

**THE USE OF DEFENSE MECHANISM IN OVERCOMING SEXUAL
TRAUMA: A PSYCHOANALYSIS APPROACH TO ANGELOU'S *I KNOW
WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS* (1969)**



THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Cultural Sciences Hasanuddin University as Partial
Requirements to Obtain Bachelor Degree in English Literature Study Program

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ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM

FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCES

HASANUDDIN UNIVERSITY

MAKASSAR

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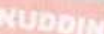
**THE USE OF DEFENSE MECHANISM IN OVERCOMING
SEXUAL TRAUMA: A PSYCHOANALYSIS APPROACH TO
ANGELOU'S *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS* (1969)**

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AGREEMENT

On 2024, the Board of Thesis Examination has kindly approved a thesis by Devi Wulandari A. T. (F041171330) entitled **“The Use of Defense Mechanism in Overcoming Sexual Trauma: A Psychoanalysis Approach to Angelou’s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969)”** submitted in fulfilment of one of the requirements to obtain a Sarjana Degree in English Literature Study Program, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Hasanuddin University.

Makassar, 16th August 2024

Board of Thesis Examination

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ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDY PROGRAM

FACULTY OF CULTURAL SCIENCE

HASANUDDIN UNIVERSITY

DECLARATION

The thesis by **DEVI WULANDARI A. TANZIL** (F041171330) entitled **THE USE OF DEFENSE MECHANISM IN OVERCOMING SEXUAL TRAUMA: A PSYCHOANALYSIS APPROACH TO ANGELOU'S *I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS* (1969)** has been revised as advised during the Examination on 2024 and is approved by the board of Undergraduate Thesis Examiner:


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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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Hereby, the writer declares that this thesis is written by herself. This thesis does not contain any materials that have been published by other people, and it does not cite other people's ideas except quotations and references.

Makassar, 16th August 2024



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Devi Wulandari A. T.



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ABSTRACT

Devi Wulandari A. Tanzil. 2024. *The Use of Defense Mechanism in Overcoming Sexual Trauma: A Psychoanalysis Approach to Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969).* (Supervised by Herawaty Abbas and Abidin Pammu).

Maya Angelou is a famous African-American writer that created phenomenal works dedicated to the humanity, civil rights, and feminism. The purpose of this research is to study the sexual trauma and defense mechanisms of Maya in Maya Angelou's autobiography entitled *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

The researcher used a descriptive qualitative method and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis approach regarding trauma and defense mechanisms. The primary data source of this research is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, and secondary data source was taken from related books and articles.

This research has found that Maya suffered from great trauma after being raped as a child. Maya decided to silence herself due to her fear and guilt. She used defense mechanisms such as repression, denial, regression, and sublimation that were greatly contributed in her journey of overcoming sexual trauma.

Key Words: sexual trauma, defense mechanism, psychoanalysis, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.



ABSTRAK

Devi Wulandari A. Tanzil. 2024. *The Use of Defense Mechanism in Overcoming Sexual Trauma: A Psychoanalysis Approach to Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1969).* (Dibimbing oleh Herawaty Abbas dan Abidin Pammu).

Maya Angelou adalah seorang penulis Afrika-Amerika terkenal yang menciptakan beberapa karya fenomenal yang didedikasikan untuk kemanusiaan, hak asasi, dan feminisme. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mempelajari trauma seksual dan mekanisme defensif oleh Maya dalam autobiografi Maya Angelou yang berjudul *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

Peneliti menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif deskriptif dan pendekatan psikoanalisis Sigmund Freud terkait dengan trauma dan mekanisme defensif. Sumber data utama dari penelitian ini adalah autobiografi *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, dan sumber data lainnya diambil dari beberapa buku dan artikel terkait.

Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa Maya mengalami trauma yang kuat setelah diperkosa ketika masih kecil. Maya memutuskan untuk diam dikarenakan ketakutan dan perasaan bersalahnya. Ia menggunakan mekanisme defensif seperti represi, penyangkalan, regresi, dan sublimasi yang berkontribusi besar dalam perjalanannya untuk mengatasi trauma seksual.

Kata Kunci: trauma seksual, mekanisme defensif, psikoanalisis, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Sexual trauma is a psychological disorder that occurs after an unfortunate event of sexual assault or sexual violence, as it is perpetrated against someone's will and may happen to anyone in any number of age. Sexual assault can come anywhere from strangers to the closest person or the family members of the victims. Although there are many cases of sexual assault, the trauma that was left within the victim has never been a public major concern. There are still many prejudices in case of sexual assault, even when the victims are underage. Many victims were silenced without having the chance to tell the truth, and growing up to carry their trauma.

Duncan in her book *Healing from the Trauma of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (2004:8) mentioned women that was sexually abused as children live for years with the memories and effect of the said trauma, while struggling with feelings to tell that they were sexually abused and keeping it as a secret. Although the victims were silenced, some of them are brave enough to find a way to speak to let people know about how much suffering it takes to heal, also encouraging their peers to open up about their trauma. Other people are also trying to speak as much as they can about sexual violence

using any kind of media in order to break the prejudice and the mindset of victim in the society.



The awareness of sexual abuse came from variety of sources, such as the legislation of laws that define the crime of sexual abuse or the production of TV shows and media with the representations of sexual abuse and sexual trauma. Aside from the broadcasting medias, literature is one of media that brings awareness about the sexual abuse. Many literary works that illustrating sexual abuse and sexual trauma began to be published and consumed more frequently.

According to Wellek and Werren (1954:12) literary language has the expressive side that represent the tone and behavior of both the speaker and writer, and not only to express, but also influencing, persuading, and changing the reader. Literary language is different to the scientific language. As the scientific language is more direct, literary language is more ambiguous and expressive to persuade and influencing the reader. Literary works that illustrate the impact of sexual abuse can help to bring awareness due to its persuasive language.

Anderson's *Speak* (1999), Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) are a few examples of literary works that described the trauma of sexual abuse.

Published in 1969, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is an autobiography written by Maya Angelou about her early life. After her parents decided to end their marriage, Maya and her brother, Bailey, were sent to the southern town, Stamps, by their father

with their grandmother along with an uncle. One day, their father came from a without any notice and picked them up to live with their mother. They



moved from Stamps to St. Louis, where Maya and Bailey lived with their mother and the mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. In one of the days where her mother went early for work, and Bailey was out to play with some friends, Maya was sexually assaulted for the very first time by Mr. Freeman. He then threatened her to not speak a word or he will kill Bailey. After the first assault, Mr. Freeman ignored her for a while, until on one sunny day where they were alone in the house again, Mr. Freeman raped her and threatened another silence to her. Although Maya was keeping it silence, her brother eventually found her bloomer that was soaked with blood from the painful force of intercourse, and soon the family found out about the sexual assault. Mr. Freeman was arrested and brought to a trial. However, in the trial, Maya was cornered with questions that she didn't have the courage to tell the truth, even thinking that she was helping him on doing the said assault. Mr. Freeman was sentenced jail for one year and one day, but he was released later that day. Although he was released, soon a police officer came to their grandparent house and told the news that Mr. Freeman was found dead. The news brought Maya to another fear that turned her into a newfound silence, she only listened and never talked to anyone but Bailey.

When the book was published in 1969, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* received many praises as a best seller book, however, the book is also banned from a lot of schools. The issues originated from racial viewpoint, as in 1983 the Alabama State

Committee believed that the book would preached hatred against the whites, Maya's premarital teenage pregnancy, the depiction of Maya's exploring her



sexuality, and also the depiction of molestation and rape on a child that was deemed too explicit for a young reader by the parent (Sova, 2006:181-182). This piqued the researcher's interest in exploring the book as the impact of the sexual assault seemed to be cause of disturbance, despite being credited for bringing awareness to the survivors and victim of sexual abuse to speak about their struggle.

Pierre Walker also claimed that *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* illustrated the personal struggle of Angelou. Not only race and gender, but also how a young girl managed to gain her voice to tell her story for all to hear.

...She suffers from an inferiority complex, an identity crisis, and the humiliation of racist insults. By the end of the book, however, she no longer feels inferior, knows who she is, and knows that she can respond to racism in ways that preserve her dignity and her life, liberty, ad property, and she knows—and demonstrates in addition through the very existences of the book itself—that she can respond by using the power of words. ... (Walker, 1995:104)

Maya's struggle and change of behavior provided a new point of view of how big the effect of sexual abuse on a child. Therefore, the writer is interested in finding more about how the character, Maya, was impacted by the sexual trauma and her environment before having the courage to overcome her sexual trauma. Sigmund Freud's theory of Psychoanalysis and Defense Mechanism offered a deeper insight to Maya's change of personality, and how her behavior can be seen as part of her defense mechanisms that helped her in the process of her healing journey. Thus the title of this

research is The Use of Defense Mechanism in Overcoming Sexual Trauma: A
analysis Approach to Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).



1.2 Identification of the Problem

According to the background, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* tells about a character who wants to overcome racism and sexual assault where the character trying to find a way to break her silence. Upon reading *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, the writer also identifies problem that can be analyzed in the novel listed below:

- a. Child abandonment
- b. Racism and slavery towards black people
- c. Sexual assault towards children
- d. Society's treatment towards victim of sexual assault.
- e. Overcoming the sexual trauma

1.3 Scope of the Problem

There are few problems that can be analyzed in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, however, the writer focus on how the character went through her sexual trauma and how the character overcoming her trauma using psychoanalysis approach.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does the sexual assault affect the character and how does her environment react towards her sexual trauma?
2. How does the self defense mechanism help the character in overcoming her sexual trauma?



1.5 Objective of the Study

1. To find out how the sexual assault affected the character and how her surrounding reacted towards the sexual assault.
2. To analyze how the self defense mechanism helps the character to overcome her sexual trauma.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The writer hopes that this research may contributes two benefits which are:

- a. Theoretical benefit: making a contribution to literary works that relates to sexual assault, sexual trauma, defense mechanism, and psychoanalysis approach.
- b. Practical benefit: the result of this research may help to raise the awareness about the prejudice of sexual assault and sexual trauma in society.



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous Study

Previous study serves as the foundation to support the research to avoid duplication and ensuring the relevance of the research to its field. It is also required to establish the scope of this research to the objective of the study. The following researches are provided for the exact purpose as the studies that relate to Defense Mechanism and the use of Psychoanalysis approach to literary works.

1. Wa Ode Nia Fadillah in “Self Defense Mechanism in Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*” (Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar. 2018)

This research attempted to discuss the character Clifford in *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* by D. H. Lawrence. The research was conducted with qualitative method and descriptive analysis by using the structuralism and psychoanalysis approach, the writer analyzed Clifford’s character and its development when using self-defense mechanism in order to confront conflicts and how the defense mechanism is affecting his decision making. The researcher concluded that after the changes in his life that affecting his physical appearance, Clifford struggled with the unstable conditions of his life that he relied on few self-defense mechanisms such as: denial, repression, regression, sublimation, and projection. However, the purpose of self-defense



mechanism to continue his life also affecting with the way Clifford made his decision thus leading in change of his personality.

2. Monica et al. in “Self Defense Mechanism as An Overcoming Tool Of Anxiety in The Novel *Me Before You* By Jojo Moyes” (Universitas Balikpapan, Balikpapan. 2020)

This study aims to identify the anxiety and defense mechanism of the character from *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes. By using psychoanalysis theory focusing on defense mechanism and anxiety, the research concluded that the character experienced neurotic anxiety, moral anxiety, and realistic anxiety. In order to reduce the anxiety, the researcher found a few defense mechanisms used by the character such as: displacement, reaction formation, rationalization, and sublimation. The character used multiple defense mechanism to overcome the anxiety, however, there are certain type of defense mechanism that can be the most effective to face the anxiety. For example, rationalization is the best defense mechanism to face realistic anxiety, reaction formation can be used to deal with neurotic anxiety, and sublimation is the most effective way to deal with moral anxiety.

3. Mega Septiawati in “Defense Mechanism of Arvin Eugene Russel in *The Devil All The Time*” (Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Jakarta. 2022)



The purpose of this research is to study Arvin Eugene’s character from the novel *The Devil All the Time* by Donald Ray Pollock. The research is

conducted using the theory of Character and Characterization and psychoanalysis approach to understand Arvin's personality. The researcher concluded that someone's background, especially in childhood trauma, can influence their behavior and personality in the aftermath. Arvin's behavior and personality were influenced by his trauma after witnessing murder and experiencing domestic violence from his father and his own peers. He used repression, displacement, fantasy, and regression as defense mechanism in act of violence to cope with his trauma.

The researches above are examples of research that discussed the use of defense mechanism after experiencing trauma or conflict. Although this research intends to delve more on defense mechanism of a character, the differences with the studies above lies in the main focus of the research, which is childhood sexual trauma in Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). By analyzing the character's childhood sexual trauma and defense mechanism, this research proposes another perspective in the purpose of defense mechanism after a sexual trauma.

2.2 Theoretical Background

2.2.1 Psychoanalysis

Literature is one of the media used to convey personal messages and feelings.

Characters were most likely linked with human in general as it is taken from the perspective, imagination, or personal experience that can be relatable to the life. Wellek and Werren stated "one cognitive value in the drama and novels



would seem to be psychological.” (1954:23). In order to understand a literary work, one of the most common approaches that can be use is psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis is the study of human mind, and with the way literature could portrayed emotion and characteristics, literature and psychoanalysis formed a mutual bond. Psychoanalysis uses literature as an example of its concepts, while psychoanalysis is used to analyze literary works. (Mijolla, 2005: 986).

Psychoanalysis is a field of study developed by Sigmund Freud. Mijolla (2005:1362) stated that Freud defined psychoanalysis as:

“Psycho-analysis is the name (1) of a procedure for investigating mental processes which are almost inaccessible in any other way, (2) of a method (based upon investigation) for the treatment of neurotic disorders and (3) of a collection of psychological information obtained along these lines, which is gradually being accumulated into a new scientific discipline.”

This field of study laid its foundation and core to understand the human mind through range of methods and theories relating to the unconscious drives such as desires, dreams, fears, and fantasy. As its focus to analyze the human mind, personality, and relationship, Tyson (2006:11) mentioned that psychoanalytic concept can be welcomed with familiarity as it is quite common in daily lives and is helpful to understand the human behavior better. The unconsciousness became the fundamental part of psychoanalysis as Freud described that the human mind is like an iceberg, the consciousness lays on the tip, while the larger part that existed below

face is the unconsciousness. (Hall, 1954: 54).



Through psychoanalysis, each individual being have their own unconsciousness that contains its own psychological history since the start of a childhood. This leads to the individual that might act and influenced by psychological problems that exist but they are unaware of. Tyson (2006:12) stated that:

“The *unconscious* is the storehouse of those painful experiences and emotions, those wounds, fears, guilty desires, and unresolved conflict we do not want to know about because we feel we will be overwhelmed by them.”

This begin since young age by *repression* as we going through unhappy psychological event. Although the unconsciousness happened because we want to hide painful experiences and emotions, it doesn't eliminate them immediately, and more likely to force them to organize the current experience, in this case, to behave the way we allow ourselves to be that may lead to the destructive behaviors. (Tyson, 2006:13). The unconsciousness keeps the unhappy psychological incidents away from the consciousness until the individual is ready to face them.

According to Freud, the human mind was divided into three major systems of personality. These systems work simultaneously and co-operating together by forming a unified organization to fulfill the basic needs and desires of an individual. These three systems are *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. (Hall, 1954: 22-33).

a. Id

The id can be defined as the child of a personality, as it is obtained since birth. It is the urge and need to fulfill pleasure in any forms possible,



the source of all desires and aggressions. Id wishes for something and wanting immediate pleasure without wondering whether there is a consequence behind the actions. Unlike ego and superego, id never have any connection to the outside world. Id resides in the unconsciousness and focuses solely on pleasure. There is no right or wrong for the id because id never concerned to the consequences of the desires and actions.

b. Ego

Ego is the impulsive behavior that is required for the id to communicate with the external world. Unlike id, ego is in line with maturation and growth due to its contact with the external world. The primary role of ego is to find the realistic way to fulfill id's wishes. Although the purpose of ego is to release the tension through action, ego also lack of the consideration and morality for the consequences of its actions. Similar to the id, ego does not inherently understand the consciences of its actions despite being responsible for making decisions on acting out id's desires.

c. Superego

The purpose of superego is to be the "parents" of both id and ego since the conscience lies heavily on the superego. Superego is moral branch that control the action and impulses to act according the society. Like a parent, superego applies reward and punishment for the impulsive



wishes and action in form of pride and guilt. Superego may punish the ego for thinking inappropriately with guilt despite not acting the thoughts out. The superego is the control of the actions to sustain the stability of environment, striving for perfection that society deemed as acceptable. By relying on the conscience and morality, superego helps leading individuals to act according the standards of the social norms and being accepted to the society.

To put it simply, id is the impulsive wishes, ego is the impulsive actions, and superego is the control that enforces the impulsiveness into action that can be accepted by society. These three personality cooperated together to create an individual that conforms to the social norms and become a perfect member of the society.

2.2.2 The Mechanism of Defense

The concept of defense mechanism referring to the process of maintaining prime conditions that helps to confront or avoid disturbance. Defense mechanism is a method that the ego used when a person is being triggered or threatened with a danger that may aroused the anxiety. This method will ease the anxiety by denying, falsifying, or distorting the reality, and might hindering the development of personality (Hall, 1954:85).



For example, *denial* is a defense mechanism that leads to the individuals into believing that the pain has never been exist or happen. Another examples are

avoidance where the individual decided to stay away and avoiding the people or situations that may trigger the unconscious experience or emotions, *displacement* where the individuals displaced or discharged the emotions and angers toward someone or something else instead to the real cause, and *projection* where the individuals place the fear, emotions, or guilt to someone else to deny the fact that they were the one who had been experiencing the event. (Tyson, 2006: 15). The defense mechanism is distorting the reality to protect the person from pain and coping with internal or external stressors. According to Minderop (2013:32-39), Freud introduced a few of key defense mechanisms:

a. Repression

One of the most common examples of defense mechanism in daily life is repression. Mijolla defined repression as "...the operation by which the subject repels and keeps at a distance from consciousness representations (thoughts, images, memories) that are disagreeable because they are incompatible with the ego." (2005:1481-1482). The purpose or repression is to repress the threats away from the consciousness. The uncertainty of an individual after a painful experience also occurred from repression. Oftentimes, the individual will question whether the event did happen because the memory is distorted. The brain is keeping the memory somewhere else until the individual is ready to face it. As explained by Hall (1954:51):



“On the other hand, one may be unable to recall something because the cathexis of the memory trace is opposed by a resistance or anti-cathexis. Such memories are said to be *repressed* rather than forgotten. A repressed memory can be recalled either by reducing the strength of anti-cathexis or by increasing the strength of the cathexis. Neither one is very easy to do.”

b. Projection

When an individual is aware of their negative impulses and deficiency, sometimes they ascribe someone else as the source of the pain. By blaming someone else for their behavior, an individual will perceive relief from their guilt. This method of defense mechanism is called projection.

Projection occurred when one is blaming their deficiency to others. For example, when someone is cheating on their partner and feel guilty, they will accuse their partner first to make themselves feel better about the infidelity. They are projecting their mistakes and believe that they are not the bad one, others are.

c. Displacement

Displacement is when an individual shifts their anger and emotions from one subject to another to release and relief their anxiety.

When projection is projecting their mistake to someone else, displacement is when an individual is misplacing their aggression to another subject as a safer option. For example, when a person is angry at someone and they cannot let their aggression out, they redirected their anger into something acceptable and less threatening.



d. Sublimation

Sublimation is a process of redirecting disruptive feeling or behavior into something that is more acceptable in society. Out of all defenses that may distort the reality or change the personality, sublimation may have a positive outcome since the energy is being discharged into something rewarding and useful for both the individual and society.

For example, when someone is having a disruptive thoughts of anger, they can release their tension by painting and create a work of art that expressed their deepest desire and emotion. This will benefit the individual instead of redirecting the anger by yelling or beating at other people.

e. Denial

When someone is receiving a bad news, sometimes their first response is to deny the reality and refuse to believe the truth. For example, when a loved one died, an individual will experience grief and unable to accept their demise. This defense mechanism is labeled as denial. Denial is a process of denying the reality and not acknowledging the fear or anxiety that associated with the event. Mijolla defined denial as "...a mental act that consist in rejecting the reality of a perception on account of its potentially traumatic associations." (2005:415).



f. Rationalization

Rationalization is a process of denying and justifying the true motive into something that is morally acceptable. The purpose of rationalization is to ease the tension and disappointment after a failure, and to justify our mistake to make ourselves feel less guilty. When the ego cannot accept the truth, the individual will rationalizing another reason to excuse their mistake and behavior.

For example, when someone with a poor time management is late to an appointment, they will offer an excuse such as traffic jam to make it more acceptable rather than admitting that it was their own mistake.

g. Reaction Formation

When an individual feels uncomfortable with someone's presence, instead of addressing their true feelings, sometimes they will act kind and friendly to cover up their hatred. This process is called reaction formation.

Reaction formation is an attitude or a behavior that contest to the repressed emotions in order to avoid actions and mistakes that could lead to anxiety. It is an act of repressing the aggression and unacceptable emotions by over exaggerating the opposite emotions.

h. Regression

The process of regression is where an individual is returning to earlier stage of development to reduce anxiety and stress (Hall, 1954:95). When



someone is experiencing a heartbreak, sometimes the pain is overwhelming them that they seek comfort from a friend or a family member to calm them down.

Despite reaching the age of an adult and being independent, there are moments where things get tough and an individual needs comfort in form of childlike things, such as watching an old cartoon that reminded them of childhood, or being dependent to someone else.

i. Fantasy

When experiencing continuous problem, sometimes an individual seeks comfort in fantasy by imagining scenarios that is ideal for themselves. Fantasy is another example of a defense mechanism that occurs in daily life. For example, an individual is daydreaming about a more desirable job than then one they have in the moment, or when someone is pressured to solve a problem but unable to handle the tension, they will imagine a scenario where they are able to resolve the situation. Fantasy offers the immediate release from tension, however, it will also hinder the development of personality because the constant use of fantasy might result in lack of problem-solving skill.

The reassurance of not experiencing unhappy psychological event is uncertain, body and mind developed defense mechanisms to protect the individual after event. The defenses are used to reduce the anxiety from unhappy psychological



event by keeping the unconscious to stay in the unconscious, repressing them in order to avoid recognizing the painful experiences and emotions. The unconsciousness is not allowing the body to recognize the destructive behavior through the defenses.

According to Minderop (2013:31), defense mechanism may affect the development of personality as it is hold a strong impact in an individual's characteristic. Although the mechanism cannot guarantee the personality of an individual, if the mechanism failed to fulfill their defensive purpose, it may lead to mental disorders.

Since the use of defense mechanism relies on the ego, the immature ego will depend on defense mechanism to confront its problem and can only be free through maturation (Hall, 1954:97). The importance of supportive environment is necessary for the ego. By offering a safe environment that support the individual, the ego will have more chance to discard the defense mechanism and start developing properly.

2.2.3 Sexual Trauma

As explained before, sexual trauma occurred after an unfortunate event of sexual assault. Mijolla defined the term sexual trauma as a situation that prompted intense fear to the subject because they are not prepare to experience and exposed to the sexual situation (2005:1592). During childhood, the helplessness of a child is resulting to the intense fear because the mind and the body is unable to cope and the danger. Herman also described traumatic event as:



“Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life and bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe.” (2015:33)

A traumatized individual may experience overwhelming fear without being able to recall the memory since the memory is repressed, or they may be able to recall every detail but without any emotion. Furthermore, when the source of trauma is from another human being, it destroyed the victim’s sense of safety and needs clear reassurances that there are someone supporting them through the pain. Since trauma is severing a sense of self and connection with others, sometimes the first stage after experiencing a trauma is confusion before leading to despair. It is important to build a safe environment for the victim in order to heal. Without a supportive community, the victim may develop a post-traumatic stress disorders or PTSD.

There are several symptoms of PTSD, however, Herman (2015:35-49) classifies the symptoms into three main categories:

a. Hyperarousal

Hyperarousal is a process where the body is always on alert to look out from any threats. After the traumatic event, there is uncertainty whether the individual may experience it again, so the mind and body is on permanent alert because they believe that the danger may return in any moment. For example, after a sexual assault with the perpetrator is a family



member, the victim will develop a sense of hearing that can distinguish the sound of footsteps from other family member to the perpetrator.

b. Intrusion

Sometimes the aftermath of a trauma is resulting in a constant reminder and re-experiencing the trauma even when the danger is already past. Unlike hyperarousal, intrusion is a symptom of forcing an individual to relive the trauma repeatedly. Although reliving the trauma can also offer mastery and helping in the process of healing, it also provides the emotional intensity and fear of the incident. Small insignificant reminders can also trigger the memories. A rape survivor may be triggered when they smell the same scent of a perfume that was used by the perpetrator on the incident.

c. Constriction

Constriction is a process of altering the reality and avoiding the pain. In traumatic events, when the individual is in state of helplessness, the pain is dissolving. Although they can still register the event, but the mind and body is disconnected, and the survivor may feel that it's not the reality and they are not the one experiencing the traumatic event.

The post traumatic symptoms are wide-ranging and may be mistaken as the s characteristic or personality instead of a post-traumatic affliction. A person



with unrecognized PTSD may live with the feeling of helplessness and fear because they couldn't get the help and support they needed. As Herman quoted:

Beyond the issues of shame and doubt, traumatized people struggle to arrive at a fair and reasonable assessment of their conduct, finding a balance between unrealistic guilt and denial of all moral responsibility. In coming to terms with issues of guilt, the survivor needs the help of others who are willing to recognize that a traumatic event has occurred, to spend their preconceived judgments, and simply to bear witness to her tale. When others can listen without ascribing the blame, the survivor can accept her own failure to live up to ideal standards at the moment of extremity. Ultimately, she can come to a realistic judgment of her conduct and a fair attribution of responsibility. (2015:68)

A traumatic experience can overwhelm the victim's adaptation to daily life again, that's why it's important for the victim to have a supporting environment that will help them through the changes of her life. The victim needs support without being blamed for the trauma.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

This research aimed to comprehend the childhood sexual trauma and the use of defense mechanism in Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. By utilizing Freud's theory of psychoanalysis and defense mechanism, it allowed the research to gain a deeper analysis to understand the connection of Maya's trauma and her way of coping through defense mechanisms.

