

## ANXIETY AND DEFENSE MECHANISMS PORTRAYED IN “CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF”

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Received: September 2, 2022 Revised: October 11, 2022 Accepted: November 25, 2022

### ABSTRACT

*Born and raised in a poor family, a childless woman named Margaret who is a wife of an alcoholic, has an ambition for wealth which eventually causes her to live with anxiety. To suppress the anxiety, she uses defense mechanisms. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the anxiety and defense mechanisms portrayed through Margaret in the drama, entitled “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof”. This qualitative study analyzed the anxiety and defense mechanisms portrayed in one of the canonical dramas of Tennessee Williams using psychological lens. The data describing Margaret's anxiety and defense mechanisms collected from this drama were revealed and interpreted descriptively in order to provide detailed explanation and deep understanding. This study identified that the anxiety experienced by Margaret was resulted from her ambition to inherit the wealth of her father-in-law. Poverty in her past life has led her to become ambitious to pursue her dreams of wealth. Besides, she got anxious about her inability to give a child to her husband. In consequence, her childlessness caused her to have anxiety. To cope with the anxiety, she used three types of defense mechanisms: (1) reaction formation, (2) displacement, and (3) denial. The female major character experiences anxiety about wealth and childlessness. To protect herself from the anxiety, she uses reaction formation, displacement, and denial as defense mechanisms.*

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Defense mechanisms

### INTRODUCTION

A child who is born and raised perfectly and normally in a supporting and conducive environment has a higher probability to experience a process of perfect growth and development. However in this process, human beings must face an unavoidable reality by the influences of several factors that affect their lives either in physical growth or psychological development. Recently, people give more concern on the importance of mental health because Plumptre (2021) argued that it is an essential element of human well-being which determines how someone can operate psychologically, emotionally, and socially in society. In life, there is a chance for a human being to experience mental problems or psychological disturbances that may affect the development of personality. One of them is anxiety.

This anxiety appears and reduces the sense of security whose symptoms can be detected. These symptoms are sometimes not so clearly felt. In other words, the emergence of anxiety causes various symptoms, such as fear, feeling weak and helpless, feeling guilty, feeling threatened, and so forth.

Anxiety is a part of neuroticism which refers to the tendency to experience negative feelings (Singh, 2015). It is a feeling that suppresses someone's soul. Anxiety depends on a person's ability to imagine something that is not accommodated in the eye, so that this feeling is more developed than, fear. Feelings of anxiety are often encountered when someone has a problem. For example, the anxiety that arises in the early years of school tends to increase and grow stronger after entering puberty. After that time, anxiety depends on the environment in which the child lives. The pressures in life that must be faced can also increase anxiety. This feeling of anxiety is a common symptom because instinctively a person must have a fear of things that are not yet known and that are still unknown or unseen clearly. This is due to a lack of understanding and knowledge, lack of self-confidence, and many other factors.

Anxiety must be suppressed and stopped to ascertain that it will not disturb the personality. Cummings and Sanders (2019) asserted that personality traits is the reflection of how a person thinks, feels, and behaves. It means that there is a strong correlation between personality and feelings. Anxiety classified into negative feelings, thus directly affects the personality. To decrease and stop this feeling, an individual can use the defense mechanisms which are defined by McLeod (2019) as psychological strategies that are unconsciously used to protect a person from anxiety arising from unacceptable thoughts or feelings. In other words, defense mechanisms refer to what an individual uses to cope with anxiety. The strong correlation between anxiety and defense mechanisms in life is often portrayed in literary works, such as novels, poems, plays. Hence, this study is expected to make people aware of the anxiety and provide solutions using defense mechanisms.

By analyzing a literary work (a play entitled *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*), this study is expected to bring the significance in English education and literature. The involvement of literary works in English education is highly important to develop

the four English skills and enrich the vocabulary. English teaching and learning should not be separated with the use of instructional materials whose content should be closely related to what happens in real life to achieve a better understanding, thus improving the language skills. Besides, this study also gives a significant contribution to the knowledge. Literary works provide knowledge about society and its culture. Therefore, the analysis of anxiety and defense mechanisms that are also parts of society and culture brings the benefits of broadening the knowledge and helping people perceive the world.

In *Cat in a Hot Tin Roof*, a Pulitzer Prize winning canonical work written by Tennessee Williams in 1958, the occurrence of anxiety and how the characters manage that feeling are clearly depicted through the female major character, named Margaret (Maggie). Born in a poor family, Margaret is the wife of an alcoholic man who comes from a rich family. Living in poverty since her childhood leads her to an ambition for wealth which eventually causes her to live with anxiety. To suppress the anxiety, she uses defense mechanisms. Therefore, this study is conducted to analyze the anxiety and defense mechanisms portrayed through Margaret in the play, entitled *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Neuroticism**

Neuroticism is one of the fundamental domains of general personality included within the five-factor model or Big Five (Tackett, 2017). Originally developed by Donald W. Fiske in 1949, Soto and Jackson (2020) asserted that the big five personality traits abbreviated with OCEAN are openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism that closely relates to emotional stability.

Psychologists believe that someone with neuroticism has a tendency to have negative feelings. Sigmund Freud initially introduced the term ‘neurosis’ to explain a condition accompanied by mental distress, emotional suffering and an inability to effectively cope with the normal demands of life (Singh, 2015). He believed that

every human has signs of neurosis. However, each individual shows different signs depending on the level of neurosis from which he/she suffers. Nowadays, the term 'neurosis' which also refers to neuroticism is described as the tendency to have negative feelings; one of them is anxiety.

### **Anxiety**

As explained in the previous section, someone with neuroticism tends to experience anxiety which is defined by American Psychiatry Association (APA) (2021) as a response occurring normally when someone experiences stress and can be useful in certain situations. The psychiatrists believe that it can alert people to dangers. However, the high level of anxiety can be disturbing. Such a disturbing condition is called anxiety disorders which should be excluded from the normal feelings of nervousness or anxiousness because this disorder may result in extreme fear or anxiety. Further, American Psychiatry Association (APA) (2021) also affirmed that almost 30% of adults experience anxiety disorders at certain points in life.

"The ego responds to such threats with anxiety, ..." (Ewen, 2003). The existence of the id, ego and superego in the human mind causes him to have anxiety. A battle in the human mind between the ego against id and superego usually ends up with anxiety. Sigmund Freud defines anxiety as "a highly unpleasant emotion that is similar to intense nervousness." (Ewen, 2003). "Anxiety is a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral process that alerts us to potential future threats." (Tartakovsky, 2014). From both definitions, anxiety as a part of uncomfortable human psychology functions to give a person a warning that something wrong is approaching. Without consciousness, it appears when someone faces dangers and feels threatened by any conditions which are resulted from human actions or other things around him. Furthermore, anxiety, which is an unavoidable condition, serves as a mechanism of human mentality in reacting to any uncomfortable conditions that exist in human life.

A person sometimes does not realize that he/she actually experiences psychological problems in life. Regrettably, they can hide themselves in the inner sides of human and will remain there until they show up and finally take him/her

to a series of problems. To find out the problems, that person may need anxiety functioning as a symptom that alerts him of problematic conditions. That is why the existence of anxiety can be seen in a positive perspective since it helps people to know the dangerous situations or conditions.

### **Defense Mechanisms**

Everyone must have experiences with defense mechanisms to cope with anxiety resulting from problems or any uncomfortable events, conditions, or situations. This term refers to psychological strategies or behaviors that people may use to cope with difficult feelings, thoughts, or events (Holland, 2022). Moreover, Holland (2022) asserted that those behaviors are usually used by people to split themselves from unpleasant or uncomfortable events, actions, or thoughts. The notion of defense mechanisms emerges from psychoanalytic theory, a psychological point of view of personality seeing personality as the relations between three components of the human mind: id, ego, and super-ego. Defense mechanisms can help people stay away from fear, pressure, threats, or any other unwanted feelings, such anxiety.

According to Tyson (2006), the term ‘defenses’ which also refers to defense mechanisms are the processes of retaining the unconscious thoughts in the unconscious mind. Similarly, they refer to the processes in which a person struggles to repress things that he/she must avoid. People tend to use defense mechanisms as a reaction to cope with anxiety. In addition, they normally suppress anything that might cause anxiety by defending themselves using those mechanisms.

Freud as cited in Tyson (2006) explained that defenses include (1) selective perception (in which a person prefers to hear and see things that he/she can handle, (2) selective memory (in which a person tries to modify his/her memories to avoid being overwhelmed by completely not recalling any distressing events ), (3) denial (accepting a belief that a problem never existed or unpleasant events never happened), (4) avoidance (avoiding a person or a situation that can probably create anxiety), (5) displacement (expressing anger towards someone or something less offensive/dangerous than the person who has hurt or given us frustration, fear, or

anger), and (6) projection (displacing our problem, fear, or guilt to another person to deny that we actually have it). This theory also affirms that people sometimes do not have any control over those behaviours. In other words, they may use them without realizing it.

There are various kinds of defense mechanisms proposed by Sigmund Freud and her daughter, Anna Freud who has continued and developed his father theory by producing proposed more defenses. Freud (1936, as cited in Cherry, 2022) developed a psychological theory about defense mechanisms in the 1930's and proposed nine defense mechanisms. They are:

1. Displacement

Displacement involves taking out our frustrations, feelings, and impulses on people or objects that are less threatening.

2. Denial

Denial refers to absolute refusal to confess or acknowledge that a problem has happened or is happening at present. Someone addicted to drugs or liquors frequently refuses to admit that he/she has the problem, whereas someone with a traumatic event may possibly deny that he/she has experienced it (Macdonald K, 2016). It is a type of defense mechanism that allows us to ignore the reality for avoiding anxiety and coping with distressing feelings. In this case, a person does not accept the reality or deny the consequences of that reality (Cherry, 2021).

3. Repression or suppression

Repression works to repress any information in the consciousness. Yet, those repressed memories cannot go away easily; they keep affecting our behaviors (Corey, 2009).

4. Sublimation

Sublimation lets us execute unacceptable impulses by transforming them into more acceptable behaviors. For instance, someone with excessive anger may do kick-boxing to vent the frustration (Kim, Zeppenfeld, & Cohen, 2013).

5. Projection

Projection is a type of defense in which you take your own unacceptable traits or feelings and attributing them to others (Corey, 2009). For instance, when you hate someone, you instead make yourself believe that he/she hates you.

6. Intellectualization

This defense mechanism allows us to avoid thinking about the stressful, emotional aspect of the situation and instead focus only on the intellectual component.

7. Rationalization

Rationalization is a defense mechanism that allows us to rationally or logically explain our unacceptable behaviors or feelings to avoid the real reasons for conducting the behaviors or having the feelings (Corey, 2009).

8. Regression

When faced by a stressful situation or event, someone occasionally throws away coping strategies and relapses to behavioral patterns he/she once used in the earlier stages of development (Corey, 2009).

9. Reaction Formation

Reaction formation copes with anxiety by showing the opposite feeling and impulse, or conducting opposite behavior (Corey, 2009). An example of reaction formation would be treating someone you strongly dislike in an excessively friendly manner in order to hide your true feelings.

## **METHOD**

This qualitative study analyzes the anxiety and defense mechanisms portrayed in one of Tennessee Williams' canonical play/drama, entitled *Cat on Hot Tin Roof* using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. This is based on the consideration that literature is the imitation of the real life, real character, and real world (Wellek & Warren, 1970). Anxiety and defense mechanisms are the phenomena that commonly happen in real life. In fact, they are a part of the human life. Hence, it is necessary to use this approach in order to explain what makes the

female central character in the play named Margaret feel, anxious and thus uses defense mechanisms to cope with it.

The method of the study which is used in this research is descriptive method. It means that all data that are performed in this play and any information that have an influence to the existence of Margaret's anxiety and defense mechanisms are described and interpreted by using the psychological lens in order to provide detailed explanation and deep understanding. Furthermore, this study is classified into library research because the object is a script of a play or drama as the primary data, whereas any theories and concepts found in books and published articles in journals and on websites are also used as the secondary data to support the analysis.

To collect the data, the writer will read the script of the play several times to get a deeper understanding of the important ideas conveyed by the playwright through his play. Then, words, phrases, and sentences will be selected based on the focus of the study: the anxiety and defense mechanisms uses by Margaret. Those data will be classified and taken into notes to make the process of analysis run effectively and efficiently.

The data for analysis are in the form of words, phrases, and sentences that describe the anxiety and defense mechanisms. They will be collected from the script of the play mentioned above. Creswell (2012) claimed, "In qualitative research, statistics are not used to analyze the data; instead, the inquirer analyzes words (e.g., transcriptions from interviews) or images (e.g., photographs)". In addition, Yin (2011) pointed out that qualitative studies could be used in many types of non-verbal presentation, such as the use of graphics, photographs, and reproductions. Furthermore, Dornyei (2007) claimed that qualitative research concentrates in depth understanding of the meaning in particular. By conducting this qualitative research, the clear description and deep understanding about anxiety and defense mechanisms can be achieved.



## RESULTS

This section presents the results of this study obtained from the data collected from the object of the study, a play entitled “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof”. The results identify the anxiety and defense mechanisms used by the major female character of the story, named Margaret (Maggie). The results were presented in three tables. Table 1 and table 2 present the anxiety, whereas table 3 displays the defense mechanisms. To support a clearer and deeper comprehension, it is very necessary to discuss those results to understand how the anxiety and defense mechanisms relate to one another. This study identified two evidences that explain why Margaret got so anxious. First, she got anxious about wealth. Second, she got anxious about childlessness.. To make the results more obvious to see, those evidences were presented in the following two tables.

Table 1. Anxiety about Wealth

Datum	Monolog/Dialog	Act – Page
AW-1	MARGARET: I'll tell you what they're up to, boy of mine!-- They're up to cutting you out of your father's estate, and--	I – p. 4
AW-2	MARGARET: No, and you don't take dope. Otherwise you're a perfect candidate for Rainbow Hill, Baby, and that's where they aim to ship you--over my dead body! Yep, over my dead body they'll ship you there, but nothing would please them better. Then Brother Man could get a-hold of the purse strings and dole out remittances to us, maybe get power-of-attorney and sign checks for us and cut off our credit wherever, whenever he wanted! Son-of-a-bitch!--How'd you like that, Baby?-	I – p. 5
AW-3	--Born poor, raised poor, expect to die poor unless I manage to get us something out of what Big Daddy leaves when he dies of cancer!	I – p. 5
AW-4	MARGARET [making diversionary tactics]: Oh, look, oh, look, why, it's a cashmere robe! [She holds the robe up for all to see.]  MAE: You sound surprised, Maggie.  MARGARET: I never saw one before.  MAE: That's funny.--Hah!  MARGARET [turning on her fiercely, with a brilliant smile]: Why is it funny? All my family ever had was family--and luxuries such as cashmere robes still surprise me!	I – p. 35

AW-5	<p>MAE [heedless in her fury]: I don't see how you could be so surprised when you bought it yourself at Loewenstein's in Memphis last Saturday. You know how I know?</p> <p>BIG DADDY: I said, Quiet!</p> <p>MAE: --I know because the salesgirl that sold it to you waited on me and said, Oh, Mrs. Pollitt, your sister-in-law just bought a cashmere robe for your husband's father!</p> <p>MARGARET: Sister Woman! Your talents are wasted as a housewife and mother, you really ought to be with the FBI or--</p>	I – p. 35
AW-6	<p>MARGARET [musically]: My family freed their slaves ten years before abolition, my great-great-grandfather gave his slaves their freedom five years before the war between the States started!</p> <p>MAE: Oh, for God's sake! Maggie's climbed back up in her family tree!</p>	I – p. 70

Table 2. Anxiety about Childlessness

Datum	Monolog/Dialog	Act - Page
AI-1	<p>MARGARET: It goes on all the time, along with constant little remarks and innuendoes about the fact that you and I have not produced any children, are totally childless and therefore totally useless!</p>	I – p. 4
AI-2	<p>BIG MAMA: Something's not right! You're childless and my son drinks!</p> <p>[Someone has called her downstairs and she has rushed to the door on the line above. She turns at the door and points at the bed.]</p> <p>--When a marriage goes on the rocks, the rocks are there, right there!</p> <p>MARGARET: That's--</p> <p>[Big Mama has swept out of the room and slammed the door.]</p> <p>--not-fair...</p>	I – p. 21
AI-3	<p>[Margaret is alone, completely alone, and she feels it. She draws in, hunches her shoulders, raises her arms with fists clenched, shuts her eyes tight as a child about to be stabbed with a vaccination needle.</p>	I – p. 21

This study also resulted in some defense mechanisms proposed by Sigmund Freud, well-known as an important figure in the science of psychology. The list of defense mechanisms is accessible in the table below. The results revealed three types of defense mechanisms, namely displacement, denial, and reaction formation. As this study focuses only on a female major character, named Margaret, the results are specified only to focus on the defense mechanism to protect her from the anxiety.

Table 3. Defense Mechanisms

<b>Datum</b>	<b>Monolog/Dialog</b>	<b>Defense Mechanisms</b>	<b>Act - Page</b>
DM-1	[Children yell below.]  Scream, monsters!	DISPLACEMENT to cope with anxiety about childlessness	I – p. 6
DM-2	MARGARET: Yep, they're no-neck monsters, monsters.... All no-neck people are monsters....	DISPLACEMENT to cope with anxiety about childlessness	I – p. 3
DM-3	MARGARET: I said to your charming sister-in-law, Mae, honey, couldn't you feed those precious little things at a separate table with an oilcloth cover? They make such a mess an' the lace cloth looks so pretty!	DISPLACEMENT to cope with anxiety about childlessness	I – p. 3
DM-4	MARGARET: And he can't stand Brother Man and Brother Man's wife, that monster of fertility, Mae; ...	DISPLACEMENT to cope with anxiety about childlessness	I – p. 5
DM-5	MARGARET: Brick?--I've been to a doctor in Memphis, a--gynaecologist.... I've been completely examined, and there is no reason why we can't have a child whenever we want one. And this is my time by the calendar to conceive. Are you listening to me? Are you? Are you LISTENING TO ME!	DENIAL to cope with anxiety about childlessness	I – p. 30
DM-6	MARGARET: Brick and I are going to--have a child!	DENIAL to cope with anxiety about childlessness	III – p. 86

DM-7	MARGARET: Oh, he exists all right, and so does my child, Brick's baby!	DENIAL to cope with anxiety about childlessness	III – p. 88
DM-8	BRICK: Give me that pillow in the big chair, Maggie.  MARGARET: I'll put it on the bed for you.  BRICK: No, put it on the sofa, where I sleep.  MARGARET: Not tonight, Brick.	DENIAL to cope with anxiety about childlessness	III – p. 89
DM-9	MARGARET: I really have been to a doctor and I know what to do and--Brick?--this is my time by the calendar to conceive!	DENIAL to cope with anxiety about childlessness	III – p. 90
DM-10	MARGARET: Brick?--I've been to a doctor in Memphis, a--gynaecologist.... I've been completely examined, and there is no reason why we can't have a child whenever we want one. And this is my time by the calendar to conceive. Are you listening to me? Are you? (DM-9)	DENIAL to cope with anxiety about childlessness	III – p. 30
DM-11	MARGARET [overlapping a bit]: Turn on the Hi-Fi, Brick! Let's have some music t' start off th' party with!	REACTION FOMATION to cope with anxiety about wealth	I – p. 31
DM-12	BIG MAMA: I'm just so happy, Big Daddy, I have to cry or something.  [Sudden and loud in the hush:]  Brick, do you know the wonderful news that Doc Baugh got from the clinic about Big Daddy? Big Daddy's one hundred per cent!  MARGARET: Isn't that wonderful?	REACTION FOMATION to cope with anxiety about wealth	I – p. 34
DM-13	MARGARET: Brick, honey, aren't you going to give Big Daddy his birthday present?	REACTION FOMATION to cope with anxiety about wealth	I – p. 34
DM-14	MARGARET [at the same time]: I want to propose a toast to Big Daddy Pollitt on his sixty-fifth birthday, the biggest cotton-planter in--	REACTION FOMATION to cope with anxiety about wealth	I – p. 35
DM-15	MARGARET: Sit with Big Mama, Brick, and hold her hand.	REACTION FOMATION	I – p. 74

		to cope with anxiety about wealth	
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## DISCUSSION

This study has identified two factors that make Margaret experience anxiety. First, wealth was the first factor that caused her anxiety. Second, childlessness was another factor. Concerning with the focus of this study, this section provides an important discussion about defense mechanisms because of their close relationship with anxiety. McLeod asserted (2020) that defense mechanisms are psychological strategies that are unconsciously used to protect a person from anxiety arising from unacceptable thoughts or feelings. They are commonly used by people to cope with a situation or condition that makes them anxious and restless, or brings them stress. The following subsections discuss the two factors, namely wealth and childlessness that significantly contribute to Margaret's anxiety and how she thinks and acts as her defense mechanisms to cope with her anxiety.

### **Anxiety about wealth**

In this study, Margaret who comes from a poor family gives much concern on wealth. She was born poor, raised poor, and expected to die poor unless she managed to get something out of what Big Daddy leaves when he dies of cancer! (Datum AW-3). Margaret's idea about getting inheritance from her father-in-law is the plan she has managed to get away from poverty. It is reasonable and understandable for someone who has lived in poverty to have an obsession with wealth to pursue a better life. Big Daddy has two sons (Gooper and Brick). Normally, his wealth should be inherited by his two sons equally after his death. What makes Margaret anxious is that she is worried that her rival, named Mae who is Gooper's wife, has a plan to take her husband's share. She has a strong suspicion that they plan to cut off her husband's from the inheritance as stated clearly in datum AW-1 when she tells her husband that Gooper and Mae will cut him out of his father's estate. The same suspicion is also explicitly portrayed in datum AW-2.

The rivalry between Margaret and Mae, her sister-in-law, for inheriting Big Daddy's wealth is clearly depicted in some conversations even though they never have a quarrel explicitly about it. Both of them secretly hide their dreams to inherit the wealth. However, their rivalry always appears whenever they have conversations. In this drama, they always argue about anything, for instance about child rearing, birthday present, and so forth. On several occasions, they both comment cynically to one another as seen in datum AW-4 and AW-5 when they quarrel about Margaret's luxurious birthday present for her father-in-law. Those data show Mae's dislike toward her exaggerating attention to her father-in-law.

In addition, the rivalry also appears in datum AW-6 when Margaret says that her ancestors used to have slaves and freed them before the abolition. With a cynical comment, Mae responds by saying that she tries to climb back up in her family tree. Before the civil war in American history, slavery is the symbol of wealth. Pruitt (2016) asserted that many of those white families, who couldn't afford enslaved people, aspired to own slaves as a symbol of wealth and prosperity. In spite of the fact that her parents are poor, Margaret tries to build an image that she also comes from a wealthy family by claiming that her great-great-grandfather used to own slaves before freeing them. She does not want her rival to look down on her economic status, thus her status is equal with Mae's so that they both have the same opportunity to inherit the wealth.

The ambition to inherit the wealth from her father-in-law causes Margaret to experience anxiety. Before getting married, She has lived a poor life so that she knows exactly how difficult living a life without sufficient money. Nobody argues that no one wishes to live in poverty in his/her entire life. Normally, they have a great expectation to have a better life. She is aware that the only chance for her to pursue that dream is by inheriting Big Daddy's wealth. Unluckily, she has some weaknesses that can cut off her husband's share from the inheritance.

Margaret's husband, named Brick, is one of the two sons of Big Daddy who has a problem with liquor. Besides her rivalry with Mae, Margaret is also worried about her father-in-law, named Big Daddy, whom she assumes that he might not give an authority to her husband to fully manage the plantation. She feels unsafe

with the fact that her husband is an alcoholic. She also feels insecure that he is desperate since the death of Skipper, his homosexual lover. Her husband's secret homosexual affair with Skipper appears in Act I on page 30 when Margaret warns his homosexual lover that he must stop loving her husband. Therefore, Big Daddy doubts his son's capabilities to substitute his position as the boss of the plantation. Besides, the fact that she and her husband are still childless also becomes a weak factor that makes her father-in-law dislike her and do not really care about her presence in the family. In short, those problems create a barrier for their relationship.

In relation with the role of ego as a form of personality that stands between the id and superego. The three elements of the human mind always get involved in human life because they have a big role in determining how someone thinks and acts. The conflicts happening in the human mind involving the ego, the id, and the superego generally result in anxiety. The battle between the id, the ego, and the superego in Margaret's mind obviously causes anxiety. Her id forces her to have a dominant control over the wealth. Yet, her superego suggests her to share the wealth with another heir, namely her husband's older brother. The opposition seen in the two different elements makes her ego work hard to decide which decisions she has to make. This absolutely creates anxiety because the ego must respond to threatening situations with anxiety (Ewen, 2003). In other words, when someone stands in a dilemmatic situation to choose between two difficult options, the ego must function as a bridge to compromise the id and the superego. Therefore, this effort frequently causes anxiety to occur.

### **Reaction Formation**

To cope with her anxiety, Margaret uses defense mechanisms that refer to the strategies to get rid of anxiety. Because of the emergence of psychological discomfort in people accompanied with anxiety, they feel an urge to do something or act both consciously and unconsciously to protect themselves from the uncomfortable feelings. One way of protecting themselves from anxiety is by using defense mechanisms. They refer to actions done by someone to cope with difficult feelings, thoughts, or events (Holland, 2022).

In relation with Margaret's anxiety resulting from the inheritance competition, she uses reaction formation which refers to a person's effort to unconsciously replace an unwanted or anxiety-provoking impulse with its opposite, often expressed in an exaggerated or showy way (Vinney, 2022). Some data presented in the results prove that Margaret tries to show her exaggerating attention to Big Daddy on his birthday. She acts things to show that she really cares for him by having an initiative to play music to make the party merrier (DF-11), giving him a luxurious robe as the birthday present (DF-13), and proposing a toast for him (DF-14). In addition, she also pretends that she really cares about Big Mama as she shows her empathy to Big Mama's excitement about his husband's health progress (DF-12) and as she asks her husband to hold her hand (DF-15).

In psychology, reaction formation is one of the defense mechanisms used by someone attempting to get rid of anxiety by forming or giving a reaction exaggeratedly to something with opposite feeling, manner, or behavior. For example, when a girl hates her mother because of some reasons, she might pretend as if she loves her so much by expressing her love and care in exaggeration. People who are engaged in this defense mechanism tend to act the opposite of what they feel. This reaction commonly appears when someone meets another person whom he/she does not like. In order to be accepted into the relationship, he/she still treats the person very well without sincerity.

### **Anxiety about Childlessness**

The fact that Margaret is childless or that she never gets pregnant after years of marriage is killing her (Datum AI-1). People around her, especially Mae (her sister-in-law) and Big Mama (her mother-in-law) think that she has a fertility problem. In datum AI-2, Big Mama says that something is not right between Margaret and Brick. She says that Margaret is childless, whereas her son is a drinker. The pressure she has for being unable to give her husband a child causes her to feel so anxious as evidenced in datum AI-3 describing how Margaret feels totally alone and so anxious at her accusation.

The marriage between Margaret and Brick has not produced any child. They are childless. Unfortunately, Margaret's role as the wife is always blamed for



childlessness despite the fact that her husband also gives a contribution to this problem because he does not want to sleep with her as evidenced by the statement made by her husband in act I on page 30 expressing how wonder he is about his wife who wants to have a child from the husband who cannot stand her. However, her parents-in-law keep questioning her infertility. It shows that they are not satisfied with Margaret's role as a wife of their son for being unable to give them any grandchildren. In contrast, Gooper and Mae have already given them grandchildren. This condition absolutely makes her restless and anxious. She feels a big pressure and burden because of her inability to conceive a baby. Those conditions result in anxiety as Freud refers to as a condition that is triggered by psychological and emotional problems that appear because of the inability to cope with the normal demands of life effectively (Singh, 2015).

### **Displacement**

On several occasions, she often uses displacement to cope with the anxiety resulting from the reality that she has not been pregnant for years. She often calls her own nephews 'no neck monsters'. When Margaret and Brick has a conversation in their room, their nephews make a noise that disturbs them. Spontaneously, she says, "Scream, monsters!" (Datum DM-1 and DM-2). In line with Tyson (2006), she acts that way to transfer her anger onto another person or other persons (usually one(s) who won't fight back or can't hurt her as badly as the person with whom she is really angry).

During the meal time, Margaret has a quarrel with Mae, her pregnant sister-in-law who has five children. One of the problems that often triggers a fight between them is the discomfort that Margaret often experiences when the 'no neck monsters' are around her. She asks Mae to feed their children at a separate table to prevent them from causing the table cloth to be messy (Datum DM-3).

What Margaret does is actually a form of displacement because she throws her anger to her female rival and her children. In other words, she makes provocative statements only for people who are weaker, thus they will not fight back and lead her to any dangers. That is why she never transfers her anger to her brother-in-law, named Gooper. Moreover, she tries to hide her hatred for Mae and

her children from people who might endanger her position in the family, such as Big Daddy and Big Mama. She barely has a quarrel with Mae in front of her parents-in-law. She never calls Mae's children 'no neck monsters' in front of them. In short, she projects her anger and hatred to anyone who seems to be powerless than her for the sake of self-protection.

### **Denial**

To cope with her anxiety that emerges because of the inability to conceive a baby, Margaret uses denial. In datum 9 found in act I, Margaret tells her husband that she has visited a gynaecologist for complete examination. She tells him that there is no reason for being unable to have a child whenever they want one. She also tells him that she is in a fertile period by the calendar to get pregnant. By telling him that information, she tries to convince him they have no problem with infertility. However, the problem related to their childlessness does not deal with infertility. She actually realizes that her husband is a gay, thus having no desire to make love with her. In other words, their sexual relationship is not normal, thus giving them no chance to produce a child. Her visit for fertility examination is actually useless because it is not the real problem they are facing. The truth is that it is a form of denial because she denies the fact that there is no chance for them to have a child unless they manage to fix their marriage first. Building love and making love are the possible solutions to handle their problem with childlessness.

Margaret continues her denial that in fact that she never gets a chance for having a child from her homosexual husband who is always reluctant to have sex with her. Datum 6 found in act III shows that she tries to ensure her husband, Big Mama, Gooper, and Mae that she and her husband are going to have a baby even though Gooper and Mae do not believe her claim. Yet, she keeps trying to make them believe it (DM-7). It is also a part of Margaret's effort to refuse the fact about her inability to have a child from her husband.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the anxiety experienced by Margaret is resulted by her ambition to inherit the wealth of her father-in-law. Poverty in her past life

has led her to become ambitious to pursue her dreams of wealth. Besides, she is also anxious about her inability to produce any child. The presence of children brings happiness to her and Brick, her alcoholic husband, including to her parents-in-law. Therefore, her inability to give them any child absolutely causes her to have anxiety.

To cope with her anxiety, Margaret then uses defense mechanisms as normal behaviors to protect herself from anxiety and other psychological discomfort. She uses reaction formation to cope with her anxiety about inheriting the wealth. She also uses displacement and denial to prevent herself from anxiety about being childless. All of those defense mechanisms are applied as strategies and preventive efforts to suppress the anxiety from developing more strongly and severely.

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**How to Cite (APA style):**

Afandi,M,D.,Mufliha,T&Aquariza,N,R. (2022,November). Nominal and Verbal Sentence of Simple Present Tense Errors in Students' Descriptive Writing Ability. *Exposure: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*, 11(2), 331-350. <https://journal.unismuh.ac.id/index.php/exposure/article/view/8721>