

## HUMBERT HUBERT'S DEFENSE MECHANISM IN VLADIMIR NABOKOV'S *LOLITA*

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### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini berfokus pada menggambarkan mekanisme pertahanan yang dilakukan oleh tokoh utama dan mengapa karakter utama menggunakan mekanisme pertahanan. Mekanisme pertahanan yang digunakan sebagai akibat dari kegagalannya kehilangan orang yang dicintai. Masalah pertama berbicara tentang mekanisme pertahanan Humbert Humbert. Masalah kedua mengungkapkan alasan Humbert Humbert menggunakan mekanisme pertahanan. Untuk menjawab masalah pertama, penelitian ini menggunakan teori mekanisme pertahanan oleh Sigmund Freud dan didukung oleh buku Albertine Minderop. Masalah kedua dijawab dengan menggunakan konsep trauma, stres dan kecemasan. Data ini menyajikan mekanisme pertahanan Humbert Humbert dan alasannya menggunakan mekanisme pertahanan. Analisis mengungkapkan sembilan jenis mekanisme pertahanan Humbert Humbert. Mereka adalah Displacement, Intelektualisasi, Rasionalisasi, pembentukan Reaksi, Represi, Denial, Sublimasi, dan Bertindak keluar. Mekanisme pertahanan ini yang digunakan untuk mengurangi kecemasan Humbert Humbert terhadap kenangan masa lalunya dalam kegiatan sehari-hari. Selain itu, mekanisme pertahanannya juga muncul sebagai akibat dari kegagalan masa kecilnya ketika ia kehilangan orang yang dia cintai sebelumnya. Selain itu, ada beberapa alasan yang membuat Humbert Humbert menggunakan mekanisme pertahanan. Yaitu trauma, stres dan kecemasan akan diungkapkan sebagai penyebab Humbert Humbert melakukan mekanisme pertahanan.

Kata kunci : Mekanisme pertahanan, trauma, stres dan kecemasan

### **Abstract**

This study focuses on depicting defense mechanism performed by the main character and why the main character uses the defense mechanism. The defense mechanism is used as the result of his failure losing a beloved one. The first problem talks about Humbert Humbert's defense mechanism. The second problem reveals Humbert Humbert's reason of using defense mechanism. To answer the first problem, this study uses the theory of defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud's and supported by Albertine Minderop's book. The second problem is answered by using the concept of trauma, stress and anxiety. The data presents Humbert Humbert's defense mechanism and the reason of using defense mechanism. The analysis reveals Humbert Humbert's nine types of defense mechanism. They are Displacement, Intellectualization, Rationalization, Reaction formation, Repression, Denial, Sublimation, and Acting out. Those defense mechanisms are used to reduce Humbert Humbert's anxiety toward his past memory in his daily activities. Besides, his defense mechanism also emerges as a result of his failure of his childhood when he lost whom he loved before. Besides, there are some reasons that make Humbert Humbert use defense mechanism. They are trauma, stress and anxiety will reveal as the causes of Humbert Humbert use defense mechanism.

Keywords : Defense mechanism, trauma, stress and anxiety

### **INTRODUCTION**

*Lolita* is one of the best known novel which was written by Vladimir Nabokov. He is an American novelist, critic, and lepidopterist. This novel ranked at No. 4 in the list of the Modern Literary 100 Best Novel. It is also one of literary works that is influential in twenty century which wa a controversial history, beginning with its projection by some American publishing houses before being published in French but in the end, *Lolita* becomes

bestseller. This novel is about Humbert Humbert who use defense mechanism to reduce his anxiety and stress of his trauma in childhood. This research is going to analyze Humbert Humbert who use defense mechanism to cover the tension of the past memory.

(1) Statement of the problem

- a. How is Humbert Humbert's defense mechanism in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*?
- b. Why does Humbert Humbert use defense mechanism in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*?

Those problems, it is obvious that this research is going to see the Nazi in two ways or point of views.

## (2) Solving problems plan

To answer those questions, this research is going to use Sigmund Freud's defense mechanism. This theory is going to analyze Humbert Humbert's defense mechanism in his life after the death of his beloved girl in childhood. It will be described one by one Humbert Humbert's defense mechanism. The causes of he uses defense mechanism reveals in the second statement of the problem. After describing some of Humbert Humbert's defense mechanism, it will be followed the reason why Humbert Humbert use defense mechanism in his life by using the theory.

## (3) Purpose of the research

Purpose of this research is obviously to answer what are questioned in statement of problems.

- a. To depict Humbert Humbert's defense mechanisms in Vladimir Nabakov's *Lolita*.
- b. To reveal the reasons why Humbert Humbert use defense mechanisms in Vladimir Nabakov's *Lolita*.

## (4) Summary about the theories

A theory is going to be used in this research. The theory is taken from Sigmund Freud and combined with Anna Freud. By analyzing the data, this study focuses on Humbert Humbert's defense mechanism and his causes of using defense mechanism. This study will use theory of ego defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and combined with Anna Freud's theory. Meanwhile, this study will use the concept of trauma, stress and anxiety by Cley Tucker-Ledd. The concept of trauma, stress and anxiety will describe the reason why Humbert Humbert uses defense mechanism.

"Defense mechanism are psychological constructs inferred from observations of the way people behave. They are useful ways of summarizing what we think is going on when we observe behaviour. But although some of the mechanisms are supported by experimental evidence, other have little scientific verification.

Labeling a person's behaviour (e.g., projection, rationalization, or repression) may provide useful descriptive information, but it is not an explanation of the behaviour. A full explanation requires understanding the needs that cause the person to rely on defense mechanisms in dealing with the problems.

All defense mechanisms are to be found in the everyday behaviour of normal people. Used in moderation, they increase satisfaction in living and are therefore helpful modes of adjustment. It is only when mechanisms become the dominant modes of problem-solving that they indicate personality maladjustment." (Minderp, 2010:30)

Defense mechanism is a psychoanalysis theory which is used to help people escape from their problem and it is used to relax their mind from the impacts of trauma or anxiety. In this case, defense mechanism is thought to keep unwated thought and impulse from the conscious mind. Defense mechanism is the easiest solution if someone didnot get the replacement of an object, but if people are not fervent in using efo defense mechanisms or people use the excessive ego defense mechanism they can have mental or personality disorder.

Related to *Lolita* written by Vladimir Nabokov, the main character Humbert Humbert uses defense mechanism to cover his painful mind of his past memory. In this case, defense mechanisms are actually defined as self-deceptive techniques for reducing stress. For example, if someone cannot fullfil the necessity he will look for the way to get it but if they cannot get the necessity they will accept it or maybe they will look for the replacement.

The desire to fulfill the necessity can be done in various ways. If the desire is not acceptable by the society, so it should repress. If the desire is forced to fill the necessity so it will happen the indirectly desire or desire replacement. The desire can be an unconscious feeling that is not visible or

by replacing it with a passion desire another. Replacement object is called defense mechanism. All people use defense Mechanisms, whether consciously or unconsciously they are.

“A defense mechanism in which a drive or feeling is shifted to substitute object, one that psychological more available. For example, aggressive impulses may be displaced, as in scapegoating, upon people (or even inanimate objects) that are not sources of frustration but are safer to attract.” (Minderop, 2010:29)

From the explanation in previous, defense mechanism appears after someone deals with stress and anxiety or trauma.

“The broadest definitions of stress include the entire complex sequence of events: (1) the event that requires some change (external or mental; real or imaginary), (2) internal processes (perception, interpretation of the event, learning, adaptation, or coping mechanism), (3) emotional reactions (our feelings) and (4) other behavioral-bodily reaction (nervousness, sweating, stumbling over words, high blood pressure, and all the medical conditions mentioned below). In a more limited usage, stress is the upsetting situation and strain is the mental and physical reactions.” (Ledd, 2004:4)

## METHOD

After explaining the theory which is going to be used, this research is going to show how the theory is applied. Because the data source which is used is novel, *Lolita* by Vladimir Nabokov will be the main data source. There are actually other data sources which come from some books or e – books, and journals.

This research will find out some proofs, formed as conversations or narrations in the novel which are related to the theory in the novel. It will also read the novel closely to get some quotes for supporting the theory. Books, e – books, and journals will also become supporting elements in this data collection. From those things, the theory will be easier to be found.

The analysis which will be done by this research will combine the data from novel with the data from references, books, e – books, or journals. Besides that, there will be also some comments of this analysis. From those data and comments, there

will be analysis which can answer the statement of the problems.

Theory which is used, defense mechanism; will be used to focus on Humbert Humbert in the novel. In the statement of problem, the questions are about the the action and the reasons of Humbert Humbert. In the analysis, the elements of this theory will be applied in Humbert Humbert. The elements of defense mechanism will be used to see how Humbert Humbert uses defense mechanism. This study also wants to see the relation of the theory elements to the story whether it is proper or not.

The analysis will be divided in to two sections according to statement of problem. Section one is about the first statement of problem related to Humbert Humbert defense mechanism. The section two is about the second statement of problem related to the reason of Humbert Humbert use defense mechanism. The result which is obtained from those sections will be written in conclusion or result section.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULT

(1) How is Humbert Humbert's defense mechanism depicted in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*?

In this analysis, this research is about the defense mechanism to cover someone's feeling from tension. It is used by Humbert Humbert who is the main character of this novel. Defense mechanism appears because of some reasons that make people feel in danger. It is a way to protect people from unpleasant emotions and keep unwanted thoughts from the unconscious mind. In this novel, the main character Humbert Humbert uses some defense mechanisms to protect him from any kind of conflicts that occur in his life. Here, Humbert Humbert has identified eight types of defense mechanisms in this study.

“I also know that the shock of Annabel's death consolidated the frustration of that nightmare summer, made of it a permanent obstacle to any further romance throughout the cold years of my youth.” (Nabokov, 1955:14)

From that narration, Humbert Humbert has a beloved girl in childhood named Annabel Leigh that he loves her so much. Unfortunately, he died because she suffered typhus. Humbert Humbert can not accept the death of Annabel Leigh that makes

him can not forget her. He was frustrated and sad because he always thought of her. Although, they are still young but, both of them often had a sex in their age. . In this case, Humbert Humbert was confused because he felt the anxiety after the death of Annabel Leigh. He could not fulfill his desire to his beloved girl anymore. So, he tried to look for a way to reduce his painful memory by using this defense mechanism.

“Now I wish to introduce the following idea. Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human, but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as “nymphets.” (Nabokov, 1955:16)

From the narration, it is described Humbert Humbert’s way to cover his frustrated. He uses displacement to cover his feeling of his lovely young girl. He tried to replace his desire to a young girl who seemed his beloved girl because he always reminds his beloved girl. This situation makes Humbert Humbert looks for the substitute target as his replacement of Annabel. In this case, the death of Annabel Leigh is difficult to accept by Humbert Humbert which makes him frustrated. His feeling of frustrated occurs because he always thinks of her. Actually, Humbert Humbert can not stay longer with his thinking of his lovely young girl whom has died since his child. He really can not stand at his past memories and he always reminds his lovely young girl but he can not meet her anymore in real life. As a result of his painful memories, he looks for substitute target to replace the position of Annabel Leigh. In this situation is Humbert Humbert’s way to begin this defense mechanism of displacement.

Moreover, the usage of this defense mechanism aims to find the acceptable object. Humbert Humbert choose the young one as Lolita because he reminds his lovely girl who is a child at that time. Besides, young girls or children may be able to be a substitute object because children are funny, innocent, infantile, weak and soon. Therefore, Humbert Humbert can be easier to close with them in some reasons.

Intellectualization is one of defense mechanism’s types. According to Freud this defense is similar to rationalization, but this defense mechanism of

intellectualization focuses on the intellect issues which is related to the problem. It aims to learn the situation that makes people anxiety. In this case, intellectualization also reduce people’s emotional (<http://people.emich.edu/pclark/freud/intellectualization.html>). This defense mechanism is used the same as another defense mechanisms, but it is replaced into deep way because this way people can learn their situation emotionally, so that they can decrease the anxiety and frustrated. People have chance to learn their problem objectively.

“I was attached to it as a “recorder of psychic reactions.” With two young botanists and an old carpenter I shared now and then (never very successfully) the favors of one of our nutritionists, a Dr. Anita Johnson — who was soon flownback, I am glad to say.” (Nabokov, 1955:21)

From the narration, Humbert Humbert tries to take the way where he can study about the expedition in a group that is looking for object of the expedition (Humbert does not tell what object the expedition about). He becomes a recorder psychic reaction in the expedition. In the expedition there are some groups which have different object to analyze.

The next defense mechanism is rationalization which seems intellectualization. It focuses on logical reason or rational reason which is not true. It occurs in order to keep someone’s existence. Therefore, the main character also uses rationalization to reduce his anxiety.

“I discovered there was an endless source of robust enjoyment in trifling with psychiatrists: cunningly leading them on; never letting them see that you know all the tricks of the trade; inventing for them elaborate dreams, pure classics in style (which make them, the dream-extortionists, dream and wake up shrieking); teasing them with fake “primal scenes”; and never allowing them the slightest glimpse of one’s real sexual predicament.” (Nabokov, 1955:34)

Those quotations describe that Humbert Humbert’s intention for the psychiatrists. This defense mechanism aims to protect himself from the reality. He does not want people to know his personality so he lies to the psychiatrists about the truth. He is really satisfied with his way that he calls an amazing game. Besides, this defense mechanism is the way to keep his feeling from painful memory

and he can keep his secret life that he does not want to tell to any one.

Humbert Humbert is also used reaction formation. It is other types of defense mechanism. Reaction formation uses to reduce the anxiety by adopting the opposite thought.

"I was angry, disappointed and bored, but being a polite European, could not refuse to be sent off to Lawn Street in that funeral car, feeling that otherwise McCoo would devise an even more elaborate means of getting rid of me." (Nabokov, 1955:36)

From the narration, it is clear that Humbert Humbert used reaction formation to cover his anxiety from his anger and he also thinks that he is a polite European, so he cools down when McCoo's offer. It is his way to minimize the painful mind that will be dangerous for him, so he should keep his emotion. Actually he wants to refuse McCoo's offer but he is afraid if he will drive him out from his place. His afraid refers to his anxiety or it can be his shyness if McCoo do it. Humbert Humbert tries to calm down in order to get sympathy from McCoo. In this case, it is his first reaction formation when he is confused looking for dwelling place.

"I left my betters the task of analyzing glacial drifts, drumlins, and gremlins, and kremlins, and for a time tried to jot down what I fondly thought were "reactions" (I noticed, for instance, that dreams under the midnight sun tended to be highly colored, and this my friend the photographer confirmed). (Nabokov, 1955:22)

From the narration, it is described his repression. Humbert Humbert decides to quit from his expedition because his job is bored. It is commonly occurs when people feels bored with something that they do. He feels that he can not stand in the expedition. Then, it makes him to leave the expedition. It is his effort to reduce his anxiety with leaving his job. He is bored with the job and there is no temptation such nymphets there.

He also uses denial to cover his anxiety in his daily life. It is clearly happen when one of Dolorez haze's teacher says that he treats his daughter like a princess but he denies the teacher's statement directly. It can be seen in the below narration.

"...Dolly is inclined to be, mildly speaking impudent. But all feel that primo, you should have your family doctor tell her the facts of life and, secundo, that you allow her to enjoy the company of her schoolmates' brothers at the Junior Club or in Dr. Rigger's organization, or in the lovely homes of our parents." (Nabokov, 1955:195)

Other type of defense mechanism which is used by Humbert Humbert is sublimation. Humbert Humbert uses sublimation to minimize his painful mind of thinking his beloved girl. This defense mechanism is a positive defense mechanism because Humbert Humbert can cover his painful mind by doing a positive activities.

"By psychoanalyzing this poem, I notice it is really a maniac's masterpiece. The stark, stiff, lurid rhymes correspond very exactly to certain perspectiveless and terrible land scapes and figures, and magnified parts of landscapes and figures, as drawn by psychopaths in tests devised by their astute trainers. I wrote many more poems. I immersed myself in the poetry of others." (Nabokov, 1955:257)

Sublimation is a positive defense mechanism than other defense mechanism. Humbert Humbert is also used fantasy to minimize his anxiety of losing someone by dreaming.

"Thus had I delicately constructed my ignoble, ardent, sinfultream; and still Lolita was safe and I was safe. What I had madly possessed was not she, but my own creation, another, fanciful Lolita perhaps, more real than Lolita; overlapping, encasing her; floating between me and her, and having no will, no consciousness indeed, no life of her own." (Nabokov, 1955:62)

The last of his defense mechanism is acting out. Acting out is the dangerous defense mechanism because it is bad behavior deals with emotional conflict. In this case, Humbert Humbert can be hurt Clare Quilty whom kidnaps Dolorez haze.

"I hit him at very close range through the blankets, and then he lay back, and a big pink bubble with juvenile connotations formed on his lips, grew to the size of a toy balloon, and vanished." (Nabokov, 1955:304)

(2) Why does Humbert Humbert use defense mechanism in Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita?

There are two reasons describes why Humbert Humbert uses defense mechanism. The first reason is trauma. Trauma appears when Humbert Humbert losses his beloved girl in childhood. He cannot accept the death of his girl so that he used defense mechanism.

“I leaf again and again through these miserable memories, and keep asking myself, was it then, in the glitter of that remote summer, that the rift in my life began; or was my excessive desire for that child only the first evidence of an inherent singularity. When I try to analyze my own cravings, motives, actions and so forth, I surrender to a sort of retrospective imagination which feeds the analytic faculty with boundless alternatives and which causes each visualized route to fork and re-fork without end in the maddeningly complex prospect of my past. I am convinced, however, that in a certain magic and fateful way Lolita began with Annabel.” (Nabokov, 1955:13)

From the narration, it shows that Humbert Humbert has a traumatic experience in childhood so it makes him frustrated of his miserable memory. His traumatic experience makes a bigger anxiety. He can not stop thinking of her and forget all memories about his lovely girl. Nevertheless, he tried to imagine the ins and outs about his memory with Annabel. He did not accept that Annabel died because he loves her very much. Humbert Humbert was confused and frustrated.

In this case, Humbert Humbert has a complicated problem since he was child. First, his mother died so he does not have mother to guide him into adult. Second, his father was not care with him and he married with his aunt. Third, his beloved girl also died because of typhus and fourth, he has no friend to invite him into social group. His traumatic event arouse stress that causes he gets difficult to sleep and has nightmare. Besides, the symptom occurs when the anxious feeling of past event happens the first factor apperance stress. Therefore, he tried to avoid his feeling, because the feeling of anxiety needs to escape.

The second reason he uses defense mechanism is stress and anxiety. Stress appears because Humbert humbert has a traumatic experience and it causes anxiety. Stress deals with anxiety.

“Saturday. My heart is still thumping. I still squirm and emit low moans of remembered embarrassment.” (Nabokov, 1955:54)

“... for I knew already that I could not live without the child.” (Nabokov, 1955:64)

My heart beat like a drum as she sat down... (Nabokov, 1955:58)

“My heart expanded with such force that it almost blotted me out.” (Nabokov, 1955:66)

“...I a humble hunchback abusing myself in the dark.” (Lolita, 1955:62)

From the narration, it can be concluded that Humbert Humbert has some symptoms of stress. Thus, he always get anxiety if he is remembered of his beloved girl. He also shows his insomnia and nightmare when he feels frustrated. His anxiety such has insomnia or nightmare cause him stress. Thus, he uses defense mechanism to reduce it as good as possible. It has clarified in the first analysis. His insomnia and nightmare In this case, the insomnia and nightmare make him stress so he can not sleep well. He always think of her that caused insomnia.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Many attentions, supports, and helps has been received during the process of writing this thesis, therefore the gratitude is expressed to Drs. Much. Khoiri, M.Si. as my advisor. I would like to say thank you so much for your help me. I also would like to send my gratitude to my second advisor, Mrs. Hujuala Rika Ayu, SS., M.A. who gives me attentions, suggestions, directions, times, and supports me. Hopefully, this journal will be useful for all of people who read this journal.

#### **CLOSING**

##### **Conclusion**

Based on the whole analysis of this study in chapter 3, there are several conclusions in line with the statement of the problems. Base on type of defense mechanism by Sigmund Freud, there are nine types depicted on the main character Humbert Humbert. The dominant are displacement, intellectualization, rationalization, reaction formation, repression, denial, sublimation, fantasy, and acting out. Humbert Humbert's displacement reflects main character's effort to look for the substitute object as the replacement. Humbert Humbert needs substitute object to get satisfaction of his desire. It aims to reduce the impulse of his past experiences with his beloved girl Annabel Leigh. It occurs when he losses his beloved girl in childhood

because of typus. He usually finds some substitute objects to reduce his mind from the memories of his young girl. Since in Humbert Humbert's childhood he loves Annabel Leigh so much and both of them have intimate relation. After he is adult he is confused and frustrated with the situation. He thinks that he needs someone to replace his young girl position. He has relationship with several girls to get a better feeling.

In other way, he also uses intellectualization to reduce his anxiety by joining the group to learn a positive activity. It can help him to learn his situation emotionally so he can decrease the emotion and the impulse that make him frustrated. In this case, Humbert Humbert joins the expedition to learn someone's psychological. He can understand about the psychological case while he reduces the anxiety of rethinking a young girl. Besides, he uses rationalization to cover himself from people around him who ask about psychological issue. It aims to help his condition and cover up the truth. He doesnot want people to know the truth because people will understand the reality that is happened by Humbert Humbert. This type of defense mechanism is usually used to protect people from the real situation that is able to make them safe. In this way, people who use defense mechanism need the reasons make sense or the rational statement. Rationalization is commonly use when people get a problem emergently so they need rational thought to answer or avoid the case.

Reaction formation is one of defense mechanism that needs an effort to cover the truth with the falsehood. Humbert Humbert uses this way to cover his feeling from people who want to know his feeling about something. Humbert Humbert can reduce his feeling from something that he dislikes. It aims to keep himself from someone's feeling so that it can make the danger situation for him. In addition, repression appears when he feels that uncomfortable condition that described in the analysis. Humbert Humbert is bored when he feels that there is no young girls whom is able to make him interested. He quits directly from the expedition to reduce his painful mind. This way commonly used in daily life, it is the same with denial. Denial is refusing someone's statement. This defense mechanism occurs when person wants to keep his self esteem in front of people. In this case, Humbert Humbert uses this defense mechanism when Ms. Pratt gave some statements

about him but he refuses that to cover himself. He doesnot want people to blame him so Humbert Humbert chooses denial to reduce the tension.

Humbert Humbert also uses sublimation to reduce himself from the painful memory. Sublimation is positive defense mechanism to face the painful memory. This defense mechanism helps Humbert Humbert to reduce his anxiety from his miserable memory with acting a postive activity. Humbert Humbert's fantasy is described when he was confused he created his imagination about his Lolita that make him reduced his anxiety at that time. This defense mechanism was easiest used by Humbert Humbert to minimize his anxious feeling when he thinks about his beloved girl.

And the last ego defense mechanism that is used by Humbert Humbert is acting out. Humbert Humbert uses this defense mechanism in the last of the story. He is really confused and frustrated when Dolorez Haze loss. He keeps the anger and after knows the cause of Dolorez lost, he hunts Clare Quilty who kidnapped Dolorez Haze. Then, he kills Clare Quilty brutally.

Humbert Humberts causes of using defense mechanism is the second statement of problem which has been identified. There two causes has been identified, they are trauma, stress and anxiety. Those factors that make Humbert Humbert used defense mechanism. Based on the first statement of the problem it can be concluded that Humbert Humbert uses defense mechanisms to reduce or cover the painful mind from tension to remind his miserable memory. In this way, it helps the main character from the uncomfortable situation. Trauma can be the reason of using ego defense mechanism because Humbert Humbert lost his beloved girl in childhood, but he cannot accept it. He thinks that he cannot live without Annabel. His trauma makes him feel anxious. The anxiety appears because Humbert Humbert always reminds her and he cannot forget his miserable memory with her. It makes his anxiety becomes bigger and it causes stress. Stress deals with anxiety. It is happened with Humbert Humbert. He found the way to reduce his painful memories by using defense mechanism that has mentioned on the first analysis. Therefore, defense mechanism is the way how to protect himself from the miserable memory from his trauma, stress and anxiety.

## SUGGESTION

For next study to this novel, other researchers may be able to take defense mechanism to be analyzed. Of course, this journal can be used for a guide to analyze someone's defense mechanism or other purposes.

The research can be also done on the effect of someone's trauma of their past memory which cannot be deleted easily. That can use psychology approach.

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