



**DEFENSE MECHANISM REFLECTED IN THE CHARACTER  
GREGORY HOUSE IN TV SERIES *HOUSE M.D* SEASON 1-3**

**A FINAL PROJECT**

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement  
For S-1 Degree in American Studies  
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities  
Universitas Diponegoro

Submitted by:

Nadhifa Azzahra Irawan

13020114140096

**Faculty of Humanities  
Universitas Diponegoro**

**SEMARANG**

**2017**

## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer sincerely affirms that she compiles this thesis entitled ‘Defense Mechanism Reflected in the Character Gregory House in TV Series House M.D Season 1-3’ by herself without taking any result from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3, and in diploma degree of any university. The writer also emphasizes she does not quote any material from the existed someone’s journal or paper except from the references mentioned later.

Semarang, 16 July 2018

Nadhifa Azzahra Irawan

## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

And He found you lost and guided [you]

*ad-Dhuha : 7*

We are here and alive in our own little corner of time.

*John O'Callaghan*

Use your mind and make it talk

Cause in this world it's all you've got

We all fall down from the highest clouds to the lowest ground

*The Answer, Kodaline*

*This final project is dedicated for  
myself, and my family.*

**APPROVAL**

**DEFENSE MECHANISM REFLECTED IN THE CHARACTER  
GREGORY HOUSE IN TV SERIES *HOUSE M.D* SEASON 1-3**

**Written by:  
Nadhifa Azzahra Irawan  
NIM: 13020114140096**

is approved by Thesis Advisor  
on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Thesis Advisor,

Rifka Pratama, S.Hum., M.A.  
NPPU. H.7.199004282018071001

The Head of English Departement,

Dr. Agus Subiyanto, M.A.  
NIP. 196408141990011001

**VALIDATION**

Approved by

Strata 1 Project Examination Committee

Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University

On 30<sup>th</sup> August 2018

Chair Person

First Member

Arido Laksono, S.S., M.Hum.  
NIP. 197507111999031002

M Irfan Zamzami, S.S., M.Hum  
NIP. 198609230115091000

Second Member

Third Member

Prof. Dr. Nurdien H. Kistanto, M.A.  
NIP. 195211031980121001

Dra. Cut Aja Puan Ellysafni, M.Ed.  
NIP. 195510031978122001

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Praised be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, the most Gracious, and the most Merciful who has given strength, health, and spirit to the writer, so this thesis entitled “Defense Mechanism Reflected in the Character Gregory House in TV Series *House M.D* Season 1-3” came to a completion. On this occasion, the writer would like to thank all those people who have contributed to the completion of this thesis.

The writer’s deepest gratitude and appreciation are addressed to Mr. Rifka Pratama, S.Hum., M.A. as the writer’s project advisor for sharing his expertise, guidance and encouragement and supported me in finishing this final project. The writer would also like to express her thank to these following people:

1. Dr. Rediyanto Noor M.Hum., as the Dean of Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University.
2. Dr. Agus Subiyanto M.A., as the Head of the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University.
3. All the lecturers in the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University. Thank you for all the shared experiences and valuable knowledge.
4. My beloved family; my mother Suwarni, my father Teguh Irawanto, my brother Naufal Adhim Irawan, my sister Nadhilah Adlina Irawan, and my beloved cat Ava who always be there for me in happiness and sorrow, who has given me strength and support in every aspect of my life.

5. My dearest friends who have been here for me since the first day, Fatimah Azzahra, Irene Indrasakti, and Gneissa Nirmala. Also my English Department friends; Ardra, Ijhar, Rheiza, Bunga, Tami, Irfan, Lala, Tikah, and also for everyone who has crossed my path.
6. My special one, Muhammad Isyraqy Putra. Your companion, support, kindness, and everything in between will always leave me thankful. Quack.
7. My dearest Bintang Muhammad Alif, the one who support me and fire me up even we are literally separated by land and sea.
8. My Friends with Benefit; Nabila Shahnaz, Sarah Novita, Nadya Nur Farida, and Octavia Bella who always spills me the tea even when I am not there in Cibubur.

The writer realizes that this final project is far from perfect. Thus, the writer will be glad to receive any advices, suggestions, and recommendations in order to make this thesis better than before. The writer hopes this final project will be useful for the readers.

Semarang, 16 July 2018

Nadhifa Azzahra Irawan

## TABLE OF CONTENT

TITLE.....	i
PRONOUNCEMENT .....	ii
MOTTO AND DEDICATION .....	iii
APPROVAL.....	iv
VALIDATION .....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT .....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENT .....	viii
LIST OF PICTURES .....	ix
ABSTRACT .....	x
ABSTRAK .....	xi
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK .....	3
2.1. Id, Ego, and Superego .....	3
2.2. Defense Mechanism.....	4
2.2.1. Denial .....	4
2.2.2. Regression .....	5
2.2.3. Displacement .....	5
3. RESEARCH METHOD .....	6
4. DISCUSSION .....	7
4.1. Denial.....	7
4.2. Regression.....	9
4.3. Displacement.....	12
5. CONCLUSION.....	15
REFERENCES .....	16



**LIST OF PICTURES**

<b>Pictures</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. House denies his addiction.....	8
2. House on a treadmill .....	9
3. House yells at Cuddy .....	10
4. Cuddy confronts House.....	10
5. House admits about the wheelchair usage .....	10
6. House busts a lock.....	14
7. House knocks over his whiteboard .....	14

## ABSTRACT

*House M.D* is an American TV series that aired by FOX from 2004 to 2012. The series is about a doctor named Gregory House who is working on an unusual medical case with his team. During the case, House is often stressed and pressured. The purpose of this study is to see the way House cope with his stress during the case solving, using the defense mechanism theory by Anna Freud. Defense mechanism is a strategy that used by ego to fight anxiety. The method used is library research method. From numbers of defense mechanism, House mainly shows three of them; denial, regression, and displacement.

Keywords: defense mechanism, denial, regression, displacement.

## ABSTRAK

House M.D merupakan serial TV Amerika yang disiarkan pada saluran FOX di tahun 2004 hingga 2012. Serial TV tersebut menceritakan tentang seorang dokter bernama Gregory House yang bekerja sama dengan tim nya untuk menyelesaikan kasus-kasus kedokteran yang luar biasa. Kasus-kasus yang sulit itu kerap membuat House menjadi tertekan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk melihat bagaimana House menangani tekanan saat memecahkan kasus, dengan menggunakan teori *defense mechanism* oleh Anna Freud. *Defense mechanism* sendiri adalah strategi yang digunakan oleh ego untuk melawan *anxiety*. Metode pengambilan data yang digunakan adalah metode penelitian pustaka. Dari sejumlah *defense mechanism* yang ada, House lebih menonjolkan tiga mekanisme; *denial*, *regression*, dan *displacement*.

Kata kunci: *defense mechanism*, *denial*, *regression*, *displacement*.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of Study

Nowadays, film is one of some effective and common ways to learn human behavior. It provides such evidences and development about the character that could be analyzed by using handful of theories, such as psychology and psychoanalysis. One of many TV series that has broad character development is House MD. It is a medical TV series run by FOX in the first decade of 2000, aired in November 16, 2004 until May 21, 2012. Medical drama is a television program genre that the story revolves around the hospital, either with the staffs, patient, or even hospital environment. The main character of this series is Dr. Gregory House (Hugh Laurie), a crippled, selfish, and narcissist doctor that heavily relies on *Vicodin* in order to ease the pain in his leg. Despite being a pain killer addict, he leads the Department of Diagnostic Medicine in a fictional hospital Princeton–Plainsboro Teaching Hospital (PPTH) in New Jersey.

The plot of this TV series are mainly about House as a doctor doing his practices with the help of his three members of diagnostics team, a friendly banter with his only friend, Dr. James Wilson, and also a romantic tension between him and the head of the hospital, Dr. Lisa Cuddy. Not only that, the series also gives the view on House's denial in his *Vicodin* addiction and its impact in his work performance, social life, and mental health. House and his team is willing to violate the medical ethics in order to solve the unusual case, he is often found in trouble due to his habit of breaking rules and not following order.

This TV series is based in New Jersey and use American medical ethics, and also shows American value. Therefore House M.D is suitable as an object for the writer to discuss.

The character Gregory House's behaviors in the series are complex and have a deeper meaning into it. He constantly does things that feed his ego regardless of what he may cause either to himself or people around him. He also displays a way into substituting his anger and stress into another form of action. This sparks up the writer's interest and would like to do a research on House's behavior using Freud's defense mechanism to see how it is define Gregory House's thinking behind his act, and also to see how he get away from his fear using his defense mechanism.

According to Freudian psychoanalytic theory, defense mechanism is a protective layer and an unconscious strategy for an ego to save them from threat and danger using realistic problem-solving method or using methods that deny, falsify, or distort reality (Hall, 1954). It was a theory found by Sigmund Freud in 1894, then perfected by his daughter, Anna Freud. Freud believes that human's mind consist of three stages; *id*, *ego*, and *superego*, and they have important roles in how defense mechanism formed. There are eight principles of defense mechanism proposed by Freud; regression, repression, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self and reversal, and denial. In this study, the writer will only use three mechanisms; regression, denial, and repression. Using House M.D. season 1 until season 3 as a primary resources, and literature for secondary resources.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Id, Ego and Superego

Freud believes that human has three major systems in their psyche; they are called *id*, *ego*, and *superego*. These three systems worked cooperatively in order to fulfill human's basic need and desire. They also enabled the human to function alongside his environment (Hall, 1954).

Being pleasure principles and as a primary process of thinking are two id's main purposes. Id becomes the reservoir for the instinct and libido, and supplies energies for the other two systems (Schultz, 2009). Ego on the other hand is the one who is responsible for governing id and superego. According to Schultz (2009:58), this ability is called secondary-process thought that based on reality principle. The ego is aware of reality that makes them able to decide when and how the ide or superego executed. While superego according to Schultz (2009:59) in the moral side that contains the idea of right and wrong that lies in the society. This side of personality usually learned by the age of 5 or 6 by our parents.

When the ego faces the fears and threat that caused by id and superego, it could create anxiety. According to Schultz in *Theories of Personality* (2009), if there is a threat to the ego, it must be prevented or avoided. As the one who is responsible, ego has to reduce the conflict between id and superego. In order to defend one self from anxiety, the mind needs a mechanism. As explained by Hall:

The ego may try to master danger by adopting realistic problem-solving methods, or it may attempt to alleviate anxiety by using method that deny, falsify, or distort reality and that impede the development of personality. (Hall, 1954:85)

## **2.2 Defense Mechanism**

According to Schultz in *Theories of Personality* (2009), defense mechanism is a strategy that is used by ego in order to defend itself from the anxiety generated by conflict in everyday life. The term defense mechanism occurs for the first time in Sigmund Freud's study in 1894 then his daughter Anna Freud refined and organized this concept later on.

In Anna Freud's book *The Ego of the Mechanism of Defense* (1993), she numbered the defense mechanism that has previously appeared in Sigmund Freud's previous study; regression, repression, isolation, undoing, projection, introjection, turning against the self and reversal. Not only that, Anna Freud also added another defense mechanism, such as denial. In this paper, the writer would explain the most common defense mechanisms that occur in House M.D which are; denial, regression, and displacement.

### **2.2.1 Denial**

In the *Theory of Personality* book by Schultz (2009: 62), denial is the act of refusing to admit the existence of an external threat or traumatic events that has happened. It is the act of denying the existence of things that creates anxiety or uneasy feeling (Freud, 1937). As an example, a

woman who has cancer her whole life may refuse to acknowledge that her death may come anytime.

### **2.2.2 Regression**

According to Sigmund Freud (1977), regression is a reversion of the ego into the earlier stage of development. The typical form of regression in adult is engaging in such childish behavior, such as lose their temper, break law, talk baby talk, drive fast and recklessly, gamble, and rebel against the authority (Hall, 1999). Regression is usually temporary, meaning the person's behavior could go back after the pressure is gone (Feist, 2006).

### **2.2.3 Displacement**

In the book *Theories of Personality* by Schultz (2009: 63), displacement is when an object that can satisfy id is not available, the person may shift its desire into another object, usually a less threatening object. A simple example is when someone kick their dog or hit their kids after being yelled at work by their boss.



### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

The writer would be using library research in order to completing the essay. It is a process that involves identifying and locating relevant information, analyze it and later express the idea, which involving a step-by-step process that used to gather information for the essay. Library research has two source; primary and secondary. In this case, the primary source is House M.D. season 1-3, which acts as the original works. And the secondary sources are journal, and textbooks that correlate with the objects and the discussion.

This research is using psychoanalytic literary criticism approach, which according to Peter Brooks on *The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism (1987)* is a theory that developed by Sigmund Freud that traditionally focus on analyzing three things; the author's life and its literary works, the reader, and the fictive person of the text. The writer also would be only focusing on psychoanalytical aspect.

## 4. DISCUSSION

In this part, the writer would explain the defense mechanism shown on Gregory House behavior during *House M.D* Season 1-3. This discussion will be parted into three sections; denial, regression, and displacement.

### 4.1 Denial

The discussion on denial will be focused on Season 1 Episode 11: Detox and Season 3 Episode 2: Cane and Able. The denial that house experiences mainly revolves around his addiction to *Vicodin*.

In Season 1 Episode 11: Detox, House is challenged by his boss, Cuddy, to be *Vicodin*-free for a week. She states that House has taken double the original dose he has been taking since the first time, and House denies that after a confrontation.

CUDDY : You're addicted.

HOUSE : If the pills ran my life I'd agree with you, but it's my leg busy calendaring what I can't do.

CUDDY : You're in denial.

Later in the conversation, House admits that taking *vicodin* does not make him high, rather makes him normal. This is a normal behavior for someone who has a substance addiction. According to Mayo Clinic, substance abusers often minimize and underestimate the amount of substance that they consume, leading them to crave a higher dosage in order to fulfill their desire to get high. Especially an opioid painkiller, referring to the *Vicodin* drug insert, has a higher risk of addiction than other types of drugs

in order to maintain the defined effect such as analgesia or the inability to feel pain, it can also due to increasing pain and the development of analgesic tolerance. House admits it later in the end of the episode;

WILSON : "You learn anything?"  
 HOUSE : "Yeah, I'm an addict."  
 WILSON : "Uh, okay."  
 HOUSE : "I'm not stopping."  
 WILSON : "There are programs. Cuddy would give you the time. You could get on a different pain management regimen---"  
 HOUSE : "I don't need to stop."  
 WILSON : "You just said---"  
 HOUSE : "I said I was an addict. I didn't say I had a problem. I pay my bills, I make my meals. I function."

In Season 3 Episode 16: Top Secret, House experiences difficulty in urinating, which is one of the main side effects of *vicodin*. However, he still denies it by mentioning that the pills allow him to get some rest during hard times and solve the case.



**Picture 1: House denies his addiction**

The *House M.D* Season 3 Episode 2: Cane and Able exhibits the denial states that House experiences. This episode tells the story when the *ketamine* treatment that House received in the previous season to fix the pain in his leg started to wear off. House's inability to walk and using cane is his external threat, and the thought of getting back into his cane and not being able to walk again scares him, and his inner ego. Hence, it sparks the

anxiety in him. He refused to acknowledge the pain and just get along with it, pretending that everything is fine.

His friend, Wilson, confront him by saying:

WILSON : You're scared that the ketamine wearing off. That is was just a tortuous window of a good life ... How can you be so sure it isn't just a sore muscle?

HOUSE : It's my leg. We've known each other a long time.

Referring to Season 1 Episode 21: Three Stories, House refuses to amputate his leg off with the same reason, because he knows his leg. But, he does not mind taking *Vicodin* to ease the pain.



**Picture 2: House on a treadmill**

The scene then change into House running on a treadmill as if he believes that it is indeed just a sore legs, which ends with a excruciating pain and House taking *Vicodin* out of his pocket. He still does not want to believe that his pain is coming back, and refuse to use his cane again.

#### **4.2 Regression**

House shows his childish behavior throughout the series when someone brought up his personal matter, in this case is losing his temper and rebelling the authority. As shown in Season 3 Episode 4: Lines in the

Sand, House wants his old carpet back, which already stained by his own blood.



**Picture 3 and 4: House yells at Cuddy and Cuddy confronts House**

The head of the hospital, Cuddy, does not agree with that due to the safety hazard. Instead of making a reasonable excuse, House chooses to yell at her, resulting in Cuddy to turn his request down. In order to get Cuddy agree with him, he starts to disrupt hospital business and uses everyone's office around the hospital and refuses to leave when got caught.

Not only losing his temper, House shows many other regressing behavior as a way to cope with complicated case, and his relationship, including his own frustration. He is often seen gambling and placing a bet with his co-worker.



**Picture 5 : House admits that he use wheelchair to gain a parking spot**

One of them is seen in Season 3 Episode 13: Needle in a Haystack, House is willing to bet that he is able to use a wheelchair in week in order to gain his parking spot back. It is all because House does not like a lady in a

wheelchair have a closer parking spot to the hospital entrance, and asking Cuddy for change does not work.

As someone who has a high ego, House rarely thinks that anything is his fault, and unable to take the blame for what he did. And due to said behavior, House is involved with the authority in many occasions. In Season 3 Episode 5: Fools For Love, House is breaking a law by inserting an object into his patient's rectum out of his consent because the patient insults him, Cuddy asks him to apologize but he refuses to do so. This incident has hurt House's ego that cause him to regress. When he is confronted with the patient he said,

HOUSE : ...Here's what's gonna happen: you go brag to your friends about how you made the big, nasty doctor go poop in his pants, I get Cuddy off my back by telling her I humiliated myself, here's the catch – we're both gonna be lying. I'm not apologizing. If anything, you deserved a bigger thermometer.

In the several next episodes, the patient who turns out to be a police does a revenge to humiliate House, even then he still does not want to surrender and apologize to his patient. And Cuddy confronts him in Season 3 Episode 11: Words and Deed by saying:

CUDDY : You're not impressing anyone. You may call yourself principled but what you really are is a stubborn adolescent idiot! This isn't his fault.

HOUSE : I'm not the one who--

CUDDY : [Walking towards House] YOU used the rectal thermometer on him, YOU insulted him instead of apologizing, YOU flaunted your drug use in his face and you REFUSED to accept a deal...

### 4.3 Displacement

An example on how House cope with his personal matter using displacement is displayed in Season 2 Episode 13: Skin Deep when his co-worker, Wilson, confronts him with his current situation.

HOUSE : Listen none of this has anything to do with Stacey  
 WILSON : Right, giant coincidence that you've gone completely off the rails since she left; inducing migraines, worsening leg pain-- (House whacks him with his cane.) Ow!  
 HOUSE : Aw. You miss Stacey too?

Hitting Wilson with his cane is one basic form of displacement, as House is unable to speak the truth he distract the person from asking him by innocently hurt him.

Also in this episode, House's leg pain is worsening due to his fallen relationship with his ex-wife. The case of this episode also frustrates House thus making him unable to make a rational decision. His co-worker, Cameron points it out during a heated conversation by saying:

CAMERON : If you're too distracted to deal with this because your leg hurts.  
 HOUSE : (Loud and angrily.) Yeah, I'm distracted. I'm all hung up on this fifteen year old patient who's cataplectic, ... Now, if you're not too distracted go take out a piece of her brain and stick it under a microscope. ... No, lets keep playing pin the diagnosis on the supermodel until she's dead.

From the script above it can be seen that House snapped at his co-worker means he is channeling his anger into them. In addition House also belittling his co-worker by saying "lets keep playing pin the diagnosis on the supermodel until she's dead" as they are an incompetent doctors, when

in reality it is because that is what they have been doing up until the said scene.

In season 2 Episode 20: Euphoria (1), the case that House handled goes into a dead end, in addition his co-worker Foreman is in danger due to the disease. During a stressful environment, House usually will order an uncommon treatment and test, however in this particular case according to his friend, Wilson, House is being cautious and common by firmly asked his other co-workers to do a complicated test.

WILSON : You're being cautious. You're being...common. When you don't give a crap-

HOUSE : [turns around angrily and interrupts Wilson] How many of your guys have caught cancer from their patients? Let me know when that happens. Then we can have this conversation.

WILSON : It's just another case, huh?

HOUSE : I'll bet you can even have unprotected sex with your cancer patients without even catching a damn thing. Boy, I wish I had your job. [Turns around]

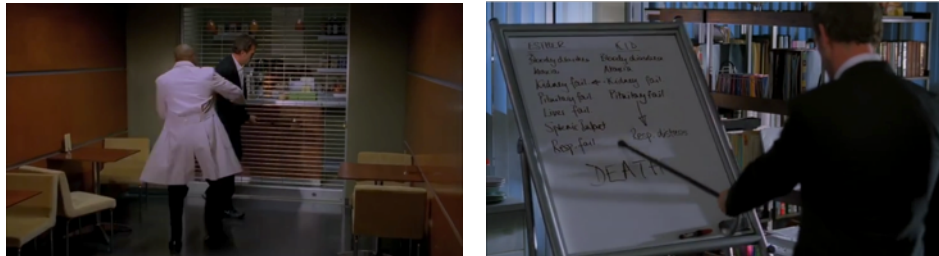
[Wilson looks at House for a moment, raises his eyebrows and turns to walk away. House bangs the end of his cane on the desk.]

Besides displacing his frustration towards Wilson by “turns around angrily and interrupts”, it is shown in the transcript that House also bangs the end of his cane on the desk. Which is a fairly common example of displacement, as House fears that he will not be able to solve the case in time is bigger than the fear of hurting Wilson's feeling along with his other co-worker's feeling.

During the case in Season 2 Episode 17: All In, House and his co-worker are facing a dead end. House then busted a lock in closed cafeteria



in order to grab a coffee, and then proceeds to aggressively knock the items on the counter out of frustration.



**Picture 6 and 7 : House busts a lock, and House knocks over his whiteboard**

On the several scenes later, House is also seen pushing his whiteboard out of despair and breaking a lamp in the process. This time House fear and anxiety lies on the fact that this case is similar to the case that he fails twelve years ago and he is scared that he would not be able to solve it for the second time. Therefore, he shifted all his frustration towards the item in front of him.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are evidences of defense mechanism being used to define Gregory House character in TV series *House MD*. From various types of Freud's defense mechanism, the character mostly portrayed three of them; denial, regression, and displacement. In this case, the denial is showed clearly on how House denies his dependency with his painkiller, *vicodin*, and his fear of getting back into using cane after being abled. As for the regression, House shows it through his childish behavior such as breaking the law by breaking the law, objecting the authority, and gambling. With the displacement, as the third finding of the writer, House usually shifted his frustration and anxiety through yelling at his co-worker, belittling them, and aggressively hit an item in front of him.

## REFERENCES

- Drug Addiction (Substance Use Disorder). 26 Oct. 2017,  
<[www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112)>
- Feist, Jess, and Gregory J. Feist. Theories of personality. 6th ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006.
- Freud, Anna. The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence. Karnac Books, 1993.
- House, M.D. Season 1-3, FOX, 2004.
- Hall, C. S. A primer of Freudian psychology. New York: The World Publishing Company, 1954
- Brooks, Peter. "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism." Critical Inquiry, vol. 13, no. 2, 1987, pp. 334–348. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1343497](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343497).
- Schultz, Duane P, and Sydney Ellen Schultz. Theories of Personality. 9th ed., Belmont: Cengage Learning, 2009.
- Vicodin HP ® [package insert]. North Chicago, IL: AbbVie Inc.