

## **DENIALS AS DEFENSE MECHANISM OF JAY GATSBY IN THE GREAT GATSBY (2013) MOVIE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research aims to analyse denial as defense mechanism in main character of The Great Gatsby (2013) movie, Jay Gatsby. This research discovered denials as defense mechanism in psychoanalytic in the main character, which based on Sigmund Freud's theory. The researcher used a qualitative descriptive method based on the movie's dialogue and character's behaviour. The Great Gatsby (2013) movie was the primary data source in this research. This research identifies 3 types of denial as defense mechanism in Jay Gatsby's character. Jay Gatsby shows that his denials were caused of his own ego, that he can't accept reality he was born in a poor family and his unhealthy obsession towards Daisy Buchanan which their relationship has ended long time ago and now Daisy is already Tom Buchanan's wife.

**Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Defense Mechanism, Denial**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of denial in psychology has its origins in Sigmund Freud's psychodynamic theories. The id, ego, and superego are the three mental dynamics, or motivational forces, that shape human behaviours, according to Freud. The id, pleasure; ego, reality; and superego, morality are the three forces that constantly compete with one other for control, leading to internal conflict. Anxiety is brought on by this conflict. By activating defense mechanisms, the ego, which serves as a mediator between the two extremes of the id and the superego, tries to lessen this nervousness. Defense mechanisms include things like shielding oneself of responsibility for problems or assigning blame to others as covert coping techniques for anxiety. One of the various defense mechanisms is denial. It means denying or not accepting an unpleasant reality. When faced with worry or conflict, or in a traumatic scenario, defense mechanisms defend an individual's psychological well-being.

Denial is frequently mentioned regarding a person's past and personal surroundings as an intra-psychic defense mechanism. Although denial functions on a psychological level, it is impacted by the environment that people live in. Thus, the development of an understanding of the psychology of denial in relation to political concerns like torture requires taking consideration more than just the individual's past and personal surroundings. People are more likely to pay attention to, learn from, and use negative information than good information when making judgments, hence influences that reveal negative information are especially effective. (Ito et al., 1998; Vaish et al., 2008).

In psychological terminology, denial is a construct with an extended history. Many writers have observed that the phrase has a wide range of interpretations and applications (Wheeler and Lord, 1999; Moyer and Levine, 1998; Manousos and Williams, 1998). In real life, the definition that is applied frequently limits its psychological usefulness. The most well-known studies on denial have been psychoanalytic and cognitive, however there have also been humanistic, behavioural, and neurological explanations offered in the literature. Some have interpreted the variety of definitions of denial as pointing to a complex and multiple construct that requires subcategories and context-specific specificity in both intrapsychic and interpsychic domains.

One key topic that runs across the vocabulary of denial is whether a person can recognize when they are engaging in denial (Breznitz, 1983; Manousos and Williams, 1998). Starting with Freud (1923), psychoanalytic theorists believe that a denier uses the defense mechanism of denial to ease anxiety, and that these catharsis actions are unconscious, pathological functions of the ego (Sperling, 1958). According to Anna Freud (1961), denial is a basic —pre-stage defense that develops into a full defense mechanism as an adult from its narcissistic beginnings.

People often feel stressed during the denial phase and find it difficult to regulate their feelings about the issue. People at the time were unable to accept the reality of something that occurred in life. Individuals that engage in denial will pretend that the upsetting reality they experienced never happened. Denial is evident in the manner and mindset. They tend to act out if others discuss their situation with them. When something doesn't satisfy their expectations, they frequently become upset. They enjoy taking their anger at a thing, animal, or incident out on other people. They usually fight with someone, torment animals, and destroy the object. In contrast to their actions, they frequently have terrible thoughts. They believe that people are always opposing the idea. They believe no one agrees with it. They think people despise them. It creates feelings of disgust and hatred for other people. When someone ignores the harsh reality in his life, these things occur.

The concept of denial is quite interesting to discuss. It displays issues that are common in adults. A related difficulty to denial is reflected in novels, short tales, and poetry. One example is Baz Luhrmann's movie, *The Great Gatsby* (2013), who is adapted from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel. The main character of this movie is Jay Gatsby, a complicated and dynamic figure who personifies the themes of love, desire, and the corrupting effects of riches and power. His journey from poverty to the highest levels of society embodies the American Dream.

Previous research by Fajar and Ningsih (2011) entitled "Reality Denial in the Novel *A Monster Calls* (2011) By Patrick Ness" using denial theory by Sigmund Freud to analysis the protagonist of the story due to something bad happened in his family. Previous research by Iftikhar, Saddique, and Nawaz (2022) entitled "Projection of Denial as a Defense Mechanism in Fatima Buttho's Novel *The Runaway*" using denial theory by Sigmund Freud to analysis the three protagonists of the novel due to their anxiety and denial about their miserable reality. Previous research by Yamamiartha (2023) entitled "Denial as Fundamental of Alyssa's Identity Development in *Chasing Amy* (1997)" using denial theory by Sigmund Freud to analysis a character named Alyssa due to her denials about her sexuality. The difference between this article and the previous article is that this article focuses more on discussing the denial only on one character and focused on what his denial about, not for the reason he's being denial.

## METHODS

The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, which is a type of research that aims to describe systematically and accurately the facts on certain data objects (Kriyantono 2006). Descriptive qualitative is also a research method that attempts to describe the object being studied subjectively with the aim of formulating characteristic facts systematically and frequently (Zellatiffany and Mudjiyanto 2018). The data in this study were analysed using descriptive methods, with an emphasis on observations of empirically observed facts and phenomena (Bustam 2020).

This research source material is *The Great Gatsby* (2013) movie, and the object of research is a character named Jay Gatsby. The analysis of *The Great Gatsby* (2013) relies on textual and contextual interpretation. This movie is analysed using fictional elements like character and plot (conflict). Character behaviour and attitude toward the issue are examined to illustrate the denying reality (Cantikawati 2024). Furthermore, these components are examined through the lens of Sigmund Freud's idea of defense mechanisms.

Sigmund Freud developed the idea of defense mechanisms, which refers to the ego's self-defense systems and internal psychological processes in response to unpleasant events. The classification of 10 different defense mechanisms was explained in Anna Freud's 1936 landmark book, "The Ego and the Mechanism of Defense". Importantly, nevertheless, this research is restricted to analysing denial as a cognitive technique people adopt to deal with a certain reality, as defined by Giuseppe and Perry (2021).

Denial is a broad term that encompasses a variety of coping mechanisms people use to protect themselves from a wide range of perceived and real threats (Yamamiartha 2023). When someone encounters a possible threat, turning away from the situation could give them time to consider the effects and depth of the threat before reacting. Individuals who engage in acts of denial can deceive themselves and use this deception as an excuse for their behaviours. It is possible to try and find a methodical way to explain away the difficulties that arise in a variety of circumstances, such running into problems in a relationship or position, making a one-way connection, or having a spouse who isn't emotionally connected.

## RESULTS

*The Great Gatsby*, which was released in 2013, contains data that the researcher uses to determine Jay Gatsby's three different forms of denial. Using psychoanalytic defense mechanisms focusing on Jay Gatsby's behaviour and qualitative descriptive research methods, the researcher discovered eight cases that could be categorized into three different types of Jay Gatsby's denial, which are as follows:

**Table 1** Result of Denial Research

Type of Denial	Finding Case
Denial of the Past	3 cases
Denial of Reality	3 cases
Denial of Identity	2 cases

The data shown that Jay Gatsby has 3 different types of denials with 8 cases, and denial of identity is the least shown in the movie with 2 cases.

## DISCUSSION

The Great Gatsby (2013), directed by Baz Luhrmann which is adapted from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, is a movie that brilliantly captures the story of Jay Gatsby, a man whose existence is based on layers of denial. The movie uses a lot of visual effects, subtle acting, and a contemporary soundtrack mixed with 1920s extravagance to show how Gatsby's denial affects his relationships, life, and finally his terrible end. With a concentrate on Gatsby's denial of the past, present, reality, and himself, Baz Luhrmann's adaptation provides an intense cinematic examination of the delusions and illusions that lead Gatsby to his unavoidable conclusion.

### 1) Denial of the Past

The most notable feature of Jay Gatsby's persona in the movie is certainly his refusal to accept the past, which drives the story and influences each of his actions. The thought of returning his long-since-ended romance with Daisy Buchanan is Gatsby's obsession. The movie frequently shows flashbacks to Gatsby and Daisy's past, which are portrayed in nostalgic, soft tones that clearly contrast with the bright, vibrant present, pointing out this obsession through images. In addition to providing the audience with background information, the flashbacks emphasize Gatsby's obsession with these memories, which he has exaggerated to the point of illusion.

Gatsby's denial of the past showed in his dialogue with Nick Carraway. He believes that the past could be repeated.



**Figure 1** Gatsby denial of the past (The Great Gatsby (2013) 01:21:02)

Nick: "Jay... You can't repeat the past."

Gatsby: "Can't repeat the past?"

Nick: "No."

Gatsby: "Why of course you can. You'll see. I'm going to fix things just the way there were before. Everything's been so... so confused since then..."

(The Great Gatsby (2013), 01:21:02)

In figure 1 and dialogue above, it's clearly stated that Gatsby being denial about the past, that he believes the past could be repeated. Gatsby is essential in expressing this denial. When he said, "Can't repeat the past? Why of course you can!" exudes a desperation that reveals Gatsby's inability to acknowledge time's irreversible nature. Detail shots of Gatsby's face emphasize this scene in the movie, highlighting the depth of his belief and his unwillingness to let go of the past.

Another obvious example of Gatsby's denial is the extravagant parties he hosts at his mansion. These lavish get-togethers are more than just social events; they have been carefully organized shows meant to draw Daisy and bring back the enchanting memories of their past times spent together, as stated by Jordan Baker in her conversation with Nick Carraway.



**Figure 2** Jordan statement about Gatsby's party (The Great Gatsby (2013) 00:47:30)

Nick: "It's a strange coincidence, isn't it? Gatsby's house being just across the bay..."

Jordan: "It's no coincidence. He bought that house to be near her, he threw all those parties hoping she'd wander in one night. He constantly asked about Daisy... I was the first one who knew her."

In figure 2 and dialogue above, Jordan stated that all the reasons why Gatsby throw a lavish party is just to draw Daisy's attention and hoping she would wander in one night. The main goal of Gatsby's action is to have reconciliation with Daisy, to reunite the long-since-ended romance 5 years ago.

An additional example concerning Gatsby's denial of the past is a recurrent visual motif in the movie; the green light at Daisy's dock's end, which is a potent representation of Gatsby's denial. Gatsby frequently appears to be staring across the bay at the light, which symbolizes his wish to reunite with Daisy and win back their lost love.



**Figure 3** Gatsby's hand try to reach the green light (The Great Gatsby (2013) 02:08:26)

Figure 3 shows Gatsby's hand trying to reach the green light at Daisy's dock. This symbolizes that Gatsby trying to reach Daisy with is almost impossible for him to take her back. The light is always far away and just out of grasp, signifying the pointlessness of Gatsby's search. This symbol is used in the movie to highlight how unachievable Gatsby's dream is and how unwilling he is to accept that the past is lost.

## **2) Denial of Reality**

Beyond his obsession with the past, Gatsby's denial also includes his unwillingness to acknowledge the reality of the present moment, especially in regards to his relationship with Daisy. Gatsby's visualization of Daisy can be seen in the movie through his conversations and interactions with her. Gatsby frequently looks at Daisy with an almost devoted intensity, admiration, longing, and hope all mixed together in his eyes.



**Figure 4** Gatsby looking into Daisy (The Great Gatsby (2013) 01:03:27)

Figure 4 shows Gatsby looking into Daisy with devoted admiration. It shows how deep Gatsby loves Daisy, even though his relationship with Daisy has ended 5 years ago and now Daisy has a husband. Close-up shots of this gaze convey Gatsby's conviction that Daisy is flawless and that she will leave her husband, Tom Buchanan to be with him.



In addition, the movie speaks to the tension that lies beneath Gatsby's denial. In certain scenes, Gatsby's optimistic beyond breaks down, exposing a man who recognizes—at least partially—that his dream is fragile. Gatsby gently expresses these moments; his tense looks, hesitating steps, and vulnerable moments imply that he is not totally unaware of the truth. For example, Gatsby is clearly uncomfortable in the scene where Tom questions him about his past; his normal calmness stumbles as Tom questions the truthfulness of his wealth and position.



**Figure 5** Gatsby feels uncomfortable (The Great Gatsby (2013) 01:36:03)

Figure 5 shows Gatsby feels uncomfortable when Tom asking about his wealth and job position. Gatsby looks nervous while trying to get rid of it. The movie's use of close-up shots and quick cuts increases the tension in this scene, highlighting Gatsby's developing sense that his dream might not come true.

Another thing that Gatsby won't acknowledge is the reality of Daisy's life as it is shown in the movie. Daisy is a multifaceted character who is endearing and gorgeous but also naive, passive, and deeply rooted in her wealthy childhood. The movie depicts Daisy's conflicted feelings toward Gatsby and her unwillingness to leave the safety and security of her life with Tom. Gatsby is firm in his belief that Daisy will pick him in regardless of this. Gatsby's insistent that Daisy declare she never loved Tom—a demand that Daisy finds difficult to meet—symbolizes this denial of reality in the movie.



**Figure 6** Gatsby convincing Daisy to be with him (The Great Gatsby (2013) 01:38:39)

Figure 6 shows Gatsby convincing Daisy to tell the truth. The truth here means what words supposed for Daisy says to Tom to fulfil Gatsby's wish. In this scene, it also showed how Daisy feels uncomfortable of Gatsby's wish, as she said in her dialogue towards Gatsby.

Daisy: "You want too much! I love you now; isn't that enough? I can't help what's past. I did love him once; but I loved you too!"

It's clearly showed how Daisy feels uncomfortable for Gatsby's wish by saying it "too much." This dialogue also stated how hesitant and naïve Daisy is. The movie captures this scene with a painful clarity, highlighting the disconnect between Gatsby's fantasy and the actual circumstances by displaying Gatsby's desperation and Daisy's nervousness.

### 3) Denial of Identity

Another major theme in this movie, which is vividly told through visual storytelling, is Gatsby's denial of his true identity. James Gatz, better known as Gatsby, has completely transformed from his poor beginnings to become a refined and prosperous gentleman. This identity construction has involved more than just accumulating wealth. The movie shows Gatsby's early years through flashbacks, contrasting the lavish lifestyle of his later years with the simplicity of his youth. The way these flashbacks are presented emphasizes the disconnect between Gatsby's past and the persona he has constructed. It is dreamlike, almost surreal. Gatsby's true identity also stated by Nick Carraway in his monologue.



**Figure 7** Gatsby's poor childhood (The Great Gatsby (2013) 01:08:25)

Nick: "Gatsby's real name was... James Gatz. His parents were dirt-poor farmers from North-Dakota... But he never accepted them as his parents at all. In his own imagination, he was... a Son of God... Destined for future glory..."

As shown in figure 7 and Nick's monologue, little Gatsby just a poor kid from dirt-poor farmers, but he's denial about it, as clearly stated by Nick's monologue "in his own imagination, he was a Son of God." It shows that Gatsby's denial about his true identity comes since he was a child. He's denial that he's come from poor family, because in his mind, he's destined for achieve something big in the future.



Gatsby's interactions with other characters, especially Tom Buchanan, in the movie further emphasize his denial of who he really is. Tension is evident in the crucial encounter between Gatsby and Tom as Tom reveals the truth about Gatsby's past. The inner chaos of Gatsby is portrayed in this scene. Gatsby's rage and desperation appear as Tom tears down what he has created, exposing the weakness of his developed identity.



**Figure 8** Gatsby losing his temper due to Tom's questions (The Great Gatsby (2013) 01:41:57)

Figure 8 shows Gatsby who looks rage and desperate due to Tom who reveals Gatsby's true identity. Gatsby's denial made him losing his control that almost punch Tom's face. He feels desperation that he scared his life will begin to fall. Using powerful close-ups, the movie depicts Gatsby's tightened fists, shaking voice, and the dawning realization that his carefully constructed life is starting to fall apart.

## CONCLUSION

The Great Gatsby (2013), directed by Baz Luhrmann, successfully illustrates Jay Gatsby as a tragic character whose constant denial determines him. The film conveys the depth of Gatsby's self-delusion through a combination of hidden acting and visual symbolism. His denial of reality, the past, and his true identity lead him into his downfall. The movie's representation of Gatsby's extravagant parties, his obsession with the green light, and his anxious search for an un retrievable life highlight the pointlessness of leading a life of denial.

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