
**OVERCOMING TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES THROUGH
SELF- DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN THE NOVEL *THE
BROKEN RING: THIS MARRIAGE WILL FAIL ANYWAY* BY
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Abstract	Article Information
<p><i>This research aims to analyze overcoming traumatic experiences through self-defense mechanisms in the novel 'The Broken Ring: This Marriage Will Fail Anyway' by Chacha Kim. The objectives of this research are: to find out the types of traumatic experiences in the novel 'The Broken Ring: This Marriage Will Fail Anyway' by Chacha Kim, and to analyze how to overcome traumatic experiences through self- defense mechanisms in the novel 'The Broken Ring: This Marriage Will Fail Anyway' by Chacha Kim. This research employs Freud's psychoanalysis theory to find out the types of traumatic experiences and the forms of self-defense mechanisms used to overcome those traumatic experiences. The method uses in this research is descriptive qualitative. The researcher found three types of traumatic experiences: neurotic trauma, trauma of loss and separation, and sexual trauma. The findings reveal seven forms of defense mechanisms: rationalization, suppression, denial, repression, displacement, reaction formation, and avoidance with.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Traumatic Experience, Self- Defense Mechanism, Descriptive Qualitative, Neurotic Trauma, Avoidance</p>	<p><i>Received:</i> 21/02/2026</p> <p><i>Revised:</i> 22/02/2026</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 28/02/2026</p>

INTRODUCTION

In the complexity of human life, individuals inevitably encounter painful events that leave enduring emotional and psychological scars. These events such as loss, betrayal, violence, or humiliation are often so overwhelming that they cannot be processed through ordinary mental functioning. Freud (2023) defines a traumatic experience as “any experience which causes the subject distressing affect fear, shame, or the like and which is not sufficiently mastered by the defensive forces of the ego, but instead breaks through them, thereby causing a lasting disturbance to the organization of the mind” (p. 38). From the researcher’s

perspective, this insight suggests that trauma is not simply remembered or forgotten, it is actively negotiated by the psyche, often outside the realm of conscious awareness.

As a response to trauma, the ego activates what Freud called self-defense mechanisms psychological strategies that operate unconsciously to protect the individual from overwhelming anxiety. These include repression, denial, displacement, sublimation, and projection (Freud, 2023, p. 53). The researcher interprets these as adaptive tools that enable temporary emotional equilibrium, especially when the conscious mind is unprepared to confront the full emotional impact of a traumatic event.

This study focuses on analyzing traumatic experiences and the use of self-defense mechanisms as portrayed in ‘The Broken Ring: This Marriage Will Fail Anyway’ by Chacha Kim. It centers on the psychological dimension of the main character, Ines, particularly on how she responds to a series of traumatic experiences such as emotional degradation, sexual violation, and abandonment across different phases of her life. The analysis highlights the intricate connection between these experiences and the unconscious psychological strategies she develops to endure overwhelming emotional pressure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traumatic Experience by Sigmund Freud

According to Freud, trauma occurs when an event produces a level of excitation so intense that it cannot be processed by the usual mental pathways, leading to a lasting disturbance in the psyche (Freud, 2011, p. 12). Similarly, trauma may arise from violent or distressing events, including deeply unsettling or unforgettable experiences that leave emotional and psychological wounds.

To understand how trauma affects the human psyche, Freud discusses various types of traumatic experiences based on their origins and psychological impact. Although Freud does not explicitly categorize trauma into specific groups, in several of his important works, he describes different forms of trauma, such as neurotic trauma, loss and separation trauma and sexual trauma.

1. Neurotic Trauma

Neurotic trauma refers to inner psychological conflict that cannot be consciously accessed and instead recurs through behavior or symptoms. It occurs when individuals fail to process disturbing experiences directly and instead relive them symbolically. Freud described this process as a “repetition compulsion,” stating that “The patient... is obliged to repeat the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of remembering it as something in the past” (Freud, 2011, p. 18). According to the researcher, this shows how unresolved trauma manifests not only in memory but also in repeated patterns of behavior.

2. Loss and Separation Trauma

Freud originally discussed this in relation to grief over death, as explained in ‘Mourning and Melancholia’, the concept is equally relevant to emotional neglect within intimate relationships. Freud stated that “the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object” (Freud, 2005, p. 249). According to the researcher, this indicates that individuals unconsciously turn rejection inward, treating themselves with the same criticism once received from others.

3. Sexual Trauma

Sexual trauma refers to overwhelming or violating sexual experiences that an individual cannot fully process, often resulting in repression, shame, or psychological fragmentation. Freud initially emphasized childhood sexual trauma but later acknowledged that such experiences at any life stage such as rape, coercion, or abusive intimacy may lead to neurosis if unresolved. As Freud noted, “The experiences of childhood leave a permanent mark upon the individual and form the basis of the neuroses” (Freud, 2000, p. 33). According to the researcher, this suggests that both early and later sexual traumas can reactivate repressed memories or generate new unresolved wounds.

Self- Defense Mechanism by Sigmund Freud

Freud, as noted in Minderop (2011, p. 31), argues that anxiety is fundamentally generated by the conflict between the id, ego, and superego. When the ego struggles to balance the demands of the id with the restrictions of the superego, internal tension arises. Defense mechanisms then operate as protective strategies, either by rejecting or reshaping reality, to lessen the psychological strain. Thus, Freud identified several distinct forms of defense mechanisms, such as:

1. Rationalization

Freud stated that rationalization is a defense mechanism in which an unacceptable behavior or feeling is explained in a logical manner, while the true reason is avoided (Feist & Feist, 2008, p. 45). According to the researcher, rationalization functions as a way to reduce anxiety by covering up deeper motives with acceptable explanations.

2. Avoidance

Freud (as cited in Feist & Feist, 2008, p. 47) stated that avoidance is a defense mechanism in which individual distance themselves from situations or thoughts that provoke anxiety. According to the researcher, this form of defense naturally arises when a person faces inner conflict or traumatic experiences that are difficult to confront directly.

3. Suppression

Freud stated that suppression is a defense mechanism involving the conscious effort to push unwanted thoughts out of awareness (Feist & Feist, 2008, p. 46).

According to the researcher, suppression reflects a more mature strategy since it allows individuals to stay functional while managing emotional discomfort.

4. Denial

Freud, as cited in Feist & Feist (2008), defines denial as a defense mechanism in which individuals refuse to accept reality or facts, thereby blocking external events from awareness (p. 45). According to the researcher, denial reflects the individual's attempt to avoid emotional suffering, even though it prevents them from facing actual problems.

5. Repression

Freud (as cited in Feist & Feist, 2008, p. 40) stated that when the ego is threatened by undesirable id impulses, it protects itself by repressing those impulses into the unconscious. According to the researcher, this mechanism serves as the basis for many other defense strategies because it hides painful content.

6. Displacement

Freud, as cited in Feist & Feist (2008, p. 42), stated that individuals often redirect unacceptable urges onto other people or objects so that the original impulse is disguised. According to the researcher, this mechanism reflects an unconscious strategy to reduce anxiety and maintain psychological balance.

7. Reaction Formation

Freud explains that a repressed impulse may surface by taking a form directly opposite to its original nature, a defense mechanism known as reaction formation (Feist & Feist, 2008, p. 41). According to the researcher, this mechanism functions as a psychological mask to reduce inner conflict and anxiety.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method that focuses on description and interpretation rather than numerical data. Creswell (2014, p. 59) explains that qualitative research emphasizes words instead of numbers and applies open-ended approaches. Therefore, this method highlights descriptive analysis to clearly present and interpret textual data. The primary data source of this study is the novel *The Broken Ring: This Marriage Will Fail Anyway* written by Chacha Kim (2023), and the data consist of textual excerpts relevant to the research focus. In addition, secondary data are obtained from books, journals, articles, and relevant online sources to support the analysis and strengthen the theoretical framework. The data collection procedures include formulating research questions, conducting library research to gather supporting references, selecting and classifying textual evidence related to types of traumatic experiences, and analyzing the data by categorizing them based on the form of self- defense mechanism according to the applied theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Types of Traumatic Experiences

The types of traumatic experiences identified in the research object include neurotic trauma, loss and separation trauma, and sexual trauma. Each type is examined through specific subcategories that illustrate how the characters undergo these traumatic experiences.

1. Neurotic Trauma

“Thus, she never expected to find herself in the middle of the hunting ground with the rifle in her hand. The weight of the rifle felt exactly as before she died. For a moment, she thought she might still be dying. Perhaps her brain was still in the process of being blown up.”
(Kim, p. 99)

The excerpt illustrates Ines’s intense fear and disorientation. The sensory detail of the rifle’s weight strengthens her perception that she is still trapped in the moment of death, blurring the boundary between past and present. Her thoughts, “she thought she might still be dying” and “her brain was still in the process of being blown up,” demonstrate how trauma distorts her sense of reality. Instead of recognizing her current situation, Ines unconsciously alters her perception to align with her traumatic memory.

2. Loss and Separation Trauma

“On the night she saw Emiliano in her dream and woke up sobbing, she re-centered herself by telling her reflection in the mirror that none of these events really happened until her tears stopped flowing. Then, the sun would rise, and everything would be fine again.”
(Kim, p. 111)

The excerpt illustrates Ines’s deep sorrow and longing, as indicated by the phrase “saw Emiliano in her dream and woke up sobbing,” which reflects the intensity of her emotional pain. Her act of convincing herself that “none of these events really happened” demonstrates her attempt to cope with the overwhelming reality of her partner’s absence. The researcher interprets this as loss and separation trauma because Emiliano’s memory continues to haunt both her subconscious and conscious life. Her ritual of speaking to her reflection reveals the depth of her attachment and emphasizes the enduring psychological wound caused by the loss of her partner.

3. Sexual Trauma

“He took her night after night, all the while knowing that he was contagious. Even when she was pregnant with his baby, she got down on all fours for him.... no amount of begging would stop him. Once she realized the full truth, Ines quickly changed her mind. How fortunate she was to never carry the seed of this disgusting man to full term. His child would be a curse to the world.” (Kim, p. 95)

The excerpt reveals the repeated sexual violence Ines suffers from her husband, who forces himself on her despite being contagious and despite her pregnancy. Her pleas are ignored, and she is compelled to submit without consent, emphasizing her powerlessness within the relationship. The coercion, exposure to disease, and abuse during pregnancy clearly reflect sexual violence as a form of trauma. What initially appears as a tragedy her inability to carry the child to term later becomes, in her perception, a form of protection from bearing the child of a cruel and abusive man. This trauma not only involves physical violation but also deeply affects Ines's perception of motherhood, trust, and self-worth, demonstrating the enduring psychological impact of sexual violence within a relationship structured by control and domination.

Overcoming Traumatic Experiences Through Self- Defense Mechanisms

This section discusses the effects of traumatic experiences on the characters' behavior in the novel. The research further examines how these traumatic experiences are managed or transformed through various self-defense mechanisms, including rationalization, avoidance, suppression, denial, repression, displacement, and reaction formation.

1. Neurotic Trauma Through Rationalization

“Then, for eight years, he would do everything wrong in the world, until his wife would be driven to shove a hunting rifle to her own head. She felt heart stirring and her brain scheming. Yes realizing that Emiliano was still alive somewhere in this version of reality gave her a momentary relief.. (Kim, p. 115)”

The quotation shows how the protagonist reimagines her pain as a chain of “everything wrong in the world,” ending with her wife's tragic act. This sense of endless suffering becomes a way to explain and contain grief, giving her anguish a grim structure rather than leaving it as raw chaos. By doing so, she keeps herself from being fully consumed by despair. According to the researcher, a mechanism of inner protection appears when she holds on to the thought that “realizing that Emiliano was still alive somewhere” provides “momentary relief.” by scheming and turning pain into a narrative of survival, she practices a quiet form of mental justification a fragile but necessary way to endure trauma without collapsing under its weight.

2. Loss and Separation Through Avoidance

“On the shores of Calztela, she had held onto Emiliano's hand for her dear life.. fleeing from the officers who pursued them relentlessly.. she swallowed her sobs and refused to dwell on these painful memories any longer. Even if Emiliano were alive again, he would just die as soon as he crossed paths with her. ...The current state of affairs was best for everyone. Emiliano had yet to meet Ines and thus was still alive and well somewhere (Kim, p. 127)”

The excerpt depicts Ines clinging to Emiliano's hand "for her dear life" while fleeing, yet later she "refused to dwell on these painful memories any longer." By insisting that "the current state of affairs was best for everyone" and imagining Emiliano as "still alive and well somewhere," she transforms unbearable grief into a survivable illusion. Avoidance becomes a shield that allows her to live beyond the trauma of separation. The researcher interprets this as memory avoidance, where the mind chooses not to revisit the most devastating scenes. These phrases show how Ines redirects loss into a narrative that provides temporary comfort, choosing life-preserving illusions over despair so the past does not dominate the present.

3. Sexual Trauma Through Suppression

"Ines revisited the conversation they had last night. Her face had turned stone cold when he mentioned "rape" (Kim, p. 240)"

The excerpt shows Ines recalling a conversation where her face had turned stone cold at the mention of "rape." This reaction signals an instinctive act of withholding, where emotional expression is deliberately suppressed to contain overwhelming pain. By freezing her response, Ines turns to silence and rigidity as a way of surviving sexual trauma. The researcher considers this an example of overcoming trauma through suppression. The phrases "revisited the conversation" and "stone cold" reveal how memory and body collaborate to guard against exposure. Ines does not deny the trauma, but her restraint illustrates a protective silence that allows her to endure without disintegration, reflecting a human attempt to preserve dignity in the face of violation.

4. Neurotic Trauma Through Denial

"No, this must be a dream. A really long dream... Instead of begging her brother any longer, she instead tried to strike her own arm with her rifle... She felt the pain. The sensation was much too clear, and this moment too long to be a flashback before death. It meant that she not dreaming right now. (Kim, p. 100)"

The excerpt illustrates Ines's refusal to accept her present reality by convincing herself, "No, this must be a dream. A really long dream..." Even when physical pain confirms her existence, she clings to denial and struggles to accept that what she experiences is not a fleeting illusion. Such insistence highlights her attempt to protect herself from overwhelming trauma. The researcher argues that this moment exemplifies denial as a means of overcoming neurotic trauma. By interpreting painful reality as a dream or a flashback before death, Ines shields herself from despair and refuses to acknowledge its permanence. This refusal operates as a fragile form of survival, allowing her to endure what would otherwise be unbearable.

5. Loss and Separation Through Repression

“She smelled the scents, heard the sound, and tasted the air the day that Emiliano died. She was trapped in that memory during her waking and sleeping hours (Kim, p. 266)”

The excerpt depicts Ines reliving the day Emiliano died with overwhelming intensity—she “smelled the scents, heard the sound, and tasted the air,” remaining “trapped in that memory during her waking and sleeping hours.” Such vivid recall shows how grief imprisoned her in the past, refusing to fade. The researcher argues that this fixation reflects trauma’s resistance to healing while also signaling the mind’s effort to repress unbearable loss. By holding on to sensory detail while burying emotional impact, Ines unconsciously works toward overcoming devastation, transforming intrusive memory into a presence that can eventually be endured.

6. Neurotic Trauma Through Displacement

“She was certain that she would end up in the hell after killing her child. But instead, she ended up in the comfortable bed and the prosperity of an aristocrat.... Ines pushed the mirror with all her might. (Kim, p. 109)”

The excerpt shows Ines anticipating eternal punishment after killing her child, yet waking instead in the comfortable bed and prosperity of an aristocrat. Faced with this unbearable dissonance, she directs her turmoil outward, as seen when “Ines pushed the mirror with all her might.” The act symbolizes her attempt to release inner torment through an external object. The researcher argues that this behavior demonstrates displacement as a coping mechanism, as Ines projects guilt and fear onto the mirror and transforms overwhelming inner pain into tangible action. This physical outburst represents a fragile but human way of surviving trauma by redirecting unbearable emotions into the external world to maintain psychological balance.

7. Sexual Trauma Through Reaction Formation

“He took her night after night, all the while knowing that he was contagious. Even when she was pregnant with his baby, she got down on all fours for him.... no amount of begging would stop him. Once she realized the full truth, Ines quickly changed her mind. How fortunate she was to never carry the seed of this disgusting man to full term. His child would be a curse to the world. (Kim, p. 95)”

The excerpt reveals the extreme violation Ines endured “night after night,” even during pregnancy, when “no amount of begging would stop him.” Once she uncovers the truth of his disease, she reframes her experience: “How fortunate she was” never to bear his child, transforming submission into rejection and renouncing his legacy as a “curse to the world.” The researcher argues that this shift demonstrates reaction formation—the movement from submission to disgust. By calling his child a “curse” and his presence “disgusting,” Ines con-

verts humiliation into active contempt. This reframing becomes a way of overcoming sexual trauma, as revulsion shields her from continued psychic subjugation and restores her sense of agency.

CONCLUSION

The study identified a total of 53 data excerpts: 34 related to neurotic trauma, 12 to loss and separation trauma, and 7 to sexual trauma. These findings indicate that neurotic trauma is the most dominant form, primarily caused by prolonged emotional suppression, repeated humiliation, and unresolved inner conflict. The character's responses to these traumas are manifested through the unconscious use of various self-defense mechanisms. The researcher categorized seven types of defense mechanisms portrayed in the novel, namely: rationalization, avoidance, suppression, denial, repression, displacement, and reaction formation. These mechanisms function as psychological survival tools that help the character manage her emotional pain and anxiety, though they also reflect unresolved trauma that continues to shape her behavior and perception. Among these forms of self-defense mechanisms, avoidance emerges as the most dominant, highlighting the character's tendency to distance herself from painful realities rather than directly confronting them. Ultimately, the study affirms that literature can powerfully reflect the workings of the human psyche, particularly how individuals unconsciously respond to psychological wounds through defense mechanisms in order to maintain emotional equilibrium.

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