

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

Adolescents' mental health is not an ordinary issue, particularly in the current situation, which is becoming increasingly concerning. The World Health Organization (2025) reports that, "One in seven 10-19-year-olds experiences a mental disorder, accounting for 15% of the global burden of disease in this age group. Depression, anxiety and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents." This statement suggests that psychological challenges significantly impact adolescent health. Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood indicated by significant emotional, social, and psychological changes. In this period, every individual faces a conflict with strong inner urges, moral demands, and social expectations from their environment.

Therefore, when these inner conflicts are unresolved, it can contribute to psychological stress, hopelessness, and a tendency to escape from reality. This condition often triggers adolescents to unconsciously use defense mechanisms as a form of self-protection. They apply Anna Freud's theory of denial and rationalization as defense mechanisms to cope with internal and external conflicts. According to Anna Freud (1967), defense mechanisms are unconscious processes originating from the ego to prevent mental stress caused by conflicts between the id and the superego. The ego acts as a mediator that tries to maintain personality

balance, and it makes individuals continue to function normally in the face of psychological pressure. In this research, defense mechanisms are applied to analyze the response of the main character Holden Caulfield regarding the conflicts presented in the narrative, with a focus on text analysis.

In addition, Anna Freud identified forms of defense mechanisms, including denial and rationalization. “The denial of reality also is, of course, one of the many motives underlying children’s play in general and games of impersonation in particular” (p. 83). While rationalization is “By means of rationalization he easily shuts his eyes to the discrepancies between cause and effect which are so noticeable to the observer and make it evident that the transference has no objective justification” (p. 21). The ego tries to maintain a positive image while avoiding unpleasant truths. This situation occurs frequently in real life and has even been depicted in works of literature, such as J.D. Salinger’s novel *The Catcher in the Rye*.

J.D. Salinger is one of the most renowned writers of his era. He was born in America, and he was popular for his novel that had themes relevant to adolescents’ lives, titled *The Catcher in the Rye*—which was published in 1951 and became one of the greatest modern literary works due to its portrayal of the inner complexities of teenagers grappling with social realities. This novel tells the story of a 16-year-old adolescent named Holden Caulfield who struggles with mental health issues and feelings of alienation. Holden feels that the people around him are only pretending to be phony, not sincere, which makes him feel lonely and distrustful of the adult world. He is impulsive, often skips school, and is eventually expelled from

Pencey Prep. Instead of going back to his house, he chooses to spend a few days in New York City in search of happiness and escape from his loneliness.

However, his encounters with several people reinforce his feelings of loneliness, especially after the loss of his brother, Allie. Finally, he finds temporary peace with his younger sister, Phoebe, which makes him begin to realize the error in his perspective of the world. Holden's inner journey then leads him to take care at a mental hospital. Along the way, Holden displays forms of defense mechanisms, such as denying the sadness he actually feels (denial) and justifying his impulsive behavior to avoid guilt (rationalization). Readers can observe how the ego struggles to survive strong emotional pressure through this character.

The Catcher in the Rye was chosen by the writer, considering the novel can explain the character Holden Caulfield as an adolescent who faces mental struggles and explores self-defense strategies. Through his narrative, the denial and rationalization reveal his efforts to avoid anxiety, identity confusion, and emotional pressure—making this novel appealing to analysis with a psychoanalytic approach. Holden, as the main character in the novel, becomes the central element of this research because his character exhibits the inner conflicts necessary for an analysis of denial and rationalization. With a subjective narrative style that directly shows the main character's thought process, this novel provides rich material for exploring how an adolescent maintains his ego stability amid feelings of social alienation and his distrust of adults' world.

Based on the references found by the researcher, there has been no research that discusses the defense mechanism, specifically denial and rationalization, exhibited by the main character. There is also no one has analyzed adolescence and its relationship to the use of defense mechanisms. This research will be different; the writer chose to research this novel because this novel has correlations with the literary psychoanalysis approach, the content of the novel highlights the psychological condition of the main character to understand the defense mechanisms he uses in dealing with life's problems, and the life experienced by Holden Caulfield is also experienced by many adolescents today. In this research, the writer will explore the denial and rationalization defense mechanisms of the main character and its relationship with adolescence characteristics in the literary work with the title *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger.

1.2 Research Questions

In this research, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is analyzed based on the following research questions.

1. What factors influence Holden Caulfield to use denial and rationalization as defense mechanisms in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*?
2. How are denial and rationalization portrayed as his defense mechanisms in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*?
3. How do Holden Caulfield's denial and rationalization as defense mechanisms reflect psychological characteristics of adolescence in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*?

1.3 Objectives of the Research

In this research, J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is examined based on the following objectives.

1. To analyze the factors influencing Holden Caulfield to use denial and rationalization as defense mechanisms in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.
2. To explore how denial and rationalization are portrayed as his defense mechanisms in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.
3. To examine how Holden Caulfield's denial and rationalization as defense mechanisms reflect psychological characteristics of adolescence in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

1.4 Previous Research

A number of previous studies have examined J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* from different perspectives. However, none of this research has specifically analyzed the factors that contributed to Holden Caulfield to exhibit defense mechanisms, particularly denial and rationalization, nor has it connected these mechanisms to adolescent psychological characteristics through Anna Freud's defense mechanism theory.

The first of the previous research is a journal "*Salinger's Depiction of Trauma in The Catcher in the Rye*" by Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Ruzbeh Babae. This journal focuses on the depiction of psychological trauma in the novel. Holden's trauma is relation to loss and its effect on his mental state. It examines

how past events can influence the way the main character thinks and acts and also shows that Holden's trauma impacts his emotional state.

The second of the previous research is an article "*The Psychological Structure of The Catcher in the Rye*" by James Bryan. This article discussed the psychological structure of the Holden Caulfield as main character. The inner dynamics experienced by Holden as a result of his internal conflict became the writer's examination in this article. The writer suggests that the conflict between social reality, fear, and idealism are important factors in developing the main character's personality. The analysis found that Holden exhibits a complex psychological structure, which implies an uncertain identity during the process of growing from an adolescent to a grown-up.

The third of the previous research is a thesis "*Personality Development of Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*" by Dyah Monika Sari. Psychological development is the main theory for the writer in examining Holden's personality development throughout the story. Holden's emotional responses and behavioral changes are important aspects analyzed by the writers in this research. The writers also include an exploration of Holden's inner state when facing challenges in his life to support her argument.

The fourth of the previous research is a thesis titled "*Self Identity in The Catcher in The Rye by J.D. Salinger (1951): An Existentialist Approach*" by Zhafirah Mayyadah. The identity crisis of the main character is the primary focus of this research. In this research, the writer analyzes individual freedom, feelings of

alienation, and the meaning of life through Holden's character. As a result, the writer argues that the struggle between the wish to remain in adolescence and the demands of the adult world represents Holden's inner conflict.

The fifth of the previous research is the journal "*The Symbolic Structure of The Catcher in the Rye*" by Clinton W. Trowbridge. The analysis of symbolic structure is the main focus of this research, particularly the symbolism connected to the novel's title. Within this research, the writer reveals that the symbols that appear in the novel have a significant role in supporting the development of change, immaturity, and the fear of adulthood as experienced by the main character. The results of the research indicate that the main character's psychological development contributes to the establishment of symbolism in the novel.

The sixth of the previous research is the journal "*The Language of 'The Catcher in the Rye'*" by Donald P. Costello. During this research, the use of language in the novel was examined from a linguistic perspective. The writer examines the elements that shape the main character's narrative style, such as the use of adolescent slang, informal expressions, word repetition, and the presence of conversational language. The writer states that the results of the research suggest that the linguistic style in the novel functions to illustrate the psychological state of the main character and to reinforce the authentic impression of adolescence.

The last previous research is the journal "*Resistance as Madness in the Novel The Catcher in the Rye*" by Sorour Karampour Dashti and Ida Baizura binti Bahar. This research uses a Foucauldian perspective to analyze the concept of

resistance in the novel. It focuses on how Holden's behavior can be understood as a form of resistance to dominant social norms. The research findings reveal that Holden's actions, perceived as 'madness,' are in fact a form of criticism directed toward the prevailing social power structure and portray Holden as an individual who rejects social normalization through opposition.

Most of the research has analyzed Holden Caulfield through the lens of identity crisis, rebellion, symbolic structure, trauma, and the use of language. Although these research studies reveal important aspects of the novel, they do not explicitly examine how Holden's internal conflicts are addressed by ego defense mechanisms. Therefore, this research employs a different approach by focusing on psychological mechanisms such as denial and rationalization, due to Holden using these two mechanisms to cope with academic failure, loneliness, social alienation, trauma of loss, and distrust of the adult world. By doing so, this research not only identifies the forms of defense mechanisms in the novel but also explains how those mechanisms reflect the emotional instability of adolescence.

1.5 Research Method

With the psychological experience of the main character in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, a psychological approach can be used to analyze. The writer uses Anna Freud's psychoanalytic defense mechanism theory to explore the self-defense mechanism Holden Caulfield carried out in living his difficult life at a young age. The writer chooses to use this approach to reveal the denial and rationalization carried out by Holden Caulfield's character as a form of self-

defense. Anna Freud's theory of adolescence is also used to examine these defense mechanisms reflect psychological characteristics of adolescence.

The writer uses library research as a method of collecting analysis, with the following steps implemented: conducting a close reading of the novel, determining the criteria for selecting data in the form of relevant quotations, classifying the data according to the focus of the study, and analyzing the data based on the theory used. According to George (2008), "Library research is a form of structured inquiry with specific tools, rules, and techniques" (p. 1). Library research is a structured method that involves collecting written sources and analyzing data for research needs. In this research, this method was applied to help the writer obtain the results that align with the research questions.

In addition, George also divided the data into two categories: primary data and secondary data. "Primary sources provide direct evidence or firsthand testimony" (p. 91). The writer takes the novel of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* as primary data with a focus on the psychological conditions and the types of self-defenses carried out by the main character, Holden Caulfield. "Secondary sources discuss, interpret, comment on, analyze, and evaluate primary sources" (p. 92). Secondary data functions to analyze and evaluate the primary data. Therefore, the data from articles, journals, or books that are related to the topic discussed can be used to support the writer in providing a more detailed analysis in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

1.6 Scope of the Research

This research focuses on examining the psychological aspects of Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, specifically through the lens of defense mechanisms. This research will discuss the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the novel. The intrinsic elements discussed include characters and characterizations, settings, and conflicts. Extrinsic elements discussion will include analyses of the factors in Holden Caulfield's life that led him to use defense mechanisms, the forms of denial and rationalization he uses as defense mechanisms, and how his defense mechanisms reflect psychological characteristics of adolescence.

1.7 Writing Outline

In the writing of this thesis, the organization of the study will follow this outline:

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, it contains information and explanations about the background of the research, research questions, objectives of the research, previous research, research methods, scope of the research, and writing outline.

CHAPTER II THEORY AND METHOD

This chapter will examine the theory and methods that will be used to analyze the object of the research, including intrinsic and extrinsic elements, and method of research.

CHAPTER III RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of the analysis of the object under study, supported by data from the novel. It aims to identify the factors that make Holden Caulfield use defense mechanisms, to analyze the denial and the rationalization that he uses to defend himself, and to explore how this defense mechanism reflects psychological characteristics of adolescence in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes all results of the object under research.