finish line in your head" [7] (506) is restricted by Zachariah's id, "Suddenly, Charlie's head jerked back" [7] (506) which leads to objective anxiety and denial. The third conflict occurs when Samantha's superego to encourage Charlie to be honest with Ben about her miscarriages, "You need to tell Ben" [7] (524) is denied by Charlie's id, "There's that you need again" [7] (524) that leads to neurotic anxiety and displacement.

### 3.2.3 The Anxiety of Charlie Quinn

#### 3.2.3.1 Objective Anxiety and Panic as the Factors of Intellectualization

Objective anxiety is the factor of Charlie's intellectualization and panic from the external threat, Zachariah. This results in the fear of being sexually abused from the id and the fear of denying the superego's urge to save her sister. Either way, the id develops more fear than the superego and it urges her to follow her instinct to run since Zachariah fears her, "Get back here!" [7] (247). Moreover, Zachariah's id to sexually abuse her also triggers Charlie's id instinct to run and deny her superego. Hence, she experiences objective anxiety. The fear then causes her to experience difficulty in breathing that overflow into panic, "What she had never trained for was the panic..." [7] (247) and intellectualization.

#### 3.2.3.2 Objective Anxiety and Panic as the Factors of Repression

Objective anxiety is the factor of Charlie's repression and it induces panic resulted from the gunshot. The objective anxiety is caused by the id's inability to reach for safety and escape from the gunpoint considering her superego urges her to help the woman instead, "Charlie reached out her hands" [7] (63). Objective anxiety is caused by the external danger, "Four shots, each a distinctive..." [7] (60). The danger instigates fear and it affects her physical condition, "...her mouth went dry...her heart stopped beating. Her throat closed..." [7] (60). This situation then induces panic which is demonstrated through numbness, "There was a familiarity to the carnage that spread a numbness through Charlie's body" [7] (62). This situation also triggers repression.

### 3.2.3.3 Objective Anxiety as the Factor of Denial

Besides repression, objective anxiety is the factor that leads to denial. Sexual abuse is the possible factor for objective anxiety, “Zach was on top of her” [7] (506). When this happens, Charlie’s id encourages her to surrender to Zachariah in the form of numbness. However, the superego conscience attempts to reject the id since rape is unethical. Later on, this situation induces objective anxiety since the superego’s urge to escape from the abuse cannot be fulfilled. Moreover, Charlie’s ego to control her id by pacifying her mind as she attempts to run is restricted by Zachariah’s id as he grabs her hair and rapes her. Hence, the fear induces objective anxiety and the anxiety induces physical disturbances, “Charlie’s mouth opened. She had no breath left to scream. She was dizzy. Vomit burned up her throat” [7] (507). To deal with this situation, Charlie’s ego tries to avoid the situation with denial.

### 3.2.3.4 Objective Anxiety as the Factor of Regression

Objective anxiety is the factor of Charlie’s regression. Before objective anxiety emerges, the mother’s murder is the potential trigger of it. When Charlie’s mother is shot by Zachariah, Charlie undergoes fear, “A trembling hand reached down to hold their mother’s” [7] (29). This situation leads the ego to pacify the id’s fear by slowly turning Charlie’s scream, into the soother one, “She could only stare at Gamma” [7] (27). However, the ego’s attempt has failed to ease the id’s fear as she keeps trembling. Hence, it induces objective anxiety, “Charlotte was going to throw up. Her stomach kept clenching” [7] (232). Her fear is not merely instigated by Zachariah’s threat but also because of the inseparable bond between her mother and her. Therefore, the objective anxiety perceived by her mother is also perceived by Charlie. Objective anxiety then leads to regression.

### 3.2.3.5 Neurotic Anxiety as the Factor of Regression

Neurotic anxiety is the factor of Charlie’s regression and the death of a father is the main reason for it, “My father is dead” [7] (480). Because of grief, the id develops revenge, “he was going to be electrocuted to death” [7] (251) and the ego attempts to eliminate the revenge by encouraging Charlie to move on, “I still need to figure out what I’m going to do with my wasted, unhappy life” [7] (486) but yet, the ego has failed to ease her, “Charlie, this is grief...you feel out of control” [7] (491) and this situation induces neurotic anxiety. Neurotic anxiety is prompted by her father’s death. It is also induced by a sense of fear if another person aside from her mother such as Samantha dies, “I was terrified...that you would die” [7] (485). To exclude herself from neurotic anxiety, Charlie employs regression.

### 3.2.3.6 Neurotic Anxiety and Trauma as the Factors of Displacement

Aside from regression, neurotic anxiety is the factor of Charlie’s displacement that might potentially trigger trauma. The trauma is instigated by the sexual abuse that leads to Charlie’s neurotic anxiety, a trauma is instigated by the past event instead of on an actual threat, “You let that monster chase me...” [7] (579). The word “monster” shows the fear

of the assault and the abuser, Zachariah. In this situation, although Charlie's ego tells her to move on, the id always seeks revenge. Hence, she pictures him as a "monster" and the imbalance between the ego and the id leads to anger and displacement. Aside from sexual abuse, miscarriages are likewise the factors of Charlie's neurotic anxiety that would potentially develop displacement. In this situation, the superego's will to deny the id's will to have a kid has failed, leading her to experience neurotic anxiety. Besides, Samantha's superego to encourage Charlie to be honest with Ben about the miscarriages is denied by Charlie's id. The hesitation from dishonesty leads her to experience neurotic anxiety since the id's desire to have a child cannot be reached, Charlie, begins to experience neurotic anxiety, "a guy jams the handle of a knife up your twat, it makes sense that you can't have babies" [7] (524). The anxiety leads her to alienate herself from other people, "I turned into such a bitch" [7] (525) especially her husband, Ben. The alienation is employed by transmitting oral gratification to a less threatening object in the form of anger, or in this case, displacement.

### 3.2.4 Ego Defense Mechanisms of Charlie Quinn

#### 3.2.4.1 Intellectualization to ease Objective Anxiety and Panic

Intellectualization is instigated by objective anxiety and panic when Charlie experiences fear of being sexually abused. Intellectualization is employed by initiating a logical fact to hinder dispassionate thoughts from objective anxiety. In this situation, the emotional thoughts that occurred by the time she experiences objective anxiety are obliterated and dispelled with new logical facts, "if she panicked even more...he would rape her" [7] (248). Because of her prevailing will to diminish the objective anxiety and panic, she could finally find one of the farmers' houses in the city and escape from Zachariah.

#### 3.2.4.2 Repression to ease Objective Anxiety and Panic

After objective anxiety and panic, Charlie develops repression. In this situation, she attempts to hinder events that might alert her to danger by restricting herself from it. Therefore, when asked about the school shooting, she cannot vividly retell the story, "Words were being shouted, but they were unintelligible to Charlie" [7] (62). The tension is so strong that the ego creates repression in the form of embezzlement and detachment. Hence, she could not vividly remember the details of the event, "Charlie didn't know what she remembered next" [7] (103) which explained the repression's trait.

#### 3.2.4.3 Denial to ease Objective Anxiety

Charlie employs denial by escaping the harsh reality and maintaining decent thinking. It is driven by objective anxiety from sexual assault. To dispel objective anxiety, Charlie's ego attempts to deny the assault by imagining the absence of herself to the assault, "I am not here" [7] (507). In this situation, she could merely imagine herself being in her house, "she was in the kitchen" [7] (507) although, in reality, she is in the forest, assaulted.

#### 3.2.4.4 Regression to ease Objective Anxiety

Charlie employs regression when she performs an attitude that might merely be committed by infants that is whimpering, "Fear ran like razor blades...Charlie began to whimper" [7] (31). When she whimpers, Charlie intends to seek security and comfort, a sense of protection. In this situation, she is engaged in a situation where she reminisces the instinctual activities she had done when she was an infant. When infants whimper, the disrupting sense could be effortlessly expressed without any interdiction whatsoever. Thus, security could be grasped as a result of the transmittable instinctual impulses.

#### 3.2.4.5 Regression to ease Neurotic Anxiety

After the death of a father and a fear of losing a sister, Charlie once again experiences regression. It is initiated by relatability with her sister, Samantha since they experience a similar situation in the past. When Charlie reunites with Samantha, her psychological condition returns to a situation when she was a child and being taken care of by her sister. Her older sister is the object of Charlie's desire to achieve comfort she received when she was little, "I don't know why I'm...pestering you, trying to annoy you..." [7] (483). It indicates the ego's temporary reimbursement to ease the fear of losing her sister in the form of childish mannerism. The fear is included as the form of neurotic anxiety. Thus, she applies regression as if it is the only way to become closer to her sister.

#### 3.2.4.6 Displacement to ease Neurotic Anxiety and Trauma

After going through neurotic anxiety and trauma, Charlie employs displacement when diverting her anger towards Huck as a way to divert her anger to Zachariah. Although Charlie is angry, she cannot be able to directly prompt her anger to Zachariah since delivering her anger to him would revisit the fear, "I was terrified that Zachariah would get out" [7] (485). Hence, she diverts her anger to Huck after he confronts her with Kelly Wilson's rape, the rape that reminds her of her rape, twenty-eight years ago, "I know exactly what it's like to run into something like that,...so fuck you with your 'You don't know what it's like'" [7] (151). By the time Charlie diverts her anger to Zachariah, Huck provokes her emotions by accusing her of not understanding what it feels like to be sexually abused. After diverting her anger, neurotic anxiety could be limited. Aside from Huck, Charlie also diverts her anger to Ben, her husband by attempting to alienate herself from him. As Charlie and Ben are going through couples therapy, "Charlie had been so nasty to him" [7] (201). Although Ben is described as a pleasant and decent guy, Charlie is enormously insolent to Ben since he is the only person for Charlie to be mad at. Although Ben has never done something terrible to Charlie, Ben becomes an outlet for anger since he is the only person that is available at that time.

## 4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis results, in *The Good Daughter* novel by Karin Slaughter, Charlie Quinn applies defense mechanisms to ease objective and neurotic anxiety. Kinds of defense mechanisms such as intellectualization, repression, denial, regression, and



displacement are identified. Charlie employs intellectualization when she tries to pacify her objective anxiety and panic during the sexual abuse, repression is executed to ease objective anxiety and panic by disremembering the memory of the school shooting, denial is applied to ease objective anxiety by denying the fact that Charlie is abused, regression is implemented to alleviate objective anxiety by whimpering and to ease neurotic anxiety by mimicking child's behavior, at last, Charlie applies displacement by expressing anger to Huck and Ben as a way to alleviate neurotic anxiety and trauma from the sexual abuse. Overall, the setting is the reason for the character to develop anxiety and defense mechanisms since in Pikeville town, sexual abuse that enforces the idea of radical feminism occurs. Therefore, this study is compatible with the first premise that defense mechanisms are applied to ease the main character's neurotic and objective anxiety.

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