

## Low Level of Defense Mechanism Portrayed on Joe Goldberg in *The First Season of You Series*

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### Abstract

Joe as the main character is in the spotlight of the You series audience because of his very brutal actions. When the writer viewed it from the perspective of a low-level defense mechanism, this kind of brutality assuredly could have formed. The method used in analyzing this article is library research through primary data, which is by the You series itself, and secondary data from previous research connected with this article. The result of this research is that the influence of Joe's bad past on his family is the origin of the low-level defense mechanism that occurs in Joe causing him to commit physical aggression toward people around Beck by killing them. Hence, it can be concluded that Joe's increased anxiety can make Joe's bad ego affect more and physical aggression occurs.

**Keywords:** You Series; Joe Goldberg; Defense Mechanism; Anxiety; Ego; Physical Agression

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### 1. Introduction

There are over 8 billion people on earth according to the statement from the World Population Prospects 2022 (Rizati, 2022). This proves that every social creature has its own way of dealing with a problem. When applying it to literary works, a character that has conflict is the main aspect of a running story because, without it, a story will not be formed.

Likewise with the series entitled *You* premiered in 2018 and was directed by Greg Berlanti which tells of a character named Joe Goldberg who has love at first sight for Guinevere Beck as an aspiring writer. Startlingly, there is no one would have thought that Joe is a person who has had a big obsession with Beck since the first day they met. It was also founded on several articles that Joe is suffering from his sociopath personality disorder that affects his surroundings. Joe's meeting with Beck was originally an accident at a bookstore where Joe worked. However, because of Joe's interest in the woman, the following meetings were actually meetings that Joe had planned. He began to obsess over Beck until he stalked through that woman's privacy without her even knowing. The personality disorder that Joe experienced due to his past also influenced the extreme actions he took.

In this article, the writer aims to analyze Joe's personality which is influenced by his bad past towards his actions in the present. These actions are formed based on the past when viewed from the perspective of Karen Horney. In order to release those uncomfortable feelings, Joe kills people around Beck whom he thinks to threaten his relationship with Beck.

## 2. Methods

In writing this article, the writer uses the library research method to make it easier to find the data needed. Thomas Mann stated that library research can be done through keyword searches, subject searches, looking for recent scholarly books and articles, and many more (Mann, 2021). The library research method focused on by the writer is keyword searches so that the required data is more relevant by narrowing down the search keywords. The theory used for this article can be seen through Anna Freud's Defense Mechanisms theory towards Joe Goldberg as the main character of the *You* series by library research to minimize fault of data or the data used is not reliable. According to Nazir (1988:41-53), Library research is a method of analyzing a data source by analyzing or reviewing journals, websites, books, theses, or various kinds of data that can help the writer solve problems on the topics discussed. Regarding these explanations, the author wants to use reliable and valid data so that the results of the article are no longer in doubt (Sari, 2020). The primary data that will be used in this article is the *You* series directed by Greg Berlanti.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. *Intrinsic Approaches*

#### 3.1.1. Character

Stanton claims that a character is made up of interests, wants, emotions, and moral beliefs. He continues by saying that most stories include a primary character who is important to the development of the story. In this article, the writer would elaborate on Joe as the main character of the story who plays an important role. A character is also described as the collection of mental and ethical characteristics identifying and frequently unique to a person, group, or country. According to Bruce, nature and upbringing determine character. A character can be distinguished by its human nature with others. It must be structured into the framework of a truly moral person and disciplined in order to generate character (Mckay, 2020).

### 3.2. *Extrinsic Approaches*

#### 3.2.1 Defense Mechanism

Defense Mechanism is a part of the personality theory from Freud which proclaims that a person's

mind consists of the id, ego, and superego. The concept of defense mechanism comes from Sigmund Freud as well as his daughter, Anna Freud. The defense mechanism is one of several ways for people to defend themselves from bad experiences including pain, abusive memories, and others. Defense mechanisms are not always detrimental and untrue, but can also be used as a form to make someone more relieved of the bad things they are experiencing. According to Horney, a multiplicity of circumstances could rise to basic anxiety (and thus neurosis). She asserted that childhood circumstances frequently result in neuroticism, including lack of warmth and parental arguments or hostility in the home (Cherry, 2022).

In general, the defense mechanism has two types of reactions, the first type is the healthier defense mechanism which is used by more mature and transcending individuals. The other type is the low-level defense mechanism that leads to injury (O'Connell, 2004).

### 3.2.2 Kinds of Defense Mechanism

There are two concepts of defense mechanisms based on the impact when someone does it. The first one is a low-level defense mechanism. A low-level defense mechanism will have an impact on harm to someone or even himself (Voyer, 2005). Usually, the signal from a low-level defense mechanism is characterized by behavior that involves other people venting what they feel. The impact of this defense mechanism is also very dangerous because it can lead to injury or even death. Low-level defense mechanisms include physical and verbal aggression, denial, autistic fantasy, projective identification, rationalization, reaction formation, omnipotence, devaluation, and displacement.

The second concept of defense mechanism is the healthier defense mechanism which is often called a higher-order defense reaction. This kind of defense mechanism believes that people try to wreek their bad moments or experiences through more mature activity. The healthier defense mechanisms include self-observation, suppression, affiliation, Altruism, Humor, Sublimation, Anticipation, and Self-Assertion.

## 4. Discussions

Every time we look at the psychological side of the main character, assuredly the first thing that can be seen is the character's past experience. In the series *You*, Joe has been a victim of a broken home since he was a child which causes anxiety to arise in Joe. Then based on Karen Horney's theory, excessive anxiety, because it is caused by the past, can cause neurosis so that a person can behave with negative

obsession. Joe, who experienced this, then applied it to the person he liked, Beck, a woman he met at the bookstore. Joe did not interest in Beck as common people do, Joe secretly stalked Beck by passing her privacy and even killing people around Beck. Joe did this in order to satisfy his inner ego which is formed by a low-level defense mechanism, which is physical aggression through killing.

In most psychological thriller films, the character becomes an aspect that is highlighted because the character will determine the story. Joe Goldberg is the main character in the series *You*, as evidenced by his frequent monologues to the audience. Almost the entire point of view of this story is seen through the perspective of Joe who is very obsessed with Beck. Joe's role in this series is one of the unique selling points because the audience can see an in-depth perspective of Joe and the thoughts he does before or after making his decision.

In the first season, Joe still introduces his sociopathic side to those around him. When he feels like having Beck, Joe begins to feel intimidated by other people who also want to have Beck. This symbolizes that people around Beck can become easy targets for Joe. In addition, Joe always believes that he is the only person who is the best for Beck. This is done in an effort to deny his anxiety if one day he loses Beck. However, because the denial no longer worked, Joe began to kill people around Beck. This sentence showed that Joe denied his thought that Beck already belongs to another man when he saw Beck get along with her boyfriend.

*Joe: "I'm not a maybe. I'm the one."*

In this incident, the writer will use the theory of Neurosis from Karen Horney which is the foundation of interpersonal relationships. This was also felt by Joe when he was a child when his parents always fought so he often felt uncomfortable at home. Joe then unconsciously experienced excessive anxiety in the form of neurosis.



**Figure 1.** Old Joe heard a fight between his parents

Despite the fight between his parents, Joe tried to erase the image of his mother who left him with his abusive father. This influenced how Joe's personality can shape into someone who experiences negative obsessions as an adult or has excessive anxiety about something. These negative thoughts can dominate his thoughts to the point where he struggles to cope with daily problems, which is a neurotic behavior.

Freud compared psychoanalysis to an iceberg. He compared the unconscious to a volcano as all the painful feelings and sensations lurk there like swirling magma that occasionally erupts as several psychodynamic. One of them is called murderous thoughts and defense mechanisms. If we applied Freud's theory to Joe's situation, his psychodynamic happened because of the traumatic feelings experienced by Joe in the past. This feeling overflowed into sadness, jealousy, and regression which then reached its peak, and comes to anger and hatred. Seeing Peaches, Beck's best friend, who did not seem to believe in Joe as Beck's lover has made Joe's ego affect his id even more. In Joe's mind, he had to get rid of Peaches because she was an obstacle to his relationship with Beck. When Joe's ego began to overshadow due to excessive anxiety towards his neurotic behavior, he thought of something that was quite extreme, which is to kill Peaches. Joe also began to feel threatened when Beck found a box belonging to Joe that contained human teeth. Beck became suspicious of him which made Joe's consciousness, which initially loved Beck, slowly changed for the sake of his ego's command.

When Joe experienced excessive anxiety about losing Beck, he began to lose his mind, which affected the results of his defense mechanism. Anxiety experienced by Joe occurs when the needs of the id conflict with the needs of the ego which results in the emergence of self-deception to avoid feelings of discomfort in a person. In this case, Joe tried to avoid this feeling of discomfort through low-level defense mechanisms, one of which is physical aggression.



**Figures 2 and 3.** Joe arrested Beck inside his books glass room.

Joe, who felt threatened, increased his anxiety so he formed a low-level defense mechanism by finally locking up his girlfriend, the person he loves, Beck. At this stage, Joe's deteriorating ego has completely clouded his mind so he is no longer able to act properly.



**Figure 4.** Joe killed Beck

The impact of Joe's low-level defense mechanism caused the death of Beck. Joe used his defense mechanism in the form of physical aggression to defend his threatened position and his uncomfortable condition. This initially became a beginning that Joe thought and acted would be repeated, it could happen again and again as long as Joe did not do therapy for his behavior that endangered other people.

## 5. Conclusion

Joe, who is often considered a sociopath, viewed from the perspective of the defense mechanism theory of Anna Freud turned out to have a low-level defense mechanism. This is due to the lack of a positive ego that affects him because in the past he was a person who saw his father who was abusive and his mother who left him. According to Karen Horney, the influence of this bad past can also contribute to the development of children to adulthood.

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