

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Trauma is something that is very familiar in human's life. Almost every human has a kind of trauma in their life. It usually relates to something bad happened in the past that makes us stress or feels afraid to do something in the future. The stress that caused by the trauma signifies that the traumatic person has difficulty to cope with the trauma itself. Esther Giller, the President of Sidran Institute, in a workshop presentation at the Annual Conference of the Maryland Mental Hygiene Administration, "Passages to Prevention: Prevention across Life's Spectrum" on May 1999, said that trauma refers to extreme stress that overwhelms a person's ability to cope. There are many things that may cause trauma in someone's life. Those can be a big one-time incident like accidents, natural disasters, crimes, surgeries, deaths, and other violent events. It can also be repeated actions, such as child abuse, neglect, combat, urban violence, concentration camps, battering relationships, and enduring deprivation (Giller) The component of trauma can be subjective and objective. Jon Allen, a psychologist at the Menninger Clinic in Houston, Texas and author of *Coping with Trauma: A Guide to Self-Understanding* wrote about it:

“It is the subjective experience of the objective events that constitutes the trauma...The more you believe you are endangered, the more traumatized you will be...Psychologically, the bottom line of trauma is overwhelming emotion and a feeling of utter helplessness. There may or may not be bodily injury, but psychological trauma is coupled with physiological upheaval that plays a leading role in the long-range effects” (Allen 14)

In other words, trauma is defined by the experience of the survivor. Traumatic experience is according to the objective of the person itself to define whether an incident is traumatic or not. One incident can be traumatic for a person, but for other people it can be just a common incident.

Trauma might be a kind of illness that can not be seen. Nobody will notice what trauma we have and nobody knows what causes it. That is why some people still take it easy and tend to underestimate it without realizing that it can also give a big influence to someone's life, because it deals with the psychological condition. It can affect somebody's behavior or view towards something, for example family and friends.

The effects of trauma are various. Most of them are related with the behavior of the people or psychologically. The fear of being alone or becoming dependent are also a kind of trauma effect. Someone can have a personality disorder, feeling depressed, anxiety, or even eating disorder (Giller)

For example, if a person ever experienced a sexual abuse in his/her childhood, the person will feel afraid to deal with any sexual experiences in their future which affected to the relationship with their partners, because he/she will automatically relate it with the bad experience in his/her childhood. He/She might even feel afraid in starting a new relationship with opposite gender. Sexual abuse might cause social anxiety, an avoidance of men or women, and a very negative self-concept resulting in suicidal depression and self-injury in middle age (Tucker-Ladd 29).

In dealing with the effect of the trauma, people tend to use defense mechanism. Defense mechanism is the way to prevent the anxiety. It is used to hide the causes of childhood fears, urges, and shame (Tucker-Ladd 59). It is not only applied in the case of sexual abuse, but also in other traumatic experiences.

Defense mechanism is a kind of way to handle the fear or the anxiety felt by the traumatic person. In short ways, we can say that defense mechanism helps people dealing with their trauma. It is somehow similar to coping processes, or things that people do to cope their trauma, but both of them are different. Coping processes are conscious, intentional, learned, and associated with normal adjustment. Defense mechanisms are unconscious, unintentional, self-protective instincts or dispositions, and associated with pathology. (Cramer)

Realized it or not, trauma is something that needs to be considered in life, because it can affect many things. Fear or anxiety caused by trauma can influence many things that we do in life, not only in activity but also ability to socialize with

other people. It is not impossible if the victim of the trauma becoming a loner, or introvert person, or even an antisocial person because of the trauma that he/she experienced. It is also possible that the person will be excommunicated by the surrounding because of the behavioral oddities as the part of the defense mechanism. That is why traumatic people sometimes find difficulty in making friends or dealing with their surroundings. Trauma and defense mechanism are two related things.

Just like any other behavioral oddities in life, trauma becomes the main theme in some literary works, including *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky. This novel gives a good depiction of trauma because it tells about the childhood traumatic experience of the main character. It tells how the traumatic experience influenced the main character's life when he grew up. The main character is Charlie, a 15 year old boy who has just entered high school. He had a childhood traumatic experience caused by the death of his aunt and his one and only best friend. His best friend committed suicide when they were in junior high school and Charlie's aunt was died in a car accident on her way to bought a present for Charlie. Charlie was very close to his Aunt Helen. She was like a motherly figure for Charlie. However, she did a sexual abuse to him which he did not realize until he grew up. The traumatic experience created a kind of fear and anxiety in his life and he has to be rehabilitated in a mental hospital for a certain time. It also influenced his ability to socialize with others which resulted him to be excommunicated by his friends. Another good thing depicted by this novel is the defense mechanism done by Charlie in dealing with the trauma.

The novel has won several awards on Youth Adult category. It has won multiple awards such as the ALA Best Books for Young Adults award in 2000, the ALA Popular Paperbacks for Young Adults award in 2002, and the ALA Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers award also in 2000. In 2001, *Booklist* chose the novel as one of the Top 10 Gay and Lesbian Books for Youth. The novel rose to popularity, especially among teenage readers, which lead us to believe that it is vital to analyze the text and the psychological processes involved in the character in order to find out why so many readers have identified with Charlie. The novel centered on themes such as family-relationships, social circles, individual growth, society, drugs, love and sex. Because of such controversial themes, the novel has been reported to be banned on several occasions after parents complained about it.

The novel is in a form of compiled letters written by Charlie as his form of defense mechanism. The letters are his diary in which he tells everything about his life starting from the day he entered high school. In those letters, Charlie tells everything about his daily life, his past, and everything that he feels. Not only that, there are also several activities that is done by Charlie that shows him doing defense mechanism to cope with his trauma. That is why the writer thinks that Freud's psychoanalytic literary criticism theory about defense mechanism is the most appropriate theory to analyze the issue in this novel. There are six Freudian defense mechanisms. The one that the writer will analyze is about sublimation done by Charlie.

1.2 Statements of the Problems

The writer of the study will discuss these main points to be analyzed in this proposal:

1. What are the causes of Charlie's trauma?
2. How does Charlie overcome his trauma through one of Freud's defense mechanisms, that is sublimation?

1.3 Objective of the Study

In connection with the statement of the problems, the objectives of this study can be formulated as follows:

1. To depict what are the causes of Charlie's trauma that makes him to do particular kind of defense mechanism
2. To find out how Charlie overcomes his trauma through sublimation as his defense mechanism

1.4 Significance of the Study

There are two significances expected in this study. The first is to contribute in broadening the knowledge of personal trauma and its defense mechanism. The second is to increase and motivate people's consideration for not underestimating trauma that happened in a person. We all know that adolescence is one of the important phases in

human's life. In this phase, human's mind is considered to be still in development and somehow people find it that adolescence are still in search for their true self. Also, in adolescence phase, teenagers started meeting new problems and they are learning to solve it by themselves. If they have a kind of trauma in their childhood, it will probably affect their way of thinking or their action in living their teenage life. So, this study hopefully can be a kind of reminder for people that we can not just ignore trauma just the way it is. And also, it can also be a reminder for teenagers who had similar background with the main character that they are not alone in facing their teenage life, as if shown in the main character's life. So, they can not just feel desperate and run into bad things to escape their problems. They can also inspire people by doing useful things and reduce the bully they accept just because they are different.

Moreover, this study is expected to be a related study for similar or different study. It is also expected that this study will lead the audience to a deeper understanding about the issue in a novel.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

This study focuses on the main character, Charlie and how he overcomes his trauma with defense mechanisms. This study is an exploration of key events and experiences which have served to shape Charlie's personality. Thus, the writer is in no position to diagnose what causes Charlie's breakdowns. This is only a modest attempt to show the relevance and applicability of Freudian Psychoanalysis in the

novel, and a contribution to the growing body of written works in psychoanalytic literary criticism.

1.7 Theoretical Background

This study focuses on what are the things that cause trauma for Charlie, and what kind of defense mechanism he did to deal with his anxieties resulted by his trauma. Trauma is resulted by the anxiety that is created by the conflict of id, ego, and super ego. And by the appearance of the anxiety, so the defense mechanism appears to help the traumatize person overcome with it. In analyzing those issues the writer will use Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, especially about defense mechanism.

Sigmund Freud describes how the Ego uses a range of mechanisms to handle the conflict between the Id, the Ego and the Super ego, which is why these mechanisms are often called 'Ego defense mechanisms'.

“Defense Mechanisms: conflict between id and superego insists that the ego activate defense mechanisms to protect against anxiety. “Some ego defense mechanisms are adaptive and become coping strategies...” (humor, anticipation, affiliation, altruism, self-assertion, self-observation, suppression, sublimation) and “some are maladaptive and self-defeating.” They also include Action Level Defenses (acting

out, regression, apathetic withdrawal, help-rejecting complaining and passive aggression).” (Thompson)

There are a large number of defense mechanisms; the main ones are repression, denial, projection, displacement, regression and sublimation.

Just like the trauma which causes the defense mechanism, defense mechanism in each person is different from another person. The way they do the defense deals with their personal background. It can be related with their hobbies, with their particular talent or skill, etc. It is according to their own convenience, as long as it can make them feel better. That is why, the defense mechanism sometimes give big influence to the person itself. It can be a good influence or bad influence. It can affect their behavior or their view towards something in their life.

The defense mechanism that will be discussed in this paper is Sublimation. This is similar to displacement, but takes place when we manage to displace our emotions into a constructive rather than destructive activity. This might for example be artistic. Many great artists and musicians have had unhappy lives and have used the medium of art of music to express themselves. Sport is another example of putting our emotions (e.g. aggression) into something constructive.

Sublimation is probably the most useful and constructive of the defense mechanisms as it takes the energy of something that is potentially harmful and turns it into doing something good and useful. Freud believed that the greatest achievements

in civilization were due to the effective sublimation of our sexual and aggressive urges that are sourced in the Id and then channeled by the Ego as directed by the Super ego.

1.8 Methods of the Study

This study is focused on how the defense mechanisms done by Charlie in *The Perks of Being A Wallflower* affected his view towards his friends and family. In gaining the information needed to analyze the issue in the novel, the writer uses a qualitative method.

The first step done by the writer is reading the novel many times to gain clearer depiction in order to acquire the important parts related to the issue in this study. Then, the collecting data from the novel itself, various books, journals, articles, and other printed materials from online books and journals (which are related to this study) are needed as secondary sources. In addition, internet sources are also used to support and complete the study. The third step is analyzing the parts of the novel which is related to the issue of defense mechanism in order to answer the statement of the problem. The collected data is read and analyzed to support and make a deeper understanding toward the study in order to answer the statement of the problem. The last step is arranging the conclusion as the final part that is aimed to give more understanding about the result of this study.

In beginning the analysis, the writer will search for some parts of the story related to the issue by reading the book, taking notes, and highlighting the parts. After collecting the parts needed, the writer will relate the findings with the theory, in this case is psychoanalytic theory. Because the issue is about defense mechanism, the writer has to find out first in which psychosexual stages that the bad experiences happened that finally causes trauma for Charlie. After that, the writer traced what are the traumas that is experienced by Charlie. As the trauma causes the anxiety, and in anxiety we can reveal core issues, the writer found out the core issues experienced by Charlie. After found all of the supporting parts, the writer searched for the defense mechanism-related parts and matched them with the findings in other related sources such as books and journal.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

Trauma: a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time. (Merriam-Webster)

Defense Mechanism: an often unconscious mental process (as repression, projection, or sublimation) that makes possible compromise solutions to personal problems. (Merriam-Webster)

Anxiety: a feeling of dread, fear, or apprehension, often with no clear justification. (Merriam-Webster)

Sublimation: one kind of defense mechanism that turns the fear into something good and useful. It change the energy into something more productive. (Merriam-Webster)

