

Research Article

Received: 10/03/2022; Accepted: 18/03/2022; Published: 16/05/2022

The Portrayal of Sutter Keely's Defense Mechanism During Adolescence In The Spectacular Now

Natasha Ivana^a, Arido Laksono^b

^aEnglish Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 50274, Indonesia

^bEnglish Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang, 50274, Indonesia

aridolaksono@live.undip.ac.id

Abstract

This thesis is written to analyze the main character, Sutter Keely, in *The Spectacular Now* by Tim Tharp, who struggles his adolescence without proper parental guidance. He is also dealing with failed romantic relationships that influence in how he grows as an adolescent. In this novel, he uses several defense mechanisms on daily basis to deal with issues and difficulties in his life. This thesis aims to identify the triggers, the kinds, and the effects of his defense mechanisms. This thesis uses Freudian psychoanalysis theory and its branch, defense mechanism, as the main theories. Library research and exponential approach are used to help the writer to get the desirable results. The result of this thesis reveals that the main triggers of his defense mechanisms are his family and his failed romantic relationships. The defense mechanisms he uses are rationalization, displacement, suppression, denial, altruism, and distortion. The effects of his defense mechanisms bring more negative results to his life.

Keywords: adolescence; defense mechanisms; Freudian Psychoanalysis..

1. Background of the Study

Adolescence is a transition phase of vulnerability that marks the end of childhood and the beginning into adulthood. It can be said that adolescence is the time of quest; a time to explore more and new things whether it is about personal – identity or about friendships [1].

The development of an adolescent is influenced by the closest interaction agent which is family. Apart from the existence of family to support self-development during adolescence, relationships outside of family is also needed, and relationship with significant other is one of them.

Romantic relationships play part in the development of adolescence. During adolescence, owning a boyfriend or girlfriend can increase someone's confidence. Teenagers love themselves more while being in a relationship with intimacy and good communication [2]. On the other side, it is almost inevitable that relationships lead to the emotionally vulnerable experience of breaking up. Teenagers who are sensitive to rejection can be triggered into the beginning of self-doubt and despair. Low-quality relationships marked by a lack of trust, ongoing conflict, and dating violence can expose young people to depression and anxiety [3].

The main character in *The Spectacular Now* portrays a teenage life with less feasible presence of family and failed romantic relationship. This novel tells a story about a high school boy, Sutter Keely, who is trying to figure himself out in the middle of the complexity of life. Sutter does not get appropriate supports and guidance from his family. He also shows difficulty to deal with his problems and emotions. He uses several defense mechanisms to deal with problems. Thus, according to the background of the study, the research questions are:

1. What triggers Sutter's defense mechanisms?
2. What kinds of defense mechanisms do Sutter apply?
3. How do his defense mechanisms affect his life?

2. Theory and Methods

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Intrinsic Aspects

2.1.1.1 Character and Characterization

Character is the agent of movement in a play or any literary works who animate the plot [4, p.32] There are two types of character. Flat characters, whose personalities do not change much from the beginning to the end of the story. Round characters, they are lively and their personality develops along the story, this feature usually possessed by main characters in every literary works.

The development of characters in literature is called characterization. The purpose of characterization is to develop the readers' imagination about the characters' look, think, or do. There are two types of characterization which are, direct and indirect. Direct characterization can be easily determined by direct descriptions written by the authors. Indirect characterization, on the other hand does not merely stated by the authors. They tend to only guide the readers by giving some implicit hints. [4, p.33]

Conflict is defined as a contrariness of physical, emotions, and assessment among characters or inner struggle within one character himself [4, p.225]. Conflict can also be perceived as collision between contracting forces that has several indications such as rage,

battle, and arguments. There are two kinds of conflicts in literature, internal conflict and external conflict

2.1.1.3. Plot

Plot is a sequence of events happen in a play or story [4, p.224]. Plot is the determinant of how a certain situation related to every situation in a story. There are five stages of plot, namely exposition, rising action, climax falling action, denouement or resolution.

2.1.2 Extrinsic Aspects

Extrinsic aspects are elements that are not built in the structure of literary works. The existence of extrinsic aspects may not straightly influence literary works, but they affect the creation of a story as they surround outside the intrinsic aspects. The writer uses one big theory with its branch to support the making of this study.

2.1.2.1 Freudian Psychoanalysis Theory

Psychoanalysis theory is a theory that was proposed by Sigmund Freud which examines the process of mental and behavior development that form human's personality [5, p.33]. Freud proposed that there are three stages of human's personality: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego.

2.1.2.2. Defense Mechanism

According to Feist & Feist in their book entitled *Theories of Personality*, which curated Freudian Psychoanalysis Theory and its branch, states that, defense mechanism appears when the Ego is unable to find the best way to satisfy the Id and the Superego [5, p.41]. Defense mechanism uncontrollably appears due to the anxieties, tensions, and displeasures that is experienced by the mind. There are several kinds of defense mechanisms exist in the novel, denial, displacement, suppression, rationalization, altruism, and distortion.

2.2. *Research Method*

2.2.1 Data and Data Source

To achieve the desirable results for this study, the writer uses the novel *The Spectacular Now* by Tim Tharp as the main data. The writer also uses several library sources such as journals, theses, and books.

2.2.2 Method of Collecting Data

This study takes library research method to collect the data. Library research is a method which practices collecting, reading, recording, and or analyzing library resources [6].

2.2.3 Method of Analyzing Data

Exponential approach is used to analyze the data. Exponential approach revolves around several intrinsic aspects in literature to analyze a literary work [7, p.148] The purpose of exponential approach is to ease the readers to comprehend a literary work when they read each words and phrases, depends on what the readers are trying to discover. The writer also uses psychological approach to analyze the extrinsic aspects for this study.. In literature, psychological approach takes its role to portray a perspective on the psychological state of the characters in literary works, or the literary writers [7, p.153].

3. DATA ANALYSIS

3.1. *Intrinsic Aspects*

3.1.1. Character and Characterization

3.1.1.1. Sutter Keely

Sutter Keely as the main character, as well as the round character in the novel is described as a teenage high school boy in his final year and is living his life in a loving relationship with Cassidy. He is considered as a devoted person in a relationship, however, his loyalty makes him irresponsible. He is willing to spend time with Cassidy and sacrifice his own business as stated in this quotation, “Theoretically, I should be in Algebra II, but in reality I’m cruising over to my beautiful fat girlfriend Cassidy’s house.” [8, p.1]. His main responsibility as a high school student is to pay serious attention to his academic life, yet, he chooses giving up his main responsibility to hang out with his girlfriend. Throughout the story, he is the character who portrays dynamic changes in personality. His personality is described as careless, reckless, caring, helpful, and charming.

3.1.1.2. Aimee Finecky

Aimee is Sutter’s love interest after Cassidy. She is described as a girl who spends her life getting herself used to prioritize anyone else’s needs before her own. Her selflessness can be identified by the first interaction with Sutter, when she appears to do the paper route job at five a.m., as proven by this following quotation, “”but Mom and her boyfriend went to the Indian casino over by Shawnee last night, and I guess it got so late they decided to stay in a motel or something. That happens sometimes.”” [8, p.71]. Aimee sincerely takes over her mother’s main responsibility, even though she is aware of the fact

that her mother is out there having fun. Throughout the story, her personality gradually evolves. She is described as a passive, awkward, and assertive person.

3.1.2. Conflicts

As stated in the previous chapter, there are two aspects of conflict which will be discussed in the analysis of the study. These two aspects are internal conflict and external conflict. Internal conflict consists of Sutter against himself. Meanwhile, the external conflict consists of Sutter against family and Sutter against girlfriend.

3.1.3. Plot

The Spectacular Now features a combined plot that tells a story from the past and a story from the present. This plot increases the story's interest and provides readers with a variety of viewpoints. There are five types of plot structure that will be analyzed in this study: exposition, complication, climax, falling action, and denouement.

3.2. Extrinsic Aspects

3.2.1. Rationalization

The proof that Sutter uses rationalization is proven by this following excerpt, "Besides, it's not like my education is some kind of priority with my parents. They quit keeping track of my future when they divorced, and that was back in the Precambrian era." [8, p.1]. He rationalizes his behavior by using his parents' behavior as a reason for his messed up academic life.

The trigger of his rationalization is his parents' absence during his academic period. His id appears when he feels at ease in his laziness and loss of motivation by neglecting school. His ego acts when he convinces himself that he does not need to prioritize school since his parents do not care. His superego knows for sure that he is the only person who is in charge of his life and his future. The result of this situation is his ego wins over his superego, hence why, even though he should start paying serious attention to his academic life, either in the future, he chooses to not make efforts and blame his parents.

3.2.2. Displacement

When Sutter meets Walter for the first time, he tells Walter that he also gets mad when his mother kicks his father away. Sutter can understand Walter who runs away from home because his mother too expels his father. The difference between them is that Sutter expresses his dislike towards the circumstance by burning down a tree in his backyard, as stated in this following sentence, "'I didn't run away but I think it was around that time that I set the tree in the backyard on fire.'" [8, p.5].

The trigger of his displacement is his mother who separates him from his father. His id emerges when he wants to know where his father is. His ego appears quickly when he is mad after not getting the answer immediately from his mother. His superego stands when he knows that he deserves an explanation later and asks his mother again, after he calms himself first. Sutter lets his ego loose when he burns down a tree in his backyard by reason of his exasperation for not getting any clue about his father's existence. He vents his anger by burning down a tree, instead of expressing his anger to his mother directly.

3.2.3. Altruism

Sutter's Altruism is proven in this following quotation, "Now, I should've been at my girlfriend's five minutes ago, but this time I have a legitimate reason for running late." [8, p.7]. He decides to help Walter when he should be picking up Cassidy.

The trigger of his altruism is Walter who is alone far from home, and his family problem. His id provokes his empathy to drive Walter back home. His ego creates the belief that he should help the one who is in urgent needs his help. His superego helps him to realize that he may not be able to help Walter and leave him be, because he promises to Cassidy first.

3.2.4. Suppression

In dealing with uncomfortable thoughts, Sutter also intentionally pushes himself to never think about them, so that they never arise to his consciousness. The proof that he suppresses his thoughts happens when he tries to not thinking about Cassidy's ultimatum to him. This incident is proven by this following excerpt, "This is it, she said. This is the last time I'm going to say it. But what is it she wants me to do? It's stupid to worry about it now, though." [8, p.17]. Cassidy warns him to never again repeats his ignorant behavior, that rarely takes things seriously, such as disowning his own words to pick up Cassidy.

The trigger of his suppression is Cassidy's remark that worries his mind about what can possibly happens to him. Sutter's id wants to only enjoy the moments with Cassidy during their relationship, while his ego refuses to hear Cassidy's ultimatum about being more respectful to her. His superego reminds him that Sutter may need to take her seriously as it can possibly affects their relationship. Sutter's ego wins over his superego, so he develops a defense mechanism that protects his uncomfortableness to come into his consciousness. He chooses to neglect Cassidy's ultimatum by stop thinking about it until he feels comfortable again.

3.2.5. Denial

The trigger of Sutter's denial is his inability to accept the fact that he is addicted to alcohol. It is proven by this following sentence, "It's not some big addiction. It's just a hobby, a good, old-fashioned way to have fun." [8, p.18]. He admits that he develops an attachment with alcohol, but still he does not admit that it has become an addiction.. His

id wants him to keep enjoying the effect of alcohol on a daily basis. His ego refuses to believe that he is in an alcohol addict and it can be harmful. His superego warns him that he may need to address his drinking pattern and try to reduce his alcohol consumption. Sutter's ego once again wins against his superego since he denies that he is addicted to alcohol. He keeps continuing his drinking habit.

3.2.6. Distortion

Sutter convincing himself and everyone that his father is a successful man and it is so hard for him to see his father due to his busy schedule. In reality, he does not know where exactly his father is, ever since his parents separated. However, he finally confess to Aimee about the fact that has been spreading this whole time is not true, as stated in this following statement, "After my mom kicked him out, he just disappeared. So I started pretending he was a big-shot executive. I pretended it so hard I almost started believing it myself, so maybe it's only kind of a semi-lie." [8, p.203].

The trigger of this defense mechanism is his father's disappearance after separating from his mother. His id appears when he wants to know where his father is all this time. His ego acts when he wishes that he knows about his father's condition. His superego tells him to admit that to admit that he has no idea where his father is.. For the umpteenth time, his ego wins over his superego because, he starts creating an unrealistic idea in his mind and believing that idea is real. The result of this situation is that he is unable to fully release himself from the burden of not knowing his father's presence.

References

- [1] Prinstein, M. J., & Dodge, K. A. (Eds.) (2008). *Understanding peer influence in children and adolescents*. The Guilford Press.
- [2] Furman, W., & Schaffer, L. (2003). *The role of romantic relationships in adolescent development*. In: Florsheim P, editor. *Adolescent romantic relations and sexual behavior: Theory, research and practical implications*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- [3] Davila, J. (2008). *Depressive symptoms and adolescent romance: Theory, research, and implications*. *Child Dev Pers.* 2(1):26-31.
- [4] Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (7th ed.). USA & Canada: Earl McPeck.
- [5] Feist, J., & Feist, G. J. (2008). *Theories of Personality* (7th ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- [6] Zeid, M. (2004). *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor. Indonesia.
- [7] Guerin, W. L. (2005). *A handbook of critical approaches to literature* (5th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- [8] Tharp, T. (2013). *The Spectacular Now*. New York: Ember.