

Emotional Denial as a Self-Defense Mechanism in Daisy's Character in *Picking Daisies on Sundays*Tyana Putri Utami¹ ✉, Thohiriyah²^{1,2} English Literature, Faculty of Language and Arts, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Semarang, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 22 June 2026 Approved 13 July 2026 Published 31 July 2026 Keywords: emotional denial, defense mechanism, psychoanalysis, picking daisies on sundays	Emotional denial is one of the psychological defense mechanisms that individuals use to cope with distressing emotions and threatening realities. This study examines emotional denial as a self-defense mechanism in Daisy's character in the novel <i>Picking Daisies on Sundays</i> by Liana Cincotti. The objective is to analyze the forms of Daisy's emotional denial and explain how it functions as a self-defense mechanism. By using a qualitative descriptive method with a textual analysis approach, data were collected through close reading and documentation techniques, focusing on relevant dialogues, narrations, and character actions. The collected data were then analyzed using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, focusing on the concept of defense mechanisms as the theoretical framework. The findings reveal that Daisy's emotional denial manifests through verbal rejection, avoidant behavior, and minimization of conflict, triggered by internal trauma, low self-worth, and external relational threats. This study concludes that emotional denial does not operate as a single reaction, but as a structured strategy combining verbal, behaviour, and thoughts. While this mechanism temporarily protects the character's mind, it operates maladaptively by creating a continuous loop emotional avoidance that stops her personal growth and negatively affects her relationship with Levi.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict does not always appear in the form of physical aggression, but often comes from character's psychological maze (Tensiranna, 2018). One of the most complex psychological conflicts is denial, which represents of human subconscious defense. When a character is confronted with a painful reality that is extremely unpleasant to acknowledge, denial appears as a way of responding to distressing experience (Cavarella et al., 2022). The response to these problems tends to lean toward rejection or minimization of the issue (Rohmatin, 2024). The recurring pattern of denial has been acknowledged in literary and psychological studies, which highlight denial as an important issue in character development and emotional struggle (Alwaitjri et al., 2022; Maretha

et al., 2025). In deeper narratives, denial is not presented as a simple response, but as a complex process shaped by a variety of emotional experiences and interpersonal stress.

Theoretically, the complexity of denial can be further understood through the lens of psychoanalytic perspectives by Sigmund Freud, which identifies denial as a form of a defense mechanism. Within this perspective, denial functions as unconscious strategies that protect individuals from psychological distress when reality becomes too threatening or emotionally overwhelming (Cramer, 2015). According to Freud, when the ego is confronted with intense anxiety, whether as a result of previous trauma or present threats, the mind will create a protection by distorting reality (Tang & Peng, 2022). In this

✉ Corresponding author:

Email: tyanaput@students.unnes.ac.id

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notion, denial becomes a strategy that is relevant in situations where individuals experience the impact of emotions such as loss, fear, or internal conflict that cannot be processed consciously.

The defense mechanism in the form of denial operates more intensely when dealing with internal psychological conditions controlled by chronic insecurity, which triggers a deep fear of loss (Laczkovics et al., 2020). The feeling of insecurity roots from the person's inability to form stable attachments in the past, which makes relational vulnerability when the individual faces relational threats in the present (Kadir & Ba'yah, 2017). Unresolved loss trauma also triggers intense separation anxiety, which then forces the ego to activate denial as its main defense. Emotional denial serves to mitigate the anxiety of relationship loss, which is perceived to destroy a person's identity (Anggraeni & Widyaningrum, 2024). As a result, behaviors shaped by denial may manifest as emotional avoidance, rejection, or the minimization of conflict, reflecting how individuals cope with distress in situations marked by both past emotional experiences and present relational insecurity.

The novel *Picking Daisies on Sundays* by Liana Cincotti explore issues of friendship, emotional vulnerability, and personal relationships through the journey of its main character. The story follows Daisy, a young woman who uses denial as her main defense mechanism to deal with complicated psychological dynamic. The internal conflict becomes more intense with the appearance of Levi, the central male character and protective figure who shares similarities with Daisy's late father. Levi's presence in Daisy's life triggers traumatic memories from the past, as he is unconsciously positioned as a substitute for her absent father figure. Daisy's emotional closeness with Levi consequently creates deep anxiety because any potential loss of Levi is perceived as a repetition of painful childhood trauma. The unresolved concern eventually breeds severe insecurity, manifesting specifically when Daisy compares herself to other women deemed more equal and worthy of being alongside the nearly perfect figure of Levi. Rather than openly acknowledging her feelings, she tends to avoid or downplay situations that threaten her relationship with Levi, reflecting patterns that are consistent with emotional denial.

In conclusion, denial is a complex psychological issue that causes fictional characters to go through identity and behavioral changes (Zulfaisya & Hasra, 2020). Literature serves as an essential instrument to connect both the fields of literature and psychology through in-depth narratives as reflected in the novel *Picking Daisies on Sundays*. Through an approach using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, it may offer significant insights into how denial is formed from the interaction of various past internal factors and present external triggers. Although studies on denial as an ego defense mechanism have been widely conducted, studies on denial have examined emotional triggers such as loss, anxiety, and relational conflict (Lestari & Sari, 2025). Many of these studies separate these elements in analysis. Some focus on past experience, while others emphasize present emotional conditions. By looking at these gaps, this study uses a different approach by exploring the connection between past trauma, anxiety, and relational pressures in the present as the main triggers for the root cause of denial. This study aims to answer the following questions: (1) How is emotional denial portrayed in Daisy's character in *Picking Daisies on Sundays*? and (2) How does emotional denial function as a form of self-defense in Daisy's character? The present study argues that Daisy's emotional denial functions as a psychological defense mechanism manifested through verbal rejection, avoidant behaviour, and the minimization of conflict. These manifestations emerge from the interaction of unresolved trauma, insecurity, and relational threats, demonstrating that denial temporarily protects the ego from overwhelming emotional pain while simultaneously hindering emotional growth and interpersonal relationships. By examining denial as a complex psychological dynamic, readers are expected to gain a new perspective on the psychological meaning behind fictional characters' behavior (Caracciolo, 2016). This analysis also contributes to literary studies by showing that literary works are not merely passive narratives, but a discursive space that allows readers to understand the complexity of negotiating emotional conflicts in the reality of human relationships.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method with a descriptive analytical approach to examine the portrayal of emotional denial in Daisy's character within the novel *Picking Daisies on Sundays* by Liana Cincotti. A qualitative framework is selected because the literary work contains psychological complexities and intricate emotional layers that are difficult to measure through quantitative method. Qualitative method is considered highly appropriate as it allows the researcher to explore dynamic character personalities and uncover hidden meanings within the narrative (Tenny et al., 2017). By focusing on interpreting meaning and understanding human experiences through textual data, the qualitative lens facilitates a deep exploration of how emotional denial is represented through the character's internal thoughts, behaviors, and interpersonal interactions (Mohajan & Haradan, 2018). The research systematically utilizes a descriptive analytical approach to identify, describe, and interpret specific forms of emotional denial as they manifest in the story through textual evidence and in-depth interpretation of the character's psychological condition.

The primary data source for the research is the novel *Picking Daisies on Sundays*, with a specific focus on dialogues, narrative descriptions, and character actions that reflect Daisy's psychological responses. Secondary data sources are incorporated to strengthen the theoretical framework, consisting of academic journals, articles, and books relevant to psychoanalytic theory and defense mechanisms. Data collection is conducted through a documentation technique, where the researcher performs a thorough, close reading of the novel to identify and categorize passages indicating emotional avoidance or internal conflict. The analytical phase applies Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, specifically the concept of defense mechanisms, to decode how denial functions as a psychological shield in response to emotional distress. By integrating the primary textual evidence with established theoretical concepts, the findings are interpreted descriptively to explain the intricate relationship between emotional denial and Daisy's psychological condition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section addresses the two research questions by examining how emotional denial is portrayed in Daisy's character and how it functions as a form of self-defense throughout *Picking Daisies on Sundays*. To provide a cohesive interpretation, the presentation of results integrated with the discussion so that each textual excerpt is analysed alongside its literary and psychoanalytic significance. The analysis first explores the forms of emotional denial manifested in Daisy's behaviour and language before discussing the internal and external factors that shape these defensive responses. Through this integrated approach, the discussion illustrates how the novel constructs emotional denial as a dynamic psychological process.

Forms of Daisy's Emotional Denial

Verbal Rejection

One of the earliest manifestations of Daisy's emotional denial appears through verbal rejection. Daisy's tendency to reject her feelings is evident in moments when her emotions toward Levi become impossible to ignore. The first occurs during a conversation with Gabe, who notices Daisy's unusual reaction whenever Levi is mentioned and asks, "Do you still love him?" Daisy immediately responds, "I—no, no, no of course not," *I said quickly* (Cincotti, 2023, p. 23). The unfinished expression "I—" briefly interrupts her answer before it is replaced by repeated negations, while the narrator's remark that she replied "*quickly*" suggests an instinctive response. The same pattern appears later when Daisy reflects on her feelings after spending time with Levi, admitting, "I didn't want to believe that I still loved him" (Cincotti, 2023, p. 166). The phrase "*didn't want to believe*" indicates that Daisy is not questioning whether the feeling exists, but resisting its acceptance. Although these moments occur in different situations, both reveal Daisy's immediate tendency to reject feelings that continue to resurface whenever she is confronted with her emotional attachment to Levi.

Daisy's repeated verbal rejections suggest a recurring pattern of emotional denial whenever her feelings for Levi are brought into question. Across both situations, Daisy does not reject the questions because her feelings have disappeared. The responses instead indicate an unwillingness to acknowledge emotions that continue to exist beneath her outward words (Paralani & Hadiyanto, 2022). Accepting that she still loves Levi would

also mean accepting the pain of a relationship that has changed and the possibility that those feelings may never be returned in the way she hopes. By refusing to admit what she feels, Daisy creates a temporary emotional distance from that painful reality, allowing her to avoid the distress associated with loss and disappointment. Hamza et al., (2024) explains that denial functions as a defense mechanism through which individuals unconsciously reject emotionally distressing realities to protect themselves from psychological discomfort. Daisy's recurring verbal rejection reflects this defensive function, as denying her feelings enables her to maintain emotional stability without immediately confronting the grief and vulnerability attached to her unresolved attachment (Sahib et al., 2026; Azahra et al., 2024). Although this strategy reduces emotional distress in the short term, it also prevents Daisy from processing her emotions fully, allowing the conflict to persist throughout the narrative (Fatmawati & Purwanto, 2020).

Previous psychoanalytic literary studies have generally examined denial by identifying defensive behaviours displayed by fictional characters (Zulfaisya & Hasra, 2020). The present study complements these findings by demonstrating that emotional denial is also conveyed through dialogue structure, lexical choice, and narrative characterization, highlighting the role of language in representing unconscious psychological conflict. A similar pattern is found in Daisy's responses, where verbal rejection functions as an immediate protective strategy whenever her attachment to Levi is questioned. While the previous study examines denial in a different literary context, both findings demonstrate that verbal rejection serves to preserve emotional stability by preventing characters from confronting painful emotional realities.

Avoidant Behaviour

Avoidant behaviour is commonly reflected through actions that create emotional or physical distance from situations perceived as psychologically threatening. Individuals tend to withdraw from interactions or redirect their attention to other activities that help reduce emotional discomfort (Xiao, 2025). This pattern can be observed in Daisy's behaviour after an emotionally overwhelming encounter with Levi, when Daisy deliberately changes a routine that had

long been part of her relationship with his family. She narrates, *"I skipped Sunday dinner with his family, which meant Levi drove me straight home. ... He offered to walk in with me, to help unpack everything to my mom. I said no. I didn't need Levi to see me cry again"* (Cincotti, 2023, p. 233). The word *"skipped"* signals her conscious decision to avoid attending the family gathering, while the brief statement *"I said no"* emphasizes her refusal when Levi offers to accompany her. The sentence, *"I didn't need Levi to see me cry again,"* directly connects her decision with her emotional condition and her wish to keep those feelings hidden.

A similar pattern appears earlier in the novel when Daisy repeatedly occupies herself with different activities after finding it difficult to stop thinking about Levi. She reflects, *"Scrapbooking didn't work; watching endless romance films didn't work; embroidering and quilting didn't work; and writing a list of all of his cons definitely didn't work because he had none"* (Cincotti, 2023, p. 3). The repeated phrase *"didn't work"* follows almost every activity, highlighting a continuous series of attempts to redirect her attention. The clause **"because he had none,"** indicates that even Daisy's effort to focus on Levi's flaws fails to change the way she thinks about him.

The recurring pattern shown in both quotations suggests that avoidant behaviour functions as a manifestation of Daisy's emotional denial. Although expressed in different ways, both reveal her tendency to create distance whenever emotions become difficult to face. Avoiding Levi after an emotionally overwhelming moment and repeatedly distracting herself with various activities reflect an effort to manage painful feelings without fully acknowledging them. Such behaviour illustrates how denial protects the ego from overwhelming distress by preventing direct engagement with unresolved emotions (Iftikhar et al., 2022). While this strategy provides temporary emotional relief, it leaves the underlying conflict unresolved. As avoidance becomes Daisy's repeated response to emotional distress, it gradually develops into a persistent behavioural pattern that shapes her psychological development (Maulidiyah et al., 2021). Emotional restraint begins to replace honest expression, making it increasingly difficult to communicate her feelings to Levi. Consequently, avoidance sustains Daisy's denial, delays her emotional growth, and prevents her relationship

with Levi from developing through open emotional communication.

The pattern of avoidant behaviour identified in Daisy is also reflected in previous literary studies that examine characters dealing with emotional vulnerability. Qonita and Margawati (2025), in their analysis of Anna in *When Marnie Was There*, found that the character distances herself from close relationships because of abandonment issues rooted in childhood experiences. Daisy demonstrates a similar response by avoiding emotionally demanding situations that involve Levi. However, while Anna's behaviour is explained through abandonment issues, this study interprets Daisy's avoidance as a manifestation of emotional denial within Freud's defense mechanism. This perspective broadens previous discussions by showing that avoidant behaviour can function as an unconscious strategy to keep emotionally threatening feelings out of conscious awareness.

Minimization of Conflict

Emotional conflict is not always expressed through direct rejection or avoidance. In some situations, individuals respond by reducing the significance of their emotional reactions, making the conflict appear less serious than it actually is (Susanto, 2023). This form of denial is reflected through minimization, where uncomfortable feelings are softened or explained in a way that feels easier to accept. In Daisy's case, her emotional conflict with Levi appears through the way she downplays her jealousy and interprets it as a normal feeling between friends. She admits, "*There were always twinges of jealousy, but I brushed it off as protectiveness for my best friend.*" (Cincotti, 2023, p. 3). The statement "*twinges of jealousy*" indicates that Daisy is aware of experiencing jealousy, although she presents the emotion as something minor. The use of the phrase "*brushed it off*" then becomes the key expression that demonstrates Daisy's minimization of conflict, which suggest a conscious act of dismissing something as insignificant, as though the feeling is not important enough to deserve attention. This expression is followed by "*as protectiveness for my best friend,*" which indicates Daisy's effort to reinterpret jealousy into a more acceptable explanation.

The way Daisy redefines her jealousy illustrates that she uses minimization as a defensive response by controlling how she interprets her own feelings. Although Daisy recognizes the presence of

jealousy, she does not acknowledge it as a meaningful emotional response, instead she changes its meaning into something she considers more acceptable (Winterheld, 2017). By interpreting jealousy as simple concern for a close friend, she weakens the emotional significance of what she actually feels. This reinterpretation prevents her from confronting the possibility that her feelings extend beyond friendship. As a result, the emotional conflict is not resolved but merely softened through self-persuasion, allowing Daisy to maintain the image that her relationship with Levi is entirely platonic (Utami & Haryanti, 2025).

The present finding is consistent with previous literary studies that examine defense mechanisms as psychological strategies reflected through fictional characters. Saragih, Damanik, and Setiasari (2023), in their analysis of the novel *Tentang Kamu*, found that the protagonist employs denial as a defense mechanism when experiencing intense emotional distress. Their study explains that denial protects the character from painful experiences by limiting emotional acknowledgment and helping maintain psychological stability. The discussion, however, remains within the general concept of denial and does not examine the character's tendency to reduce the significance of emotional conflict. This aspect becomes the primary focus of the present study. This study extends the discussion by showing that denial can also appear through the minimization of interpersonal conflict. In Daisy's case, jealousy is not openly rejected but redefined into a less threatening emotion, illustrating how emotional denial operates subtly in everyday relationships.

Factors Contributing Daisy's Emotional Denial

Internal Factors

Past Trauma

Past trauma becomes one of the emotional factors that shapes Daisy's use of denial as a self-defense mechanism. A painful experience from the past may remain active and influence how a character responds to emotional threats in the present, especially when the new situation reminds her of earlier loss (Maretha et al., 2025). For Daisy, the death of her father leaves an unresolved wound that later affects the way she faces another painful possibility. This background is reflected when Daisy recalls, "*Well, a month before my first day, Dad passed away from cancer. The wake, funeral, and pity greetings the nights after felt like some nightmare I*

couldn't wake up from." (Cincotti, 2023, p. 23). The phrase "passed away from cancer" shows the traumatic loss that changed Daisy's emotional condition, while "some nightmare I couldn't wake up from" suggests how hard it was for her to accept the reality. This emotional distance becomes clearer when Daisy later faces a place connected to that loss. After avoiding her father's grave for a long time, Daisy finally decides to visit the cemetery, and the moment becomes emotionally heavy for her. Daisy's avoidance appears again when she says, "I hadn't realized how much I was... avoiding this until I arrived at the cemetery, frozen in the parking lot" (Cincotti, 2023, p. 257). The phrase "avoiding this" points to her effort to stay away from painful memory, and "frozen in the parking lot" shows the emotional tension that appears when she is forced to face it.

Both excerpts suggest that Daisy's past loss continues to influence her emotional responses in the present. Fredrickson (2018) explains that traumatic experiences can create emotional conflicts that are difficult to confront directly, causing individuals to rely on defense mechanisms to reduce psychological distress. Daisy's denial develops from her fear of repeating the same experience of losing someone important. Her refusal to fully acknowledge painful emotions toward Levi can be understood as an extension of her earlier loss, where accepting the possibility of another separation would mean confronting a familiar emotional pain. Therefore, denial allows Daisy to temporarily protect herself from anxiety, although it also prevents her from fully understanding and accepting her own feelings Pebriyana & Panggabean (2026). The connection between past trauma and denial shows how Daisy's emotional development is shaped by unresolved grief and the fear of experiencing loss again.

The relationship between trauma, loss, and defense mechanisms has also been discussed in previous literary studies. Ningrum et al. (2025), for example, examine Ratih Anjani in *Laut Bercerita* and explain that the character's trauma from losing a significant person leads to the use of defense mechanisms, including denial, as a way to manage emotional suffering. Both the textual evidence and previous research indicate that unresolved trauma can continue influencing an individual's emotional responses long after the traumatic event has occurred. In Daisy's case presents a different

pattern because her denial is connected to the fear of experiencing another loss after a previous traumatic event. This finding contributes to a deeper understanding of denial as a protective response that is shaped by past trauma and continues to affect a character's emotional development.

Anxiety

Anxiety becomes one of the internal factors that contributes to Daisy's emotional denial, particularly through her fear of losing her connection with Levi (Andiara & Kasprabowo, 2020). After experiencing several emotional losses in her life, Daisy develops a strong attachment toward Levi as someone who provides emotional support and familiarity. This attachment creates anxiety when Daisy faces the possibility that her relationship with Levi may change or disappear.

A clear example appears after Daisy reconnects with Levi following years of separation. During this moment, Daisy reflects on the importance of keeping him close and says, "*Not when I had the chance to be friends with him again and be part of his life. Not when we had gone through the same trauma, and he helped me climb out of the hole I had dug*" (Cincotti, 2023, p. 29). The repeated phrase "*Not when*" emphasizes her strong determination to maintain Levi's presence in her life. Meanwhile, the expression "*be part of his life*" suggests that remaining emotionally connected to Levi is more important than acknowledging her own romantic feelings. Another significant phrase, "*he helped me climb out of the hole I had dug,*" presents Levi as someone who supported Daisy during one of the most difficult periods of her life. A similar response appears during another encounter with Levi. Daisy reflects, "*Every bone in my body wanted to revert to high school habits... But my present self was too nervous to even look him in the eye*" (Cincotti, 2023, p. 28). The phrase "*wanted to revert to high school habits*" suggests her desire to return to the closeness they once shared, while "*too nervous to even look him in the eye*" reveals the anxiety she experiences in his presence.

Anxiety functions as an emotional force that sustains Daisy's denial throughout the story. After reconnecting with Levi, his presence becomes a source of comfort and emotional security that she is unwilling to lose. Admitting her feelings could change their renewed friendship into a romantic relationship, but such a change also carries the risk

of a future breakup that might separate them completely (Febriana & Dharma, 2020). For Daisy, preserving the friendship feels far less threatening than risking the loss of someone who has helped her heal from past pain. Faced with this possibility, denial becomes a psychological strategy that allows her to avoid confronting emotions she believes could endanger their relationship. By refusing to acknowledge her love, Daisy maintains a sense of safety and keeps Levi within her life, even if only as a close friend. Daisy's decision does not remove the anxiety she experiences, yet it temporarily reduces the emotional burden created by the fear of losing him. As the story progresses, this pattern continues to shape Daisy's emotional responses, showing that anxiety does not simply accompany her denial but continually reinforces it, delaying her ability to accept her genuine feelings and move toward emotional growth.

Similar findings have been reported by Syahidah and Laksono (2021), who found that Charlie Quinn in *The Good Daughter* employs several ego defense mechanisms, including denial, in response to objective and neurotic anxiety. Anxiety functions as the psychological pressure that motivates the character to protect herself from emotional distress. A similar pattern appears in Daisy's character, where anxiety also reinforces the use of denial. However, Daisy's anxiety is primarily rooted in the fear of losing a meaningful relationship after reconnecting with Levi, rather than the traumatic external conflicts experienced by Charlie. Such differences suggest that emotional denial may emerge from different forms of anxiety, depending on each character's emotional experiences and interpersonal relationships.

The evidence demonstrates that Daisy's anxiety stems from the fear of losing Levi as an important attachment figure. Her repeated emphasis on remaining part of his life reflects a deep concern that the emotional security she has rebuilt could disappear. This fear does not encourage Daisy to confront her feelings openly. It leads her to deny them, allowing her to preserve the hope of maintaining her connection with Levi while avoiding the emotional pain that separation might bring (Saputri & Marlina, 2023).

Insecurity

Insecurity emerges as another internal factor that contributes to Daisy's emotional denial by influencing the way she perceives her own

worth in relation to Levi. After agreeing to pretend to be Levi's girlfriend, Daisy finds herself in a conversation with Gabe and Jia that gradually reveals her fragile self-perception. Jia responds by comparing Daisy to "the other woman" in a romantic story, making Daisy question her own position in Levi's life. Daisy reflects, "*And it wasn't the first time I had envisioned myself as the side character. But it hurt to hear it from her*" (Cincotti, 2023, p. 23). The phrase "*it wasn't the first time*" suggests that this way of thinking has appeared repeatedly, showing that seeing herself as less important has become a familiar pattern. The expression "*the side character*" also indicates how Daisy places herself outside the central role in Levi's life, while the sentence "*it hurt to hear it from her*" shows that Jia's words reinforce an insecurity that Daisy has already carried within herself.

Daisy's insecurity in this passage represents more than a temporary feeling of self-doubt. It reflects Daisy's deeply rooted belief that she is less worthy than other women who might become part of Levi's life (Syah & Zahid, 2021). Such a belief intensifies the emotional threat she experiences whenever her relationship with Levi becomes uncertain. Facing that possibility directly would require Daisy to admit both her love for Levi and the fear that those feelings may never be returned. Denial becomes a safer psychological response because it allows her to distance herself from that painful possibility (Siskawati, 2020). Seeing herself as "the side character" also limits her willingness to imagine that she could have an important place in Levi's future. As a result, insecurity supports the development of emotional denial by encouraging Daisy to suppress her emotional needs before reality has the chance to confirm or reject them.

Questions surrounding emotional vulnerability have also been explored in previous literary studies. Lestari and Ahmadi (2025), in their analysis of Aralya Rylie Millano in *Stigma*, explain that low self-esteem and psychological pressure influence the character's emotional reactions and interpersonal relationships. Although Aralya's insecurity develops from different life experiences, both Aralya and Daisy struggle with negative self-perception that makes emotional vulnerability increasingly difficult to express. The present study extends this discussion by demonstrating that Daisy's insecurity emerges specifically from her belief that she occupies only a

secondary place in Levi's life. Such self-perception encourages emotional denial before any direct rejection actually occurs. Daisy's reflection marks a turning point in the way she sees herself. The moment she accepts the role of a "side character," she begins to distance herself from the possibility of being loved in return. This fragile self-perception becomes the foundation of her emotional denial. By refusing to acknowledge her feelings, Daisy protects herself from a reality she already believes will end in disappointment and rejection.

External Factors

Presence of Another Woman

Beyond Daisy's internal struggles, her emotional denial is also reinforced by an external factor: the presence of another woman in Levi's life. Witnessing Levi form a romantic relationship forces Daisy to confront a reality she has tried to avoid. As a result, the situation intensifies her emotional conflict and strengthens her tendency to deny her true feelings. The impact of this external factor becomes evident when Daisy witnesses Levi sharing an intimate moment with another woman. She recalls, "*But I had never seen him kiss anyone before. That...that felt wrong—intrusive, actually.*" (Cincotti, p.3). The phrase "had never seen him kiss anyone before" highlights Daisy's unfamiliarity with witnessing Levi in a romantic relationship, while the repeated word "that" in "That...that felt wrong" shows her hesitation in processing the situation. The description of the moment as "intrusive" also indicates Daisy's discomfort toward the presence of another person in a relationship that she unconsciously considers emotionally significant. Through the narration, the appearance of Jennifer becomes a moment that exposes Daisy's hidden attachment to Levi.

The encounter with another woman creates a relational threat that pushes Daisy to maintain her emotional denial. Instead of immediately accepting that her reaction comes from romantic feelings, Daisy attempts to redefine her jealousy as a normal response from a close friend (Cahaya & Rahayu, 2024). The conflict emerges because Jennifer's presence challenges Daisy's previous understanding of her relationship with Levi, where their emotional closeness had become a familiar and secure part of her life. By viewing the situation as something "wrong" and "intrusive," Daisy unconsciously places herself as someone who has lost a position that she never openly admitted

wanting. Daisy denial functions as a psychological protection because acknowledging jealousy would also require her to recognize that her feelings for Levi have developed beyond friendship. The external threat of another woman therefore strengthens Daisy's tendency to reject her own emotions, allowing her to avoid the painful realization that she may lose her special connection with Levi (Cahyani & Sumaryani, 2025). However, the mechanism also prevents Daisy from confronting her true feelings, which later influences her difficulty in developing a healthier understanding of her relationship with him.

Previous literary studies have also explored how the presence of a romantic rival shapes a character's emotional response. Prabowo and Fajria (2021), in their analysis of Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl*, explain that jealousy emerges when a valued relationship is perceived to be threatened by another person. The study shows that such relational threats influence the character's emotions and subsequent behaviour throughout the narrative. A comparable situation appears in *Picking Daisies on Sundays*, where Jennifer's presence becomes a reminder that Levi may build a romantic relationship with someone else. However, the present study offers a different perspective by focusing on emotional denial as the character's primary defense mechanism. Rather than examining jealousy itself, this study demonstrates how the appearance of another woman strengthens Daisy's denial and contributes to her psychological development.

Levi's relationship with another woman becomes the external event that disrupts the emotional world Daisy has tried to preserve. Faced with a reality that contradicts her unspoken feelings, Daisy retreats further into denial to avoid confronting the possibility that her place in Levi's life has changed. The presence of another woman therefore strengthens the psychological defenses that have been shaped by Daisy's grief, anxiety, and insecurity (Zahrah et al., 2023).

Collectively, these findings answer the first research question by showing that Daisy's emotional denial is portrayed through verbal rejection, avoidant behaviour, and minimization of conflict. They also answer the second research question by showing that emotional denial functions as a self-defense mechanism shaped by past trauma, anxiety, insecurity, and the presence of another woman. Overall, these factors lead Daisy to deny her true feelings as a way to protect herself from

emotional pain, although this ultimately hinders her emotional growth and relationship with Levi.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that emotional denial in *Picking Daisies on Sundays* by Liana Cincotti functions as a complex psychological defense mechanism that shapes Daisy's emotions, behavior, and relationships. Using Freud's psychoanalytic theory, the study identifies three main forms of denial: verbal rejection, avoidant behavior, and minimization of conflict. These mechanisms work in a continuous and interconnected way, where Daisy denies her feelings through speech, distancing behavior, and cognitive reframing. This research demonstrates that emotional denial is a dynamic coping strategy that operates across behavioral, cognitive, and emotional levels, rather than a single or isolated reaction.

The main contribution of this study lies in its comprehensive explanation of emotional denial as a multilayered defense mechanism that integrates behavioral, cognitive, and emotional processes within a single character analysis. This study also supports and enriches the use of Freud's psychoanalytic theory in literary analysis, particularly in explaining how defense mechanisms are represented in fictional characters. It highlights that emotional denial can be interpreted as a structured pattern of coping that shapes character development and narrative behavior. In a more applied sense, this study helps readers, especially students of literature and psychology, recognize how emotional defense mechanisms appear in real-life behavior. It shows how trauma, anxiety, and insecurity can influence thoughts, actions, and relationships in everyday situations.

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