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Projection of Denial as a Defense Mechanism in Fatima Bhutto's Novel The Runaways

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Abstract: *Three main characters Anita, Sunny, and Monty in Fatima Bhutto's novel The Runaways are examined in this study by using the theory of defense mechanisms. Data is collected from Fatima Bhutto's novel The Runaways as it cherishes Cramer's theory of defense mechanisms that she presents in her book Protecting the self: Defense Mechanisms in Action. Phebe Cramer while defining defense mechanisms asserts that denial is the most important aspect of defense mechanism. The analysis is derived from events in the lives of the protagonists, who due to their realistic and moral anxieties see change in their personalities and face miserable situations such as poverty, migration, disaffection, violence, alienation, exploitation, and dislocation. The text of novel serves as the primary source of information, and secondary sources for this study include books, articles, reviews, essays, research papers, and journals. The study will attempt to look into how the novel's main characters change themselves in various circumstances that is actually the result of how denial as a defense mechanism affects people's lives.*

Key Words: Defense Mechanisms, Psychoanalysis, Denial, Transformation, Protagonists

Introduction

The study begins by examining defense mechanisms through the prism of psychoanalytic theory, proposed by Sigmund Freud. A. Freud (1936) and Fenichel (1945) who described defense mechanisms as ways to get rid of anxiety, unpleasant thoughts, and guilt. Historically, Defense mechanisms start with Sigmund Freud's early work *Neuro-Psychoses of Defense*" (Freud, 1936, p.31), in which Defense mechanisms are defined as the mental process which keep undesirable thoughts, concepts, and state of mind out of perception. Idea of defense mechanisms as a check on the expression of desires and impulses is expanded by numerous other theorists, including, Melanie Klein, Anna Freud, and Alfred Adler.

According to Cramer's (1991) theory of defense mechanisms development, the use of defenses increases in stressful and anxious situations in old people. Defenses are mental processes which are unconsciously carried out to protect the individuals from both internal and external drive forces, especially from those which threaten their self-worth or personality. Defense mechanisms serve two purposes: first, they shield the person from experiencing anxiety and, second, they protect the integration of the self.

The Runaways is purely based upon Cramer's idea of a defense mechanism as each and every character from its physical and mental appearance shows the denial which is the most important

Defense mechanisms as suggested by the Freud. Denial, Projection, and Identification are three basic defense mechanisms that are elaborated by Phebe Cramer in her book *Protecting the self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*. According to Cramer, denial is a mental process used in early childish stage, while projection, requires more cognitive complexity, so is used in adolescence. Identification, appears in youth, when the growth of one's own identity is a major worry for the person.

Denial is used as a defense mechanism in this study on the personalities of Anita Rose, Sunny, and Monty. Due to their realistic and moral anxiety, they change their personality and behavior when faced with a variety of situations such as poverty, migration, disaffection, violence, alienation, exploitation, and dislocation. They reach crisis due to their anxiety. Their anxiety is primarily a result of their family history and social environment. Their families' failure to meet their expectations caused them anxiety. The setting of the novel is set in the Karachi slums, where all of the characters try to control their circumstances and avoid the worst aspects of reality.

According to Cramer (2006) the earliest form of defense is denial. Anita Rose and her brother Ezra deny their financial reality when they were in their childhood. On the other hand, Anita and Sunny also use denial as a Defense mechanism in various circumstances in *The Runaways*. Anita closes her eyes in the opening lines of the text so that she won't be able to see actual events. In the same manner Sunny also wants relief by escaping reality. Denial is based upon Perceptual system and cognitive level (Cramer, 2006, p.46). Perceptual system means to avoid reality by failing to see it, or shattering it. Anita Rose, the protagonist, uses perceptual system to avoid communication. She closes her eyes so that she might not see her deplorable social standing in the real world. "Misperception," "Reversal," and "Negation" are the three components of perceptual denial. Misperception transforms an upsetting perception into one that is less painful but does not exist in reality.

Review of Literature

Theoretical framework used for this study is psychoanalysis. It was coined in 1856 by Sigmund

Freud, a Viennese physician, psychoanalyst, and man who has been referred to as the "father of psychoanalysis." The Greek words psyche means soul, mind, and logos refers to study of. It is also known as the study of the mind, soul, and behavior. Psychoanalysis is etymologically related to mental analysis. He provided three structures of personality Id, ego and superego. Psychoanalysis and literature have a close relationship. It is thought that the author's personality has an impact on the majority of literary works. Freud theory of defense mechanisms, was further developed by several other theorists like his daughter Anna Freud who says that a person is always protected from anxiety by the use of defense mechanisms. Numerous additional mechanisms have been suggested and approved. Defense mechanisms seem to be common occurrences that are used by people in daily life. Defense mechanisms are used unconsciously to suppress negative emotions, thoughts, or impulses like fear, anxiety, and frustration. Researchers, critics, and psychologists frequently referenced Freud's theory of the defensive operation of the ego.

According to Schultz (2016), defense mechanisms operate unconsciously, so we don't even realize we're using them. If we intentionally used these mechanisms, they would be less effective. We cannot exist without the use of defense mechanisms, as they are crucial for maintaining our mental health. Defense mechanisms, according to Hilgard (1953), are based upon reactions of discomfort, unhappiness and anxiety. Regarding personal defense mechanisms, Hilgard suggested three safety measures. Initially, defense mechanisms can be seen in people's behavior. Happiness can be achieved through the proper use of defense mechanisms. However, a person's personality may become maladjusted if they are under the control of a particular defense mechanism. Different mechanisms are classified in the second step. They protect a person from unpleasant feelings and assist in maintaining their sense of self-worth. Defense mechanisms are enjoyable when used in moderation. However, when they are overused, they cause mental turbulence. According to Kaplan, no one can endure anxiety for an extended period of time (1965). Nature has endowed us with a variety of cognitive and behavioral skills that enable us to manage or prevent anxiety. Deception, substitution, and avoidance were

three categories of anxiety Defense mechanisms that Kaplan listed.

Ego defense mechanisms have been the subject of numerous previous studies. Because the human psyche must psychologically navigate and survive from realities, Zulfaisya and Hasra (2020) applied psychological approach in their article. According to their research, after experiencing physical and psychological bullying at school, the main character Melinda Sordino used a variety of defense mechanisms to deal with her anxiety. Amalia (2020) discussed about anxiety of women that also becomes the harbinger of Defense mechanisms. After witnessing a murder, Anna started to have doubts. A literary text that is also about human behavior is understood through the use of psychoanalysis. Realistic anxiety and moralistic anxiety were two different types of anxiety that the main character Anna experienced. She uses Defense strategies like reaction formation, rationalization, denial, undoing, repression, and displacement to get over her fears. The ego employs a defense mechanism to safeguard people and assist them in Defense with anxiety. The people used defense mechanisms to change their anxiety into something more palatable. Cohen (2018) argued that it is very difficult to locate oneself in a burning planet. According to him, Fatima Bhutto's most recent book, *The Runaways*, addresses that problem from perspectives that draw attention to the diversity of contemporary Pakistan's features and touch on issues like radicalization and issues of Muslim identity and these issues are resolved by the characters of this novel through the use of defense mechanisms.

Research Methodology

The research is based upon the textual analysis of Fatima Bhutto's *The Runaways* in the light of denial as a defense mechanism. Through this analysis, entire text of *The Runaways* is interpreted with the help of Phebe theory of Defense mechanisms. In psychology, Sigmund Freud first introduced the idea of a defense mechanism in his early writings, describing it as a mental process that keeps upsetting thoughts and feelings in the unconscious. With the passage of time, Freud's theories on defense mechanisms changed. Over the past ten years, new ideas about defense mechanisms have been emerged. Theoretical ideas about defenses as well as the

scientific method for evaluating defenses have also been changed.

Anna Freud (1936) broadened the idea of defense mechanisms and categorized them into different types. She explained defense mechanisms as ego's defensive strategies and egos protective techniques. She focuses upon tenacities, implications, and effects of defense mechanisms. She went on to list three things that can threaten the ego. The ego defends itself by denying the first source of anxiety, which is objective danger. Vaillant (1992) spent most of his time in investigating defense mechanisms and suggests that there are four levels of development ie mature, immature, neurotic, and narcissistic, depending on their developmental stage, which ranges from primitive to mature.

Denial is a mental process that helps us turn away from internal and external factors that make us feel anxious, uncomfortable, or guilty. Originally it was used to replace external stimuli that cause anxiety but later it was also used to replace internal stimuli. According to Cramer, denial was initially employed to deflect attention from exterior reality; however, through time, it was broadened to include interior reality and helped people relieve the pain induced by internal stimuli. The notion of denial was broadened to encompass repressing some internal cues as well as disguising, or "screening," the upsetting thought. (Cramer, 2006, p.44). Cramer asserts that denial can be the partial acceptance of something because one person may partially accept one thing while negating another in a same way that is inconsistent. Negation is a further element of denial that enables simultaneous perception and rejection of reality (Cramer, 2006, p. 45).

There are two categories for denial-related components: perceptual and cognitive. They make the conscious decision to either not observe, avoid, or distort reality. (Cramer, 2006, p.45). When discussing perceptual denial, Cramer asserts that it typically occurs in the early stages of life. According to her, a young child tries to alter his perception of things in order to make them less painful. "Attention withdrawal or removal and avoidance, are two key elements of denial, which take place at the perceptual level. Denial can happen by "not seeing" something or by "avoiding seeing" (Cramer, 2006, p.55). Perceptual denial is based upon "reversal," "negation and "misperception. And all three work from

childhood to adulthood. Children have the ability to both refute false beliefs and also to turn around previous beliefs. Misperception transforms the upsetting perception into something that is less painful and doesn't actually exist. Misperception can also occur when painful events are projected away using a distorted internal reality or a terrifying instinct. (Cramer, 2006, p.55). Reversal, or turning a distressing perception into its opposite, is another aspect of denial. For instance, laughter can change into tears. Early on, this defense is triggered by altered cognition.

Negation is a part of denial in which reality is reciprocal meaning there by it can be rejected or accepted. Negation transforms distressing perceptions that are perceived but not understood. This defense manifests in youth. Infants' cognitive development begins to include the concept of "no" or negation. This kind of infant criticizes the outside world in order to deny its existence. Reversal works with negation. The opposite of reality is true if reality does not appear. Cramer also talks about Denial through Fantasy and asserts that this type of denial turns reality into a personal fantasy. The term "family romance" also refers to the projection of fantasy onto reality. In this type of denial, fantasy operates, and a child who grows up adopts it by continuing to act in accordance with the presumptive nature he most likely acquired as a child. By trying to sandwich the previously held concept and the new external reality, he actually misinterprets reality. This type of denial which is based on childhood fantasy occurs even in mature characters, and minor characters are typically the main victims. (Cramer, 2006, p. 60)

Analysis and Discussion

The main function of denial is to withdraw our focus away from internal and external stimuli that cause us feel anxiety, pain, or guilt. It disturbs our mentality by perturbing our attention. It disregards the outside world's reality. Additionally, it works in opposition to our conscious memories and thoughts. It manifests in a milder form and eliminates upsetting memories and thoughts on a physical as well as psychological level. Denying reality obscures what is actually there. (Cramer, 2006, p.44).

Sunny the protagonist of Fatima Bhutto novel *The Runaways* refuses to accept reality and longs to

leave his life behind the miserable condition. He is a gay man. He abandons all of his bad habits out of denial and feels ashamed. His life changes when he became of nineteen, and he wants to reconstruct his personality. He leaves his room and refuses to speak to anyone. Gloria Estefan, Sunny's best friend, is pushed away from him in a gay bar by Sunny, who doesn't want to see him again. He starts feeling guilty and anxious about Stefan and says where could Sunny go to escape the depressing circumstances of his life? In order to escape the emptiness of it all, where might Sunny go? (Bhutto, 2018, p. 48.). Since Sunny is tired of his life and wants some relief, these lines display his denial. The things that attract him now become the cause of anxiety. He wants to turn his back on all of those things. He adopts different ways, such as joining the gym and spending the majority of his time on social media, to distract himself from his guilt feelings. He then closes his eyes to block out the outside world. He struggles to obtain his true identity and struggles with identity confusion throughout the entire book.

According to Phebe Cramer there are two main components of denial, perceptual system and cognitive level. Perceptual denial, which Cramer claims first manifests in infancy, occurs when a person alters his perception of reality, avoids situations, and closes his eyes before experiencing unpleasant things. (Cramer, 2006, p.45). Anita's character in *The Runaways* illustrates the perceptual system by avoiding danger. In order to obtain identity, which she really wants, she even changes her name. She is not interested in working at Clifton House, where her mother was working as a maid. Anita feels embarrassed by questions that Madam asks her. She ignores her personal life and concentrates on her career. Like her mother, she does not want to work as a maid at Clifton House. Anita experiences anxiety about who she is and where she fits into the world. Due to an unfair society, she alienates herself. In a society where she is only seen as a servant, she tries to voice her opinions that these should be taken seriously. She aspires to restore her identity and uphold her self-worth. She also demonstrates the perceptual system by not seeing, as when Anita and the lady of the house at Clifton House do not make eye contact despite her mother's apology, Anita continues to insist that she doesn't want to work here when

madam of Clifton house asks her, would you like to work here? I'm in school, Anita declares. (Bhutto, 2018, p. 67)

Misperception is something that does not exist in reality rather makes us feel less painful to the event which otherwise would have been very painful for us. Misperception in forecast alters one's inner reality or frightful impulse to erase painful events. Fearful impulse is externalized from the self (Cramer, 2006, p.55). In *The Runaways*, a character of Sunny is fed up from his current lifestyle and desires to leave it behind. He uses variety of alternative techniques to divert his attention and gets rid of all the upsetting things in his life. Sunny struggles with his identity because he is an Indian immigrant. He wasn't a good character at first. His life changes when he turns nineteen years old. He spends the majority of his time online and uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp to distract himself from his guilt inducing thoughts. He begins by reading Holy books and their Google Arabic translation before posting his reading on Facebook in an effort to gain followers. He is tired of doing all the shit he has done and no longer desires it. The girls he dislikes are the external object in this situation. He had no interest in any of those women. (Bhutto, 2018, p.43)

Negation is a part of denial as well. Negation enables the simultaneous perception and rejection of reality (Cramer, 2006, p.56). Negation detects unsettling perception while also transforming it by downplaying its significance. The ability of infants to conceptualize "no" or negation develops early. In this type, the infant criticizes the existence of external reality in order to deny its existence. Reversal works with negation. The opposite of reality is true if reality does not appear. According to Cramer, reversal and negation give characters qualities of strength and moral power beyond what is known to mortals, making them appear to be "not weak." These characteristics set reality apart from illusion.

Through her book *The Runaways*, Fatima Bhutto brings to light the idea of negation, which Phebe Cramer introduces as a part of denial. She portrays a reality that is simultaneously accepted and rejected through the protagonist Sunny. Although Sunny, the novel's protagonist, is aware of his father's second marriage, he refuses to accept his second mother because, in his opinion, only the mother who gave birth to him can give actual love. Because he

thinks maternal love is unworldly love. (Bhutto, 2018, p.38).

The order of the denial's components depends on the growth of cognitive ability. From childhood to adulthood, Cramer charts the emergence of the elements of perceptual denial. Then, she moves on to adulthood and charts the elements of denial through fantasy. She continues, "To look and not see is the prototype for denial" (Cramer, 2006, p.44). This "not seeing" refers to the psychological attention being drawn away from outside stimuli. Even though the person is paying close attention to the object, their gaze quickly shifts from being intense to being uninterested, giving the impression that the object is not real. (Cramer, 2006, p.55).

Fatima Bhutto also discusses this example of denial in her book *The Runaways*, which features nearly all of the characters looking at certain things but not at them in a way that serves their own interests. For instance, when considering his family, Sunny, the novel's protagonist, consciously chooses to ignore the fact that his father has abandoned him and left his family. The same is true of Anita Rose, who ignores various characters who make overt attempts to flirt with her. The same thing is done by Oz, whose real name is Ozair, who asks Sunny not to visit the mosque while willingly ignoring the religious feelings he harbors. Sunny shuts his eyes and takes a deep breath. He could already be breaking something. In an effort to avoid thinking about it, he blinks it back. He moves everything far behind the gates while keeping his eyes closed. He doesn't consider him or Aloush, and he doesn't consider the Apollo Café. (Bhutto, 2018, p.333).

Denial is employed by the person in order to avoid reality and take voluntary actions. Due to a "stimulus barrier," the person has turned away from the outside world and is therefore unable to respond to external stimuli. "Stimulus barrier" was first used by Sigmund Freud in (1920) is an earliest defense mechanism that protects the person from outside stimuli. The way a stimulus barrier works affects how much attention a person pays to their surroundings. The first sign of perceptual denial is attention withdrawal from the outside world. It demonstrates a developmental shift in which a psychological mechanism drives a physiological response. The purpose of perceptual denial is to eliminate awareness from the outside world or of external

reality. This implies that the child always perceives an external object even though it is always present but not visible. So put into a nut shell it can be said that each character of the novel tries to escape from internal and external realities through the use of denial which is a type of defense mechanisms.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates how the novel maintains Freud's concept of defense mechanisms because each character uses a variety of defense mechanisms. Phebe Cramer suggests three defense mechanisms in her book *Protecting the self: Defense Mechanisms in Action*: denial, projection, and identification, but only denial is used in this study as it is the oldest form of defense, which starts in infancy and is connected to Sunny and Anita Rose's characters. The protagonists of *The Runaways* employ denial as a Defense mechanism in a variety of circumstances. In the first line of the text, Anita Rose closes her eye so she won't see actual life events. Sunny, on the other hand, struggles with reality and longs to escape his current way of life in search of solace. He retracts his words because he feels embarrassed. According to the Phebe Cramer there are two fundamental

categories of denial are the "perceptual system" and the "cognitive level." The perceptual system prevents us from seeing, avoiding, or dissecting reality.

Even though *The Runaways* has been the subject of extensive research, psychological analysis of the work, such as the application of defense mechanisms, has not yet been done. Numerous Pakistani writers and scholars have examined this text using postcolonial theory as well as other literary theories like structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism. The intent of this study is to demonstrate how defense mechanisms can affect the daily lives of various characters in *The Runaways*. Defense mechanisms have never been used in this text, despite the fact that some authors have also used psychoanalytical theory in this novel. This study was conducted in order to understand the concept of defense mechanisms. With the use of defense mechanisms, it becomes obvious that almost all characters use denial and demonstrate the importance of denial through their own lives. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the effects of defense mechanism like denial on the lives of the novel's main characters.

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