

**Anxiety and Defense Mechanism in Jenny Han's
*To All The Boys I've Loved Before***

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana konflik memicu kecemasan pada Lara Jean, tokoh utama dalam novel *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* karya Jenny Han, serta bagaimana mekanisme pertahanan dirinya muncul untuk melindunginya dari berbagai ancaman yang menimbulkan rasa tidak nyaman. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan psikoanalisis berdasarkan teori Sigmund Freud. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Lara Jean mengalami tiga jenis kecemasan, yaitu kecemasan realistik, kecemasan neurotik, dan kecemasan moral. Untuk mengatasi kecemasan tersebut, ia menggunakan beberapa mekanisme pertahanan diri, yaitu proyeksi, penyangkalan, dan pengalihan. Sebagai seorang gadis yang belum pernah menjalin hubungan romantis dengan siapa pun, Lara Jean mengalami konflik yang memunculkan kecemasan dalam hubungan percintaannya. Namun demikian, mekanisme pertahanan diri yang digunakannya berkembang dari sekadar bentuk perlindungan diri menjadi bagian dari perkembangan karakter yang menandai kematangan emosionalnya.

Kata Kunci: *To All The Boys I've Loved Before*, pendekatan psikoanalisis, kecemasan, mekanisme pertahanan diri.

Abstract

This study aims to examine how conflicts trigger anxiety in Lara Jean, the main character of Jenny Han's *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, and how her defense mechanisms emerge to protect her from threats that make her feel uncomfortable. A psychoanalytical approach based on Freud's theory was applied. This study revealed that Lara Jean experiences three types of anxiety: realistic, neurotic, and moral anxiety. To cope with this anxiety, she uses more specific defense mechanisms, including projection, denial, and displacement. Lara Jean, as a girl who has never been in a love relationship with anyone, experiences a conflict resulting in anxiety within her love relationships. However, Lara Jean uses a defense mechanism that shifts from a form of protection to character development that marks her emotional maturity.

Keywords: *To All The Boys I've Loved Before*, psychoanalytical approach, anxiety, defense mechanism.

INTRODUCTION

The feeling of love is a sense that is commonly experienced by people throughout their lives. Karandashev described that love is a "relationship between a man and a woman implying sexual interest and attraction." (2017). Love causes a person to experience complex emotions because it involves both positive and negative emotions, which then lead to various unconscious behaviors in dealing with the experience of love.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, a person's psychological condition and the relationship with love can be analyzed using Sigmund Freud's theory. These human personalities influence a person's decision in dealing with

feelings of love. that leads to conflicts which cause anxiety and defense mechanisms.

A psychological phenomenon of love relationships can be found in Lara Jean, the main character from the novel *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* written by Jenny Han. This novel was published in 2014 and was so successful that it became a New York Times Best Seller (Simon & Schuster, n.d.). Han writes this novel based on her habit of writing love letters to people she likes when she was a teenager. She chooses the character Lara Jean, who is Korean-American, to represent the lack of Asian-American characters in American teen romance novels.

She presents the unique story of a Korean-American girl living between two cultures, focusing on her teenage years. The success of this novel also leads to its adaptation into a film released on Netflix in 2018.

The reason for choosing *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* written by Jenny Han is because this novel describes the main character's complicated love relationship which triggers anxiety within her and leads her to use defense mechanisms to protect herself from psychological threats. In addition, almost all humans, including the writer, experience internal conflicts about love relationships in a manner similar to the main character, Lara Jean. By analyzing the character of Lara Jean, this article is significant as it explores how her love relationship through a psychoanalytical approach based on Freud's theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms.

In the novel, Lara Jean is portrayed as a shy girl who is afraid to express her feelings for the boys she likes. She keeps her feelings in letters that she writes since she was a child till her teenage years. There are a total of five boys she writes love letters to, two of whom are Peter Kavinsky, a handsome and popular boy who steals her first kiss, and Josh, her best friend who is also her sister Margot's boyfriend. The letters are never sent to the boys she liked and are only kept in a hat box in her closet. Until finally Lara Jean's sister, Kitty, sends all the letters to the boys she likes. As a woman who has never been in a relationship, Lara Jean feels her world was turned upside down. She is filled with anxiety and conflict in dealing with the letters. Moreover, she also uses defense mechanisms to cope with her anxiety and emotional distress.

In this novel, the character of Lara Jean provides an interesting case study, where her psychological condition plays an important role in her love relationship. Furthermore, there is a complicated love relationship that begins because of a letter she writes. The letters that are spread around cause Lara Jean to experience true love herself. The letters make her feel anxious because she has never experienced true love before. This triggers anxiety within her, as Lara Jean has never been in a real love relationship before. Based on this, the writer reveals how anxiety affects Lara Jean's love relationship and identifies the specific defense mechanisms she uses to cope with her emotional conflicts.

Yuwana (2020) analyzed Han's *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* to see why each character acted the way they do, based on psychological issues, and compares it to the real-life experiences of teenagers today. In analyzing characters, the author uses a medical review by Timothy J. Legg (written by Kimberly Holland), which divides humans into introvert and extrovert types. This article reveals that, in reality, humans do have personality types

that are similar to some of the characters in this novel. If they have an introverted personality, like Lara Jean, humans may be hesitant to express their feelings of love to others and prefer to keep them to themselves.

Meanwhile, Safira (2020) discussed how the novel *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* represents romantic love in two characters, Lara Jean, and Peter Kavinsky. In this case, the author used Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (1986) and discusses intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. In addition, the author also analyzes romantic love through Ben-Nun's Romantic Love - Characteristics and Effects (2017) and elements of love from Fromm's theory of love in *The Art of Loving* (1995). As a final result, this thesis reveals that all aspects of romantic love are present in Lara Jean and Peter's relationship, which then has an impact on both of their lives. Lara Jean and Peter's romantic relationship brings new color to their respective lives and enables them to become better person.

Juliananda (2023) analyzed the main character of *To All The Boys I've Loved Before*, Lara Jean, with a focus on her problem of internal and external anxiety. In analyzing the anxiety experienced by the character Lara Jean, the author uses the theory of Sigmund Freud. This thesis finds that Lara Jean experiences realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. These anxieties came from threats, conflicts, and frustrations she experiences in her relationships with Peter, Josh, Margot, and Genevieve.

Based on the three previous studies mentioned above, there is no study specifically examining Lara Jean's anxiety, which she overcomes by using a defense mechanism in her love relationship using Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud's psychoanalytic theories, and limiting the in-depth analysis to the main character. Therefore, this study is to examine how internal and external conflicts trigger anxiety in Lara Jean and how her defense mechanisms emerge to protect her from threats that make her feel uncomfortable.

METHOD

This study used the library research method and qualitative research as an approach to understand Lara Jean's behavior and actions in more detail. The writer applies psychoanalytical approach, including anxiety and defense mechanism, to analyze Lara Jean's love relationship in *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* novel.

The writer uses Jenny Han's *To All the Boys I've Loved Before* (2014) as the primary data. In addition, books by Sigmund Freud, including *An Autobiographical Study, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, The Question of Lay Analysis, and Other Works* (1959), as well as Anna Freud's *The writings of Anna Freud. Volume II: The Ego*

and *The Mechanisms of Defense* (1966) are used as secondary data.

The writer uses a method of data collection in the form of textual data collection that focuses on close reading to analyze in detail the character, anxiety and defense mechanism of Lara Jean from Jenny Han's *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*. Textual data collection is the analysis of a text that "...make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of the text" (McKee, 2003). Textual data collection is not merely copying sentences from books, but also attempting to find the most reasonable interpretation of the theory that is used.

In applying data collection through textual data collection, the writer uses the close reading method because it requires careful analysis down to the smallest details in the text from the collected quotations. According to Brummet, close reading is "the mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding of its meanings" (2019). Through this quote, Brummett wants to convey that close reading requires readers to pay attention to every word of the text through a specific theoretical framework.

It can be seen that the writer analyzed this problem using psychological theory by Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud (1959), which covers anxiety, and defense mechanism of Lara Jean's love relationship in *To All The Boys I've Loved Before* by Jenny Han. This article proves that Lara Jean, a shy girl who has never been in a relationship, experiences various forms of anxiety and uses specific defense mechanisms to cope with her emotional distress. She eventually deals directly with her complicated love relationship because her love letters to all the boys she likes are spread to them.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lara Jean is portrayed as having a physical appearance more similar to her Korean mother than to her American father. She is the main character because in this novel, the story always revolves around her feelings and decisions. The story in this novel focuses on the conflict of her love letters being spread to all the boys she likes, and all the important scenes always happen through her. Her relationships with John Ambrose, Kenny, Lucas, and especially Josh and Peter, will turn Lara Jean's life upside down.

From the beginning of the story, Lara Jean is portrayed by Han as an innocent and well-behaved girl. Because she was left behind by her mother who died when she was a child, Lara Jean always listens to her sister Margot's advice and does not want to cause more problems in her family if she acts badly. Han directly described Lara Jean

as an innocent and well-behaved girl through Josh's line, in which he says that Lara Jean is "...sweet, innocent girl who likes to be at home with her family" (Han, 2014). When in fact, girls in her age should already have a boyfriend and be enjoying life, especially since she lives in America, which is known for its freedom of expression.

Every love letter Lara Jean writes always conveys her true feelings towards the boys she likes. Her thoughts about these boys are written based on what she sees and feels, without knowing what the boys she likes are really like. This is especially apparent in her love letter to Peter Kavinsky, in which she one-sidedly claims that Peter has a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Peter directly addresses this judgmental attitude in the narrative: "I think you're judgey in general. That's a character flaw that you should work on. I also think you need to learn how to kick back and have fun" (Han, 2014).

Lara Jean's characterization as a shy girl is depicted through her action of writing love letters to the boys she likes. Rather than expressing her feelings directly or approaching someone she likes to be her boyfriend, Lara Jean prefers to write and keep the love letters containing all her feelings and thoughts about the boys she likes. When her letters are sent to all the boys, Lara Jean feels as if her world has been turned upside down because the letter means everything to her. She also considers her love letters to be strictly for her own personal use, not to be read by anyone else. "I'm sorry you got that letter. You were never supposed to see that. It wasn't meant for you to ever read. It was just for me" (Han, 2014). This shows that she is really a shy girl and that it is very embarrassing for her to have her love letters read by others and herself.

Han also indirectly portrays Lara Jean as a fainthearted girl and underestimated herself. Lara Jean always feels useless as a second sister, especially since Margot's departure to study abroad left her feeling quite lost and having to be relied upon by her family. "Maybe I'm not ready for it yet. Maybe I'll never be ready. Maybe even when I'm old, my sisters or my dad will have to drive me around, because that's how useless I am" (Han, 2014). This quote shows that she really underestimates herself before trying harder. In fact, Lara Jean is actually capable of acting bravely for herself.

Lara Jean is dealing with an internal conflict because she has romantic feelings for several boys, but at the same time, she is afraid to express her feelings. Since love is a feeling that arises beyond our control, her inability to express these feelings creates an inner conflict within her. Furthermore, Lara Jean has developed feelings for her own sister's boyfriend, Josh. When Margot and Josh break up, her desire emerges to make Josh hers. "I can't stop myself from thinking it: If you were mine, I would never have broken up with you, not in a million years" (Han, 2014).

Fortunately, Lara Jean is able to control her feelings because she believes in strong moral values—dating her older sister’s ex-boyfriend is simply wrong. In the end, she feels guilty and ashamed toward Margot, even going so far as to call herself “dirty” and unfaithful. “Thinking these kinds of thoughts, feeling these kinds of feelings, it’s more than disloyal. I know that. It’s downright traitorous. It makes my soul feel dirty.” (Han, 2014).

To cope with her unspoken feelings of love, Lara Jean chooses to express her love in a safer way, by writing love letters and keeping them in a hat box in her room. “When I’m done, I put the letter in my diary instead of in my hat box. I have a feeling I’m not done—done yet, that there’s still more I need to say, I just haven’t thought of it yet.” (Han, 2014). This action seeks a safe path so that Lara Jean remains safe and her feelings can continue to be expressed.

When her love letters spread to the boys she likes, Lara Jean is suddenly faced with a huge problem. Her love letters are never meant to reach those boys, especially Josh, the boyfriend of her sister. Lara Jean, trying to protect herself from Josh, who keeps chasing her for answers, follows her instincts and suddenly pulls Peter—who just walks by—in for a kiss, just to convince Josh. “I don’t even know how my body knows how, because I’ve for sure never touched a boy like this in my life.” (Han, 2014). Finally, after that impulsive kiss ends, Lara Jean immediately experiences a new internal conflict because, to her, bringing Peter closer and kissing him to win Josh over is a bad choice.

“If I had thought it through, I would have made up a boyfriend and not picked an actual person. More specifically, I would not have picked Peter K. He is literally the worst person I could have picked, because everybody knows him.” (Han, 2014: 88).

Lara Jean’s internal conflict grows more intense due to her decision to choose Peter as her fake boyfriend. Peter, who is comfortable with physical contact in public, makes Lara Jean feel uncomfortable. However, since she needs Peter to avoid Josh, Lara Jean eventually finds a solution by drawing up a dating contract and setting boundaries on the physical contact between her and Peter. “Peter is allowed to put a hand in Lara Jean’s back jean pocket. “But no more kissing,” (Han, 2014).

After entering into a contractual relationship with Peter, Lara Jean then experiences internal conflict with herself because she finds it difficult to acknowledge her true feelings for Peter. Her contract relationship with Peter, which is essentially a fake one, confuses her as to whether she should feel comfortable and enjoy all the attention that comes with being Peter’s fake girlfriend. At first, she feels that they were just mutually beneficial

partners. Lara Jean wants to avoid the boys who receive her love letters, and Peter wants to make his ex-girlfriend, Genevieve, jealous.

She is afraid that their relationship will end because she enjoys being Peter’s girlfriend and does not want to lose the activities they usually do together. This can be seen in the narrative: “I’m going to miss riding around in his car. It was starting to feel like home. I’m going to miss being somebody’s pretend girlfriend.” (Han, 2014). Lara Jean truly enjoys her life as Peter’s fake girlfriend, and she, who is initially unfamiliar with Peter and his friends’ life, begins to consider them as her home. This feeling of joy causes her to experience an inner conflict once again, and she is forced to hold back her feelings because she still believes that Peter will get back together with Genevieve.

Over time, Lara Jean begins to get carried away by her feelings and begins to develop real feelings for Peter. Yet, she still believes that Peter has not moved on from Gen. “But aren’t you still in love with Genevieve?” (Han, 2014). When Peter confesses his feelings and says he likes her, Lara Jean is still in conflict with herself, wondering whether she should accept Peter’s declaration of love or not. Even though she knew she also likes Peter, there is always the obstacle of Genevieve that prevents her from thinking clearly.

“I’ve always known he didn’t belong to me. But tonight he said he liked me. The thing I’ve been hoping for, he said it. So why didn’t I just tell him I liked him back when I had the chance? Because I do. I like him back.” (Han, 2014).

Meanwhile, Lara Jean has an external conflict with her contract boyfriend, Peter Kavinsky, when Peter breaks his promise to study with Lara Jean, leaving her waiting for hours. Peter chooses to prioritize Genevieve, his ex-girlfriend, even though he should no longer care about Genevieve and should try to maintain the charade of a relationship between him and Lara Jean. This makes Lara Jean angry and question Peter’s commitment to their relationship, even though it is only a contractual relationship.

Several romantic moments can be felt through Peter’s actions towards Lara Jean and vice versa. Although their relationship is based on a mutually beneficial contract, there are times when readers feel that their actions and words are sincere. Lara Jean makes lunch for Peter, teaches Peter material he does not understand, and even kisses Peter on the cheek because of his kindness to Kitty. Likewise, Peter willingly changes his car to pick up Lara Jean and Kitty, and always writes notes to Lara Jean every day. “Halfway through class he sends me a note. He’s drawn spiderwebs around the edges. It says, I’ll be on time

tomorrow. I smile as I read it.” (Han, 2014). The notes Peter writes always make Lara Jean happy, even though it is originally used as an agreement in their dating contract.

The peak of their romantic moment comes when Lara Jean confesses her feelings to Peter in the lodge’s hot tub and they finally confess their feelings to each other. Readers can feel the intimate romantic atmosphere because they are alone in the hot tub and they kiss with narration that makes readers’ hearts flutter. “Peter’s holding my face in his hands, kissing me. “Are you okay?” he whispers. His voice is different: it’s ragged and urgent and vulnerable somehow.” (Han, 2014). Moreover, this romantic and intimate kiss was the first time they did it without being forced by a contract after they both confess their love for each other, supporting a deeper romantic atmosphere.

When Lara Jean is angry at Peter for not protecting her reputation when they are accused of having sex in the hot tub at the lodge, Lara Jean does not contact Peter and Peter does not contact Lara Jean either. They argue and do not communicate after recital day at the Coveys’ house. Furthermore, she also argues with Margot because Margot knows that Josh kissed Lara Jean. This silence and emptiness are compounded by Lara Jean hoping for a snowstorm, as if it mirrors her own feelings of not wanting to do anything. “OUTSIDE MY WINDOW, SNOW IS falling in clumps that look like cotton. The yard is starting to look like a cotton field. I hope it snows all day and all night. I hope it’s a blizzard.” (Han, 2014). The silent and empty atmosphere of this narrative reflects reality, because almost all humans who get problems in their lives will feel like they do not want to do anything.

After the argument, Lara Jean begins to miss Peter and ponders a lot because she hopes Peter will contact her. Readers can also feel the atmosphere of silence and emptiness when Peter does not appear together with Lara Jean because part of the novel describes Lara Jean and Peter’s relationship. The author describes this silence and emptiness through narration: “I don’t know! Maybe I miss someone.” “You miss Peter? Or Josh?” I hesitate. “Peter.” Despite everything, Peter. “So call him.” “I can’t.” (Han, 2014). In this narrative, Lara Jean cannot even do anything when she misses Peter, yet she is hindered by her arrogance and emotions. She is so angry that her anger ends up turning into emptiness.

Lara Jean’s Anxiety in Her Love Relationship

Anxiety is a psychological response that arises from the accumulation of excitation (or libido) that cannot be released. Freud et al. define anxiety as “a libidinal impulse which has its origin in the unconscious and is inhibited by the preconscious” (1959). They also emphasize that

anxiety is “a reaction to a situation of danger” (Freud et al., 1959). The reaction is to a dangerous situation, where emotions signal a threat. Anxiety often occurs as a result of psychological repression, where libidinal urges from the unconscious are blocked by the preconscious.

Freud divides anxiety into three types, namely realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. Realistic anxiety is “anxiety about a known danger” (Freud et al., 1959). Realistic anxiety is related to external and recognized dangers. For example, when an individual feels anxious because of a real reason, such as fear of school exams. The individual recognizes the cause of this form of anxiety.

Neurotic anxiety is “anxiety about an unknown danger” (Freud et al., 1959). Neurotic anxiety related to internal dangers that have not been consciously identified by the individual. For example, when an individual suddenly becomes worried that something bad might happen even though there is no apparent danger. This anxiety occurs without the individual knowing the exact reason.

Meanwhile, moral anxiety is a form of anxiety that perceives a threat from internal norms or values emphasized by the superego, such as guilt or fear of moral transgression. Freud et al. compare moral anxiety to how “the father has become depersonalized in the shape of the super-ego, so has the fear of castration at his hands” (1959).

Realistic Anxiety

Lara Jean experiences anxiety for which she can recognize where it comes from. The source is real and identifiable to her. The realistic anxiety she experiences is caused by the sudden pressure and changes in her life.

The first example of the pressure and life changes that she experiences is closely related to the love letters she writes. Lara Jean’s life, which is once very peaceful without any boys in it, suddenly becomes one where she is pursued by the boys to whom she has written love letters.

Lara Jean is terrified to think of the worst-case scenario if her letter falls into the hands of the other boys, because suddenly her letter is in Peter’s hands. “What if . . . what if my other letters somehow got sent too? To John Ambrose McClaren. Kenny from camp. Lucas Krapf. Josh. Oh my God, Josh.” (Han, 2014). This quote becomes realistic anxiety because she knows the external danger that is coming, which is caused by all the love letters she writes. And sure enough, her letters, which become an external threat to her anxiety, are sent to everyone, including Josh. “It got sent to me in the mail.” Josh jams his hands into his pockets. “When did you write this?” (Han, 2014). The love letter she writes becomes the cause of her complicated love relationship, because she is forced

to choose to have a fake relationship with Peter to avoid Josh.

The second example is the pressure from the people's perspective who see her with Peter. Peter is a handsome boy who is very famous, has many friends, and everyone at school knows Peter Kavinsky. Meanwhile, Lara Jean is just an ordinary girl who focuses on school and only befriends Chris and a few others. If she walks with Peter, what will people think? Lara Jean is worried about the negative comments from people who will see her walking with Peter. "What people will say when they see me walking down the hall with Peter Kavinsky." (Han, 2014). Her anxiety about other people's opinions made her hold back her feelings and actions towards Peter, especially in public. As a result, during the first week of their relationship, it is difficult for them to develop their relationship and it still feels forced and unnatural.

The last example is pressure from Peter's ex-girlfriend, Genevieve. Gen, who has dated Peter for a long time, becomes an influential person in Peter's life, and everyone at their school knows about it. Also, Genevieve was a beautiful, popular girl who is many friends everywhere, in contrast to Lara Jean, who is very innocent. This can be seen in the following two quotes: "But you know Gen's gonna come after you, right? They may be broken up, but she still thinks she owns his ass." My stomach lurches. "Yeah. I know. I'm scared, Chris." (Han, 2014) and "Hello, I just got through explaining to you how Gen will kill any girl that goes near you!" (Han, 2014). Her anxiety towards Genevieve's pressure makes Lara Jean constantly compare herself to Genevieve. She becomes afraid to act like a real girlfriend to Peter, and when discussing her relationship with Peter, Lara Jean always brings up Genevieve, who is like a shadow in their relationship.

When she has a problem with Peter—who turns out to meet Genevieve even though he promises to study with Lara Jean—she is once again faced with the fear that Peter will always prioritize Genevieve over her, since she is just a contract girlfriend. "And really, what's the whole point of this charade if he's just going to keep going back to her anyway? What's even in it for me anymore?" (Han, 2014). Genevieve always ends up being a roadblock in their relationship, because Peter is still helping Genevieve, who needs him, while Lara Jean does not dare to do anything.

The pressure and changes in her life that cause Lara Jean to experience this anxiety result in her love relationship with Peter becoming unnatural, full of suspicion and insecurity.

Neurotic Anxiety

Lara Jean's neurotic anxiety is caused by internal conflicts within herself that she is not aware of. An example of this

is her inner conflict when she always afraid to start a love relationship with someone, even though nothing bad happens if she approaches the boy she likes. This is evident in Peter's annoyed words to Lara Jean in the narrative:

"You only like guys you don't have a shot with, because you're scared. What are you so scared of?"
[...] "I'm not scared of anything."
"The hell you're not. You'd rather make up a fantasy version of somebody in your head than be with a real person." (Han, 2014, p. 311-312).

This dialogue between her and Peter shows that her fear of starting a love relationship is unconsciously destroying her own love life. Her relationship with Peter remains stuck if Lara Jean does not dare to fight her fears, which should not be fear.

Lara Jean refuses to accept this reality and says that she is not afraid of anything, even though she does not realize that if she is not afraid to start a love relationship, all those love letters might not exist. And maybe she is not single all this time if she is just a little bit braver.

Moral Anxiety

Threats from the Moral Standards

Lara Jean experiences moral anxiety due to the tension between her desires and her internal moral standards, which leads her to be haunted by inner conflict. An example is when Lara Jean falls in love with Margot's boyfriend, Josh. Even though Lara Jean does not approach Josh and only pours her feelings into love letters that she keeps secretly in her hat box, for her, liking her sister's boyfriend is a huge betrayal of her family. "I'm a betrayer of the worst kind, because I'm betraying my own sister, and there's no greater betrayal than that." (Han, 2014).

Lara Jean feels embarrassed and panicked because the letter has been sent to Josh, and she does not want to hurt Margot's feelings. She even makes sure Josh will not tell Margot about the letter. "Do you swear? On your life?" If Margot was to ever find out . . . I would want to die" (Han, 2014)

The moral anxiety caused by the threat of her moral standards makes her afraid to love Josh, even after he breaks up with Margot. This anxiety causes her to be haunted by feelings of guilt and ruins her relationship with Josh.

Social Norm Pressure

The social environment of Lara Jean's school and family causes moral anxiety in Lara Jean. For example, when she is suddenly accused by Genevieve of having sex with Peter

in the hot tub at the lodge during the ski trip. This triggers everyone to gossip about Peter and Lara Jean. Genevieve exaggerated statement that the two of them were disgusting because there was “stuff” from them that might have mixed in the hot tub triggers Lara Jean’s fear, as she has never experienced anything like this before.

“I’m sorry, but I think it’s absolutely disgusting. I mean, sex in a hot tub—a public hot tub—is just . . .” She shudders. “God only knows what kind of stuff is floating around in there now. Families use that hot tub, Lara Jean. There could be a family in there right now.” (Han, 2014).

The social norm pressure experienced by Lara Jean causes her relationship with Peter to suffer and they stop communicating altogether because she feels dirty. She finds it difficult to enjoy her relationship with Peter as a good relationship again.

Moreover, her father and sister believe she has had sex, even though Lara Jean had not done so at all. They only kissed. But because the story that is spread is exaggerated and does not match the facts, she feels very embarrassed and afraid because her family judges her morals to be that bad. “It’s bad enough for strangers to think the worst of me, but I never thought my sister and dad would believe it.” (Han, 2014). Gossip from school friends and judgment from Lara Jean’s family made her life, which should have been happy because she is experiencing a sweet teenage romance for the first time, become a source of fear and humiliation.

Lara Jean’s Defense Mechanisms in Her Love Relationship

Lara Jean uses defense mechanisms such as projection, denial, and displacement as part of protecting herself from anxiety in her love relationship as explained in the previous section. Without waiting for advice or guidance from Margot, Lara Jean learns to protect herself and makes these defense mechanisms the starting point of her maturity.

Defense mechanisms are ways used to deal with conflicts or threats arising from instinctual drives that are painful or unbearable. The aim is to protect an individual from excessive pain, anxiety, or psychological distress. Anna Freud emphasizes that “defense mechanisms are brought into operation against the instincts, with all the familiar results in the formation of neuroses and neurotic characteristics” (1966).

Although there are many ways people use to protect themselves through defense mechanisms, in this article the writer focuses on the types of defense mechanisms most frequently used by the main character. The mechanisms

discussed include projection, denial, and displacement. These three mechanisms are described in more detail in the following paragraphs.

First, projection is an action taken to shift unacceptable desires to other people. Anna Freud describes that “the effect of the mechanism of projection is to break the connection between the ideational representatives of dangerous instinctual impulses and the ego” (1966). In other words, this mechanism frees a person from feelings of guilt because those negative impulses seem to come from someone else.

Second, denial is a form of refusal to acknowledge a threatening or painful reality. Denial based on “the fantasy of the reversal of the real facts into their opposite, is employed in situations in which it is impossible to escape some painful external impression.” (Freud, 1966). This quote shows that an individual will deny painful facts and creates an opposing reality to protect their mental.

Finally, displacement is a form of self-protection by transferring emotions to other objects that are considered less threatening. Through displacement “prohibited forms of gratification are exchanged for other modes of enjoyment” (Freud, 1966). Therefore, those emotions do not actually disappear but are simply being released through alternative methods that are considered safer.

Projection

Lara Jean uses the defense mechanism of projection when she experiences realistic anxiety. This realistic anxiety arises from the pressure she feels due to how people view her and Peter walking together. When Lara Jean first walks holding hands with Peter at school, she is nervous because it actually makes her uncomfortable. Her hands are sweaty, but she transfers her nervousness by blaming Peter’s warm hands for making her sweat. “At one point I try to let go of his hand, because mine is starting to feel sweaty, but he tightens his grip. “Your hand is too hot,” I hiss. Through clenched teeth he says, “No, your hand is.” (Han, 2014).

By transferring her nervousness, reflected in her sweaty, hot hands, to Peter, Lara Jean is able to speak and behave normally in front of Peter and everyone who sees them at school. After successfully releasing Peter’s hand with the excuse that it is “hot” she can at least feel calmer and less threatened. If she does not lie by saying that Peter’s hand is hot, Lara Jean will feel so embarrassed that she might have run away from the place.

In addition, the realistic anxiety arising because of the pressure from Peter’s ex-girlfriend, Genevieve, causes Lara Jean to use projection. She accuses Peter of still being in love with Genevieve, even though Peter has clearly said that he likes Lara Jean. She projects her own fear that she

has truly fallen in love with Peter and that Peter will choose Genevieve over her.

"But aren't you still in love with Genevieve?"

Peter frowns.

"Why are you always bringing up Gen? I'm trying to talk about us, and all you want to do is talk about her.

Yeah, Gen and I have history. I'm always going to care about her." He shrugs. "But now . . . I like you." (Han, 2014: 310).

Lara Jean, who is just an ordinary girl and not as popular as Genevieve, always feels inferior to Genevieve, who is very popular at her school. Lara Jean uses this projection to hide her feelings for Peter, who has been her fake boyfriend from the start because she wants to make Genevieve jealous. If she does not mention Genevieve in Peter's confession of love, Peter might just be pretending, and she will be heartbroken because she truly loves Peter.

Denial

Lara Jean uses denial as a way to reject the facts about herself. She experiences denial when she faces realistic, moral, and neurotic anxiety. This defense mechanism is the method she most frequently uses to cope with the threat caused by her anxiety. First, realistic anxiety. The appearance of this anxiety comes from her life suddenly changing due to her love letters being spread around, which ultimately forces Lara Jean to make Peter her fake boyfriend to avoid Josh. As a result, her relationship with Josh feels awkward and distant. Josh senses this, but Lara Jean feels that everything is fine.

Lara Jean denies Josh's feelings that their relationship has grown distant and that they no longer talked or hung out like they used to. In fact, their relationship has indeed grown distant because Josh and Margot have broken up and Lara Jean's letter has been sent to Josh. "I want to say something to you, but I feel weird bringing it up. Which is also weird, because we've always been able to talk to each other." "We can still talk to each other," I say. "Nothing's changed." (Han, 2014).

Lara Jean's denial anticipates the future of her relationship with Josh so that it can continue to run smoothly. She does not need to feel guilty all the time by clinging to the idea that their friendship is still the same as before. If she admits that their relationship has really changed and become awkward, distance will surely occur and her whole family, especially Margot, will know that something is wrong between them.

The second event concerns the appearance of moral anxiety. Because she feels uncomfortable about having feelings for her own sister's boyfriend, even after Margot and Josh break up, Lara Jean denies Peter's claim about

Josh likes her and has deliberately worn the same costume as Lara Jean on Halloween. She remains adamant that Josh is only for Margot and will get back together with Margot, even though Josh actually likes Lara Jean too. "No, he isn't. He loves my sister. He always has and he always will." (Han, 2014).

Her choice to deny that Josh likes her is made so that she does not feel guilty because her sister's ex-boyfriend should not like her, even though Lara Jean is the one who likes Josh first. If she accepts the truth that Peter tells her, things will get even more complicated. The love triangle between her, Josh, and Margot. The choice between love and family is one she can never make. This will also hurt both Margot and Josh.

Neurotic anxiety is also the reason Lara Jean uses defense mechanisms. She does not realize that all this time she is afraid to try starting a love relationship and always denies the fact that someone likes her. Others have noticed this, especially Peter and Josh. The first incident is when Lara Jean denies her own feelings for Peter. Josh says that Lara Jean looks the same as the other girls around Peter, even though she does change when she is around Peter and has already shown signs that she is also falling in love with him.

"You act different around Kavinsky. Did you know that?"

[...] "You don't act like you. You act like . . . like how all girls act around him. That's not you, Lara Jean." Annoyed, I say, "I act the same as I always do. What would you know about it, Josh? You've barely ever even been around us." (Han, 2014: 275).

To maintain her image as an ordinary girl who is not interested in popular boys like Peter, Lara Jean denies what Josh says. If she is honest with Josh and tells him that she has also changed like the other girls who like Peter, she will indirectly admit her feelings for Peter without considering that Peter is still involved with Genevieve.

When Peter confesses his love to Lara Jean, she accuses him of lying and says he must still be in love with Genevieve. Offended by Lara Jean's words, Peter then says, "You only like guys you don't have a shot with, because you're scared. What are you so scared of?" (Han, 2014). But Lara Jean actually denies Peter's statement by saying "I'm not scared of anything." (Han, 2014). She does not feel afraid of anything, even though, in reality, Lara Jean is actually afraid of being in a love relationship, as shown by the fact that she has never dated anyone and only fantasizes about writing love letters that she never sends to the boys she likes.

Even when she already confesses her feelings to Peter in the hot tub during the school ski trip, when they

have a fight, Lara Jean again denies her own feelings that she is deeply in love with Peter but is too scared to make up with him. "Daddy lifts my chin and wipes the tears off my face. "You must really like Peter, huh?" "No," I sob. "Maybe. I don't know." (Han, 2014).

The shame and fear of being judged harshly for truly loving someone for the first time leaves Lara Jean confused about her feelings and denying her sincere love for Peter. If she says "Yes" to her father, she has to fully acknowledge that her greatest sadness is caused by Peter, and her father will surely try to get her to fix her relationship with Peter, while at that time Lara Jean is still enveloped in emotion that does not want to contact Peter before Peter contacts her first.

Displacement

Lara Jean uses a defense mechanism called displacement when she experiences realistic anxiety. She transfers or vents her emotions onto something she feels is a safe target. First, she eats a lot of ice cream as a way to cope with her stress over losing her hat box and her letters being spread to all the boys she likes. "We hang up and I make myself an ice cream sundae right in the carton: chocolate sauce, whipped cream, chopped nuts. [...] I feed it to myself like medicine, until I've eaten the whole thing, every last bite." (Han, 2014).

By transferring her emotions to sweet foods, namely ice cream, and eating it excessively, Lara Jean can at least improve her mood and calm herself down so she does not experience excessive anxiety. She can also temporarily forget about her lost hat box. If she does not eat ice cream, Lara Jean will definitely be overwhelmed and severely stressed, or even cry in front of her family.

Lastly, she expresses her frustration with Peter for breaking his promise to study together. She releases her emotions on Josh by asking him to go to school, acting annoyed and making Josh wonder what is wrong. It is as if she involves Josh as a way to get revenge on Peter.

The next morning, I wake up still mad. I call Josh to ask him for a ride to school. [...]

Josh is looking at me with suspicious eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

He doesn't believe me, I can tell. "Did you and Kavinsky have a fight?"

"No." (Han, 2014: 216-217).

Lara Jean does not want to get into a fight with Peter and takes her emotions out on Josh instead. She does this so that her morning will not start with an argument with Peter in his car. If she does not transfer her emotions to Josh, she will have to be honest about her hurt feelings

because Peter breaks their promise and chooses to meet Genevieve instead. This will definitely affect their contractual relationship, which should not be influenced by personal feelings.

CONCLUSION

In the journey of love, humans often face complex dynamic situations. Love can run smoothly and be enjoyable, but in certain situations it can cause conflict and emotional pressure when making decisions. This is the same with Lara Jean, the main character from the novel *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*, who experiences various conflicts related to her love life, both internal conflicts with herself and external conflicts with others, specifically Peter, Josh, and Margot. Lara Jean, who experiences various events that have never happened to her before her letters are spread, has to face them like any normal human being and no longer hide behind her fears.

When experiencing problems in her love relationship that make her feel threatened, Lara Jean experiences anxiety in the form of realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. This problem then also causes her to protect herself with defense mechanisms in the form of projection, denial, and displacement. Since Lara Jean can no longer rely on her older sister Margot for help, she eventually tries to protect herself on her own. At first, this method of self-protection is indeed effective in reducing her stress and anxiety. But it does not last long, because basically humans must face problems with courage, step out of their comfort zones, and act like adults.

Over time, her defense mechanisms shift from a form of protection to character development that marks the maturity of Lara Jean, as by the end of the novel she shows her bravery in reaching out to Peter and writing him a real love letter. Therefore, this article shows that anxiety is a signal of conflict threats, defense mechanisms are a temporary solution that then leads to maturity when she dares to face problems instead of hiding behind defenses.

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