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## Intrapsychic Conflict and Defense Mechanisms in the Representation of Anxiety in Tamara Ireland Stone's *Every Last Word*

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### Abstract

*This study examines the representation of anxiety disorder and the deployment of defense mechanisms in Tamara Ireland Stone's novel Every Last Word (2015). Anxiety is portrayed as a complex psychological condition emerging from internal psychic conflict involving the id, ego, superego, and the pressures of external reality. The study is grounded in the assumption that literary works reflect authentic psychological experiences and can therefore be analyzed to deepen understanding of mental health conditions. The objectives of this research are twofold: first, to identify how anxiety disorder is depicted through intrapsychic conflict in the protagonist, and second, to analyze the defense mechanisms employed by the main character, Samantha McAllister, in coping with her anxiety. This study applies a descriptive qualitative method and adopts Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory as its primary analytical framework. The data consist of narrative descriptions, dialogues, and character actions that illustrate psychological tension and coping strategies. The findings reveal that Samantha's anxiety stems from persistent conflicts between the id, ego, superego, and social reality. In response to this psychological distress, she unconsciously employs various defense mechanisms to reduce internal tension and maintain emotional stability. This study highlights anxiety as a dynamic psychological process shaped by ongoing intrapsychic struggle and demonstrates how psychoanalytic theory provides valuable insight into character development and emotional conflict within literary narratives.*

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**Keywords:** : *anxiety disorder, defence mechanisms, psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, Every Last Word*

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## INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental health conditions worldwide, affecting individuals across age groups, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. While anxiety can function as an adaptive response to stress or perceived threat, its excessive and persistent manifestation may develop into an anxiety disorder that significantly disrupts daily functioning. Epidemiological research identifies anxiety disorders as among the most common psychiatric conditions globally (Baxter et al., 2012), underscoring their urgency as both clinical and social concerns. Beyond clinical diagnosis, anxiety influences emotional regulation, cognitive performance, decision-making, and interpersonal relationships, often diminishing overall psychological well-being (Utami, 2022). Consequently, anxiety should not be reduced to a temporary emotional state; rather, it must be understood as a complex psychological phenomenon shaped by intrapsychic and social dynamics.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Freud conceptualizes anxiety as a signal of danger experienced by the ego when confronted with internal conflict or external threat (Freud, 1917). Anxiety emerges when the ego struggles to mediate between the instinctual demands of the id, the moral imperatives of the superego, and the constraints of reality. In this framework, anxiety is not solely a reaction to objective danger but also a manifestation of unconscious conflict within the personality structure. When such tension becomes chronic and unresolved, it may crystallize into anxiety disorder, expressed through intertwined emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms. Psychoanalysis therefore situates anxiety as a dynamic process rooted in structural imbalance within the psyche rather than as a purely situational response.

To manage this tension, the ego deploys defense mechanisms, unconscious psychological strategies that reduce distress and preserve psychic equilibrium. Freud (1917) identifies mechanisms such as repression, projection, denial, displacement, regression, rationalization, reaction formation, and sublimation as protective operations that shield the ego from overwhelming anxiety. Although these mechanisms serve stabilizing functions, their persistent or maladaptive use may distort reality and shape patterns of behavior. Contemporary public discourse further demonstrates the relevance of anxiety and its coping strategies beyond clinical settings, as public figures openly discuss their struggles with anxiety disorders (Dixon, 2021), reflecting the normalization yet continued complexity of mental health experiences in modern society.

Literature provides a crucial site for exploring these psychological dynamics. As Wellek and Warren (1956) argue, literary works mirror human experience and offer insight into psychological realities. Novels, in particular, enable nuanced representation of internal conflict by granting access to characters' thoughts, emotions, and unconscious processes (Susanto & Nurmaily, 2023). Young adult fiction has increasingly foregrounded mental health themes, positioning psychological struggle as central to identity formation. Tamara Ireland Stone's *Every Last Word* (2015) exemplifies this trend through its portrayal of Samantha McAllister, a teenager grappling with obsessive thoughts, social anxiety, and profound internal conflict. The narrative not only depicts

the symptoms of anxiety but also dramatizes the intrapsychic tensions underlying her psychological distress.

While previous studies tend to categorize anxiety according to diagnostic types or symptoms, fewer analyses examine anxiety as a dynamic outcome of ego conflict within literary representation. This study addresses that gap by analyzing how anxiety disorder in *Every Last Word* emerges from structural conflict between the id, ego, superego, and external reality. Drawing on Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the research further investigates the defense mechanisms Samantha unconsciously employs to negotiate psychological tension. By foregrounding anxiety as a process of intrapsychic negotiation rather than merely a clinical label, this study contributes to interdisciplinary conversations between literary studies and psychoanalytic psychology. It demonstrates how literary narratives can illuminate the complexity of mental health experiences and deepen understanding of anxiety as both a psychological condition and a formative element of character development.

## METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design to examine the representation of anxiety disorder and defense mechanisms in Tamara Ireland Stone's *Every Last Word* (2015). A qualitative approach is appropriate for this research because the objective is to interpret meaning, psychological experience, and character behavior as constructed within a literary narrative rather than to generate statistical measurement. Qualitative inquiry emphasizes depth, contextual interpretation, and the exploration of subjective experience (Creswell, 2014), making it particularly suitable for psychoanalytic literary analysis.

The primary data consist of narrative passages, internal monologues, dialogues, and character actions involving the protagonist, Samantha McAllister. These textual elements were selected based on their relevance to manifestations of anxiety, intrapsychic conflict, and the use of defense mechanisms. Data collection was conducted through close reading, involving repeated and systematic examination of the novel to identify significant excerpts reflecting psychological tension and coping strategies.

The analysis is guided by Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly his structural model of the psyche (id, ego, and superego) and his concept of defense mechanisms. The analytical procedure involved three stages: (1) identifying textual evidence that indicates anxiety symptoms and internal conflict; (2) categorizing these instances according to forms of ego conflict—between the ego and id, ego and superego, and ego and external reality; and (3) interpreting the defense mechanisms employed by the protagonist to manage psychological distress. Through this interpretive process, the study seeks to reveal how anxiety operates as a dynamic intrapsychic process within the narrative structure.

This methodological framework enables a systematic yet interpretive examination of literary representation, ensuring that psychological concepts are grounded in textual evidence while maintaining analytical rigor.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Anxiety Disorder in *Every Last Word* (2015)**

Based on Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Samantha's anxiety arises from the ego's failure to balance the demands of the id, the pressures of the superego, and the limitations of reality. These conflicts create psychological tension that develops into persistent anxiety. Her obsessive thoughts, compulsive behaviours, and fear of social judgement show how anxiety dominates her mental and emotional life. This supports Freud's view that anxiety functions as a danger signal for the ego when it is threatened by internal and external conflicts.

### ***Anxiety as a Result of Ego and Id Conflict***

In *Every Last Word* by Tamara Ireland Stone, Samantha McAllister's anxiety can be understood through Freud's psychoanalytic theory, particularly anxiety arising from ego and id conflict. Freud (1917) states that anxiety emerges when the ego fails to control the instinctual demands of the id, indicating that anxiety originates from unconscious inner conflicts rather than external factors alone.

Samantha's obsessive thoughts, compulsive behaviours, physical symptoms, and fear of social situations show that her ego struggles to manage repressed fears and desires. This supports Freud's view that anxiety functions as a danger signal for the ego when it is threatened by internal psychological conflict (Freud, 1917).

*"I grab a rose out of the bucket and pick the scissors up off the floor. The instant I slide my fingers through the handles, this thought hits me out of nowhere, and before I have time to react, I feel my brain sink its teeth in and latch on tight, already preparing to fight me for it. My hand starts trembling and my mouth goes dry"* (Stone, 2015, p.10). This quotation shows that Samantha's intrusive thoughts appear suddenly and create intense fear rather than intentional harm. Freud (1920) calls this phenomenon the *return of the repressed*, in which suppressed inner drives resurface in the form of compulsive thoughts. The ego attempts to block aggressive id impulses because they conflict with the superego, but continuous repression causes these impulses to reappear as anxiety symptoms.

Samantha's panic attack, marked by physical reactions such as a dry mouth and shaking hands, indicates that her ego is unable to manage excessive internal conflict. This condition reflects anxiety arising from ego and id conflict, where repressed impulses remain active in the unconscious and emerge as anxiety and behavioural symptoms (Freud, 1920).

### ***Anxiety as a Result of Ego and Superego Conflict***

Samantha McAllister's anxiety in *Every Last Word* can also be seen as a result of the conflict between the ego and the superego. Freud (1917) explains that the superego represents internalized moral standards that continuously judge and criticize the ego.

When the ego feels it fails to meet these standards, psychological tension appears in the form of guilt, shame, and fear of moral judgement.

In Samantha's case, an overly strict superego intensifies her anxiety, making her feel strange, weak, and morally flawed. She becomes excessively worried about how others perceive her, fearing that her condition will be exposed. This anxiety does not arise from real external threats, but from the ego's fear of being judged and punished by the superego itself (Hamim et al., 2024). Thus, Samantha's belief that others can detect her problems reflects anxiety rooted in ego and superego conflict rather than in objective reality.

*"They'll know I'm sick. I wanted to believe that I could get up on this stage and drop my guard like AJ and Sydney did so easily, but now I'm not so sure anymore. They're all watching me, and I look at each of their faces, realizing that I know nothing about them. I don't even know most of their names"* (Stone, 2015, p. 78). Samantha's anxiety is not only caused by the content of her poems but also by her fear of appearing different. Freud (1917) states that the superego functions as an internal moral judge that evaluates the ego according to strict social and moral standards. Because of this, Samantha constantly feels embarrassed and anxious, fearing that she fails to meet these expectations. Her stage fright reflects the conflict between the ego and the superego, where the superego's rigid demands intensify her fear of judgement and rejection. While her ego attempts to act realistically, the pressure of the superego's moral standards increases her anxiety during public performances (Freud, 1917).

### ***Anxiety as a Result of Ego and Reality Conflict***

Anxiety arising from ego and reality conflict occurs when the ego responds to threats coming from the external world. Freud (1917) states that this type of anxiety functions as a realistic warning signal that encourages individuals to protect themselves from potential danger. Unlike anxiety rooted in unconscious conflict, this anxiety is triggered by situations that are perceived as truly threatening.

In *Every Last Word*, Samantha McAllister experiences this form of anxiety through common adolescent stressors, particularly those related to social interaction, performance, and peer judgement. Her anxiety reflects the ego's response to real pressures from her environment, showing how external situations can intensify her psychological distress (Freud, 1917).

Samantha experiences this type of anxiety when she has to read a poem in front of people. *"The negative thoughts overpower all the positive ones, and the familiar swirl begins. They'll know I'm sick"* (Stone, 2015, p. 78). In this situation, the ego responds to an outside demand that could lead to judgment and embarrassment from other people. Freud (1917) states that anxiety is a problem when it goes beyond what a person can realistically handle in a situation and gets in the way of how well the ego can function. Samantha's fear of being seen in public gets stronger than is fair, which shows that her anxiety is made worse by unresolved internal tension.

### **Defence Mechanism in *Every Last Word* (2015)**

Samantha exhibits various types of anxiety and applies several defence mechanisms to cope with her psychological pressure. Freud (1920) states that defence mechanisms are unconscious strategies used by the ego to protect itself from anxiety arising from conflicts among the id, ego, and superego.

#### ***Sublimation***

Samantha exhibits sublimation, a defence mechanism that involves redirecting emotional drives or bad impulses into good and useful tasks (Freud, 1917). Unlike other mechanisms that are repressive or avoidant, sublimation turns negative emotions into actions that are good for both the individual and society. Through her love of writing poems, Samantha shows sublimation in the context of the novel *Every Last Word*.

The activity helps her get rid of the anxiety and obsessive thoughts she's been having. *"When I write, the noise in my head finally quiets down. The words make sense when nothing else does"* (Stone, 2015, p.145). The quotation illustrates Samantha's main way of dealing with her anxiety is by writing, refers to a mental state that was initially occupied with persistent thoughts and a lot of anxiety, but that eased as the writing progressed. The phrase *"the words make sense when nothing else does"* makes a point of showing that writing gives her a place to find peace and meaning when everything else seems out of control. In this situation, sublimation is a defence strategy that lets Samantha's ego get back to normal without her having to hurtfully control her subconscious urges.

#### ***Repression***

One of the most fundamental defence mechanisms is called repression and it is the process by which the ego attempts to suppress undesirable emotions, thereby relegating them to the unconscious mind. Freud (1917) referred to repression as the gatekeeper of consciousness due to its function of obstructing the id's impulses from penetrating the ego's awareness. Samantha exemplifies the manifestations of repression, since she constantly encounters confronted with sudden unwanted ideas.

*"I grab a rose out of the bucket and pick the scissors up off the floor. The instant I slide my fingers through the handles, this thought hits me out of nowhere, and before I have time to react I feel my brain sink its teeth in and latch on tight, already preparing to fight me for it. My hand starts trembling and my mouth goes dry. It's just a thought. I let the scissors fall to the floor and I shake out my hands a few times, looking around the circle to be sure no one's watching me. I'm in control. I try again"* (Stone, 2015, p.10). This quotation shows that Samantha's violent intrusive thoughts conflict with her morals and self-image, creating fear and guilt that lead her ego to use repression. Freud (1920) states that repression pushes painful thoughts out of awareness to protect the ego, yet these thoughts remain active in the unconscious and can return as anxiety or intrusive symptoms. Warkey et al. (2020) also argue that repression often contributes to anxiety disorders because suppressed psychic energy has no outlet and may appear as

psychosomatic symptoms. Thus, Samantha's repression only gives temporary relief and does not resolve her internal conflict, keeping her trapped in persistent anxiety.

### **Reaction Formation**

Samantha demonstrates reaction formation, a defence mechanism wherein an individual exhibits emotions or behaviours that oppose their genuine feelings to safeguard their ego from emotional strain. This mechanism is clearly visible when Samantha interacts with The Eights. Despite experiencing anxiety, fear of rejection, and discomfort, she tries to create an image of happiness and confidence to her friends. *"I smiled, laughed, and played along like everything was fine, even though I felt like I was drowning inside"* (Stone, 2015, p. 63). This quotation shows that Samantha's cheerful external appearance contrasts sharply with her inner fear and loss of control, reflecting reaction formation as a defence mechanism. Freud (1917) states that reaction formation occurs when the ego hides unacceptable impulses by transforming them into their opposites, allowing individuals to appear socially stable and acceptable. In this case, Samantha's laughter and smiles function as a mask for her anxiety and emotional pain. Similarly, Nurcahya & Juanda (2024) explain that individuals who feel scared or insecure may act confident and happy to cope with their inner distress. However, this strategy only provides temporary relief because it does not resolve the root of her emotional conflict, leaving Samantha trapped in ongoing inner turmoil despite her seemingly positive behaviour.

### **Displacement**

Displacement is a defence mechanism in which the ego redirects anxiety from a threatening source to a safer object (Freud, 1917). In *Every Last Word*, Samantha shows displacement by channeling her anxiety and guilt into her behaviour and social withdrawal instead of facing the real source of her conflict.

*"I dig my fingernails into the back of my neck. One, two, three. One, two, three. One, two, three. "And, you know, say thank you...for letting me join you guys last week." AJ checks the area around us and steps in closer. He's a full head taller than me, and when he tucks his chin to his chest and stares down at me, I feel guilty, even though I haven't done anything wrong"* (Stone, 2015, p.61). This quote illustrates a type of movement that happens inside and outside of a person. When Samantha suddenly has obsessed thoughts, she tries to deal with her feelings by hurting herself in small ways. She digs her nails into her neck repeatedly in order to feel something in her body. Not only is this a weird habit, but it is also a sign that psychic energy is moving from mental stress to easier-to-control physical pain. Freud (1917) states that displacement happens when the ego cannot face the real source of its internal stress head on, the ego pushes its anxious feelings or urges onto a target that is safer or easier to control. This mechanism lets the ego lower anxiety by moving the emotional reaction away from its source, which is seen as too dangerous. Samantha's fears and anxieties are not directed at the deep-seated psychological conflict. They are turned into feelings in her body that she can notice and try to control. Samantha's physical problems can be seen as a form of displacement,

which means that her deep psychological stress is released through her body instead of her mind recognizing and processing those emotions

### **Denial**

Consistent with the preceding explanation, the ego defence mechanisms exhibited by Samantha illustrate her attempts to manage the psychological strain induced by her anxiety disorder. Each mechanism gives a general idea of the unconscious ways she keeps her emotions stable. At this time, denial seems to be the most common method. This is the inclination to reject or dismiss facts that could make more anxious (Freud, 1917).

*“You can’t get by with four to five hours of sleep each night, Sam.” I’ve been doing exactly that for the last couple of months, and I’m fine. I’m not failing my classes or anything. Well, I might be failing Trigonometry, but that doesn’t have anything to do with the amount of sleep I’ve been getting. That’s entirely about me sucking at trigonometry* (Stone, 2015, p. 131). This quotation reveals a kind of denial that is clearly tied to her anxiety illness. Samantha is currently experiencing the physical and emotional effects of her anxiety, which include insomnia, exhaustion, and increasingly severe obsessive thoughts. But instead of accepting that these symptoms mean her anxiety issue is getting worse, she denies this by saying she is alright. Freud (1917) states that denial occurs when individuals confront situations that may induce significant anxiety, prompting the ego to deny this reality to avoid heightened dread or discomfort. Samantha had to face the fact that her anxiety was once again getting in the way of her life when she admitted that she was not sleeping well. She had been attempting to avoid this. So, denial was a way for her to protect herself for a short time so that she could keep believing she was still stable, even while her symptoms were getting worse. This denial finally demonstrates that Samantha's anxiety not only impacts her cognition but also shapes her perception of her illness, causing her to dismiss facts that jeopardize her stability. So, the quote shows that denial is one of the ways Samantha deals with her anxiety problem, which makes it harder for her to notice and deal with the symptoms that come up.

### **Projection**

After using denial to avoid anxious realities, Samantha begins to express her emotions outwardly through more complex defence mechanisms. One of the most dominant is projection, in which she unconsciously transfers her fear and guilt onto others as a way to protect her ego.

*“I look at her. This would have been good information to know yesterday. I have a feeling she knew this was coming, and I feel even more betrayed. I stuck up for her. “So you’ve been spying on me?” I ask them. “No,” Kaitlyn says plainly. “Yes,” I say”* (Stone, 2015, p. 154). The quotation illustrates a type of projection, that occurs when an individual denies their internal impulses, guilt, or fear and subsequently attributes it to others. Freud (1917) states that projection happens when the ego seeks to protect itself from anxiety that is too scary to deal with directly. Samantha is really anxious in this scenario because she got caught lying to her friends. She feels internal tension because

she is afraid of being rejected and guilty for being dishonest. Samantha does not admit that she's anxious and defensive, instead she projects those feelings onto someone else by saying "So you've been spying on me?". This is an overreaction to the circumstance. The charge is not only a reaction to the facts, it also shows her inner uneasiness. She is afraid of being watched, judged, controlled, and this fear comes out in her conviction that others are threatening her. So, projection acts as a cover to lessen her inner fear, even though it makes her interactions with other people even more strained (Putra et al., 2023). This defence mechanism demonstrates the strong connection between Samantha's social anxiety and the psychological techniques she employs to preserve her mental stability.

### **Regression**

Samantha's changing emotional state shows that her anxiety affects not only her thoughts but also her behaviour. Her nervousness leads her to respond impulsively, especially in situations that overwhelm her mentally and physically, as a way to release emotional tension she cannot control.

*"It was horrible. I'd yell at my parents. Throw tantrums like a six-year-old. I was tired all the time, because trying to function while you're trying to ignore all those swirling thoughts is physically and mentally draining. I'm still myself on the meds, but they help me control the thought spirals. I wouldn't go back to a life without them"* (Stone, 2015, p.131). Samantha's claims of having yelled at her parents and thrown tantrums like a six-year-old clearly demonstrate how her anxiety induces the activation of regression. According to Freud (1917), regression is an ego defence mechanism that occurs when individuals cannot manage internal conflicts or emotional pressures at an adult level, prompting the ego to regress to a prior stage of psychosexual development that is perceived as safer and more manageable. In other words, regression happens when the ego feels too anxious and naturally goes back to more basic ways of handling problems, like how kids act. Samantha's regression is not just shown by her nasty behaviour or tantrums, it also shows a subconscious need for protection, comfort, and safety. When kids have emotional problems, they frequently deal with them in more spontaneous and outspoken ways, not via more adult thinking or self-control (Andini, 2023).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that *Every Last Word* (2015) portrays anxiety disorder as a structurally rooted and dynamically sustained psychological condition rather than a temporary emotional disturbance. Through a psychoanalytic lens, Samantha McAllister's anxiety emerges from persistent intrapsychic conflict in which the ego struggles to mediate between the instinctual pressures of the id, the moral rigidity of the superego, and the expectations of social reality. The resulting imbalance generates sustained psychological tension, manifested in obsessive thoughts, compulsive behaviors, and

heightened fear of social judgment. Anxiety in the novel therefore functions as a signal of unresolved structural conflict within the personality.

The analysis further reveals that Samantha unconsciously mobilizes multiple defense mechanisms—including repression, denial, projection, displacement, reaction formation, regression, rationalization, and sublimation—to mitigate psychological distress. While these mechanisms temporarily stabilize the ego and allow her to navigate social demands, they do not resolve the underlying conflicts that produce anxiety. Their repetitive deployment underscores the cyclical nature of anxiety as a defensive yet incomplete coping process. The narrative thus illustrates how defense mechanisms both protect and constrain the subject, preserving psychic equilibrium while simultaneously perpetuating internal tension.

Overall, this study affirms that anxiety in *Every Last Word* is represented as a dynamic process of intrapsychic negotiation rather than merely a clinical symptom. Freud's psychoanalytic framework proves productive in illuminating the structural foundations of the protagonist's distress and in clarifying the psychological function of defense mechanisms within literary characterization. By bridging psychoanalytic theory and literary analysis, this research reinforces the capacity of fiction to model complex mental health experiences and contributes to ongoing interdisciplinary dialogues in psychoanalytic literary studies, particularly concerning the representation of anxiety and personality formation in contemporary young adult literature.

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