

**DEFENSE MECHANISMS TO COPE WITH ADVERSE CHILDHOOD  
EXPERIENCES IN NOVEL *GOD HELP THE CHILD* BY TONI  
MORRISON (2015)**

**THESIS**

*Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement to Obtain Strata One (S1)  
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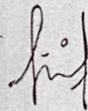
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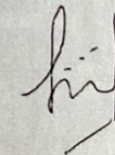
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### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis reveals the form of adverse childhood experienced by the main character in Toni Morrison's novel *God Help the Child*, Lula who changed her name to Bride when she was an adult as a form of defense mechanism for herself. The main focus of this thesis is how an adverse childhood plays a role in the formation of defense mechanisms used by the main character in dealing with the realities she faces in her life. This thesis uses the psychoanalytic theory of self-defense mechanisms by Sigmund Freud and the theory by Felitti regarding adverse childhood experiences in analyzing the defense mechanisms used by the main character with an adverse childhood background. Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) are a theory propounded by Felitti which defines it as a bad experience in childhood before the age of 18 that left such an impression that it caused childhood trauma. In this study, the researcher finds that from various forms of ACE that Felitti revealed in his research, the main character experiences adverse childhood forms such as verbal abuse and physical violence. Verbal violence and physical violence are received include bullying, abandonment by parents, neglect and others. The second theory is the theory of defense mechanisms by Sigmund Freud. Freud reveals that the defense mechanism is a form of self-defense by individuals to reduce feelings of pressure, anxiety, stress, or conflict that is carried out consciously or not. In this research, the researcher finds that from the eight types of defense mechanisms propounded by Freud, the researchers found that only some of these defense mechanisms were used by the main character. These defense mechanisms are Repression (block unpleasant things), denial (avoid reality), rationalization (justify everything), and sublimation (do positive things). Among the four types of defense mechanisms used by the main character as a form of self-defense, sublimation is the most prominent self-defense mechanism. The main character changes her name to Bride as a form of defense against her bad past. The main character changes her name which is considered to be the source of her past misery with the aim that her new name will bring goodness and change her current life.

**Keywords:** *Adverse Childhood, Defense Mechanism, Trauma*

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### **ABSTRAK**

Tesis ini mengungkap bentuk adverse childhood yang dialami oleh tokoh utama pada novel *God Help the Child* karya Toni Morrison, Lula yang mengganti namanya menjadi Bride di saat dewasa sebagai bentuk mekanisme pertahanan pada dirinya. Fokus utama dari tesis ini adalah bagaimana masa kecil yang merugikan berperan dalam menghadapi kenyataan yang dihadapinya dalam kehidupannya. Tesis ini menggunakan teori psikoanalitik mekanisme pertahanan diri oleh Sigmund Freud dan teori oleh Felitti terkait pengalaman masa kecil yang merugikan dalam menganalisis mekanisme pertahanan yang digunakan oleh tokoh utama dengan latar belakang pengalaman masa kecil yang merugikan. Pengalaman masa kecil yang merugikan merupakan sebuah teori yang dikemukakan oleh Felitti yang didefinisikan sebagai pengalaman buruk di masa kanak-kanak sebelum umur 18 yang begitu membekas yang menyebabkan terjadinya trauma masa kecil. Pada penelitian ini peneliti menemukan dari berbagai bentuk masa kanak-kanak yang merugikan yang diungkapkan oleh Felitti dalam penelitiannya, tokoh utama mengalami bentuk-bentuk masa kanak-kanak yang merugikan seperti kekerasan verbal dan kekerasan fisik. Kekerasan verbal dan kekerasan fisik yang diterima meliputi perundungan, ditelantarkan oleh orang tua dan lainnya. Teori kedua pada penelitian ini adalah yaitu teori mekanisme pertahanan oleh Sigmund Freud. Freud mengungkapkan bahwa mekanisme pertahanan merupakan bentuk pertahanan diri oleh individu untuk mengurangi perasaan tertekan, kecemasan, stress, ataupun konflik yang dilakukan secara sadar ataupun tidak. Pada penelitian ini peneliti menemukan bahwa dari delapan mekanisme pertahanan dalam teori Freud, hanya sebagian dari mekanisme pertahanan tersebut yang digunakan oleh tokoh utama. Mekanisme pertahanan ini adalah represi (menghalangi hal-hal yang tidak menyenangkan), denial (menghindari kenyataan), rasionalisasi (membenarkan segala hal), dan sublimasi (melakukan hal positif). Dari keempat jenis mekanisme pertahanan yang digunakan oleh tokoh utama sebagai bentuk pertahanan diri, sublimasi adalah mekanisme pertahanan diri yang paling menonjol. Tokoh utama mengubah namanya menjadi Bride sebagai bentuk pertahanan dirinya terhadap masa lalunya yang buruk tersebut. Pemeran utama mengganti namanya yang dianggap sebagai sumber kesengsaraannya di masa lalu dengan tujuan agar nama barunya membawa kebaikan dan dapat mengubah kehidupannya saat ini.

**Kata Kunci:** *Masa Kecil yang Merugikan, Mekanisme Pertahanan, Trauma*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	i
<b>ABSTRAK</b> .....	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	iii
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	v
<b>CHAPTER I</b> .....	1
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
1.1. Background of the Research .....	1
1.2. Focus of the Problem .....	6
1.3. Research Questions .....	7
1.4. Purpose of the Research.....	7
<b>CHAPTER II</b> .....	8
<b>REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</b> .....	8
2.1. Review of Related Studies .....	8
2.1.1. Elements of Novel.....	8
2.1.2. Concept of Adverse Childhood Experience/ACE'S .....	11
2.1.3. The Defense Mechanism.....	13
2.1.4. Types of Defense Mechanism.....	15
2.1.5. The Relation between Adverse Childhood Experience and Adult Life .....	19
2.2. Previous Research .....	20
2.3. Conceptual Framework .....	24
<b>CHAPTER III</b> .....	26
<b>RESEARCH METHOD</b> .....	26
3.1. Data and Source of Data .....	26
3.2. Technique of Data Collection .....	27
3.3. Technique of Data Analysis .....	28
<b>CHAPTER IV</b> .....	30
<b>DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS</b> .....	30
4.1 Adverse Childhood Experiences.....	30

4.2 The Defense Mechanisms Used by Main Character to Cope with Adverse Childhood Experiences .....	40
<b>CHAPTER V</b> .....	48
<b>CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION</b> .....	48
5.1. Conclusion .....	48
5.2. Suggestion.....	50
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	51

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background of the Research**

Humans and the past are two things that cannot be separated. Human life is determined by how the processes occur in their current life and will also be determined by how their past is stored in their memory. Memory is a structured system that allows organisms to record facts about the world and use their knowledge to guide their behavior. Thus, every experience, both in the past and present, will be recorded in human memory, which one day will come back to life in their minds. Those who experience something that makes an impression on their life will make the incident last forever in their memory because the wounds they sustain in life are not healed by time.

Childhood plays an important role in someone's life. A child's brain is like a sponge that catches and absorbs quickly everything they see around them. Their memory captures well what they see and what they experience. One of the things that usually leaves the most impact on their memory is the things they consider memorable in their lives. For example, the adverse childhood experiences they have had and witnessed that occur in various forms ultimately cause trauma to the child. Freud said that an experience could be said to be traumatizing if the experience causes a very severe mental disturbance. It can even permanently affect the working system of the brain. Freud believed that an experience is called trauma if it causes the mind to experience a bad experience.



This situation is characterized by the mind not being able to work for a while, usually and permanently disrupting the brain's work.

Individuals who experience adverse childhood experience (ACE) during childhood will adopt behaviors that are harmful to health. These behaviors include substance abuse, alcohol abuse, smoking, risky sexual behavior, violence, and crime or behavior that leads to obesity (Donkin, 2015:16). This happens because when they were children, they did not get special attention from their parents even if they only had bad memories. The abuse of children globally in 2017 revealed that: 23% of kids experience physical abuse, 36% experience emotional abuse, 16% experience physical neglect, and 12% experience sexual abuse. Many cases are unreported and undetected, often because children are afraid to tell someone who can help.

Nowadays, studies are increasingly exposing the relationship between the memories produced in childhood and the emergence of bad behavior as they grow up. The first large-scale adverse childhood experience (ACE) study in the US is beginning to look at the impact of adverse childhood experience (ACE) on health and behavior throughout the life course. In this study, they explained the form of ACE they experienced in their family and the consequences of adverse childhood experience (ACE). Adverse childhood experiences (ACE) can make it difficult for kids to manage their emotions and to interact with others. They can also have low self-esteem and have a hard time respecting themselves (Ford, 2016:3). Some of the everyday adverse childhood experiences experienced by children are the loss of a parent due to divorce,

separation, or death, living with someone who is mentally ill or depressed, experiencing domestic abuse, and more (Bellis, 2013:81). Some studies are starting to show how adverse childhood experiences have an impact on children's lives. The causes are usually very varied, starting from their family, surroundings, and daily interactions. The implications of early trauma on adult health and well-being have not been fully explored, as shown by these findings (Foege, 1998:354-355). One of the reasons for choosing adverse childhood experiences and racism as the topic to be discussed in this thesis is that researchers are interested in seeing how adverse childhood experiences and racism impact a person's life. The thing that makes this topic very interesting is that the problem of adverse childhood is very close to our lives, but sadly, most do not realize that this is so important and impacts someone's life. The main subject that plays a significant role in providing a bad childhood experience is family, where we sometimes don't realize that the closest people are the biggest enemies in our lives.

Adverse childhood experiences become an important study to discuss because this problem is getting more severe but still getting less attention. Whereas the impact that will be caused can significantly affect the attitude of children in the future because they will have a negative and lasting impact on their lives later. This effect can also be passed on to their children in the next generation. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are associated with a higher likelihood of parents later exposing their children to the same (Bellis, 2013:89). This means that individuals who have suffered from adverse

childhood experience (ACE) can be vulnerable to exposing their children to it, leading to a cycle of adversity, social disadvantage, and ill health. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are among the strongest predictors of poor health and social outcomes in adulthood, according to a number of studies, and these experiences play a significant role in defining an individual's future health and social prospects.

Several studies related to adverse childhood experiences—the first research by Saunders. The study title is Adverse childhood experiences, stress, and emotional availability in an American Indian context (Saunders, 2016:11). The quality of parent-child connections, early caregiver trauma, caregiver stress and mental health, and a child's socioemotional functioning were all covered in this study. This study examines the connections between a child's socioemotional functioning, a caregiver's adverse childhood experiences, concurrent caregiver stress, caregiver mental health, and the emotional quality of caregiver-child interactions. Second, research by Michaels. The study title is The Impact of adverse childhood experiences on adult monetary behaviors. This study discussed whether there is a relationship between dysfunctional money behavior and adults having adverse childhood experiences. When viewed from the point of view of the purpose of this study, the author's goal is to set benchmarks on how dysfunctional money behavior can damage everyday life. People with an ACE background were selected for this study to assess their vulnerability to money. The overall overview of this study is to convey an understanding of how adults who experienced childhood adversities can sabotage their financial



stability. These two studies examine individuals who experience adverse childhood experiences in their lives. Adverse childhood experiences are described as things that impact individuals in their lives. Those with a background with adverse childhood experiences can influence their attitudes emotionally and socially. So what distinguishes the researcher's research from the two studies is that this study focuses on how the main character who experienced adverse childhood experiences performs a defense mechanism on herself in the face of various things. This study focuses more on the way of self-defense carried out by the main character who had an adverse childhood experience. This study also reveals the existence of racial discrimination experienced by the main character as a form of adverse childhood experiences she experienced. This study also describes how the main character experiences an identity crisis as a black person who experiences various harmful treatments from her family.

Numerous literary works have addressed the problem of adversity in childhood such as poems, novels, and plays. This analysis focuses on the novel written by Toni Morrison. Her novel that is related to this topic is *God Help The Child*. Her book depicts the type of adverse childhood experience (ACE) the main character had. The adverse childhood profoundly impacts the character's life because all the memories related to the trauma are difficult to erase. Starting from the treatment, they get from their family to the social environment in which they live. This will affect how they live and deal with the reality in their environment while growing up. Adverse childhood experiences are a serious

problem, hence it is crucial that this topic be discussed. This study can also serve as a resource for other academics who are interested in researching the same subject in relation to adverse childhood experiences.

In this study, I will focus on discussing how some experiences are recorded in memory. In addition, the focus of this study is to describe the defense mechanisms and to reveal the implementation of characters' mechanisms in solving conflicts. An adverse childhood experience describes a terrible event that happened in a person's life before the age of 18 and that they still recall as an adult is referred to as an adverse childhood experience (Kostić, 2019:15). Sciaraffa, P. Zeanah, and Zeanah also describe adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) as a number of traumatic events, such as abuse or neglect, that take place during a person's first 18 years of life. The period that they should have passed as a time where they could develop their talents, play with their friends and learn from many things must turn into a scary time that they should not have passed at that age. This traumatic experience significantly impacts the individual who experiences it even until they grow up. Experiences during childhood can have a long-term impact on a person's entire mental and physical health.

## **1.2.Focus of the Problem**

This study focuses on how the character in the novel experience adverse childhood that affect how they behave as adults. This study is to identify the implied meaning from the text in the novel, and the goal is to know how the

form of adverse childhood is by using several literary elements and, of course, using related literary theories.

### **1.3.Research Questions**

Based on the research background above, the research problem are:

1. How does the novel *God Help The Child* portray the forms of adverse childhood experiences?
2. What defense mechanisms are used by the main character to cope with the adverse childhood experiences?

### **1.4.Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of this study is to find out how these adverse childhood experiences are portray in novel . In addition, this research also aims to educate the public that adverse childhood experiences will significantly impact a person's life. In other words, this issue is raised with the aim that the public is more concerned about things that have been ignored, whereas this is a serious issue that must be considered.