

PARENTAL SCARS AND CHILDREN'S DEFENSE MECHANISM: A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS OF *NANTI KITA CERITA TENTANG HARI INI* (2020) AND *BEEF* (2023)

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Keywords

childhood trauma
ego defense mechanism
Freudian psychoanalysis
popular culture
screen studies

Kata Kunci

trauma masa kecil
mekanisme pertahanan diri
psikoanalisis Freud
kultur populer

Abstract

Childhood trauma, particularly that rooted in bad parenting styles, is able to have lasting effects on individuals' psychological welfare. These ordeals can cause mental anxiety and shape how individuals cope with the unpleasant memories which they might use in their interaction with the world as adults. The movie "*Nanti Kita Cerita tentang Hari Ini*" (NKCTHI) and the TV series *Beef* are two popular works that discuss the aforementioned issue. This paper explores how both works portray the characters' use of defense mechanisms as adults, rooted in childhood trauma caused by bad parenting approaches. Qualitative analysis is conducted by dissecting the cinematic elements provided using the psychoanalytical framework. In both works, the portrayal of several defense mechanisms, such as: identification, displacement, regression, sublimation, projection, rationalization, and reaction-formation, employed by the characters. The significance of this study is to contribute to the understanding of the lasting effects of childhood trauma and the potential use of defense mechanisms in adulthood.

Abstrak

Trauma masa kecil, khususnya yang berakar pada pola asuh orang tua yang buruk, mampu memberikan dampak jangka panjang terhadap kesejahteraan psikologis individu. Pengalaman pahit ini dapat menyebabkan kecemasan mental dan membentuk cara individu menghadapi kenangan tidak menyenangkan yang mungkin mereka terapkan dalam interaksi mereka dengan dunia luar saat dewasa. Film *Nanti Kita Cerita tentang Hari Ini* (NKCTHI) dan serial TV *Beef* merupakan dua karya populer yang membahas isu tersebut. Artikel ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana kedua karya tersebut menggambarkan penggunaan mekanisme pertahanan diri (*defense mechanisms*) oleh para karakter di masa dewasa, yang berakar pada trauma masa kecil akibat pendekatan pola asuh yang buruk. Analisis kualitatif dilakukan dengan membedah elemen-elemen sinematik yang tersedia menggunakan kerangka kerja psikoanalisis. Dalam kedua

karya ini, ditemukan penggambaran beberapa mekanisme pertahanan diri yang digunakan oleh para karakter, seperti: identifikasi, pemindahan (*displacement*), regresi, sublimasi, proyeksi, rasionalisasi, dan formasi reaksi (*reaction-formation*). Signifikansi dari penelitian ini adalah untuk berkontribusi pada pemahaman tentang dampak trauma masa kecil yang menetap serta potensi penggunaan mekanisme pertahanan diri di masa dewasa.

1. Introduction

Family influence on children's development undoubtedly takes a significant portion in shaping their personalities until adulthood. Among the many familial associations, the role of parenting styles and parents' behavior towards their children plays a role in shaping children's behavior and how they see themselves as individuals. Belsky (1984, as cited in Achtergarde et al., 2015), argues that parental child-rearing practices exert a direct influence on children's development and psychological state. Commonly, there are two kinds of parenting mannerism: positive parenting and negative parenting. Positive childhood relationships with parents have been associated with healthy mental development (Chen, 2022), whereas negative filial relationships have elicited detrimental outcomes, such as the tendencies to undergo negative emotions and poor to none ability to respond to stimuli in their surroundings (Gölcük & Berument, 2021). Furthermore, it has been proven that negative parenting behavior, such as overprotection and hostility, is accountable for triggering childhood trauma (Williamson et al., 2017).

Films and TV series, as both cultural products (Pope, 2008) and forms of literature (Stout, 2002; Klarer, 2004), frequently depict how parents' unfavorable parenting mannerism induces trauma in their children. *Beef* (2023) and *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini* (hereafter shortened as *NKCTHI*, 2020), each in its own right, are two works that touch upon the issue. From the very beginning to the end, both the film and the TV series depict how the role of parental influences the personality of children into adulthood. Despite their cultural background differences, both *NKCTHI* and *Beef* explore how negative parental behaviors could leave lasting scars and trauma. These trauma continue to influence the characters' personalities, behaviors, and ways of thinking.

Beef (2023) is an American drama series that tells a story about two strangers, Amy Lau and Daniel (Danny) Cho, who are involved in a road rage incident that further escalates into a continuous quarrels and revenge between them, such as pranks, theft, fraud, and infidelity. Danny Cho is a Korean-American contractor whose business fails and has difficulty finding work. Throughout the series, Danny's various efforts to earn money is aimed at being able to build a house in America for his parents, who previously had a motel business but went bankrupt and required them to return to Korea. The effort he makes in the beginning is doing manual labour, although eventually he turns to more transgressive methods, such as fraud. On the other hand, the character Ammy Lau is a Chinese-Vietnamese-American botanical entrepreneur who feels fed up with her busy work schedule and dreams of becoming a housewife that can spend much time with her child, June, and her husband, George. Throughout the series, Amy is depicted as a character that often suppresses her emotions and desires when interacting with other people, especially people in her working scope, which actually makes her mentally tired.

Still, she feels it is necessary to do it in order to earn money. As the series progresses, it unveils the bitter impetus behind all of their actions and emotions, originating from their childhood days: Danny got pressure from his parents to be a good older brother for his younger brother, Paul, and Amy heard her parents fight about the financial burden of having a child as well as the lack of communication that her parents have in their relationship.

Continuing the same discourse of the aforementioned subject matter, *NKCTHI* (2020) is an Indonesian family drama film depicting the lives of three grown-up children: Angkasa, the oldest; Aurora, the middle child; and Awan, the youngest. The film reveals how each child copes with the prolonged sense of discomfort springing from the different treatments by their parents. Angkasa is always taught to protect his younger siblings, while Awan is always commanded to obey her parents' words. Aurora, as the middle child, was portrayed as receiving less attention from her parents, and like her older brother, she was also told to be a good sister to her younger sibling. As the story unfolds, the film delves into deeper family secrets and past traumas that compel the family members to repress their emotions. When Awan was born, she actually had a twin brother. However, the family has to lose the baby during labor. This incident then led the father figure, Rendra, to be overprotective to his children, especially Awan, for the reason that he did not want to experience another loss. Another incident that was also experienced by the family was when the mother figure, Ajeng, picked up the children from school. Awan, who saw her mother's car, felt excited, so she immediately crossed the street without paying attention to the surroundings. A motorbike sped up and hit Awan, who was running towards his mother's car. As a result of this accident, Ajeng, has a trauma that makes her no longer want to drive.

As of the time of writing, there is a relative scarcity of studies that use a comparative approach to discuss two different works in order to explore the relationship between childhood trauma and ego defense mechanisms. For that reason, this research will attempt to address the impact of negative parenting on the formation of ego defense mechanisms in the Indonesian film *NKCTHI* (2020) and the American TV series *Beef* (2023). This article also aims to discuss what are the defense mechanisms used by the characters when faced by anxiety-provoking thoughts or situations. Through focused and detailed analysis on *NKCTHI* and *Beef*, this research argues that certain negative parenting practices could generate trauma to children which later bring about certain mechanisms from the self to reduce the feeling of anxiety during adulthood. By identifying and categorizing these mechanisms, insights about how negative parenting styles contribute to children's psychological development might shape their expression in both works are expected to be attained.

The term 'ego defense mechanisms' is initially formulated by Sigmund Freud (1960, as cited in Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013) to describe the psychological strategies that individuals use unconsciously in order to protect themselves from anxiety-provoking thoughts. The formation of these mechanisms is related to the conflicting agendas of the three psychic elements present in the human mind. In his book titled *The Ego and The Id* (1960), Freud explained that an individual's personality is composed of three psychic elements: the Id [Ucs - Unconscious], the Ego [Cs - Conscious], and the Superego [Pcs - Preconscious]. The Id represents the instinctual part of the human psyche and is entirely unconscious, operating by the pleasure principle that seeks immediate gratification. The Ego is the coordinator of the instinctual needs of the Id and the physical world, driven by the reality principle, as the objects it provides must be concretely present in reality. The

Superego represents the internalized values that individuals learn since childhood, which later govern their future behavior.

Since the Ego is the one dealing with the real world, it is the “executive of the personality” (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013). It has the job of satisfying the needs of the Id but also ensuring that the Ego does not ignore the moral principles held by the Superego. When the Ego perceives that Id’s needs are too uninhibited and may violate the internalized values held by the Superego, anxiety will appear. As Freud (1955) further explained, “...there exists in the mind a strong *tendency* towards the pleasure principle, but that tendency is opposed by certain other forces or circumstances, so that the final outcome cannot always be in harmony with the tendency toward pleasure” (p. 3). To deal with the anxiety, the Ego employs processes known as the ‘ego defense mechanisms.’ The anxiety could come from the external world, from the realization of the person’s uncontrolled internal instinct, or from the perception of doing something contrary to someone’s moral code internalized by identifying with parents’ or any authoritative figure’s moral code (Hall, 1954). Anxiety is a signal of oncoming dangers that need to be neutralized or avoided (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). To reduce anxiety, the Ego use defense mechanisms as protective moves. They serve to manage the Id’s intolerant wish and the Superego’s moral onslaught in parallel. By incorporating defense mechanism, the Ego tries to diminish the conflict between the Id’s impatient demands and the Superego’s ethical constraints that cause anxiety. Since all behaviors are motivated by instincts, but these instincts could, to some extent, disagree with moral judgment, these defenses should always be in operation to provide a realistic middle ground.

Furthermore, by undertaking several large-scale revisions to his father’s work, Anna Freud extensively categorized all types of defense mechanisms in her book, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* (1966). The following are some of the most employed defense mechanisms by the Ego (Piliang, 2018):

1. Repression: Repression is the most fundamental defense mechanism due to its involvement in the other mechanisms (Feist & Feist, 2008; Schultz & Schultz, 2009; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013). Repression protects the Ego from undesirable Id impulses. It represses the feelings so that it does not emerge to conscious awareness. Repressed ideas can manifest themselves in the form of humor, dreams, or physical cues. (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).
2. Displacement: Displacement is at play when individual redirects wrong impulses that provokes anxiety with the ones that do not, such as another person or object. (Feist & Feist, 2008; Schultz & Schultz, 2009; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).
3. Sublimation: According to Freud, sublimation is the civilized mechanism (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013). The Id impulse is altered into a more socially acceptable viewpoint (Feist & Feist, 2008; Schultz & Schultz, 2009). Humans’ expression in the form of art, literature, religion, sports, education, or other kinds of civilized activities can be a form of sublimation mechanism (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).
4. Projection: Projection is functioning when the Ego attributes impulses that cause too much anxiety as “out there” i.e. to external objects, usually another person (Feist & Feist, 2008; Schultz & Schultz, 2009; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).

5. Identification: Identification comes into effect when the Ego adopts someone else's value, since it has not lived up to certain internalized values (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).
6. Rationalization: Rationalization is operating when the Ego reinterprets unacceptable behaviors or impulses by giving a rational and logical, but false reason, rather than actual occurrence (Schultz & Schultz, 2009; Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).
7. Reaction formation: When someone does the opposite of what they desire, reaction formation mechanism is at play (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013). Individuals adopting a disguise to hide disturbing impulses (Feist & Feist, 2008; Schultz & Schultz, 2009).
8. Denial: Denial is a mechanism where the Ego refuse to acknowledge the existence of certain threats or traumatic events (Schultz & Schultz, 2009).
9. Regression: When it is faced with stress, the Ego performs behaviors that return to an earlier period of life that is free of frustration and anxiety. (Feist & Feist, 2008; Schultz & Schultz, 2009).
10. Fixation: Fixation occurs when the Ego permanently attached to an earlier and more comfortable stage of development when the prospects of moving on to the next stage of development is too anxiety provoking (Schultz & Schultz, 2009).

Emphasizing the usage of psychological analysis in literary works, there has been numerous research that examines the relation of childhood trauma with individual defense mechanisms in films (Anwar, 2013; Darwanti, 2021; Nada, 2023; Wijayanti & Yulistiyanti, 2023) and TV series (Labidi, 2022; Mao-jin, 2023). Using the framework of Freudian theory of defense mechanisms, these studies examine how the trauma experienced by characters during childhood shaped their personalities, which are projected through various defense mechanism strategies.

On the cultural domain, several studies have been conducted in socio-cultural contexts to investigate the parenting styles of both Asian-American and Indonesian parents. In the Indonesian context, to make the theory in-line with the plot of the film *NKCTHI* (2020), a recent study from Untariana & Sugito (2022) is used to discuss how the film portrays the parenting strategy applied by the parents' to the main characters. This research reveals that there are indeed some differences in the parenting treatments of children based on the child's birth order. In the Asian-American context, well-acknowledged research by Kim & Wong (2002) and Wong et al. (2012) is extensively used to discuss how the parenting styles of Asian-American parents are portrayed in the TV series *Beef* (2023).

Along similar lines, thorough readings have been conducted on a variety of elements in both works. Due to its recent release, there has been a limited amount of research conducted on the TV series *Beef* (2023). A recent study by Pham-Ada (2023) discusses how the series mindfully depicts Asian Americans by "showing their adversities and emotions" and successfully excludes the stigmas typically associated with the community. Conversely, due to its relatively dated release in 2020, there have been few studies on the film *NKCTHI*. Most studies used semiotic analysis to unveil the representation of family communication (Pratiwi & Kusumaningtiyas, 2022; Maulana & Aesthetika, 2023; Susanto & Wibowo, 2023; Esmeraldien et al., 2023). Other researchers used different frameworks by examining how the film portrays gender-related issues, including toxic masculinity (Wahyudi et al., 2023; Nurhakim & Haqu, 2023) and gender equality (Naurah & Siregar, 2023). One study by Gracia et al. (2022) examines how the film portrays the emergence of family dysfunction phenomena due to the family's

collective past trauma that provoke controlling parenting behaviors resulting in existence of empathy-lacking ambience between parents and children, as well as communication problem within the family. Their study more or less touches upon the issue that this research further explores about how such familial conflicts, potentially caused by mentally-detrimental parenting style, could trigger defense mechanisms within the children's ego.

However, at the time of writing, no research has been done in comparing the two works through the lens of psychoanalytical framework in discussing the defense mechanisms of childhood trauma caused by bad parenting practices. Therefore, analyzing how both the film *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini* (NKCTHI 2020) and TV series *Beef* (2023) portray the characters' defense mechanisms rooted from childhood trauma is the focus of this study. The usage of the concept of ego defense mechanisms is deemed appropriate for this research because it provides a framework to understand how the characters cope with the anxiety-provoking situations or thoughts caused by childhood trauma. By examining the character's defense mechanisms, insights about the lasting impact of these past experiences on their behaviors are expected to be gained.

2. Research Method

This research methodically analyzes textual data of cinematic elements—such as dialogues, scenes, character actions, and *mise en scène*—from both the movie and the TV series to develop qualitative remarks. Primary data is gathered through watching both corpuses multiple times and taking specific notes on certain elements that are relevant to the discussion. Supporting arguments are acquired from journals, articles and other additional literature. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis and examination is done by exploring how the cinematic elements reflect the psychoanalysis framework of the defense mechanism theory proposed by Freud as a response to childhood trauma due to bad parenting style. The results and discussion section will consist of two parts. The first part will analyze how negative parenting styles depicted in the Indonesian film *NKCTHI* (2020) contribute to the development of ego defense mechanisms employed by the characters to cope with childhood trauma. The second part will examine a similar theme portrayed in the American TV series *Beef* (2023).

3. Results and Discussion

At first glance, a movie depicting the dynamics in a single Indonesian family and a series portraying a road rage incident of two different Asian-American individuals might seem like entirely different discourse. However, as both works progresses in its own respective way, their plot center around characters dealing with the lasting effects of childhood trauma derived from unpleasant parenting practices. There are also other elemental reasons why this research considers both works to be comparable. On the similarity aspect, both works discuss how values instilled by parents in children build their mental perspectives on how to behave. These perspectives endure until adulthood and shape their behaviors. Speaking of which, as briefly mentioned in the Introduction section, one of the characters in both works is the first child of the family: Angkasa from the movie *NKCTHI* (2020) and Danny from the series *Beef* (2023). The further discussion will discuss how both Angkasa and Danny restrain themselves to be good older siblings for their younger ones. In contrast, there are also components that make the two works distinct. The cultural difference is visibly noticeable. The family dynamics in *NKCTHI* (2020) happen within one Indonesian family, while in *Beef* (2023), the main characters

are not from the same family, and in addition, both of them have different familial backgrounds. Even though this cultural matter is not thoroughly discussed in this paper, this could act as a substantial consideration of why these characters act as such.

a. Childhood Trauma and Ego Defense Mechanisms in *NKCTHI* (2020)

Research findings show how the parents in *NKCTHI*—particularly the father—implement an authoritarian parenting style toward their children. Baumrind (as cited in Jadon & Tripathi, 2017) described authoritarian parenting as too rigorous, where parents impose strict rules that the children should follow. Most parents who implement this parenting style have a mindset that what they have done will guarantee their children's safety and well-being. However, the strict and controlling tension they create upon their children actually leads them to having low self-esteem and inadequate problem-solving capabilities. In the movie, Rendra, instils in his children the main principle of the family, that they should always look after each other. While this might seem like what parents usually do, what Rendra does to his children exceeds normal limits. He always blames his first child, Angkasa, whenever unexpected incidents happen to his two sisters. Angkasa is always positioned as the designated "protector" of his siblings, while the last child, Awan, is required to always obey Rendra's words. Since Rendra's attention seems to have been given to his oldest and youngest children, viewers can see that his middle child, Aurora, receives less attention. As the film progresses, it is revealed that what causes Rendra's protectiveness towards his children, especially Awan, is due to the death of Awan's twin brother on the day they were born. He and his wife, Ajeng, agree to keep the painful memories away and hide the truth from their children. They themselves have not been able to reconcile with their loss, so they are afraid of experiencing another loss.

In reviewing the parental parenting approach, the kind of familial pattern portrayed in *NKCTHI* can be reviewed from a real-life context based on the previous research conducted by Untariana & Sugito (2022) on an actual Indonesian family. In their research, they find differences in the parenting style based on the children's birth order, which then shaped the children's personality. Judging from the level of intimacy between parents and their children, this research finds that the first child is closer to the father because the father pays more attention to him, and the last child is closer to the mother for the same reason. They also find that the mother has a higher level of anxiety about her youngest child's safety than the other siblings. Meanwhile, the middle child tends to be more independent and can do everything herself because they are "in a tight position, so they have to compete to get their parents' attention" (Untariana & Sugito, 2022). Viewers can observe these tendencies in the film, as Angkasa consistently receives advice and direction from his father to look after his younger siblings, Aurora spends more time alone, while Awan gets more attention from her mother, especially since the accident that she experienced as a child that traumatizes her from driving a car. From such parenting, we see that the three children grow up differently. Angkasa becomes a man who feels constrained by rules and often has difficulty making personal decisions, Aurora turns out to be someone who cannot freely express her emotions to her family members and spends more time alone, and Awan grows up stubborn and feels that she does not have the freedom to choose her own path in life.

Differences in parental treatment of their children can cause trauma. According to the Center for Child Trauma Assessment and Service Planning (2020), emotional neglect is a form of trauma that a person experiences as a child. Children who receive excessive parental pressure will become anxious. Similarly, kids who don't feel like they get enough

attention from their parents will become adults who don't feel as loved. In the film, Angkasa and Awan are two characters who are portrayed as having a lot of pressure from their parents, while Aurora is depicted as a loner who rarely interacts with her parents. This then influences their behavior and personality which is demonstrated through several defense mechanisms that they operate.

As someone who is always given instructions to look after his younger siblings by his father, the ego defense mechanism that Angkasa mostly uses is identification. In 00:29:35, Angkasa had a fight with his school friend because his friend, Rio, accidentally pushed Awan to the ground.

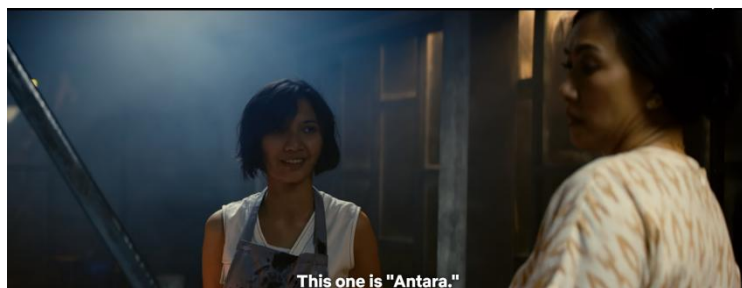
Rendra: *"Rio bilang nggak sengaja. Kalaupun Rio sengaja, itu bukan berarti kamu bisa seenaknya gituin anak orang!"* (Rio said it was an accident. Even if it wasn't, that doesn't mean you can treat him like that!)

Angkasa: *"Ayah 'kan yang nyuruh Angkasa untuk jagain adik-adik!"* (You told me to protect my sisters!)

Angkasa did that because he internalized his father's instructions to that extent. Here, the very first impact of the identification mechanism established by Angkasa is shown. As a result of accepting his father's orders to always be a good older brother to his siblings, Angkasa lives up to the values instilled by his father. Therefore, due to his Ego adopting the identification mechanism, Angkasa fights with his friend because he feels that it is his obligation to protect Awan.

Another impact of the identification mechanism that Angkasa's Ego uses can be seen when he is an adult. In 00:22:11, Angkasa, who was having a warm and romantic dinner with his girlfriend, Lika, decided to leave because he suddenly got a call from his father to pick Awan up from her workplace. In this scene, Angkasa depicted as someone who is already permanently possessed the value his father instill to him since child, which is it that he should always puts his family first before himself or his personal matters due to the reason that he will one day be the head of the family, altering their parents to take care of his siblings. Therefore, he immediately decided to leave the dinner with his girlfriend and went straight to Awan's workplace to pick her up.

Another character, Aurora—the middle child—dominantly uses the sublimation mechanism. As an artist, Aurora is described as someone who often spends time alone working on her art in her private art studio. Two of Aurora's works mentioned in the film are named Antara and Niskala.



Picture 1. Aurora tells her mother that the artwork she is working on is called Antara.



Picture 2. Aurora is working on her artpiece called Niskala.

Both Aurora's artpieces can be interpreted as the *mise en scène* elements that depict Aurora's feelings towards her relationship with her parents. In Bahasa Indonesia, the word *antara* means "in the middle," and *niskala* means "intangible." This can be interpreted as a representation of Aurora herself, who is often in a stagnant position when trying to get her parents' attention, which usually makes it seem as if she is invisible to her parents. The sublimation mechanism is at play in such a way that it alters Aurora's desire to get affection and attention from her parents as expressed in works of art.

Another character, Awan—the youngest child—is described as a rebellious and outspoken child. She often felt that her father did not give her freedom and felt a lot of disappointment to her father because he intervened too much in her life. In 01:29:00, when Awan found out the truth that her parents had hidden about her twin brother who died the day they were born, she felt angry at his father. Still feeling angry, Awan left the house and went to meet Kale, her friend. In this scene, Awan's ego exhibits the occurrence of displacement mechanism. Here, instead of putting forth her fury toward her father (the original source that provokes anxiety), Awan finds comfort in meeting her friend, Kale. By redirecting the anger impulse toward her father in a more subtle form, Awan consoles her anxiety.

In *NKCTHI*, the ego defense mechanism employed by the characters comes from their bad memories about the different treatment they received from their father. As the oldest, Angkasa mostly uses identification to fulfill his father's expectations. On the total opposite, Awan has a rebellious nature that makes her feel tired of his father's overinvolvement in her life. As a result of memories of the lack of attention she received from her parents, Aurora is used to do everything by herself and channeled her repressed emotions into her artworks.

b. Childhood Trauma and Ego Defense Mechanisms in *Beef* (2023)

In *Beef*, the portrayal of the consequences of bad parenting given by parents plays a major role in shaping children's personalities when they grow up. Previous study by Pham-Ada (2023) has highlighted how the series portrays Danny's and Amy's personality. Danny is described as a depressed character who tends to be aggressive. At the beginning of the story, Danny attempted suicide by planning to inhale the poisonous air from the grills, but he finally decided to abandon his intention. Furthermore, Danny's aggressiveness is shown not only by his involvement with Amy in road rage but also when he commits some physical violence against his younger brother, Paul. Also having internal conflicts within the self, Amy is described as a character who always tries to "put on a mask" in front of the people around her by showing that she is fine and living her best life. However, her body language says the opposite: her smile is always forced and she always hold in disguise all the complaints she feels. Later, in Episode 8, it is revealed that both Danny and Amy withhold traumas stemming from their unpleasant memories of their parents. Danny is required to be a child who meets the expectations of his parents and becomes a reliable older brother figure, while Amy listens to her parents' arguments about the financial burden of having a child and how little communication there is between them.

The parental treatment that Danny received was not very pleasant and tended to be demanding. As a child, Danny often experienced bullying from his friends. Danny's parents are a Korean couple who owned a motel business. One day, when they were talking about Danny's education, Mr. Cho (Danny's father) said he was more concerned about their motel business, which was starting to fail. When Danny said that he did not want to go to school, his parents, who already knew that their child was being bullied, still told Danny to go to school. His father also always encouraged Danny to be a good *hyung* (older brother) to Paul, his younger brother. One day, when his younger brother feels like he was going to fail when applying to college, his father says, "Help Paul out. You're the older brother after all." [Episode 10, 00:15:04]. In Episode 4 [00:15:22], when Danny and Isaac are talking about Paul's mischief, Danny said that life as an older brother is always the worst. Due to his parents' treatment of him, Danny grew up with a feeling that he wanted to be treated the same as his younger brother.

Isaac: "That's why you smack them maknaes (Korean term for younger siblings) or they turn out like this. They never get disciplined like we do. Parents are too tired after the first one."

Danny: "Their oldest always gets it worse. Every time."

On the one hand, Amy's childhood memories was not very delightful either. She heard her parents arguing about their limited financial condition. At one point, she hears her father say, "I told you, having a child is expensive!" [Episode 8, 00:08:20]. At the time when she hears it, she feels that she is unwanted and that her father does not love her. Her father's words make her feel like she always has to work so that she and her family will not have to live with financial problems. In Episode 2, when Amy and her husband, George, have a verbal argument due to Amy's disappointment with her husband, who refuses to sell a piece of art made by her husband's father because it is a valuable legacy from the father no matter how much the price offered by the buyer, Amy says, "I just want to be taken care of! I didn't grow up the way you did. Do you ever notice how it's only people who have money that think money isn't important?" Though parents argue about financial conditions might sound like a similar pattern for most parents, Amy's father's words about the financial burden of having a child are taken by Amy into her unconscious as her father's statement that he does not love her. In episode 8, Amy, who is now an adult, makes a visit to her parents' house, and at one point, when she disagrees with her father, she says, "You didn't even wanna have me." [00:06:06]. It can be understood that Amy still clearly remembers the feeling of being unwanted she had when she was a child when she heard what her father's said, even though she is now an adult and the experience happened long in the past.



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Parental Scars and Children's Defense Mechanism: A Psychoanalytic Exploration Of The Main Characters of "Nanti Kita Cerita tentang Hari Ini" (2020) And "Beef" (2023)

Picture 3. During an argument with her father, Amy brought up what her father had said about financial difficulties due to having her as a child.

In addition, Amy's parents are the type of parents that do not build good communication with their child. They taught Amy that talking about feelings is the same as complaining. In Episode 3 [00:01:53], when she and her husband go to the counselling centre, Amy explains the connection between her mental state and her parents' parenting style, especially regarding communication.

“You know, my dad held a lot in. Chinese guy from the Midwest, I mean, communication wasn't his forte. He'd just bottle up everything inside until it just exploded out at once. My mom, she wasn't any better. She thought that talking about your feelings was the same thing as complaining. She told me the first time she heard birds singing was when she came to America, because during Vietnam War, they ate all birds. Can you imagine what that does to a person? No bird. It's hard to admit, but I think that growing up with my parents taught me to repress all my feelings.”

Furthermore, when Amy visits her parents' house amid her marital problems with George, she wants to tell her mother that, when she was a teenager, she saw her father having an affair with another woman. However, her mother says that she does not want to talk about this. Instead, Amy's mother changes the subject of their chat, discussing whether Amy and her husband have a problem in their relationship. She adds that whatever happens between Amy and George, Amy has to deal with it. [Episode 8, 00:06:42]

Amy: “Mom, I drove all the way up here to tell you something. I don't mean to upset you, but I saw something my senior year, and I should have told you—”

Amy's mom: “Oh, my God, Amy. Just stop. Okay? You're not gonna tell me anything I don't already know. Okay?”

Amy: “What do you mean? You and dad already talked about it?”

Amy's mom: “No. We don't have to. And you and I don't have to either.”

Amy: “Okay, see, now this is the problem with our family. We never talked about anything openly.”

Amy's mom: “Why are you bringing this up now? Are you and George having problem?”

...

Amy: “More and more I looked in the mirror, I see you and dad. And I hate it. I know that sounds ungrateful, okay, and I don't know, maybe you felt the same way about your parents too at some point. You know, just generations of bad decisions sitting inside you.”

Amy's mom: “You'll realize this as you get older, but if you look back all the time, you crash. Whatever's going on, put it behind you. George is good for you. For June too.”

The series' depiction of Asian-American parenting approaches appears to resonate with findings from previous research. Kim & Wong (2002) found that Asian parents tend to think that it is the parents' obligation to pay attention to children's education, since the teaching of Confucius about "competent human being" being achieved through educational efforts has become part of the dominant culture that they embraced (Wu, 1996, as cited in Kim & Wong, 2002). Wong et al. (2012) noted that Asian American

youth have difficulty communicating with their parents. Moreover, Man (2022) stated that Chinese immigrant parents and their second-generation children face detached interactions due to the avoidance of “discussing feelings and emotions.” Second-generation adolescents have to bear a more severe communication incompatibility with their parents (Wu & Chao, 2017, as cited in Man, 2022).

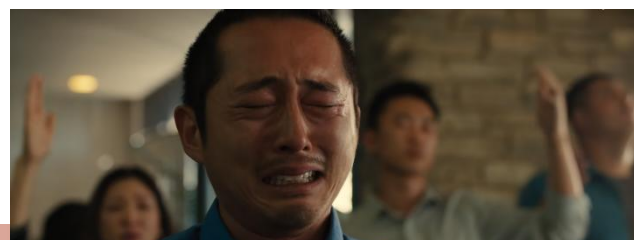
A parenting style that is perceived by a child as an unpleasant memory is unlikely to make the child feel comfortable. However, since certain values are instilled in children from childhood, they become something that children believe in and live by until adulthood. The trauma Danny and Amy recall as adults is mostly a result of their parents' poor parenting styles. This causes them to utilize a variety of defense mechanisms to ease their anxiety.

In episode 1 [00:21:51], Danny employed the regression mechanism. In this scene, Danny desperately calls a lot of banks to secure a loan which will be used to buy land and build a house for his parents. As a result of not getting any reply, he started to feel anxious. He was afraid that he could not fulfil his parents' expectation. The film shows a pattern where Danny always consumes chicken sandwiches and French fries in large quantities when he feels stressed. Danny's tendency to overeat can be categorized as a form of regression. According to Freud, overeating in adults is a manifestation of not fulfilling the pleasure needed during the oral stage (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).

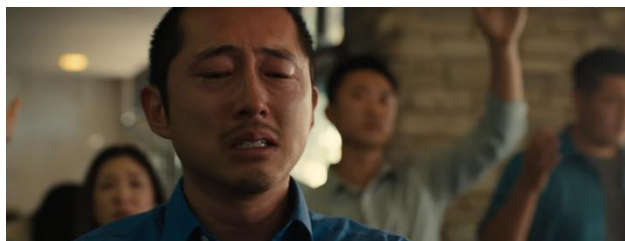


Picture 4. Danny eating an excessive amount of chicken sandwich and french fries to reduce his stress.

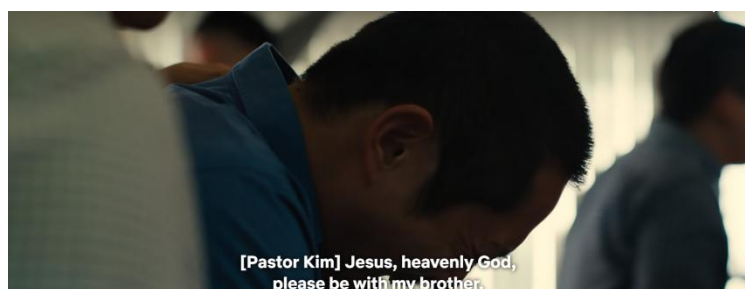
Another mechanism that Danny's Ego employed to reduce his anxiety is sublimation. In episode 3 [00:08:36], Danny comes to church after receiving an invitation from his ex-girlfriend to join the service. In this scene, the audience can see how Danny seems to be having a spiritual experience during the worship session. As mentioned in the first paragraph, Danny is described as a depressed character, one of which is because he is afraid of not being able to meet his parents' expectations. Research by Pham-Ada (2023) successfully pointed out how the spiritual encounter that Danny experienced he felt welcomed by the community and finally found a place where he could release his stress. However, it worth noted that in the subsequent episodes, Danny's action in using the church as a place to hide contraband goods with his cousin, Isaac, shows behavior that is not Christian-like. Through this scene, the sublimation mechanism can be seen in Danny's actions because, according to Freud, religion can be a form of human outlet for their urges (Hergenhahn & Henley, 2013).



Grace Rode Lanitaman



Picture 4 & 5. Danny is crying during the worship session at the church.



Picture 6. Pastor Kim, the pastor of the church, comes to Danny and prays for him. This act might be interpreted as how the church is being welcoming towards Danny.

In order to reduce his anxiety of not living up to his parents' expectations, Danny also used rationalization and projection mechanism. In Episode 8 [00:24:43], Danny finally manages to build a house for his parents and brings them to America. However, when he returned with his parents after picking them up from the airport, a large fire had engulfed the house. Danny tells Paul that Amy is the one burning his house, even though the truth is that he is the one responsible for the incident by installing the wrong wiring system. In this scene, Danny shows two mechanisms at once, namely projection and rationalization. First, he blames Amy instead of himself as the one responsible for burning the house. Second, he gives a 'rationale' to his action by saying that Amy is the one who did it in order to take revenge on Paul for telling George, Amy's husband, about their affair. Danny's reasoning may sound reasonable, but viewers can see that it is false since Amy has nothing to do with the incident.

On the other hand, Amy also employs defense mechanism to repress her anxiety. Mostly, reaction-formation mechanism is at play when she is faced with situations that bring out her childhood trauma. Due to remembering how hard it is to live financially unstable, to the point where her father does not even "want to have her," Amy always makes her maximum effort to stay financially safe. In episode 3 [00:13:22], Amy calls George and tells him that she does not want to hang out with Jordan Forsters, a potential business investor who wants to take over her company; what she needs primarily is just a business deal. However, even though she says that she hates it, she still hangs out with Jordan, hoping that Jordan will make a deal with her. In this scene, Amy's ego creates a reaction-formation mechanism. Instead of refusing Jordan's invitation to hang out, she accepts the offer since the thought of declining it causes fear that she might lose the business deal. Another portrayal of the employment of identification mechanism is shown in 00:16:50 within the same episode. In this scene, Amy calls Paul as Kayla, a pseudonym, so that Paul will not know who she is in their affair. Paul asks 'Kayla' about her "bad day," and 'Kayla' responds that she hates work. Amy hates work, and she only wants to do nothing. However, since she thinks that she needs money to support her family's welfare, she keeps working hard and doing what Jordan wants.

Paul: “So who made your day so shitty and where do I have to go to beat them up?”

Kayla: “Um, it’s just my boss. I hate having to put her feelings before mine all the time.”

...

Paul: “What else do you hate?”

Kayla: “Uh, gosh, you know, it’s a— No one’s ever asked me that before. Um... Well, to be honest, uh, I hate pretending that I don’t hate things.

Paul: “Like... what?”

Kayla: “Like work. I—I hate work. I wish I could just, like, do nothing all day. Not have to worry about money.”

The defense mechanisms used by Danny and Amy which originate from childhood trauma in *Beef* are indeed different, but are both caused by parenting patterns which they remember as unpleasant experiences. The series shows how Danny uses the mechanisms to reduce his anxiety due to stress due to not being able to meet his parents' expectations and not being treated equally with his younger sibling. On the one hand, the defense mechanism that Amy uses helps her reduce her worries about not having a stable financial condition.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, both the movie *Nanti Kita Cerita Tentang Hari Ini (NKCTHI)* and the TV series *Beef* manage to portray how childhood trauma is able to provoke individuals' anxiety, which later causes those individuals to form certain defense mechanisms to reduce the feeling of discomfort and soothe their mental state, through the dialogues, scenes, character's actions, and *mise en scène*. While the movie *NKCTHI* depicts problems that occur in one family, the TV series *Beef* depicts problems that occur in two different families. However, the two works similarly depict the unfavorable memories that children have about their parents' parenting patterns, making this a trauma that influences the formation of ego defense mechanisms to make children feel less anxious due to not living up to certain internalized values or expectations received during the childhood period.

The authoritarian parenting style applied by Rendra in the movie *NKCTHI* compels his children to employ certain defence mechanisms when they face certain situations related to family affairs, especially issues that are not considered as decent for their father, such as when Angkasa forgets to pick up Awan from her workplace, or any other situations the three siblings have to deal with related to their relation with their father. The mechanisms that we can identify in the movie are: sublimation, identification, and displacement. On the other hand, the parental-related experiences that Amy and Danny undergo in their childhood force them to form various mechanisms when confronted with unpleasant situations. The mechanisms are: regression, sublimation, projection, rationalization, and reaction-formation.

The significance of this research is to fill in the gap regarding the comparative discourse of two different works that address the impact of childhood trauma rooted in negative parenting practices on the establishment of ego defense mechanisms. It explains how parents different treatments toward their children, as well as the parental values instilled in children, might govern their future behavior and personalities. In essence, this study might contribute to the mainstream discussion about the usage of psychoanalytical

perspective in a comparative study of literature about the portrayal of childhood trauma and ego defense mechanism.

However, it is also worth noting that this paper only discusses two works based on the framework of psychoanalysis theory, so further studies using other approaches may also be conducted for a more thorough elaboration of the works. Moreover, parallel studies discussing the ego defense mechanisms in both works is also encouraged since limited studies has been found that discusses each work separately or simply to add to the current discussion as a way to highlight points that might not be adequately touched by this paper.

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