



The Loss of the Motherly Role in James' Life: A Psychoanalysis Study on Charles Forsman's *The End Of The F*ing World***

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ABSTRACT

*There are several things that might become the aftermath of someone's trauma. It might influence someone's capability to form any social interaction with other people or even how someone feel about themselves. To cope with their own trauma, one usually does something unconsciously to make them feel better, as a normal effort that might be carried out by someone to protect their selves from being hurt. This is qualitative research where the data are taken from a graphic novel entitled *The End of the F***ing World* by Charles Forsman. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis will be used as the grand theory to analyse the character's core issue, especially for the part of psychosexual development and defense mechanism. This research aims to discuss about James, the main character in *The End of the F***ing World*, who is struggling with his surroundings as the effects of his childhood trauma. This research reveals that James' core issue is Oedipus complex and unstable sense of self, which is strongly associated with his trauma of witnessing his mother's suicide. The loss of his mother has also affected James' personality as well that he got stuck in his phallic stage and became mother-fixated. Since James did not successfully resolve his phallic stage, his tripartite model becomes imbalance. When the id in himself started to become too demanding, James let out his defense mechanism, which are displacement and repression.*

Keywords: *Defense Mechanism, Graphic Novel, Oedipus Complex, Psychosexual Development, Unstable Sense of Self*

INTRODUCTION

When someone experienced some undesirable experiences during some times in their life, the memory of those undesirable experiences will unconsciously become their trauma. Trauma is an experience of extraordinarily stressful and disturbing events or an accumulation of events that overwhelms a person or group of people (Collective, 2022). Exposure to trauma can increase the risk for severe mental disorders, including mood disorders and psychotic disorders (Gradus & Galea, 2023). Traumatic experiences can have a profound impact on individuals and can affect their development, relationships, and mental health.

Psychological trauma can have various effects on individuals. It can lead to persistent daily pain or increased symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Kang et al., 2021). Trauma can also alter people's fundamental beliefs and change the way they interact with the world (Anassontzi & Kollia, 2022). Trauma can severely affect individuals both psychologically and socially, leading to difficulties in mentalization, feelings of disconnection, and questioning of social identity (Streeck-Fischer, 2021). A psychological trauma overwhelms a person's coping mechanisms and is influenced by personal interpretation, stage of development, constitutional preconditions, and individual social environment (Kang et al., 2021). People cope with trauma in various ways. To cope with their own trauma, someone usually does something unconsciously to make them feel better. People who have experienced trauma rely on various coping strategies, including making sense of what happened to them and generating meaning from the events (DeShay, 2016).

Published in the form of graphic novel, *The End of The F***ing World* emphasizes the story of the two outcast teenagers in a black and white format with deeper meaning. Graphic novel is a publication format for comics which came to prominence in the 1990s and generally refers to a comic that is published in its entirety and will later be collected into trade paperbacks (Kukkonen, 2013). These days, the chance of any graphic novel as a choice to become the object of any formal research is pretty much rare. However, in this research, it is going to be proven that any kind of contemporary literature such as digital literatures or graphic novels could be used as the object of a formal research as well.

Currently, there is yet to be any formal studies which has been found using graphic novel *The End of The F***ing World* as the object. However, there are some previous studies with the similar theory and character's background that have been collected to be considered and might help the researcher conduct the analysis and identify the research gap. The first related research is conducted by Ulfa & Wulandari (2019), where they had conducted a research on Alice, the main character from Lewis Caroll's novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The study identified that Alice suffered from reality, moral, and neurotic anxiety. The study also revealed some forms of repression, intellectualization, displacement,

regression, reaction-formation, and introjection as Alice's defense mechanism. The second previous related study is conducted by Saputra (2020), which revealed avoidance and selective memory as the defense mechanisms of Marayo, the protagonist in Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path*. The research identified that Marayo's defense mechanism are strongly associated with her anxiety of a sexual abuse she happened to encounter to when she was only 12, that later make her grew some defense mechanism forms of avoidance and selective memory. The last study is conducted by Lin-juan (2020). Lin-juan's research is focused on Jack, the main character in the novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. This research revealed the different states of id, ego, and superego reflected in Jack and how it stressed to the civilization on the barbarism of human nature.

The research gap between this research and the previously mentioned related studies are the object itself and the findings which focuses more on what the condition of the main character after the traumatic childhood experience. In *The End of The F***ing World*, readers are encouraged to identify the major reason of James's childhood trauma which resulting in his questionable behaviors throughout the story. Based on the background of the study, this research aims to reveal how the loss of his mother affects James' personality and how James' defense mechanism work to cope with his trauma.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychosexual Development

Every individual developed a psychological development during their childhood which takes place during five psychosexual stages of oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital (Lantz & Ray, 2021). The first five years of the childhood where these psychosexual earlier stages took place are very crucial to the personality formation when we become an adult later (Elkatawneh, 2013).

The tripartite model of id, ego, and superego is a psychological framework proposed by Sigmund Freud. The id represents the primitive and instinctual drives, particularly sexual drives, that motivate an individual to seek pleasure. It is the oldest and most basic part of the psyche (Hussaini, 2019). The ego, on the other hand, is a modification of the id that emerges as a result of the influence of the external world. It acts as the executive of the personality, regulating the id's drives to align with the demands of reality. The ego is responsible for reason, reality testing, and defense mechanisms to manage unrealistic or forbidden drives (Jamal & JaF, 2023). Lastly, the superego is a further development of the ego and represents the individual's internalized moral values and conscience. It emerges through the Oedipal drama and guides the pursuit of idealistic goals and perfection (Hussaini, 2019). The id must be controlled to avoid conflict which might contradict with social norms, while ego and superego are developing together in order to train the control of id and lead the satisfaction into a much more socially acceptable

behavior (Tato, 2023). Since the satisfaction takes place in different areas of the body with different stages of growth, some conflicts may occur during each psychosexual stage. There are five stages of psychosexual development, starting from oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latency stage, and genital stage (Lantz & Ray, 2021).

Defense Mechanism

When the id or the superego in someone started to become too demanding, defense mechanism may occur. The term defense was described for the first time as the ego's struggle against painful or unendurable ideas or affects (Yusuf & Pratama, 2021). Freud also describes defense mechanism as a conceptual operation that occurs on an unconscious level. Defense mechanism is defined as theoretical construct used to make assumptions about how the mind works (Nugroho & Viladinia, 2018). There are several forms of defense mechanism, such as displacement, which is the act of taking it out on someone or something that is less powerful than the real person or subject, and repression, the act of human being to overlook an undesirable memory about someone or something in the past, which then leads one to its' own unconscious mind (Boag, 2020).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative approach to interpret the object of the study, a graphic novel entitled *The End of The F***ing World* by Charles Forsman. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Wardono et al., 2022). In this research, the issue of how a single traumatic experience in the past might affect someone's personality is going to be analyzed from both the narrative aspects (of the story and the formal elements) and the non-narrative aspects (captions, facial expressions, and speech bubbles). This research was conducted with two kinds of data sources, the primary and the secondary data. For the primary data, the source originated from a graphic novel entitled *The End of The F***ing World* by Charles Forsman. For the secondary data, the source came from several legitimate data such as books, theses, journal articles, and online articles with the related topic that is being discussed in this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

James Witnessing His Mother's Suicide

The chapter of the *Drowned Deeper* was started with one big panel of James unscrewing a bolt. The black caption with white colored fonts beneath read a flashback as James narrating his most unforgettable childhood experience. One morning when James was only 4 years old, his mother drove him to a lake to feed some geese.

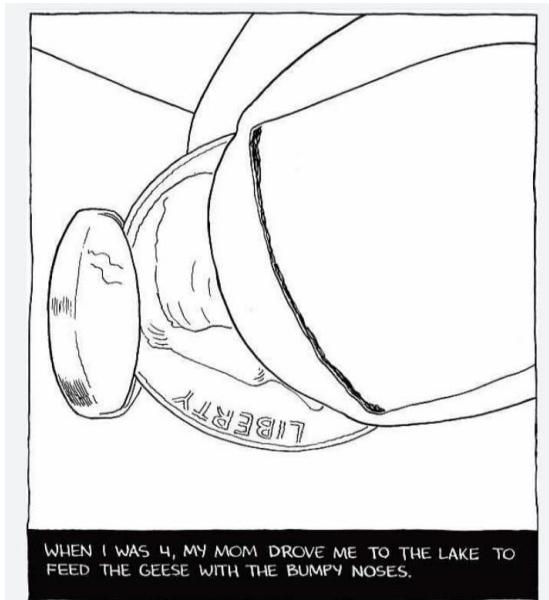


Figure 1. James recounted his last memory of his mother while unscrewing something
 Source: Forsman (2013)

In the next page, it turns out that James was trying to unscrew a random car's license plate and changed it into another random license plate. Placed side to side with his acts of unscrewing and changing a random car's license plate were another black captions with white colored fonts of James continue narrating about the last morning he spent with his mother. James stated clearly that he exactly remember his mother's smile, how she looked so relaxed, a facial look that James admitted he had never seen in his mother before. James also recalled about how his mother kissed the top of his head (Forsman, 2013).



Figure 2. James unscrewed a random car's license plate and changed it into another random license plate
 Source: Forsman (2013)

The next page consists of two different panels, each with the black captions of James' narration above. The first panel shows a silhouette of a man and a woman holding hands, assumingly that they were Alyssa and James. The caption read that James' mother then drove the Pontiac they rode in that morning into the lake. The second panel shows a car drove off straight to the road, while the caption read that the 4 year old James watched how the car, in which his mother was still inside, bubbled and he innocently waited for his mother to come back. The narration ended there, implying that James' mother intentionally drowned the car with her inside.

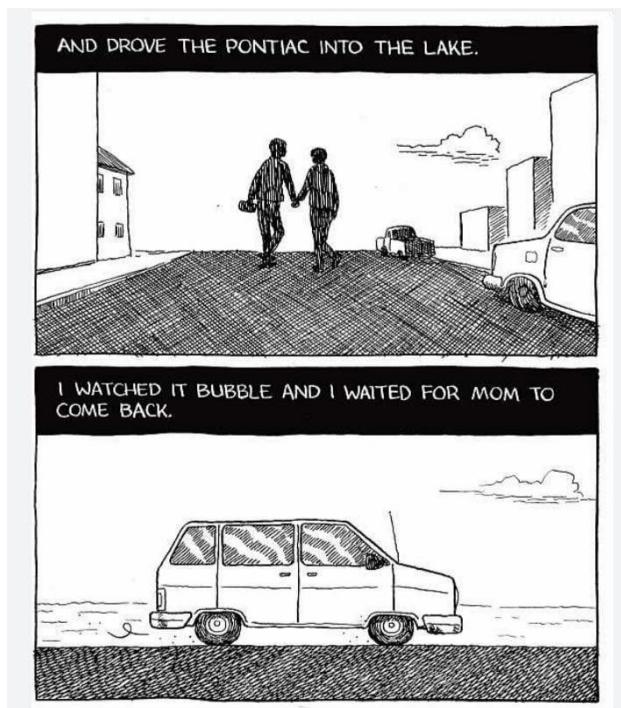


Figure 3. James and Alyssa broke into the random car and ran away

Source: Forsman (2013)

James Suffered From Oedipus Complex

Every individuals developed a psychological development during their childhood. This psychological development takes place during five psychosexual stages of oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital. One of them is phallic stages and what need to be resolved by a child in this stage is the adoption of characteristics from the same sex parent, for example, a son imitates on how his dad behaving all day. Freud also stressed that the first five years of the childhood where these psychosexual earlier stages took place are very crucial to the personality formation when we become an adult later. Therefore, if there were any stages that was not successfully resolved by an individual during his or her childhood, a fixation might occur. For instance, when a boy did not successfully resolve his phallic stage, he might remain stuck in the stage, become mother-fixated, and suffers from an Oedipus complex. Oedipus complex is a dysfunctional bond with a parent from the opposite sex that was not solved in adulthood.

Phallic stage happened in child between the ages of three to six years. In this case, James is categorized as someone who did not successfully resolve his phallic stage. His mother killed herself when James was only 4, when he was supposed to resolve his phallic stage by imitating his dad's behavior. However, James could not also look into his father as a real fatherly figure. He did not laugh at his father's jokes, as following:

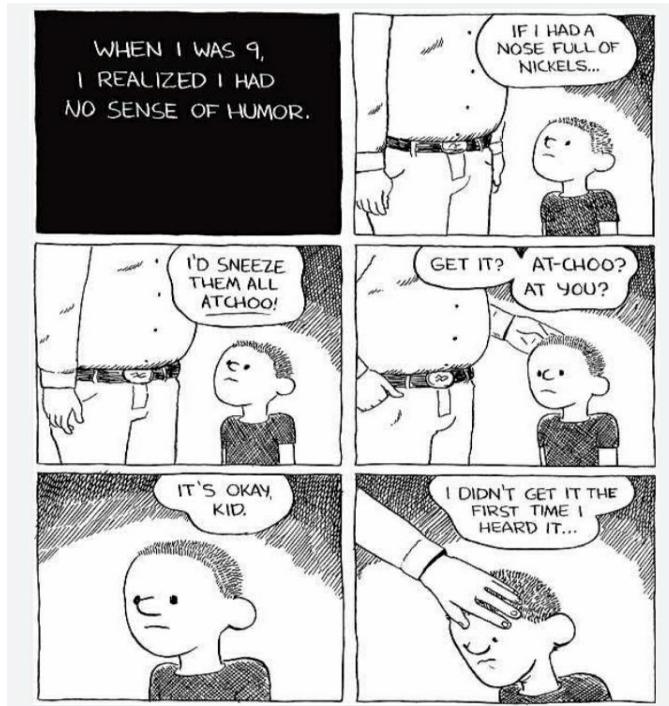


Figure 4. James was unable to understand his father's joke

For the next 5 panels, it could be seen that James' facial expression did not even change a little bit. It does convey the fact that he really had no sense of humor since he did not even react about the joke that was told by his father, even after his father explained it to him. In this page, James' dad was only shown from his chest to below. It might implying to the readers about how a nine year old James never even have any idea on how his father actually is. The unrevealed face of James' father might also lead to a finding that James' father was just a stranger that James himself, even as a son, could not even identify. Furthermore, based on how James' dad figure was composed in a way to dominate the figure of nine year old James might represent an imbalance imagery in which made James not only unable to understand his father's joke, but also how James could not able to rely into his father as a real fatherlike figure.

Later, when James turned 17 years old, he punched his father in the face and decided to stole his father's car to go on a runaway trip with Alyssa (Forsman, 2013). The first panel in the page showed James' dad, repeating the curse words with confused facial expression, followed by furious facial expression as he tried to scold James who turned out was just cursing at him. In addition, James' dad face

was revealed for the first time in these panels. The reveal of James' father might lead to a conclusion that when James was finally able to identify how his father is, the 17 year old James refused to respect or look up into him as an appropriate role figure of same sex parent. Hence, when the balanced imagery finally showed up between James and his father, they decided to fill their already awkward relationship with such a verbal violence by throwing curse words to each other.

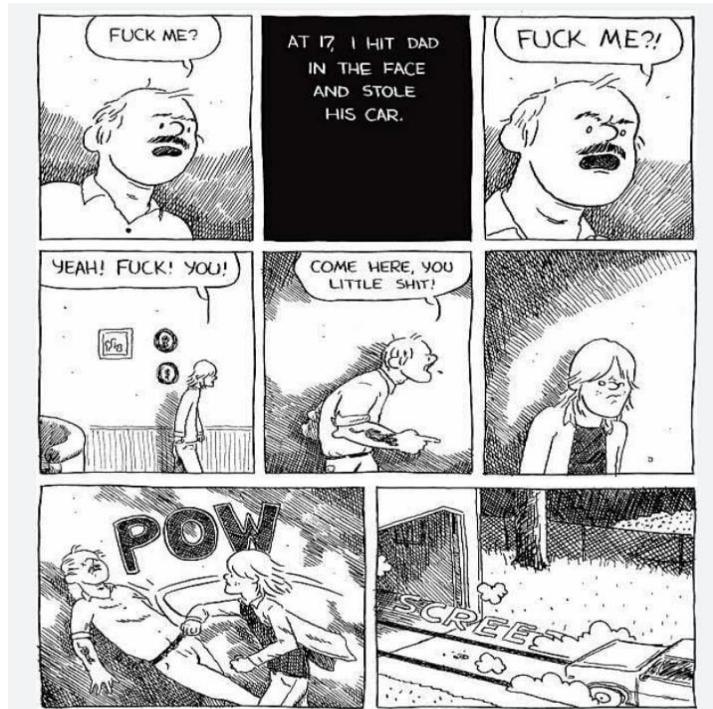


Figure 5. James punched his father and stole his father's car

Source: Forsman (2013)

It is also noticeable that in every panels of the pages where James' dad was shown, some black strokes were drawn around the panels. Some were functioned as the shadow of the characters James and his father, and some were intentionally drawn above their heads. These black strokes might symbolize the confusion, or even their rage towards each other. The fact that they both were never have a meaningful father and son relationship before, let alone that now James decided to show no respect towards his father.

Due to his unresolved Oedipus complex challenged James in achieving a romantic relationship with Alyssa. At first, James already planned that he was going to strangle Alyssa to death. It could be seen that James with his shirt sleeves rolled up, staring still into one thing. The next panel, still colorized as the white colored fonts in a pitch black panel, read as following:



Figure 6. James called off his plan to kill Alyssa and had sex with her instead
Source: Forsman (2013)

Moving to the next panel, it is revealed that James was staring into Alyssa, dressed only in her underclothes. They shared one deep, french kiss before they eventually had sex. James' strange obsession to murder Alyssa had just turned into an inexplicable romantic feelings. This time, it is visible that the black strokes background of James' confusion had disappeared, altered into a clear white panel along with James' act of making love with Alyssa. It might be interpreted that Alyssa's presence had made James' life a little bit clearer, a little bit brighter.

James' Sense of Self Became Unstable

Suffering from Oedipus complex is not the only core issue that James had experienced. Insecure or unstable sense of self, is the lack of ability to maintain a sense of personal identity, a sense of understanding who someone actually is. This core issue leads someone to become extremely vulnerable to the influence of others. During their runaway trip, James and Alyssa were waiting for a ride on the side of the road after they abandoned James' dad's car in a house they broke into earlier. While waiting for a ride, James thought to himself in another pitch black colored caption and white font read as following:

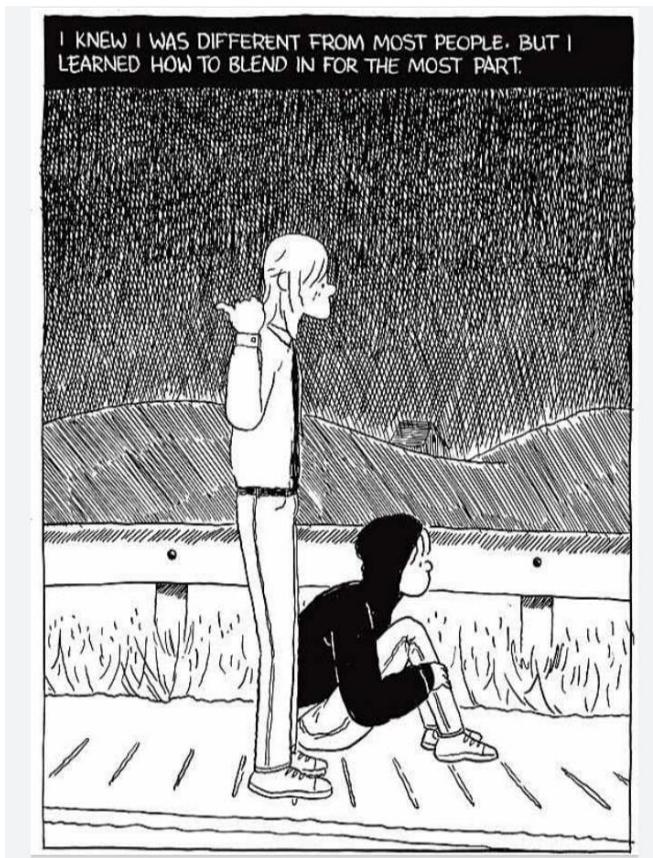


Figure 7. James and Alyssa were waiting for a ride

Source: Forsman (2013)

At this point, James has been completely aware with the fact that he is built different from any other people. He even stated that he tried to blend in for many times in his life. From this panel alone, it is visible that James had a hard time in the past to get along with different people. Thus, his sense of self had become unstable.

Moving to the next page, James narrating for once again. Not so long after, a random car approached James and Alyssa. After that, the driver offered them a ride. James and Alyssa stared into each other for a moment before they both agreed to accept the random driver man's offer. The driver also deliberately asked James to sit in the front seat to keep him company.



Figure 8. James and Alyssa hitchhiked into a random car
Source: Forsman (2013)

In accordance with what James already stated earlier about how he there were times when he does not know how to act and how he let things he did not understand to happen, James did not do a single thing when the creepy driver man shamelessly asked him whether he would mind if the creepy driver man rest his hand on James' lap. With no any response from James, the creepy driver man's hand slowly reached James' thigh and was so close to unbutton James' pants.

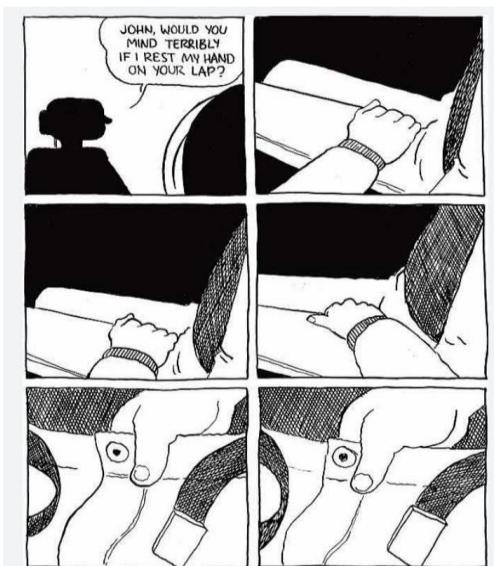


Figure 9. James was sexually harassed by the creepy driver man
Source: Forsman (2013)

Alyssa who was sitting on the back seat, quickly realizing an act of sexual harassment in front of her. She tried to stop the creepy driver man's action by strangling his neck with her own arms from the backseat, cursing, and also threatening the creepy driver man to pull over. Alyssa's heroic action was set in a pitch black panel, along with irritated look on Alyssa's face and terrified look from the creepy driver man. Moving to the next panel, James and Alyssa seemed to already got off from the creepy man's car as Alyssa questioning why James let that creepy driver man to do such thing to him. On the contrary, when James and Alyssa already got off from the creepy driver man's car, the act was set in a clear white panel, as if the issue they faced in this chapter has already been resolved.



Figure 10. Alyssa threatened the creepy driver man then she immediately got off the car with James

Source: Forsman (2013)

However, in the next page, James' thought is returning for once again, as follows:

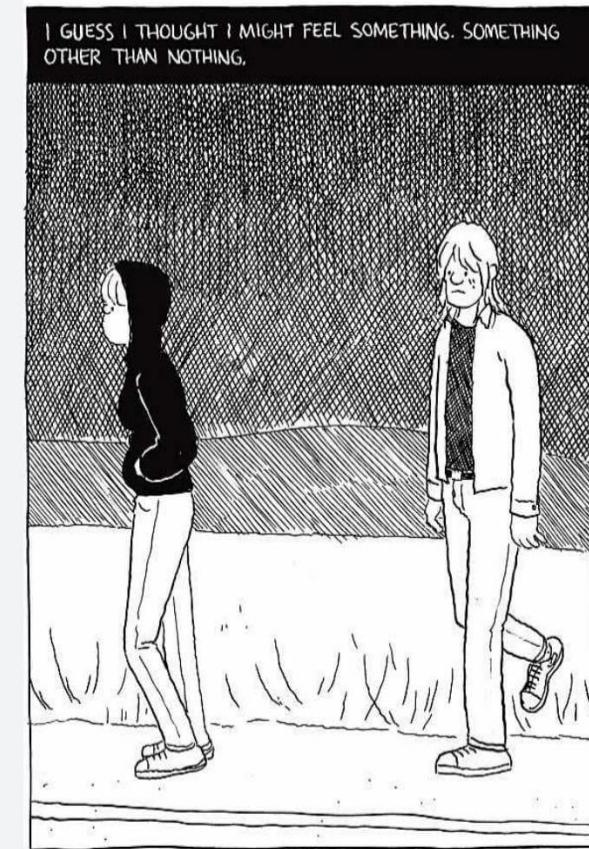


Figure 11. James and Alyssa continued their journey by walking
Source: Forsman (2013)

James' statement right after he was saved by Alyssa from being harassed indicates that he would not mind being sexually harassed by random people, as long as he could feel something other than nothing. In a much simpler way, James thinks that he would rather be harassed to feel something than to not be harassed and feel nothing. Nothing, as what he had felt for the rest of his life up until the moment he was being harassed.

James' Displacement towards His Surroundings

Defense mechanism is commonly used by human-beings to prevent their feelings from being hurt. Displacement is the act of taking it out on someone or something else that is less powerful than the real person or subject, is one of the most common used form of defense mechanism. Driven by his uncontrollable id, James also did his own act of displacement. When he found a cat in the woods, he consciously smashed its' body with a stone and killing it. After that, he then killed more and more animals and remembered them all.

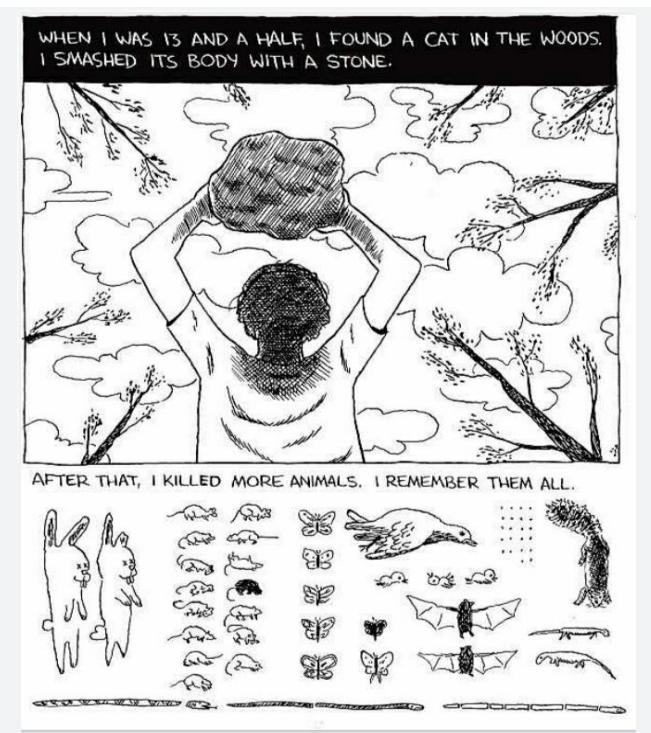


Figure 12. James' first animal killing experience and his dead animals' collection

Source: Forsman (2013)

James' Repression towards Himself

As a defense mechanism, repression is actively working to prevent such unpleasant past memories and morally disagreeable impulses from entering conscious awareness. The act of repression was discussed in the context of motivated forgetting. For years, this kind of defense mechanism had been occurred in James character since he wanted to ignore the fact that he could not ever seen his mother again because his mother took her own life in front of 4 years old him. During his runaway trip with Alyssa, the two sneaked into a stranger's empty house.



Figure 13. James and Alyssa were exploring the house they had broken into

Source: Forsman (2013)

While narrating such confessions, James and Alyssa were carelessly doing whatever they would like to do after breaking into the house, such as eating the remaining food, gulping down bottles and bottles of the beer, even casually laying on couch while watching television. Never felt the feeling of 'being home' in his own hometown, James finally felt it in a stranger's house that he (and Alyssa) broke into, instead. Breaking into an empty house is the product of James' second defense mechanism, which is repression. The act was motivated by the fact that he wanted to be somewhere that feel like home, especially after the trauma of witnessing his mother suicide that he encountered.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the core issue of James who had developed such strange behavior and personality in the graphic novel *The End of The F***ing World*, it turned out that James suffered from Oedipus complex, ever since he lost his mother to suicide. The trauma of witnessing his mother's suicide caused James became stuck in his phallic stage of psychosexual development, which later challenged him to form a romantic relationship with Alyssa, a girl he barely even knows about. Besides that, it is revealed that James is also lacking the ability of maintain a sense of personal identity, in which it also affects James' personality that he becoming insecure and having unstable sense of self. Due to his unstable sense of self, James became easily influenced and extremely vulnerable by the influence of others.

Growing up with an unforgettable childhood trauma, James' tripartite model also becoming imbalance. James' id eventually became dominant in the end. In this case, James is included as the one who was unable to listen to his own superego and chose to follow his id instead. When his id became too demanding, making James did his products of defense mechanism, which are displacement and repression.

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