DEFENSE MECHANISMS OF CHLOE DAVIS TO COPE WITH ANXIETY IN STACY WILLINGHAM'S *A FLICKER IN THE DARK*: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY

THESIS

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MOTTO

"You can cling to this world for a thousand years and still be plucked out of it in a breath."

– Anthony Doerr, *Cloud Cuckoo Land*

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents and my dearest sister, my strength in every step of the way.

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Bismillahirrohmanirrohim,

I begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to Allah SWT for His blessings, guidance, and strength throughout the process of completing this thesis. I also send my peace and blessings to Prophet Muhammad SAW, whose teachings continue to guide us in life.

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Last but not least, this thesis is far from perfect, and I welcome any constructive feedback, suggestions, and discussions for its improvement. I hope that

this study will be useful for readers in the future and provide a brief reference for those interested in exploring the same topic.

Malang, 8 September 2026

The Researcher

Nilafa Nahda Ariza

ABSTRACT

Ariza, Nilafa Nahda (2026). *Defense Mechanisms of Chloe Davis to Cope with Anxiety in Stacy Willingham's A Flicker In The Dark: A Psychoanalytic Study.* Undergraduate Thesis. Department of English Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Advisor: Dr. Syamsudin, M. Hum.

Keywords: *A Flicker in the Dark, anxiety, defense mechanisms, Freudian psychoanalytic*

Anxiety is an emotional state that almost everyone experiences at some point in their lives. However, for some individuals, anxiety can become excessive and difficult to manage, affecting their daily lives. Anxiety can come from several situations, such as actual danger, internal factors, and social issues like stigma. To deal with anxiety, individuals may use unconscious psychological strategies, namely defense mechanisms. Literature also expresses these psychological experiences through characters' thoughts, emotions, and actions. This study looks at the types of anxiety experienced by the main character in *A Flicker in the Dark,* Chloe Davis, and the use of defense mechanisms. The study adopts a literary criticism method with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as its basis, specifically the concept of anxiety and defense mechanisms. The data are selected dialogues, inner monologues, and narrative descriptions in the novel. The data were gathered using close reading and note-taking and were analyzed in the form of classification and interpretation according to Freud's theoretical concepts. The results offer evidence of three kinds of anxiety: realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety, in the case of Chloe. Realistic anxiety is due to real threats in her environment, while neurotic anxiety is reflected in her fear of possible failures and situations beyond her control. Meanwhile, moral anxiety is due to inaction as it conflicts with internalized moral standards. In addition, four defense mechanisms are noted in Chloe, namely, intellectualization, rationalization, denial, and reaction formation. Her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during anxious or psychologically distressing situations are indicative of these mechanisms.

مستخلص البث

أريزا، ني لافا نهضة (2026). آلية دفاع كلوي ديفيس في مواجهة القلق في رواية ستايسي جيلينغهام "وميض في الظلام": دراسة تحليلية نفسية. رسالة بكالوريوس. برنامج دراسة الأدب الإنجليزي، كلية العلوم الإنسانية، جامعة مولانا مالك إبراهيم الإسلامية الحكومية بمالانج. المشرف: د. شمس الدين، ماجستير في العلوم الإنسانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: وميض في الظلام، القلق، آليات الدفاع، التحليل النفسي لفرويد

القلق حالة عاطفية يمر بها معظم الناس في مرحلة ما من حياتهم. مع ذلك، قد يصبح القلق لدى بعض الأفراد مفرطًا ويصعب السيطرة عليه، مما يؤثر على حياتهم اليومية. ينشأ القلق من مواقف مختلفة، كالخطر الحقيقي، أو عوامل داخلية، أو قضايا اجتماعية كوصمة العار. ولمواجهة القلق، قد يلجأ الشخص إلى استراتيجيات نفسية لا شعورية تُعرف بآليات الدفاع. في الأعمال الأدبية، غالبًا ما تنعكس هذه التجارب النفسية في أفكار الشخصيات ومشاعرها وتصرفاتها. تتناول هذه الدراسة أنواع القلق التي تعاني منها الشخصية الرئيسية في رواية "وميض في الظلام"، كلوي ديفيس، واستخدامها لآليات الدفاع. يستخدم هذا البحث مناهج النقد الأدبي القائمة على نظرية التحليل النفسي لسيغموند فرويد وتحديدًا مفهومي القلق وآليات الدفاع. تتكون البيانات المستخدمة من حوارات، ومناجاة داخلية، ووصف سردي مُختار من الرواية. جُمعت البيانات من خلال القراءة المتأنية وتدوين الملاحظات، ثم حُللت بتصنيفها وتفسيرها بناءً على مفاهيم فرويد النظرية. تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى ثلاثة أنواع من القلق تعاني منها كلوي: القلق الواقعي، والقلق العصابي، والقلق الأخلاقي. ينشأ القلق الواقعي من التهديدات الحقيقية في بيئتها، بينما ينعكس القلق العصابي في خوفها من الفشل المحتمل والمواقف الخارجة عن سيطرتها. أما القلق الأخلاقي فينشأ من أفعال أو امتناع عن أفعال تتعارض مع المعايير الأخلاقية الداخلية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، وُجد أن كلوي تستخدم أربع آليات دفاعية: التبرير العقلاني، والترشيد، والإنكار، وتكوين رد الفعل. وتُعدّ أفكار كلوي ومشاعرها وسلوكها في المواقف التي تُسبب لها القلق أو التوتر النفسي مؤشراً على استخدام هذه الآليات.

ABSTRAK

Ariza, Nilafa Nahda (2026). *Mekanisme Pertahanan Chloe Davis dalam Menghadapi Kecemasan dalam Novel A FLICKER IN THE DARK Karya Stacy Willingham: Studi Psikoanalisis.* Skripsi Sarjana. Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Fakultas Humaniora, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. Pembimbing: Dr. Syamsudin, M. Hum.

Kata Kunci: *A Flicker in the Dark, kecemasan, mekanisme pertahanan diri, psikoanalisis Freud*

Kecemasan merupakan kondisi emosional yang hampir dialami oleh setiap orang dalam hidup mereka. Namun, bagi sebagian individu, kecemasan bisa menjadi berlebihan dan sulit dikendalikan, sehingga memengaruhi kehidupan sehari-hari. Kecemasan dapat muncul dari berbagai situasi, seperti bahaya nyata, faktor internal, maupun masalah sosial seperti stigma. Untuk menghadapi kecemasan, seseorang mungkin menggunakan strategi psikologis yang tidak disadari, yang dikenal sebagai mekanisme pertahanan diri. Dalam karya sastra, pengalaman psikologis semacam ini sering kali terefleksikan melalui pikiran, emosi, dan tindakan tokoh-tokohnya. Studi ini menelaah jenis-jenis kecemasan yang dialami oleh tokoh utama dalam novel *A Flicker in the Dark*, Chloe Davis, serta penggunaan mekanisme pertahanan diri olehnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kritik sastra dengan berlandaskan pada teori psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud, khususnya konsep mengenai kecemasan dan mekanisme pertahanan diri. Data yang digunakan berupa dialog, monolog batin, dan deskripsi naratif yang dipilih dari novel tersebut. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik membaca saksama (close reading) dan pencatatan, kemudian dianalisis dengan cara mengklasifikasikan serta menafsirkannya berdasarkan konsep-konsep teoretis Freud. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya tiga jenis kecemasan yang dialami oleh Chloe: kecemasan realistis, kecemasan neurotik, dan kecemasan moral. Kecemasan realistis muncul akibat ancaman nyata di lingkungannya, sementara kecemasan neurotik tercermin dari ketakutannya terhadap kemungkinan kegagalan dan situasi di luar kendalinya. Adapun kecemasan moral muncul akibat tindakan atau kelalaian yang bertentangan dengan standar moral yang telah terinternalisasi dalam dirinya. Selain itu, ditemukan empat mekanisme pertahanan diri yang digunakan oleh Chloe, yaitu intelektualisasi, rasionalisasi, penyangkalan, dan pembentukan reaksi.Pikiran, perasaan, dan perilaku Chloe saat berada dalam situasi yang mencemaskan atau menekan secara psikologis menjadi indikasi dari mekanisme-mekanisme tersebut.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study, including the explanation for adopting the topic, theory, object, and also a brief literature review for this study. This section also discusses the problem of the study, the significance of the study, scope and limitations, and also the definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

Anxiety is an emotional state that almost everyone experiences at some point in their lives. For some, however, anxiety can become excessive and difficult to manage, to the extent that it interferes with their daily lives. According to the World Health Organization, anxiety disorders are the most prevalent mental health disorders worldwide, impacting roughly 470 million individuals in 2023. Social stigma is also recognized as a barrier to care for people with anxiety (World Health Organization, 2026). A single factor does not necessarily trigger anxiety; it can arise from real-world threats, internal pressures, or social challenges such as stigma. Merhi et al. (2024) explain that having an incarcerated parent is a traumatic experience for millions of children globally, increasing their risk of developing mental health issues. These children often encounter stigma, which can diminish social support from their surroundings, lead to rejection by peers, or even foster the assumption that they are destined to follow in their parents' footsteps. In response to events that trigger fear, shame, or a sense of insecurity, individuals employ defense mechanisms, which are psychological strategies that typically operate

outside of conscious awareness. Therefore, anxiety and ways to relieve it are inherent parts of normal human existence, seen in daily life. (Merhi et al., 2024)

This type of emotional experience is also often represented in literature by character dialogue, internal monologue, or narrative. One such example is *A Flicker in the Dark* by New York Times bestselling author Stacy Willingham, who is known for her psychological thrillers. The main character, Chloe Davis, is a psychologist whose father was arrested for the killings of several girls in his community when Chloe was twelve. Her role as the child of a perpetrator is a reality that is similar to the situation described earlier, as she has to deal with a constant stigma and with the suspicious looks of others. Numerous events cause Chloe fear, suspicion, and insecurity throughout the story, especially when young women start disappearing around her again. Threats to her safety in her surroundings, pressures and anxieties within her, and guilt and stigma from her identity all make the anxiety she has real. Chloe uses multiple defense mechanisms to deal with the anxiety, evidenced in how she thinks, speaks, and acts. As a result, *A Flicker in the Dark* is well suited to Freudian psychoanalysis. The purpose of this study is to pinpoint the specific anxiety that Chloe Davis experiences (realistic, neurotic, and moral anxiety) and the defense mechanisms that she uses.

In conducting this research, the researcher has reviewed several studies that have analyzed characters' anxiety and defense mechanisms from a psychoanalytic perspective based on Sigmund Freud in literature. Ali, Kuncara, and Rahayu (2023) identified the character Charlie in the novel *The Leap* by Jonathan Stroud as having neurotic and moral anxiety in their research. Her neurotic anxiety is expressed in

panic, hallucinations, and recollections of Max, and her moral anxiety in guilt and fear of judgment from others. The study also uncovered the use of defense mechanisms in this situation, such as displacement and denial. Another study by Syahidah and Laksono (2021) identified objective and neurotic anxieties, and five defense mechanisms, namely intellectualization, repression, denial, regression, and displacement, in *The Good Daughter* by Karin Slaughter. In Lala Bohang's *Waking Up for the First Time*, Lestari and Sari (2026) found all three types of anxiety, which are defined by Freud, along with five defense mechanisms, which are repression, denial, projection, displacement, and sublimation. These studies all show that anxiety and defense mechanisms can be studied together to provide understanding of the psychological reactions of a character. All of these research studies, however, are based on different characters and texts from the one that the present research examines. Thus, the present study aims to analyze anxieties and defence mechanisms in the novel *A Flicker in the Dark*, as they are manifested in the character Chloe Davis.

Other studies have focused more on the identification and analysis of defense mechanisms used by the characters in literary texts. In their study on the use of defense mechanisms in the novel *Lelaki Harimau* of Eka Kurniawan, Prastya et al. (2023) found that Margio used six defense mechanisms, namely repression, rationalization, displacement, projection, denial, and regression. The mechanisms were discussed in the context of Margio's experiences of domestic violence and the conflicts he encountered. Khoirunnisa and Nugroho (2023) investigated the defense mechanisms and the stress coping of the main characters in the short story

anthology *Malam Terakhir* written by Leila S. Chudori. This research found repression, rationalization, reaction formation, denial, and also self-control and escape avoidance as stress coping mechanisms. Another study by Ramadhan and Dinurriyah (2025) identified the following defense mechanisms: denial, identification, repression, and suppression, and discussed how they relate to the character's reactions to threatening experiences in *The Only One Left* by Riley Sager. These studies demonstrate the various ways in which defense mechanisms can be analyzed in literature. The basic focus of these studies, however, is on defense mechanisms or their relationship to coping with stress, rather than on types of anxiety as defined by Freud, which is a major interest in the present study. Thus, this research combines an examination of the anxiety types and defense mechanisms of the same character, Chloe Davis.

There have also been several studies examining defense mechanisms in the context of trauma, loss, and psychological distress. Mahardhika, Susanto, and Nur'Aini (2023) discuss Amir's defense mechanisms in dealing with the loss in *The Kite Runner.* The study found seven mechanisms, such as displacement, rationalization, projection, repression, regression, undoing, and denial. A study of *The Island of Missing Trees*, Kanwal, Khan, and Tabassum (2024) discusses the link between trauma and defense mechanisms in the three main characters and found defense mechanisms in each character, such as repression, suppression, and intellectualization. According to Setyo and Nugroho (2024), there are seven defense mechanisms in the movie *No Longer Human*, which are denial, projection, displacement, sublimation, reaction formation, undoing, and isolation. The study

also investigates the struggles of the protagonist to find identity, feel alienated, and to conform to society as they deal with trauma, guilt, and inner and outer conflict. These studies are then concerned with the strategies of defense used in the presence of trauma, loss, and psychological conflict, and not with anxiety as specifically described by Sigmund Freud's theory which would then lead to the use of the defense mechanisms.

Previous research has led to the study of anxiety and defence mechanisms in different literary texts, focusing on different aspects and methods. Some studies examine anxiety and defence mechanisms at the same time; others examine defence mechanisms more specifically in relation to coping with stress, trauma, or loss. Research that specifically tackles both the type of anxiety, as outlined by Sigmund Freud, and the defense mechanisms used by Chloe Davis in the novel is still limited. Hence, this study is intended to explore the psychological dimension of the study through the identification of the types of anxiety experienced by Chloe Davis and the analysis of the defense mechanisms she uses to handle the anxiety. This research will form a psychoanalytical perspective for seeking the deeper meaning of anxiety and defense mechanisms depicted in the novel A Flicker in the Dark by Stacy Willingham using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytical theory.

B. Problem of the Study

Based on the identified gap, the researcher formulates the following research questions:

1. What types of anxiety does Chloe Davis experience in *A Flicker in the Dark* by Stacy Willingham?

2. What defense mechanisms does Chloe Davis employ in *A Flicker in the Dark* by Stacy Willingham?

C. Significance of the Study

This research has two important aspects: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, this research expands the study of the psychology of literature by applying Freud's theories of anxiety and defense mechanisms and bringing them to the story of a female protagonist in a psychological thriller. The study elucidates the nature of the anxiety that the character feels, and the defense mechanisms that she uses to reduce the anxiety and make sense of the world, so that the reader can comprehend how anxiety is related to the character's psychological reactions in the story. Moreover, this study presents an insight into the study of modern literature as it shows that classical psychoanalytic theory is still applicable in analyzing works of modern literature that deal with human psychological experiences.

Practically, this study can add a new reference source for students, literature enthusiasts, and scholars who want to analyze the psychological aspect of a literary work, in this case the portrayal of anxiety in the character's thoughts, actions, and words. It also gives an example of the way in which the defense mechanisms can be identified and interpreted in a narrative context, and may assist future researchers in conducting similar analysis.

D. Scope and Limitation

This study examines the character of the protagonist, Chloe Davis, of the novel *A Flicker in the Dark* by Stacy Willingham. The analysis is confined to two aspects: the types of anxiety that Chloe experiences and the defense mechanisms she employs. The theoretical framework is based on the theories of anxiety and defense mechanisms of Freud. The data are narratives, internal monologues, and dialogues that reveal Chloe's anxiety and her psychological responses.

There are many different kinds of defense mechanisms, but this study will only discuss those that were found in the novel, such as intellectualization, rationalization, denial, and reaction formation. This study is not focused on trauma; instead, it is focused exclusively on the anxiety that the character experiences in her thoughts, actions, and speech. Also, the study does not include an analysis of plot, symbolism, or comparisons with other characters or works of literature. There is a brief mention of other characters where it is essential to the situation that Chloe experiences throughout the story. This research was undertaken on a fictional character, and the conclusions are an interpretation of the text only and not a clinical diagnosis.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. **Psychoanalysis** is a psychological approach developed by Sigmund Freud to examine how people behave through unconscious mental processes (Freud, 1927). In this study, psychoanalysis serves as the theoretical foundation for analyzing Chloe Davis's anxiety and how she copes with it through defense mechanisms.

2. **Anxiety** serves as a danger signal to the ego and is characterized by unpleasant feelings such as fear and worry (Freud, 1949). Freud explains that the ego is threatened from three directions: the external world, the drives of the id, and the demands of the superego—giving rise to three types of anxiety (Freud, 1927). These three types of anxiety are used to identify the anxiety experienced by Chloe Davis.

3. **Defense mechanisms** are unconscious psychological responses used by the ego to manage anxiety and internal conflict (Freud, 1993). In this study, the term refers to the way Chloe Davis alleviates her anxiety, as evidenced by her thoughts, behaviors, and interactions within the story.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework used as the basis for the analysis in this study, including the explanation of psychology of literature, an explanation of the psychoanalytic approach. Furthermore, this chapter also discusses anxiety, the concept of defense mechanisms and their types, which are used as an analytical framework in examining the main characters in the novel *A Flicker in the Dark.*

A. Psychology of Literature

Psychology of Literature is a method of literary analysis that uses psychological concepts and lenses to examine literary works, aiming to understand the psychological states of fictional characters. Psychology is the study of the human mind and behavior, while literature is the expression of human experience through imaginative narrative (Eagleton, 1983/1996; Zhang, 2020). The correlation between psychology and literature demonstrates that the two fields have a common area of interest, namely the study of human thoughts, emotions, and behavior. This relationship enables literary works to be interpreted not only as artistic creations but also as respresentations of human psychological experiences.

Literary works may mirror a person's psychological life, internal struggles, and emotional experiences, as René Wellek and Austin Warren (1948) suggest, illustrating the close relationship between psychology and literature. This renders literature an efficient way in investigating psychological phenomena including

inner conflict and emotional reaction. In such a way, the analysis of literary works may help to understand how literary characters reflect wider human psychological conditions.

Through the psychology of literature, the characters are considered as psychological objects, whose thoughts, emotions, and actions can be interpreted in the same way as actual people. According to Gillespie (2010), psychological criticism is concerned with the way the mental state of the characters affects the unfolding of the story. In this way, researchers are able to focus on the expression of internal conflicts in terms of narrative components, such as dialogue, actions, and inner monologues. As such, this study employs the psychology of literature approach to examine the psychological state of the main character, particularly the types of anxiety and she experiences and the defense mechanisms she employs in dealing with her anxiety.

B. Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis is a psychological theory developed by Sigmund Freud between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The focus of the theory is the function of the unconscious in human action. Freud (1927) distinguished between three parts of the human mind: the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. The id represents instinctual drives and seeks immediate satisfaction, while the ego operates according to the reality principle and mediates between the id, the superego, and external reality. The superego represents internalized moral standards and ideals.

These three parts often conflict with each other and may lead to anxiety or psychological disorder.

Freud also emphasized that human behavior is influenced not only by conscious thoughts and desires but also by unconscious impulses, fears, and memories. These unconscious processes may influence how individuals respond to situations without their being fully aware of the underlying psychological processes. In literary works, psychoanalysis can therefore be used to examine characters' thoughts, emotions, dialogue, and actions to understand the psychological processes underlying their behavior.

In this study, Freud's psychoanalytic theory serves as the theoretical foundation for examining Chloe Davis's psychological experiences in Stacy Willingham's *A Flicker in the Dark*. Specifically, Freud's concept of anxiety is used to identify the types of anxiety experienced by Chloe, while his theory of defense mechanisms is used to analyze the psychological responses she employs in dealing with her anxiety.

C. Anxiety

In Freud's psychoanalytic theory, anxiety is acrucial component. Freud (1949) claimed that anxiety has a link with danger or threat that is felt by the person. Anxiety in its essence is a warning signal, a warning that there is danger or a threat, either from the outside or from within ourselves. This signal allows the ego to react, whether by confronting the danger or by trying to ward itself against the danger.

Freud distinguished three types of anxiety: realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety.

Realistic anxiety is a type of anxiety that is due to a threat that is actually occurring or is expected to occur from the outside world. Freud (1949) says that it is an anxiety felt by a person when they consider a danger that could endanger their physical life or well-being. For instance, someone may experience realistic anxiety when facing someone who poses a genuine threat to their safety. At this level, anxiety is a signal to alert the person to the outside threat and to act appropriately.

Neurotic anxiety is linked with the fear of the ego that instinctual drives can become out of control, creating undesirable results. Freud (1949) theorized that this anxiety is because the ego sees the threat in the id's desires and fears the repercussions if it lets the id's desire take over. Whereas realistic anxiety is related to an external danger, neurotic anxiety is about the loss of control over internal instinctual demands. So this kind of anxiety is an expression of the ego's fear of the potential repercussions of impulsiveness.

Moral anxiety is the result of struggle between the ego and superego. Freud (1949) proposed that the superego is the internalization of moral values that affect the judgment of one's thoughts and actions. Moral anxiety is a feeling that occurs when the ego foresees or feels a conflict with one or more of these standards and experiences guilt, shame, or fear of moral condemnation. This form of anxiety is therefore related to the moral expectations of the person concerned, not to a concrete external danger or to the fear of losing control of instinctive drives.

From the above explanation, it can be inferred that anxiety can be due to threat or anticipation of threat from outside or from within the individual. These sources of risk can come from the outside, from instinctual needs, or from moral requirements. Understanding these distinctions helps clarify the psychological experiences represented through fictional characters. In this study, Freud's classification of anxiety is used to identify and analyze the types of anxiety experienced by Chloe Davis in Stacy Willingham's *A Flicker in the Dark*.

D. Defense Mechanisms and How They Work

One of the fundamental concepts in psychoanalysis is defense mechanisms, which help explain how the ego responds to anxiety and internal psychological conflicts. According to Freud (1949), anxiety signals a potential threat that requires the ego to take action. To manage this anxiety, the ego may employ defense mechanisms, which generally operate unconsciously and help reduce psychological tension. These mechanisms influence how individuals respond to uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and situations.

Anna Freud further developed the concept of defense mechanisms by describing and classifying different forms of these psychological responses. She explained that defense mechanisms are not necessarily signs of psychological abnormality but can function as ways for the ego to manage anxiety and adapt to difficult circumstances (Freud, 1993). However, excessive reliance on certain defense mechanisms may interfere with an individual's ability to respond to situations effectively. Therefore, understanding these mechanisms can help explain how individuals manage psychological conflicts and emotional distress.

In literary studies, defense mechanisms can be identified through characters' thoughts, dialogue, emotions, and actions within a narrative. These elements can reveal how characters respond to anxiety and internal conflicts, even when they are not fully aware of the psychological processes influencing their behavior. In Stacy Willingham's *A Flicker in the Dark*, Chloe Davis experiences anxiety that can be examined through Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Therefore, this study focuses on identifying and analyzing the defense mechanisms employed by Chloe Davis in dealing with the anxiety she experiences.

1. Intellectualization

The concept of intellectualization originated in Sigmund Freud's theory of ego defense mechanisms. Although Freud did not explicitly use the term *intellectualization,* the idea is found in the concept of the *Isolation of Affect,* which he described in his work *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1949). In this context, Freud stated that the ego can separate the cognitive components of an experience, such as ideas, facts, and memories, from its affective components, namely feelings and anxiety. This separation allows an individual to discuss or recall an uncomfortable situation without experiencing the intense emotions associated with it. It serves as a way for the ego to distance itself from potential anxiety, emotional experiences, etc.

This was later elaborated and formalized by Anna Freud (1993) with the term *intellectualization*. This concept is manifested in a person's attempts to overcome emotional stress or conflict by redirecting their focus towards thinking,

reasoning, and intellectual analysis. The person uses a rational approach by making the issue impersonal, abstract, or academic in order to avoid dealing with the emotional content of the issue. So, intellectualization can help people to emotionally detach themselves from a stressful situation by concentrating on the cognitive aspects.

The mechanism of intellectualization operates by replacing the emotional experience with the act of thinking about the thoughts themselves. Sometimes people try to figure out why, how, what if, how come, or what step things are following, in other words, they try to understand what is happening in a situation, instead of thinking about how they feel about the situation. This can help the ego to manage emotional distress by making an uncomfortable or scary experience known and analyzable. That is, the person is not completely removing the source of anxiety but rather providing some separation between the intellectual and emotional component .

For this study, intellectualization refers to Chloe Davis' reaction to an anxiety provoking situation, in this case the use of reason and analysis of that situation. When Chloe asks why, thinks about a different way to do things or asks to understand what people are doing, instead of paying attention to her fear, this mechanism is visible. Therefore, if there is a tendency to experience emotional distress by using thought processes and reasoning, giving emotional distance from the emotional experience, it is considered intellectualization and it can be regarded as a response.

2. Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism that helps the ego deal with reality or experiences that create psychological stress. In Anna Freud's view of the ego's psychological mechanism, this refers to the way the ego tries to avoid or deny reality instead of facing it (Freud, 1993). Denial helps the person keep their psychological state more tolerable; if they face reality, they might experience anxiety or emotional distress. Therefore, denial becomes the strategy of the individual's ego to protect him or herself from the psychological consequences of facing the threatening reality.

Anna Freud (1993) explained the types of denial mechanisms, including *Denial in Fantasy*. This form is when a person denies or changes a reality that they see as threatening to make it psychologically acceptable. To show this mechanism, Anna Freud described a child who had to deal with a frightening supernatural figure (father figure) and who made the figure in their fantasy something tame and pet-like, a lion, for example. In this fantasy, the child is not dealing with the father in his true form, but rather with a version of the father who is safer. In this fantasy, the child is facing the father, but not as he is really facing him, rather facing a version of the father that is safer for him.

Another type of denial is *Denial in Word and Act,* wherein an individual consistently denies reality through both their speech and their actions. This form of denial encompasses both verbal expressions and behavioral acts, treating the situation as if the reality in question need not be accepted. The mechanism functions

by prompting the individual to deny, verbally or physically, a reality that is difficult to accept (Freud, 1993). By acting as though the situation is untrue or does not require acknowledgment, the individual can alleviate the emotional pain associated with having to accept that reality.

In this study, the concept of Denial in Word and Act is used to analyze how Chloe Davis denies or rejects a reality that causes psychological discomfort. This form of denial is expressed through her verbal rejection of reality and actions that reflect her refusal to accept it. By examining these responses, the study identifies how denial is manifested in Chloe's behavior. This analysis helps explain how Chloe employs denial as a defense mechanism to cope with her anxiety.

3. Rationalization

Rationalization is a defense mechanism in which a seemingly rational and acceptable explanation is offered for a situation, decision, or action that is actually rooted in emotionally or psychologically difficult circumstances. Cherepanov et al. (2013) discuss Ernest Jones's (1908) early account of rationalization, which explains how individuals provide explanations for their thoughts and actions even when the underlying causes may remain outside their awareness. In psychoanalytic theory, rationalization involves justifying behavior through explanations that make it appear reasonable or acceptable, even when these explanations do not reflect the actual motives behind it (Di Giuseppe & Perry, 2021). Through this mechanism, individuals can reduce psychological discomfort by accepting an explanation that is easier to confront than the underlying reason for their behavior.

Rationalization differs from intellectualization; while intellectualization seeks to shift attention from the emotional experience to the mental (cognitive) aspects of a situation or action, rationalization attempts to offer a reason or justification for that action or situation. An individual may use seemingly valid motives or explanations to justify specific actions or decisions, even if those reasons are not as valid as they appear. In this way, the individual avoids confronting the reality of what truly motivated their decision or action. Thus, rationalization serves to generate an alternative explanation that is more psychologically acceptable.

In this study, rationalization is used to describe Chloe Davis's response, specifically, her provision of seemingly rational reasons or justifications for actions or situations that could potentially cause psychological distress. A response is classified as rationalization when Chloe offers specific reasons that psychologically justify her actions or circumstances. This does not constitute functional intellectualization; in functional intellectualization, ideas are detached from feelings, whereas in rationalization, reasons or justifications are put forward.

4. Reaction Formation

Reaction formation, as an ego defense mechanism, is a concept originally introduced by Sigmund Freud and more systematically by Anna Freud (1993). This mechanism happens when someone receives impulses or feelings that cause anxiety or are considered unacceptable. The person does something different to the impulse; rather than expressing it directly, they show their behavior, thoughts, or feelings to

be opposite to the impulse. This is why the reaction that is demonstrated to the outside world can be inconsistent with the person's internal feelings.

The mechanism of reaction formation works when there is an impulse that cannot be accepted by the ego, setting up a reaction to the impulse that would block it from being conscious. The initial impulse is there but the opposite response is used to cover or squelch the impulse and the person continues to act in a more socially appropriate manner. A defining feature of this mechanism is that the exhibited response can feel as if it is stiffened or exaggerated because it is intended to maintain the underlying impulse. So, the lack of alignment between inner and outer perception becomes an important factor for detecting reaction formation.

In this study, reaction formation is used to analyze Chloe Davis's responses when her expressed attitudes or behaviors contradict her underlying feelings or impulses. A response is classified as reaction formation when the narrative provides evidence of this contradiction rather than merely showing a change in mood or behavior. The analysis considers the context of Chloe's actions and interactions to determine whether her outward response represents an opposite reaction to an unacceptable feeling. This approach helps identify how reaction formation is manifested in Chloe's behavior throughout Stacy Willingham's *A Flicker in the Dark*.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter discusses the research method used in the study, including the research design, data source, data collection, and data analysis. This section aims to clarify how the research is conducted and how the data are analyzed to answer the research question.

A. Research Design

This study utilizes the literary criticism approach in analyzing psychological aspects that appear in literary works. Literary criticism involves the study, discussion, evaluation, and interpretation of literary works. It provides a way to analyze and interpret literary works through different perspectives (Bennett & Royle, 2004, as cited in Ferdinal et al., 2020). Literary criticism may be broadly categorized into approaches to literature, such as the psychology of literature, which uses psychological principles to study the thinking, emotions, and actions of literary characters (Wellek & Warren, 1948). The study uses the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, especially the ideas of anxiety and defensive mechanisms. To identify and analyse the type of anxiety that Chloe Davis experiences, the classification of anxiety into realistic, neurotic, and moral anxiety is used, which was developed by Freud. Freud's useful classification of anxiety into realistic, neurotic, and moral anxiety is used to identify and analyse the type of anxiety experienced by Chloe Davis. In addition, the idea of defense mechanisms is

discussed to explore how Chloe utilizes her psychological defenses to react with anxiety.

B. Data Source

The primary source of this study is Stacy Willingham's novel *A Flicker in the Dark*, published in 2022 by Minotaur Books. The novel tells the story of Chloe Davis, the main character whose psychological experiences are the focus of this study. The novel serves as the primary source because it contains textual evidence relevant to the analysis of Chloe's anxiety and defense mechanisms. The data consist of selected excerpts from the novel, including dialogue, inner monologues, and narrative descriptions that reflect Chloe's thoughts, feelings, and behavior. These excerpts are selected based on their relevance to Freud's concepts of anxiety and defense mechanisms. The selected data are then analyzed to identify the types of anxiety Chloe experiences and the defense mechanisms she employs to cope with her anxiety.

C. Data Collection

The data in this study were collected through close reading and note-taking techniques. First, the researcher read the entire novel to gain a thorough understanding of the plot, background, and psychological state of the main character, Chloe Davis. Next, the researcher identified relevant text passages that reflected the character's thoughts, actions, dialogue, and emotional responses related to anxiety and defense mechanisms. The selected excerpts were then

recorded and categorized based on Freud's classification of anxiety and the relevant types of defense mechanisms.

D. Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the selected excerpts reflecting Chloe Davis's thoughts, actions, dialogue, and emotional responses. To answer the first research question, the researcher classified the data according to Freud's (1926) three types of anxiety: realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety, and moral anxiety. Each excerpt was examined in its narrative context to determine the type of anxiety represented by Chloe's psychological experiences. The classification was based on the characteristics of each type of anxiety, including external threats, fear of losing control over instinctual impulses, and conflicts with internalized moral standards.

To answer the second research question, the researcher examined the selected excerpts to identify the defense mechanisms employed by Chloe to cope with her anxiety. Each excerpt was interpreted by considering Chloe's thoughts, actions, dialogue, and responses in relation to the characteristics of the relevant defense mechanisms. The researcher identified the defense mechanisms represented in the selected excerpts based on Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Finally, the findings were organized and interpreted to explain how Chloe employs defense mechanisms to cope with her anxiety.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter contains the findings of this study and a discussion of the data obtained through analysis of the novel entitled *A Flicker in the Dark,* authored by Stacy Willingham. The discussion is organized around two research questions representing the main subject of the research. The first part of the chapter is dedicated to the types of the anxiety experienced by the protagonist, Chloe Davis, based on Freud's classification of realistic, neurotic, and moral anxiety. The second one discusses the defense mechanisms employed by Chloe Davis to cope with her anxiety.

A. Types of Anxiety Experienced by Chloe Davis

A Flicker in the Dark shows that Chloe Davis suffers from various kinds of anxiety during the novel. Freud (1949) described three types of anxiety: realistic anxiety, neurotic anxiety and moral anxiety. Such types of anxieties occur as a result of various threats coming from the outside, conflicts with instinctual drives, and with internalized moral standards. The next discussion looks at how Chloe Davis experiences each of these types of anxiety throughout the novel.

1. Realistic Anxiety

Realistic anxiety is the anxiety that arises when an individual faces a threat originating from a real situation in the external environment. In Freud's (1949) conceptualization, this anxiety is linked to a danger that the individual can directly

perceive. In the case of Chloe Davis, realistic anxiety is reflected in her responses to external circumstances that she perceives as threats to her safety. Therefore, this subsection examines how realistic anxiety is experienced by Chloe through her thoughts, feelings, and responses to external threats throughout the novel. This type of anxiety can be observed in Chloe's experience when receiving a call from an unknown number.

> *"The anniversary is coming up. Twenty years. I'm sure you know that."*
>
> *"Of course I know that," I snap back. "It's been twenty years and nothing has changed. Those girls are still dead, and my father is still in prison. Why are you still interested?"*
>
> *"But you've changed," he says. "You and your brother. The public would love to know how you're doing–how you're coping."*
>
> *I hang up, slamming the phone back into its base harder than I intend to. I look down and notice my fingers are shaking. (p.13)*

The quote above comes from a phone call with Aaron Jansen, a journalist whose actions force Chloe to confront her family's past once again. Aaron not only reminds Chloe of the twentieth anniversary of the murders committed by her father but also hints that information about her family could be exposed to the public, remarking, *"The public would love to know."* Furthermore, Chloe's reaction after the call ends, *"My fingers are shaking,"* reveals the emotional impact of the conversation. This statement shows that the conversation did affect her emotional state, and the threat Chloe faced was increasingly real because this incident could affect her reputation as a professional psychologist.

This aligns with Freud's (1949) concept of realistic anxiety that arises in response to a known danger in the outside world. In this context, the threat arises from Aaron's spoken and unspoken behavior, as he intends to explore her family's

history and explicitly suggests that the public could know about it. It is not just a figment of Chloe's imagination; the cause comes from Aaron being a real outside agent who wants to disclose the information about Chloe's father. Thus, in this particular case, the fact that Aaron emerges as an outside person who brings the opportunity for Chloe's past to be revealed is the reason for her experiencing real anxiety because the threat that she faces involves real outside effects. Another example of realistic anxiety is presented in the following quotation:

> ***"****Even if it could save a life?"*
>
> *I feel a punch in my chest, like the wind has been knocked straight from my lungs. The missing girls, the police asking questions. It's too much, too similar. I blink hard, trying to shake the bright light that's surging through my peripheral vision. For a second, I think I might faint.*
>
> *"I'm – I'm sorry," I stutter. "What did you just say?"*
> *"If Lacey told you anything during your session on Friday that could potentially save her life, would you tell us?"*
>
> *"Yes," I say, my voice shaking. I glance down at my desk drawer, at my sanctuary of pills just barely out of reach. I need one. I need one now.*
> .
> .
> *I was at the crime scene where Aubrey's body was found–this very officer walked up on me holding a piece of evidence, for Christ's sake–and now I'm the last person Lacey saw before her disappearance. These two coincidences, paired with my last name, would put me squarely in the center of the investigation–somewhere I desperately don't want to be.* ***(p.113-114)***

The quote above shows that Chloe feels anxious because the detective wants to know about her conversations with Lacey. She tries to maintain patient confidentiality, but things get tough when the police stand up to her and say, *"Even if it would save a life?"* This question places her in a harder situation; she must deal with the demands of people who are investigating what happened to Lacey when she disappeared, and she also knows that the information she possesses could be vital to someone's safety. Chloe also draws a parallel between the police

investigation and a strikingly similar murder case 20 years ago, conjuring up the thought, *"It's too much, too similar,"* which makes the situation feel even more like a lot.

Chloe's anxiety comes out in her body, evident *in "a punch in my chest, like the wind had been knocked straight from my lungs."* But when she's asked again about anything that might save Lacey, her voice shivers, and she looks to a drawer filled with pills, wondering what she needs now. This reaction shows that Chloe sees the situation as a threat and copes by taking medication. So anxiety is a warning signal to Chloe that something is perceived as dangerous and needs protection.

As she thinks about what could lead her to be involved in the investigation, her sense of danger sharpens even more. She knows she was at the scene where Aubrey's body was discovered, met Officer Doyle as he was handling evidence, and now, she is the last person who saw Lacey before she disappeared. When combined with her last name, Chloe feels she will be *"squarely in the center of the investigation,"* a situation she does not want to find herself in. Concrete external threats, in the form of a police investigation and her possible role in the investigation, rather than internal impulses in the absence of an environmental threat, are present here.

This corresponds with Freud's (1949) notion of realistic anxiety, which is a response to an actual threat from the outside world. The danger is visible in this data in the following ways: the presence of police, the questions about Lacey, and the fact that Chloe could be involved in both investigations because of her connection with both. Her strong physical response also suggests that Chloe's ego

is responding to an external threat that she believes is real and that it may jeopardize her self-preservation or well-being. Given that, the police investigation into Lacey's disappearance can be understood as a situation where there is a known external threat and an anxiety reaction that serves as a signal to confront that threat, a situation that meets the criteria of a realistic anxiety as defined by Freud. The realistic anxiety can also be seen in the following excerpt:

> *My eyes register the man before me, and my smile fades, my playful expression replaced with one of horror. This man isn't Daniel. My hand drops to my side as I look him up and down, his husky frame and dirty clothes, his wrinkled skin and dark, dead eyes. They're even darker than they were in his picture, still pulled up on my laptop screen. My heart starts to accelerate, and for one terrifying second, I grasp the doorframe to stop myself from passing out. Bert Rhodes is standing on my doorstep. (p. 184)*

In this section, it is noticeable that Chloe, who has been playful, becomes fearful when Rhodes shows up at her place. Signals like *"my heart starts to accelerate"* and *"passing out"* suggest that Rhodes has posed a threat to Chloe. This shows that the anxiety she feels is triggered by outside factors, since Rhodes has actually seen him. This reaction is reinforced by the following scene:

> *Even if I had something to say, I wouldn't be able to say it. My lips are frozen in place, the sheer terror of Bert Rhodes in the flesh rendering me immobile. I can't move, I can't speak. All I can do is stare. My gaze travels down from his eyes to his hands, callused and dirty. They're large. I imagine them gripping my neck easily, squeezing gently at first before increasing the pressure with every gag. (p.185)*

This quote highlights that her anxiety does not only come from recognizing Rhodes but also from the threat that she sees in him. Chloe's fantasy of Rhodes' dirty, big hands choking her indicates how Chloe's ego construes Rhodes' presence as a danger to her physical safety. She becomes so scared that she cannot move or speak, which is suggested by the statement, *"I can't move, I can't speak."* According to the concept introduced by Freud (1949), this situation can be classified as realistic

anxiety since the source of the threat comes from the external world. The appearance of Rhodes allowed Chloe to realize that she was in danger of suffering some bodily harm. Thus, the physiological responses included a fast heartbeat, a feeling of faintness, as well as fear, which hampered her from moving or even talking. Thus, the presence of Bert Rhodes in front of Chloe's house created a situation that resulted in her experience of realistic anxiety due to the danger posed by the external threats to Chloe.

Another situation that triggered realistic anxiety in Chloe occurred when Detective Thomas informed her that Lacey's body, who had previously been reported missing, had been found in the alley behind her office.

> *"Lacey's body was found early this morning in the alleyway behind your office. I'm sorry to have to tell you this over the phone." I gasp, my hand instinctively moving to my mouth. Daniel looks at me, lower his phone. I shake my head silently as tears begin to well in my eyes… "She's been identified," he says. "But since he was found right outside your office, and the last place her mother saw her was dropping off there, it's safe to assume at this point that you were the last person to see her alive. We'd like you to take a look at her and tell us if anything seems different than it did when you saw her for your appointment. If anything looks out of place." I exhale, moving my hand from my mouth to my forehead. The room seems to be getting hotter, the rain outside louder. (p.145-146)*

The excerpt above captures a portion of a telephone conversation between Detective Thomas and Chloe. The exchange elicits several reactions from Chloe, including *"gasping, " covering her* mouth with her hand, and shedding tears. She also senses that the room she had been feeling comfortable in feels extremely hot, and the rain sounds louder. These reactions illustrate Chloe's anxiety at the news of the body found and the powerful impact that the news of Lacey's body has on Chloe's emotional state.

This condition can be related to Freud's (1949) notion of realistic anxiety, which occurs when the ego encounters a real threat from the outside world. For Chloe, her anxiety is about a true event in her world, the death of Lacey. This is a direct threat to Chloe, as the base of her office is an alley behind where Lacey's body was found, and she had been told she very well may have been the last person to see Lacey before she vanished. Chloe's problem is not something hypothetical or something that she is worried about but is something that could actually happen and would threaten her sense of security.

Furthermore, Chloe’s nervousness manifested even more when she was asked by Detective Thomas to examine Lacey's body. She was questioned if there was something wrong with the body from when she last saw Lacey. This was, of course, an even more dire request to Chloe. She was not only expected to be confronted with the death of someone, but she was also expected to look into the corpse's condition.

Chloe's reaction to this news suggests that the cause of her worry was related to the situation she was presented with at the moment. Chloe's anxiety was about something that was actually happening around her, as opposed to something in her mind or in her heart. For instance, when she was told that Lacey had died, she gasped immediately, showing a relationship between events that happened outside of her and the onset of anxiety.

This data represents actual fear, in that Chloe's distress was caused by a real event in the outside world, namely, the finding of Lacey's body close to Chloe's place of work. The situation confronted Chloe with potential danger and a loss of

safety, manifesting in emotional and physical responses such as shock, weeping, and a sensation of overheating. Thus, the discovery of Lacey's body stands as an external trigger for realistic anxiety in Chloe Davis. The realistic anxiety is also illustrated in the following passage:

> *The truth is, I couldn't stand to be in the same house as Daniel for a minute longer than necessary. Sitting in that kayak, the water bobbing us gently as I stared at Cypress Stables in the distance, I had finally allowed myself to be scared. Not just suspicious…scared. Scared of the man who was sitting right behind me, my neck within grabbing distance of his hands. Scared of sharing a roof with a monster–a monster that hid in plain sight, like that alligator gliding across the surface of the water. Like my father twenty years ago. (p.241)*

The passage above shows that Chloe's anxiety regarding Daniel did not arise suddenly simply because they were sharing a kayak or living under the same roof. She was afraid of the thought that maybe Daniel was somehow involved in the disappearances of Aubrey and Lacey, especially when she found jewelry under their bed. This is made even more probable by Cooper's previous opposition to their relationship and a conversation with her mother regarding the Breaux Bridge murder case, which also involved Daniel. As a result, Chloe saw Daniel not as a partner who could provide a sense of safety, but as a possible threat to her safety.

Chloe went from *"suspicious"* to *"scared,"* meaning she had grown more alarmed at the prospect of danger. This danger felt more imminent while they were in the kayak because she knew that he was in physical contact behind her. But his position was not the source of her fear; it was a threat that had already formed in her mind. This fear also shows up in her lack of feeling comfortable in his presence, in his home.

From a Freudian (1949) perspective, this can be seen as realistic anxiety, where Chloe feels danger from her environment. Chloe feels like she is in danger,

even though Daniel has not been proven to be guilty, and from actions that directly affect her, as rumors circulate about his involvement in the case. So, her anxiety is not just a product of internal turmoil, but also from feeling that someone in her sphere of life could harm her. With this sense of outside threat, she loses her sense of safety near Daniel.

From this analysis, when suspicions that Daniel may be involved in the situation arise, it can be classified as a realistic anxiety scenario. Chloe's thoughts and feelings about her physical and emotional connection with Daniel changed when she suspected him of being involved in the murder investigation. The sensation of fear also suggests that Chloe might now be seeing the danger posed by Daniel to her safety. Thus, the realistic fear of being harmed is what lies behind her suspicion of her when she's around Daniel. A similar form of realistic anxiety is illustrated in the following passage:

> *I take a deep breath and stick my nail into the crack, flipping the pages open. I look down and feel that same twist in my chest as my eyes scan a name. Only this time, it's not Daniel's name. And it's not a business card. It's a collection of old newspaper clippings, pushed flat from two decades of being wedged between these pages. My hands are shaking, but I force myself to pick them up. To read the first headline that stretches across the top in boldfaced print.*
>
> RICHARD DAVIS NAMED AS BREAUX BRIDGE SERIAL KILLER, BODIES STILL UNFOUND
>
> *And there, staring back at me, is a picture of my father. (p.281-282)*

The discovery of an old newspaper clipping regarding Chloe's father's case in Daniel's childhood room causes Chloe to experience anxiety. This is evident when Chloe feels *"that same twist in my chest"* and her hands begin to tremble while reading the news about Richard Davis, her father. These reactions indicate

her fear and distress upon encountering information about her father's case in a place associated with Daniel. The discovery also raises concerns for Chloe because it suggests a possible connection between Daniel and the events surrounding her father's crimes.

The findings are notable in that it becomes obvious that Daniel is the elder sibling of Sophie, who was one of the girls who disappeared during the case against Chloe's father two decades ago. In the past, Chloe found Daniel suspicious without sufficient evidence. The newspaper clipping shows his connection to the case and reveals new details about what Daniel knew. This leads Chloe to re-evaluate her previous conclusions about her fiancé. What is more important is that Chloe's discovery undermines her confidence in Daniel since she can see how it is possible that a person she thought was close to her might have known something she had no idea about.

The concept of anxiety put forward by Freud (1949), specifically realistic anxiety, can be applied in this case since it occurs due to the perception of danger from outside. In this case, Chloe experiences anxiety as a result of how she sees the situation, especially after having discovered something of the sort concerning Daniel. Even though there is no proof of Daniel's connection with the case, this discovery made the threat seem much more realistic for Chloe. Consequently, this anxiety can be understood as realistic anxiety, as it emerges when Chloe perceives a potential threat within her immediate environment.

Chloe's bodily reaction proves the strong influence the incident has over her. She shows tightness in her chest and trembling hands, which imply that the

discovered information influences not only her thoughts but also causes her a state of anxiety in the physical sense. In contrast to the scenario in the scene where Chloe is kayaking in Daniel's company, the anxiety here does not stem from the physical closeness to him as much as from the new information that changes her perception of him. Thus, the discovery of the newspaper clipping acts as a trigger for realistic anxiety, as it causes Chloe to perceive her surroundings, and specifically her relationship with Daniel, as potentially dangerous to her.

2. Neurotic Anxiety

Neurotic anxiety relates to danger stemming from an individual's instinctual drives. Freud (1949) explained that this anxiety arises when the ego fears that these drives cannot be controlled and could lead to undesirable consequences. Thus, neurotic anxiety differs from realistic anxiety because the threat does not originate from an external danger, but rather from the possibility that the individual's internal drives could result in unwanted consequences. This subsection discusses the neurotic anxiety experienced by Chloe, based on threats associated with those internal drives. The first neurotic anxiety is illustrated in the following passage:

> *"Most of our Fridays are booked as well, for rehearsals," she said. "But it looks like we do have one. July 26." Daniel glanced at me, raised his eyebrows. "Think you can pencil it in?" He was joking, I knew, but the mention of July sent my heart into a flurry. But I refused to turn, refused to face him. Refused to admit the completely irrational reason why the month of July morphed my anxiety into something debilitating, a progressive disease that worsened as summer stretched on. Refused to acknowledge the rising sense of nausea in my throat.. (p. 50-51)*

The excerpt demonstrates that the mention of July triggers intense anxiety in Chloe. This is obvious in this comment she made in July because it said, *"the*

mention of July sent my heart into a flurry," but at the time nothing was happening with the wedding, and Daniel and the venue owner were just talking about the schedule, not a real danger to Chloe. Her anxiety level is so intense that it is actually described as *"debilitating,"* and *"the rising sense of nausea in my throat"* is a response more vigorous than would have been justifiable given the situation. So, when we talk about July, it is a reminder that triggers Chloe's fear, even though the circumstances are not particularly threatening.

This can be connected to Freud's (1949) definition of neurotic anxiety, which is anxiety resulting from a fear that the instinctual drives might become more powerful than the ego and might cause unwanted consequences. There doesn't seem to be any external threat when July is referred to. Rather, Chloe's response is a psychological reaction to the month being associated with something that makes her feel afraid, so her anxiety isn't related to what is happening to her at that time. This is different from realistic anxiety, which is triggered by a real threat from the outside world.

When Chloe explains that she is feeling anxious because *"completely irrational,"* she is aware of this reaction. She also reiterates that she *"refused to admit"* and *"refused to acknowledge"* reason, which signifies that she is aware of the problem that is fueling her anxiety yet she is not able to take a direct look at it. However, the nervousness is physical and the symptoms are a racing heart and nausea. Therefore, the information shows that July itself is not necessarily an immediate danger in Chloe's life, but when the word July is mentioned, it creates a

neurotic feeling of anxiety in the person. Another neourotic anxiety experienced by Chloe can be seen in the following quotation:

> *I fear all situations where I'm not in control. I imagine the things that can happen to me in my sleep, defenseless. I imagine the things that can happen to me in the dark, unaware. I imagine all the invisible killers that can strangle the life from my cells before I even know they're being suffocated; I imagine surviving what I survived, living through what I lived through, only to die from a case of unwashed hands, a tickle in my throat. (p.65)*

Anxiety also emerges when Chloe starts talking to herself and feels out of control of her own safety. This is clear in her response, *"I fear all situations where I'm not in control."* This means that her anxiety is not confined to any particular object, but rather she feels she has no control over what becomes of her. Also, Chloe suffers from a state of anxiety that is not actually happening. When she is powerless, her mind continues to evoke possibilities, as she repeats the word *"imagine."* This phenomenon is referred to as 'over-predicting threat' or 'threat anticipation'. Thus her fear is not for a real threat, but rather for a possible threat.

This is consistent with Freud's (1949) notion of neurotic anxiety in which Chloe's anxiety comes from a perceived potential danger. Rather, her ego is always and everywhere ready to guard against any possible danger, and is ready to act as if it were there, even if it is not. This shows that her anticipation of danger and inability to control what will happen in the future is a cause of her anxiety. That is, a threat or danger that has not yet occurred may cause anxiety when Chloe feels she has no control over the threat.

From such analysis, it is possible to identify situations in which Chloe cannot control her safety as a trigger for neurotic anxiety. In response to this, it's clear that anxiety need not be triggered by real threat but by perceived threat. This

pattern illuminates how her sense of impotence affects her anxiety reaction. Therefore, situations that leave Chloe feeling she lacks control over herself act as triggers for neurotic anxiety within the novel.

3. Moral Anxiety

Moral anxiety involves the relationship between the ego and the superego, wherein the superego establishes moral demands or standards that the individual must meet. Freud (1949) explained that this anxiety arises when the ego feels threatened because its actions conflict with those moral standards, often associated with feelings of guilt or the fear of judgement and punishment by the superego. In this study, moral anxiety is evident in Chloe when she experiences a conflict between her actions and the moral standards of which she is aware. Therefore, this subsection examines how moral anxiety is experienced by Chloe through her feelings of guilt, shame, and fear of moral judgement throughout the novel. Chloe's moral anxiety is evident in the following quotation:

> *I feel of a wave of tears pricking at my eyes. I hate that Daniel is taking the blame for this, but I can't think of another explanation. Another way out without telling Cooper that I've been calling pills in for myself under Daniel's name. So instead, I'm quiet. I let Cooper believe it. I let his distrust for my fiancé sink deeper, simmer louder.* (p.208)

The quotation above illustrates Chloe's moral anxiety through her awareness that Daniel is taking responsibility for something she has done. In the situation, Chloe has been secretly obtaining Xanax under Daniel's name, but when Cooper discovers the medication, she allows him to believe that it belongs to Daniel. Her statement, *"I hate that Daniel is taking the blame for this,"* reveals that she

recognizes the unfairness of her actions toward her fiancé. Although she feels uncomfortable knowing that Daniel is being blamed for her own actions, she chooses to remain silent to protect her secret. This demonstrates the conflict between her desire to conceal the truth and her awareness that her decision is morally wrong.

This conflict can be understood through Freud's (1949) concept of moral anxiety, which arises from the tension between the ego and the superego. In this situation, Chloe's ego attempts to protect her secret by allowing Cooper to misunderstand the situation, while her superego represents the moral standards that make her recognize the wrongdoing of her actions. Her emotional response is reflected in the statement, *"I feel a wave of tears pricking at my eyes,"* which indicates her distress over the situation. This emotional reaction suggests that Chloe experiences psychological discomfort because her decision conflicts with her moral awareness. Therefore, this passage reflects moral anxiety as Chloe struggles between concealing her actions and recognizing the moral consequences of allowing Daniel to take the blame.

B. Defense Mechanism Employed by Chloe Davis

After examining the types of anxiety Chloe Davis experiences, the discussion now turns to the defense mechanisms she employs throughout the novel. Freud (1927) explained that defense mechanisms are unconscious strategies used by the ego to reduce anxiety and protect itself from distressing thoughts, feelings, or realities. In *A Flicker in the Dark*, Chloe employs four defense mechanisms:

intellectualization, rationalization, denial, and reaction formation. These mechanisms are reflected in her thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, particularly when she encounters situations that cause psychological distress.

> *"It's okay, Chloe," I say out loud, my voice painfully shrill in the otherwise silence of my car." What's bothering you? Verbalize it."*
>
> *I drum my fingers against the steering wheel, push down my turn signal, and decide to take a left. I'm talking to myself the way I talk to my clients.*
>
> *"A girl is missing," I say. "A local girl has gone missing, and it's upsetting me."*
>
> *If this were an appointment, next I would ask: Why? Why is this upsetting you?*
>
> *The reasons are obvious, I know. A young girl is missing. Fifteen years old. Last seen within jogging distance from my house, my office, my life.*
>
> *"You don't know her," I say out loud. "You don't know her, Chloe. She isn't Lena. She isn't any of those girls. This has nothing to do with you."... "This has nothing to do with you," I repeat, pushing through the intersection and taking a right. (page 63-64)*

The quote *"I'm talking to myself the way I talk to my clients"* demonstrates that Chloe employs a rational mindset when confronting news about the disappearance of a fifteen-year-old girl. Chloe treats the issue like a case study, positioning herself not as a frightened victim, but as a psychologist objectively analyzing a patient. This is further illustrated by the subsequent statement noting the girl's disappearance and Chloe's attempt to identify why the event disturbs her. Chloe's tendency to transform an emotional experience into something that can be objectively analyzed exemplifies the use of intellectualization to cope with emotional stress.

The statement *"A young girl is missing. Fifteen years old. Last seen within jogging distance from my house, my office, my life"* reveals Chloe's attempt to detach the unfolding situation from her personal experience. She transforms a

potentially threatening personal experience into an observable fact. Instead of succumbing to panic or tears, Chloe converts her fear into a structured inquiry. This aligns with Freud's (1993) concept of intellectualization, a defense mechanism that allows individuals to distance themselves from difficult emotions by focusing on the rational aspects of a problem. This approach is linked to Chloe's identity as a psychologist, as she applies the same patterns she uses with clients to manage her own emotional responses.

Later, in the quote *"You don't know her, Chloe. She isn't Lena. She isn't any of those girls. This has nothing to do with you,"* Chloe reasons that the event is unrelated to her. This passage illustrates another defense mechanism, namely rationalization. Chloe attempts to establish the logical fact that she does not know the missing girl. Rationalization thus serves as a means to alleviate her anxiety or fear by justifying why she should not be overly affected by the incident.

Chloe's use of rationalization shows that she prefers explanations that are logical so she can deal with her anxiety. Rather than seeing her own emotional connection with the incident, she convinces herself that the situation is unrelated to her life. This tendency shows that Chloe cannot make sense of her emotions until she rationalizes them. Thus, this mechanism reveals her tendency to rely on reasoning when confronted with situations that trigger emotions she finds difficult to comprehend. Chloe also employs another defense mechanisms, as shown in the following quotation:

> *I shake the thought from my head. I don't have a problem. I'm not addicted or anything. I don't go out to bars and drink myself into a coma or break into clammy night sweats when I deny myself that nightly glass of merlot. I could go days, weeks, months without a pill or a glass of wine or any kind of chemical substance to numb the constant fear vibrating*

> *through my veins; it's like a plucked guitar string reverberating through my bones, making them rattle. But I have it handled. All of my disorders, all of those big words that I've been fighting for so long–insomnia, nyctophobia, hypochondria–they have one common trait, one significant quality that binds them all together, and that's control. (p.64)*

The excerpt reveals a conflict between Chloe's admission regarding her use of drugs, Xanax (a medication for anxiety), and alcohol, and her perception of that behavior. Chloe acknowledges using *"a pill or a glass of wine"* to *"numb the constant fear"* she experiences. Yet, conversely, she insists she has no problem, stating, *"I'm not addicted or anything."* This indicates that while Chloe is aware of her substance use and its link to her fear, she does not view it as evidence of a problem, instead, she maintains the belief that she remains in control of the situation.

Her attempt to uphold this belief is evident when she compares herself to individuals with more severe alcohol issues. She notes that she has never *"drink myself into a coma"* and experiences no specific withdrawal symptoms when abstaining from alcohol. Furthermore, she emphasizes her ability to stop using pills or alcohol for *"days, weeks, months."* She uses these points to support her assumption that she is not an addict and that her substance use remains under control.

This pattern reflects two interconnected processes, consistent with Freud's (1993) concept of denial in word and act, wherein Chloe not only rejects reality mentally but also actively verbalizes that denial. This concept is illustrated by her insistence that she *"don't have a problem"* and is *"not addicted."* This denial is then reinforced through rationalization, as she offers reasons intended to prove that her substance use is not problematic. Thus, denial and rationalization work in

tandem, where denial prevents her from accepting the possibility that she has a problem, while rationalization helps sustain that denial by providing seemingly logical justifications.

The interplay of these mechanisms is also apparent in her statement, *"But I have it handled."* After admitting that she uses medication and alcohol to alleviate her fear, she reassures herself that the situation remains within her control. By maintaining that belief, she can avoid the discomfort that might arise if she acknowledged that substance use had become a way to cope with her fears. Ultimately, both mechanisms help Chloe maintain the view that she remains in control of the situation she is facing. A different defense mechanisms is reflected in the following passage:

> *"I, um…" I hesitate, unsure if I heard him correctly. I'm sorry Detective, I've only met Lacey Once. Surely you'll want her mother to come identify her instead? I barely know her–"*
>
> *"She's been identified," he says. "But since she was found right outside your office, and the last place her mother saw her was dropping her off there, it's safe to assume at this point that you were the last person to see her alive. We'd like you to take a look at her and tell us if anything seems different than it did when you saw her for your appointment. If anything looks out of place."*
>
> *I exhale, moving my hand from my mouth to my forehead. The room seems to be getting hotter, the rain outside louder.*
>
> *"I really don't know how much help I can be. We were together for one hour. I barely remember what she was wearing."*
>
> *"Everything helps," he says. "Maybe the sight of her will jog your memory. The earlier you can get here, the better."*
>
> *I nod, agreeing, before hanging up the phone and sinking back into bed. (p.145-146)*

The excerpt above illustrates Chloe's hesitation when asked to view Lacey's body. She cites the fact that she met Lacey only once, even stating, *"I barely know her."* After Detective Thomas explains that Chloe was the last person known to have seen Lacey alive, Chloe reiterates the limitations of her knowledge, saying, *"I really don't know how much help I can be. We were together for one hour. I barely remember what she was wearing."* This repetition underscores the limited nature of her memory regarding Lacey and her uncertainty about whether she can actually assist the investigation.

Her physical response to the detective's explanation also reveals the emotional strain the situation places on her. She exhales, moves her hand from her mouth to her forehead, and feels the room growing hotter as the sound of the rain intensifies. These reactions signal stress and discomfort when faced with the request to view Lacey's body. Nevertheless, Chloe does not explicitly voice this fear or discomfort to the detective; instead, she sticks to the rationale that she knew Lacey for only an hour and cannot recall what she was wearing.

This pattern can be linked to the concept of rationalization, as Chloe offers a seemingly logical reason to cope with an uncomfortable situation. While the claim that she met Lacey only once is objectively valid, her repeated use of this excuse coincides with physical reactions indicating emotional distress. By citing her limited knowledge, Chloe can explain her reluctance without having to state it outright. Thus, rationalization functions by providing a logically acceptable explanation, even though it does not necessarily eliminate the anxiety arising from

the situation itself. Another defense mechanism can also be observed in the following quotation:

> *"I'm sorry," I say again. "Just…look. It could be a lot of things, okay? Maybe it's revenge, targeting girls I know to harass me or make me feel the same pain he felt when his daughter was taken.. An eye for an eye. Or maybe it's grief, a need for control, the same fucked-up reason victims of abuse will go on to become abusers themselves. Maybe he's trying to make a point. Or maybe he's just sick, Detective. Twenty years ago, he wasn't exactly the best father either, okay? Even as a girl, I just had a feeling about him. That something wasn't right." (p.200)*

This excerpt begins with Chloe visiting the police station and meeting Detective Thomas after Bert Rhodes had appeared at her home. She suggests that Bert Rhodes might be involved in the recent incident, citing several underlying reasons. Her repeated use of the word *"maybe"* indicates that Chloe is attempting to articulate various possibilities, such as revenge (evoked by the phrase *"an eye for an eye"*), grief, a need for control, or Rhode's psychological state. Chloe also offers a psychological explanation, noting the tendency for victims of violence to become perpetrators themselves. This statement demonstrates that Chloe is not merely reacting to the situation with fear, but she is also attempting to comprehend the potential threat through reasoning and an analysis of Rhode's behavior.

This pattern aligns with the concept of intellectualization described by Freud (1993) wherein individuals cope with stressful situations by focusing on intellectual thoughts and explanations rather than directly confronting the associated emotions. In this excerpt, Chloe transforms her fear regarding Rhode's potential involvement into a series of arguments concerning his motives and behavior. Instead of dwelling on the fear that she or those she knows might become targets, she focuses on the

possible reasons behind his actions. Thus, intellectualization enables Chloe to process a stressful situation through analysis and reasoning, rather than facing the threat solely through an emotional response. The use of Denial is also evident in the following passage:

> *“Have you been taking those?”*
> *“What? No,” I say. “No, those aren’t mine—”*
> *“Did Daniel give you those?”*
> *“No, Daniel didn’t give me those. Why would you say that?”*
> *“His name is on the bottle.”*
> *“Because they’re his.”*
> *...*
>
> *“I’m not here to fight,...I love you, Chloe. And I know why you do it. I just wish you would stop. Get some help.”*
>
> *I feel a tear escape, gliding down my cheek and leaving a trail of salt in its wake. It lands on Cooper’s leg, leaving a small, dark stain. I bite my lip, hard, trying to stop the rest from falling.*
>
> *“I don’t need help,” I say, pushing down on my eyes with my palms. “I can help myself.” (p.207-208)*

The quote above occurs when Cooper visits Chloe’s home and asks why there is a bottle of Xanax on the table with Daniel’s name on it. Although the medication actually belongs to Chloe, having been filled under Daniel’s name, she denies ownership because the label does not bear her name, stating instead, *"Because they're his."* This response reveals her attempt to conceal the truth about her medication use while upholding the impression that the drugs belong to Daniel. Furthermore, when Cooper assumes the medication belongs to Daniel, Chloe does not correct the misconception but remains silent; this is illustrated by the lines, *"I'm quiet. I let Cooper believe it."* Additionally, when Cooper suggests she seek help for the past trauma driving her to use unprescribed medication, Chloe again denies the need, asserting, *"I don't need help. I can help myself."*

Chloe's instances of denial align with Freud's (1993) concept of denial, specifically denial in word and act, wherein a refusal to accept reality is manifested through both speech and behavior to maintain a state of affairs contrary to what the individual knows to be true. In this case, denial in word is evident when Chloe denies owning the medication and needing help, while denial in act is reflected in her decision to let Cooper's misunderstanding persist. Through this mechanism, Chloe maintains a specific narrative without having to openly acknowledge her Xanax use. Thus, denial in word and act operates through a combination of verbal denial and actions that reinforce that denial, allowing Chloe to avoid directly confronting the reality of her medication use. Chloe also employs another defense mechanism, as shown in the following quotation:

> *"I remember feeling surprised, how easy it was," he says, his eyes drilling into the countertop. "My hands on her throat, and the way the movement just…stopped." He pauses, looks at me. "Do you really want to know all of this?"*
>
> *"Cooper, you're my brother," I say, reaching my hand out to cover his. Right now, touching his skin, I want to vomit. I want to run away. But instead, I force myself to regurgitate the words, his words, that I know I work so well. "Tell me what happened." (p.341)*

Cooper's arrival at Chloe's house is where the incident started. Cooper admitted to killing multiple girls, including the victim in a case 20 years earlier, and said, *"how easy it was."* Chloe's response to this confession is conveyed in the lines, *"Right now, touching his skin, I want to vomit. I want to run away."* But even as she wanted to run away, she extended her hand and took his, and asked him to tell her his story and that he was her brother. Her words indicate a complete contrast between her inner feelings and her actions towards Cooper.

This difference is consistent with Freud's (1993) concept of reaction formation, that is, a person's reaction to an unacceptable unconscious emotion or impulse is the inverse of the emotion or impulse. Chloe was disgusted by her own feelings in this case and wanted to get away, but the behavior she showed Cooper was one of acceptance. She even admitted that she had to try to keep herself present in the discussion. This is a mechanism that enabled Chloe to deal with a tough situation by exhibiting a response opposite to what she was feeling. Based on the analysis, Chloe Davis employs four defense mechanisms throughout the novel: intellectualization, rationalization, denial, and reaction formation. These mechanisms reflect the different ways Chloe responds to situations that cause psychological distress.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This section presents the conclusions and suggestions based on the findings and discussion discussed in the previous chapter are presented in this chapter. Conclusions are based on the analysis of the types of anxiety experienced by Chloe Davis and the defense mechanisms she employs throughout the novel. Meanwhile, the suggestions are intended for future researchers who are interested in exploring psychological aspects of literary works, particularly those related to anxiety and defense mechanisms.

A. Conclusion

From the analysis of *A Flicker in the Dark* by Stacy Willingham, it can be concluded that Chloe Davis has two types of anxieties, which are according to Freud's theory: realistic anxiety, neurotic, and moral anxiety. Realistic anxiety is when Chloe is anxious about a situation or threat in the outside world that poses an actual threat, like the police investigation, Lacey's death, the return of Bert Rhodes, and her relationship with Daniel. Neurotic anxiety is rooted in fear and anticipation of possible failures, as when July is mentioned, or when she is concerned about something outside of her control. Meanwhile, moral anxiety is caused by the conflicts between her actions and moral standards, for instance, when she feels guilty that she let Cooper think the drugs she consumes were Daniel's. These results indicate that the anxiety type differs according to the threats and conflicts Chloe encounters.

Chloe uses four defense mechanisms to deal with the anxiety she feels: intellectualization, rationalization, denial, and reaction formation. Intellectualization is seen in her logical and factual approach to situations without addressing her emotions directly. Rationalization is when she gives a logical explanation or justification for her actions and reactions. Denial is reflected in her inability to admit that there are issues with her drug use and personal health. At the same time, reaction formation appears in her attitude of acceptance towards Cooper, although she is disgusted and desires to get away after his confession. These findings indicate that Chloe uses different unconscious strategies to manage the anxiety and psychological distress she experiences throughout the novel.

B. Suggestion

The results of this research can be used to inform future researchers who want to use Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory in literature. In future studies, researchers can further investigate the link between anxiety and defense mechanisms by studying how the interaction between the id, the ego, and the superego affects a character's psychological state and actions. Other psychological theories, such as trauma theory, coping mechanisms, or psychological development, can be used to explore various aspects of Chloe Davis's experiences and behavior in the novel.

In addition, future researchers could apply reader-response theory to investigate how readers view and react to Chloe Davis's feelings of anxiety, psychological struggles, and actions. It would give a different point of view that

would not just be the psychological profile found in the text, but also the readers' interpretation and response to the character. Finally, other psychoanalytic theories, such as those of Jacques Lacan or Carl Jung, can be explored to look at Chloe's psychological experiences through various theories. These techniques could be used to gain additional information about the psychological facets of *A Flicker in the Dark.*

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