

LINDA'S EGO DEFENSE MECHANISMS AS SEEN IN PAULO COELHO'S ADULTERY: A PSYCHOANALYSIS STUDY

By: Azizah Nurhayati, Yogyakarta State University, ziezah.nh@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aimed to analyze the forms of repression and denial found in the main character of Adultery named Linda when she dealt with her situation. This research used the psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud. This research applied qualitative research method with content analysis technique. The source of the data for this research was taken from Paulo Coelho's Adultery published in 2014. The researcher found the main character was dominated by her superego, even though at first her id dominated her personality. The domination of the id led the main character into adultery. The researcher found repression and denial as the main character's ego defense mechanisms to cope. Repression and denial can be seen through the main character's dialogue and behavior towards herself and others. Although at first she was afraid, bored, confused, and depressed with her marriage and adultery, in the end her personality becomes balanced again.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, Freud, imbalanced personality, ego defense mechanisms, Adultery

INTRODUCTION

The death of Robin Williams (63 years old), an actor and a comedian, on 11 August 2014 shocked everybody anywhere. It was a suicide by hanging in his house in Tiburon, California. The CNN reporter (2014, par.1), Matthew Stucker, wrote that Robin Williams was found dead using a belt to hang himself from a bedroom door. He suffered from depression, recent increase of paranoia because of insomnia and anxiety, associated with Parkinson's, according to the coroner's report. Nobody would have known that a comedian like him died by suicide. His death was the evidence that mental illness like depression should be taken more seriously.

Mental illness is a serious health problem that can happen to anyone in this world. No matter who the people are, where they live, all of them have a chance to suffer from it. Most sufferers of mental illness do not seek for help because they are embarrassed by it. They ignore the symptoms until it is already too late for them to recover. Unlike fever, lungs cancer, brain

tumor, or any other physical disease, some of mental illness cannot be detected from the physical characteristics. Some of the sufferers look physically healthy, as if their mental illness disguised behind their normal physical appearance.

There are many kinds of mental illness suffered by people around the world. A simple symptom can lead into a severe mental illness, which will be harder to recover, if it is repressed, ignored, or denied. Every mental illness has various symptoms and psychologists call these as *psychopathology*. Oltmanns and Emery (2013:2) state that *psychopathology* is a collection of symptoms related to mental illness, such as depressed mood, panic attack, and false belief. Feelings related to depressed mood are often including disappointment and hopelessness. Depression is more than just sadness (Oltmanns and Emery, 2013:140). Depression can lead into dysfunction (social, physical, and psychological), even death.

Many films and literary works have mental illness as the main issue. Some authors try to lift up mental illness in order to remind people about the danger of it if it is not treated carefully. One of the literary works that has mental illness as the main issue is the novel *Adultery* (2014) by Paulo Coelho.

A reader can even find some literary works as a reflection of a real human experience. It is not complete and satisfying when a person reads a literary work without wondering how such a story can happen. In order to gain a deeper understanding about the literary works, a reader can use some approaches, such as psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalysis shows human as a form of instincts and structure of personality conflicts. These conflicts appear from the struggle between *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. Minderop (2016:9) states that “to most psychoanalysts, the term ‘personality’ is a priority of the unconsciousness outside the consciousness, which makes the way of thinking colored by emotions.”

Adultery by Paulo Coelho is an example of literary works that deals with personality development and the impact towards the character’s personality can be analyzed by using psychoanalysis theory. In this research, the researcher uses psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud. This theory focuses on someone’s personality (*id*, *ego*, *superego*) and *ego defense mechanisms* if the personality is imbalanced.

Human beings are the only creatures from the beginning people are born; they depend on their parents and cannot help themselves to survive. This dependence of their parents’ help is purely material matter, like the needs to eat and to be safe. This dependence, like Eagleton (1983:153) states is “a matter of the satisfaction of what may be called ‘instinct’, by which is meant the biologically fixed needs human beings have for nourishment, warmth and so on”. This instinct is often thought of as the *id*, the unconscious part. The *id* is a pleasure seeker, without any contact with reality. The dissatisfactory feeling in this phase may lead to the imbalance of the human personality.

As human is not only an individual creature, but also a social one, an individual cannot live without each other. Considering the phase in which a baby will undergo, from Nature to Culture, the baby will grow in life with moral value demands. If the baby wants to live with other people, it has to obey the rule in the society. In the case of Oedipus complex, Freud regards this as the beginnings of morality, conscience, law and all forms of social and religious authority, or he calls it *superego* (Eagleton, 1983:156).

Ego is the moderator between *id* and *superego*. *Ego* also deals with reality. It holds the most important position to control *id* for pleasure seeker and to obey the rule in society in which *superego* always considers it. *Ego* helps people to get what they want without causing trouble or suffering to themselves.

Ego is in between consciousness and unconsciousness. *Ego* deals with reasoning, problem solving, and taking a decision. The *superego* and the *id* are like North and South poles of the Earth. *Id* and *ego* have no morality judgement because both of them do not know right and wrong. Therefore, a balanced person must have a strong *ego* to deal with the *id* and the *superego*.

The researcher analyzes the main character in *Adultery* named Linda. This research aims to explore the forms of Linda's ego defense mechanisms, which are repression and denial. Based on the two major problems appear in the novel, this research focuses on how Linda's personality becomes imbalanced (*id*, *ego*, *superego*) and her ego defense mechanisms (repression and denial).

RESEARCH METHOD

The Kind of the Research

This research applied qualitative research method with content analysis technique.

The Time and Place of the Research

This research was conducted since December 2015 to June 2017 in Yogyakarta.

The Object of the Research

The main source of this research was a novel entitled *Adultery* (2014) by Paulo Coelho.

The Data, Instrument, and Data Collecting Technique

The primary data of the research were in the form of word, phrase, and circumstance containing, reflecting, and/or having correlation with *ego defense mechanisms* found in Linda's personality as the main character in the novel.

The instrument of the research was the researcher herself. The data collecting technique were by reading the novel, by writing carefully about the words, phrases, and circumstances that contain, reflect, and have correlation with *ego defense mechanisms* phenomenon from the novel, and by categorizing the data into the data sheet.

The Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique of this research was conducted through four steps: re-reading the collected data, identifying the themes of the data and putting them into categories based on the objective of the research, coding the data based on the types of personality structure categories and ego defense mechanisms categories, and analyzing the data from each category more deeply in order to interpret the meanings and to make a conclusion from the result of the analysis.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Freud uses the term *defense mechanism* to refer to the unconsciousness of an individual in dealing with anxiety; the mechanism protects the person from external threats or there are impulses from internal anxiety that distort reality in many ways (Hilgard, *et al.*, 1975:442). The first ego defense mechanism found in the novel *Adultery* by Paulo Coelho is repression. Repression is the foundation of all ego defense mechanisms. Repression is an effort to avoid anxiety by pushing the threatening memory into the unconsciousness or it is often called as "motivated-forgetting".

However, there are two different processes in avoiding anxiety: consciously and unconsciously. Repression works unconsciously, whereas the other that works consciously is called suppression. Repression can be detrimental to someone's personality development. On the contrary, suppression can be controlled because the individual does it with full consciousness. Nevertheless, the repressed memory can reappear through dreams or slip of tongue (Pekker, 2013).

Burton (2012) states that it is difficult to differentiate repression from denial. He explains that repression relates to internal or mental stimuli, whereas denial relates to external stimuli. However, denial and repression often work together and may be difficult to disentangle from each other. Simon (2008) states that denial is commonly found in neurotic people and denial is for "impression-management, manipulation, and responsibility-avoidance". If people are in denial, they do one of these: 1) Refuse to acknowledge a stressful problem or situation, 2) Avoid facing the facts of the situation, and 3) Minimize the consequences of the situation. Three points above are found in Linda's behavior as her ego defense mechanism, which is denial.

Linda as a beautiful woman, a successful journalist, married to a loving husband, and having three children, certainly has an image to keep. Wearing a mask is what she has been trying to do in the novel *Adultery*. Linda as the main character in *Adultery* has to deal with her anxiety related to her boredom in

marriage and the extramarital affair she has with Jacob König as her ex-boyfriend during high school. Since her interview with Jacob, Linda's life has turned upside down. If used properly, denial can give advantage in daily life, but it also has negative effect to personality development.

Freud finds that childhood experience is not always realized by the individual's conscious mind (Minderop, 2016:10). Linda notices there is something wrong with her during childhood, but she only realizes it after the flashback of the childhood memory. When Linda is 8 years old, she believes she is better than anybody else is. She is arrogant and ostentatious. Driven by her *id*, she loves wearing branded clothes and riding luxurious car. In the end, she has no friends and becomes lonely. This loneliness has later grown and shaped Linda's personality.

It is hard for Linda to stay romantic after ten years of marriage. Every time she makes love with her husband, she does not enjoy it. By faking an orgasm, she realizes that she feels much more disappointed. Loras College psychologist, Julia Omarzu and colleagues observe the reason of infidelity among adults. Whitbourne (2012) states based on Julia Omarzu and colleagues' study, that lack of sexual satisfaction in primary relationship is the most common reason to cheat. Linda is not satisfied in her sexual relationship with her husband.

Loras College psychologist, Julia Omarzu and colleagues observe the reason of infidelity among adults. Whitbourne (2012) states based on Julia Omarzu and colleagues' report that there are eight reasons people cheat on their partners. They are: 1) lack of sexual satisfaction in primary relationship, 2) desire for additional sexual encounters, 3) lack of emotional satisfaction in primary relationship, 4) wanting emotional validation from someone else, 5) falling out of love with partner, 6) falling in love with someone new, 7) wanting to seek revenge, and 8) curious and want a new experience.

When Linda is bored with her life, suddenly she meets Jacob König, her former boyfriend in high school. Linda as a journalist gets a job to interview him. Somehow, Jacob senses sadness in Linda and he feels he is in the same boat with her related to each marriage life. He seduces her and she falls to his trap. Linda wants to do something amazing, which is different from her daily life, and she believes it will make her happier. She is afraid of being caught, even though she says she feels no remorse, and this is a form repression and denial. The fact that Linda has married and Jacob has a wife is repressed and denied by her. She is involved in an adultery act with Jacob. As stated by Whitbourne (2012), another reason of people to have an affair is that they are curious and want a new experience.

As stated by Whitbourne (2012), lack of sexual satisfaction in primary relationship is the most common reason cited by individuals in the

Omarzu study. Linda seems to lack of sexual satisfaction in her primary relationship. Driven by her *id*, Linda believes her next meeting with Jacob may help saving her marriage. Despite knowing the fact that Jacob had adultery once, Linda does not care. She kisses Jacob and then they go back to their different lives. Linda believes no one sees them kissing. She believes a kiss will not ruin anyone's marriage. Her refusal to acknowledge the consequence of her action is a form of repression and denial.

Linda envies Jacob because he can talk to his wife about his problems, whereas Linda's cannot do the same to her husband. Unlike Linda, there is no fatal risk in Jacob's marriage if his wife knows the affair he has with Linda. The children are the ones who will bear Linda's mistakes if someday her husband knows about it. The kiss and oral sex with Jacob however satisfying for Linda, they still make her anxious. Based on Omarzu study that stated by Whitbourne (2012), for sexual reasons, there is a positive effect, which is the participants feel more energetic about life and emotionally open. On the negative side, the participants feel guilty, shameful, disappointed, anxious over being caught, fear of abandonment by the affair partner, jealousy, and depression.

Linda feels jealous over Marianne—Jacob's wife—because Marianne has what Linda wants: Jacob. Then Linda wants to ruin their marriage by planting drugs to trap Marianne. Linda tries to rationalize all the reasons behind her action, but actually she does it because she is jealous. To have Jacob, Linda

ignores morality and law. She wants to be admitted as a better woman than Jacob's wife was. In the end, Linda cancels her evil plan even though she has already been halfway there.

Finally, Linda and Jacob have sex in a hotel, but Jacob acts as if he does not want to be caught for the second time. He had an affair before and now he wants to take precaution. During the intercourse, Linda felt no pleasure because Jacob treated her like a prostitute. According to Omarzu report, the adulterers were not disappointed with themselves but more with their partners because their partners cannot make them satisfied. It also includes "...the fact that the affair didn't bring them as much satisfaction as they thought it would."

Stated by Whitbourne (2012), falling out of love of someone's partner is one other reason to cheat in marriage. Linda says she never stops loving her husband, but she also says she wants to fall in love with him again. It is a form of denial because it means that Linda has already lost her love to her husband. Her marriage can end anytime if her husband knows about her extramarital affair with Jacob. She knows she has no future with Jacob and she has betrayed her husband, but she does not want to lose both of them.

After her sexual desire is fulfilled, Linda says to Jacob that she needs to end their adultery. Despite how much she enjoys their sexual relationship, she knows she has to let it go. She does not want to continue the affair. She also gives him the drugs she wanted to use

to trap Marianne. Linda realizes her adultery with Jacob is no longer giving her the happiness she is looking for.

People think that adultery ruins marriage whereas there is no guarantee it will end that way. The proof is Linda and her husband can get closer than before. Their marriage is getting better. Linda's husband has known about the adultery and forgiven Linda. They are going on vacation to build a stronger bond.

CONCLUSION

Although at first Linda's *id* dominates her *ego*, in the end her *superego* dominates her *ego*. The imbalanced of her personality only happens for a while and eventually she gets back to normal state as soon as she leaves Jacob. The domination of her *superego* is also marked by her anxiety when she deals with her boredom and loneliness. She is a journalist and she wants a challenge in her life, but she is restricted by her marriage and family. As she also a person who has a need to impress others, she does not want to ruin her image. Therefore, she has no choice but to get back to her family to save her life and her children. She knows her immoral action can affect her children's future as well.

The forms of repression and denial in Linda's personality appear together. They cannot be separated because both of them affect each other. Her repressed sexual desire appears because Linda is in denial about her sexual life in her marriage. She cannot admit

to her husband that she is not sexually satisfied. She is afraid if she tells her husband about it he may lose interest and find a mistress. If she loses her husband, her children will lose a father too. Linda's children are still young to understand adult's problems. Therefore, she refuses to acknowledge that she is unhappy.

When Linda has an affair with Jacob, the fact that both has married is repressed and denied. At the first time, Linda believes Jacob also loves her and will fight for their love as much as Linda will. Although Jacob treats Linda like a prostitute when they make love, she believes that sexual activity in adult is not like in teenage, which is without romance. These above are the proofs that Linda is in denial, accompanied with many feelings and thoughts of hers that being repressed.

Based on the findings above, infidelity in marriage clearly does not occur without any specific reason. It can also happen regardless the gender, the husband or the wife has the same possibility to cheat on their partners. An extramarital affair may bring relative pleasure for a while, but the price is far more expensive in a long term like divorce and broken home, which can cause trauma to the partners and children. Many people believe that adultery ruin marriage, whereas in *Adultery* novel by Paulo Coelho (2014) proves the opposite. In the end, adultery can strengthen the bond of marriage if the couples understand each other's flaws.

REFERENCES

- Burton, Neel. (2012). "Self-Deception Series: Repression and Denial". Taken from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/hide-and-peek/201203/self-deception-series-repression-and-denial> retrieved on March 7, 2017
- Coelho, Paulo. 2014. *Adultery*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Hilgard, Ernest R., et al. 1975. *Introduction to Psychology*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Minderop, Albertine. 2016. *Psikologi Sastra: Karya Sastra, Metode, Teori, dan Contoh Kasus*. Jakarta: Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- Oltmans, Thomas F, et al. 2013. *Psikologi Abnormal*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Pekker, Michael. (2013). "Repression and Suppression: Defense Mechanisms by Sigmund Freud". Taken from: <http://interpersonal-compatibility.blogspot.co.id/2013/01/repression-and-suppression-defense.html> retrieved on March 7, 2017.
- Simon, George. (2008). "Understanding Denial as a Defense Mechanism". Taken from: <http://counsellingresource.com/features/2008/10/08/denial-as-defense-mechanism/retrived> on March 8. 2017
- Stucker, Matthew. (2014). "Robin Williams' Death Ruled Suicide". Taken from <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/11/07/showbiz/robin-williams-autopsy/retrieved> on February 27, 2015.

Whitbourne, Susan Krauss. (2012). "The Eight Reasons that People Cheat on Their Partners: the emotional causes, and costs, of extramarital affairs." Taken from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201209/the-eight-reasons-people-cheat-their-partners> retrieved on May 31, 2017.