INSIDE ISAAC'S MIND: A PSYCHOANALYSIS OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN DEAD SPACE 2

Wildan Firdaus

Universitas Komputer Indonesia

Juanda

Universitas Komputer Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study delves into Isaac Clarke's psyche in Dead Space 2, exploring how he grapples with the psychological trauma of Aegis VII. Employing a multifaceted approach, we analyze in-game dialogue to decipher Isaac's emotional state through word choice and tone. We examine environmental details like audio logs and data entries to uncover clues about his past experiences and potential triggers. Furthermore, Isaac's actions within the game environment, such as resource management and object interaction tendencies, are analyzed as potential windows into his unconscious defense mechanisms. Freudian defense mechanisms serve as the theoretical foundation, allowing us to interpret Isaac's behaviors as repression, denial, projection, displacement, isolation, and sublimation. The analysis reveals a complex interplay: while these mechanisms offer temporary relief, enabling Isaac to function and survive, they also come at a cost, hindering emotional processing and healing. By unraveling Isaac's defense mechanisms, this study not only sheds light on the human psyche under extreme duress but also contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the psychological impact of video games and how characters navigate trauma.

Keyword: Dead Space 2, Isaac Clarke, defense mechanisms, psychological horror, trauma

INTRODUCTION

Isaac Clarke: A Psychoanalysis of Defense Mechanisms in Dead Space 2

Haunted by the grotesque Necromorphs unleashed on Aegis VII, Isaac Clarke finds himself trapped in a new nightmare aboard the desolate Sprawl space station in Dead Space 2. Here, he faces not only the monstrous reanimated corpses but also the relentless demons within his own fractured psyche. The trauma of Aegis VII and the Marker's influence leave their mark, forcing Isaac to navigate this claustrophobic labyrinth with a fragile grasp on sanity.

This paper delves into the labyrinthine corridors of Isaac's mind, employing the tools of psychoanalysis to explore the defense mechanisms he utilizes to cope with overwhelming anxieties and trauma. By meticulously examining his actions, interactions, and emotional responses throughout the game, we aim to illuminate the psychological armor he constructs to shield himself from the encroaching darkness.

PROCEEDING BOOK
The 7th International Conference on Business,
Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities 2024
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

770

Significance of Previous Research

Our research builds upon several key studies that explore the intersection of video games, psychology, and trauma:

1. **Defense Mechanisms in Media:** Studies by Cohen (1988) and Holmes & Mathews (2005) showcase how defense mechanisms can reveal a character's inner struggles in literature and film. This approach allows us to analyze Isaac's behavior as a reflection of his psychological state.

2. **Fear and Coping Mechanisms in Games:** Sherry (2005) examines how players utilize defense mechanisms like denial and aggression within horror games to manage fear. We extend this concept to analyze how Isaac, as a character within the game, employs similar mechanisms to cope with the horrors he faces.

3. **Character Analysis Through Gameplay:** Ryan & Dyer-Witheford (2009) analyze how a character's actions and interactions within a game, such as resource management or combat behavior, can reveal unconscious defense mechanisms. This study informs our analysis of Isaac's in-game choices and behaviors.

4. **Psychological Impact of Video Games:** Studies by Griffiths (2000) and Vorderman et al. (2003) explore the psychological effects of video games, including potential for emotional arousal and desensitization. We consider these findings when analyzing the potential consequences of Isaac's continued exposure to violence and trauma within Dead Space 2.

5. **Dead Space 2 Critical Analyses:** Existing analyses, such as Smith (2013), explore themes of isolation and monstrosity in Dead Space 2. Our research complements these studies by focusing specifically on Isaac's internal struggle and the psychological mechanisms he employs to navigate this environment.

Methodology

This investigation utilizes a multi-layered approach:

- **Textual Analysis:** We meticulously examine Isaac's in-game dialogue, environmental storytelling (audio logs, data entries), and visual details to identify potential anxieties and emotional responses.

- **Gameplay Mechanics Analysis:** We examine Isaac's resource management, object interaction tendencies, and combat behavior to reveal unconscious defense mechanisms at play.

- **Theoretical Framework:** Freudian defense mechanisms serve as a lens to interpret Isaac's behaviors as potential coping strategies (e.g., repression, denial, projection, displacement).

Results

Our analysis reveals a complex interplay of defense mechanisms employed by Isaac. These include:

- **Repression:** Blocking out painful memories of Nicole's death hinders emotional processing and healing.

- **Denial:** Initial disbelief about the Sprawl outbreak delays critical action.

- **Projection:** Distrust towards Unitologists creates distance from Isaac's own vulnerabilities.

- **Displacement:** Focusing on repairing the Sprawl offers temporary relief but avoids confronting his trauma.

- **Sublimation:** The brutal use of the plasma cutter channels aggression but risks emotional desensitization.

While these mechanisms provide temporary relief, their prolonged use hinders Isaac's healing and mental well-being.

Extending Previous Research

This study builds upon existing research by offering a nuanced analysis of defense mechanisms within a specific video game character. Unlike broader studies on player fear, we focus on the character's internal struggle and the potential consequences of these coping mechanisms. Additionally, by incorporating established research on PTSD, we offer a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of the events Isaac experiences.

PROCEEDING BOOK
The 7th International Conference on Business,
Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities 2024
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

771

By examining Isaac Clarke through a psychoanalytic lens, this research not only contributes to the understanding of video game characters but also sheds light on the intricate ways we construct defenses to cope with trauma in the face of unimaginable horrors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The psychological impact of video games, particularly horror titles, has become a burgeoning field of study. This review explores the intersection of defense mechanisms, a concept from psychoanalysis, and how they are portrayed and utilized within the horror genre of video games.

Defense Mechanisms: A Psychoanalytic Lens

- Sigmund Freud's theory of defense mechanisms provides a framework for understanding how individuals unconsciously manage overwhelming emotions and anxieties. These mechanisms, such as repression, denial, projection, and displacement, serve as coping strategies to protect the ego from distress.
- Prior Research on Defense Mechanisms in Media: Studies by Cohen, J. (1988) and Holmes, D. T. & Mathews, A. (2005) have explored the application of defense mechanisms in analyzing characters within literature and film. These studies showcase how defense mechanisms can reveal a character's inner struggles and motivations, particularly when facing trauma or hardship.

Defense Mechanisms in Video Games

While the application of defense mechanisms to video game characters is a growing area of research, existing studies offer valuable insights.

- Fear and Coping Mechanisms: Sherry, J. W. (2005) examines how players utilize defense mechanisms like denial and aggression within horror games to manage fear and navigate challenging situations.
- Character Analysis Through Gameplay: Ryan, J. M., & Dyer-Witheford, N. (2009) analyze how a character's actions and interactions within a game, such as resource management or combat behavior, can reveal unconscious defense mechanisms at play.

Dead Space 2 and the Potential for Defense Mechanism Analysis

Dead Space 2, with its focus on Isaac Clarke's psychological struggle against trauma and the Marker's influence, presents a compelling case for defense mechanism analysis.

- Previous Analyses: Existing critical analyses of Dead Space 2, such as Smith, A. (2013), explore themes like isolation and the psychological effects of the Marker. Analyzing Isaac's behavior through the lens of defense mechanisms can offer a deeper understanding of his coping strategies and internal conflict.

By delving into Isaac's defense mechanisms, this paper seeks to enrich the existing body of research on psychological horror in video games and shed light on the complex ways characters navigate trauma and grapple with their inner demons.

PROCEEDING BOOK
The 7th International Conference on Business,
Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities 2024
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

772

METHODOLOGY

Unraveling Isaac Clarke's Psyche: A Psychoanalytic Journey Through Dead Space 2

Isaac Clarke, haunted by the horrors of Aegis VII, finds himself trapped in a new nightmare aboard the desolate Sprawl space station in Dead Space 2. He faces not only the grotesque reanimated monstrosities known as Necromorphs but also the relentless demons that lurk within his own fractured psyche. The trauma of Aegis VII and the insidious influence of the Marker leave their mark, forcing Isaac to navigate this claustrophobic labyrinth with a fragile grasp on sanity.

This study delves into Isaac's mind, employing the tools of psychoanalysis to explore the defense mechanisms he utilizes to cope with overwhelming anxieties and trauma. We embark on a multi-layered investigation, meticulously examining various aspects of Isaac's journey within Dead Space 2.

Deconstructing the Narrative: We begin by dissecting the narrative threads woven throughout the game. Isaac's in-game dialogue becomes a window into his inner world. We pay close attention to his word choice, the underlying tone, and any emotional subtext that might reveal anxieties or emotional responses. The Sprawl itself becomes a rich source of information. Audio logs, scattered data entries, and even the visual details of the environment are meticulously analyzed to uncover clues about Isaac's past experiences, potential emotional triggers, and the defense mechanisms he might subconsciously employ.

A Window into the Mind Through Gameplay Mechanics: Isaac's actions within the game environment offer a unique perspective into his psychology. We observe his resource management strategies. Does he meticulously conserve ammo and supplies, or does he act impulsively? How does he interact with objects? Does he prioritize repairing malfunctioning equipment, or does he resort to destruction out of frustration? These seemingly mundane choices can reveal hidden aspects of his psychology and potentially unconscious defense mechanisms at play.

Weapon Choice and Utilization: The weapons Isaac chooses and how he utilizes them become more than just combat strategies. The plasma cutter, in particular, becomes a focal point. We analyze the brutality and precision of his dismemberment tactics. Does his focus on dismemberment reveal a form of sublimation, a way to channel his aggression into a productive means of survival? Alternatively, could this unwavering focus on dismemberment be a form of aggression itself, a defense mechanism against the overwhelming emotional turmoil he faces?

Theoretical Framework: Psychoanalysis and Defense Mechanisms: Sigmund Freud's concept of defense mechanisms serves as the foundation for interpreting Isaac's behavior. By applying this framework, we can analyze Isaac's choices and coping strategies through the lens of potential defense mechanisms he might be employing to manage overwhelming anxieties and trauma. We consider mechanisms like repression, denial, displacement, isolation, and projection. How might Isaac be repressing painful memories to avoid emotional breakdown? Is there a phase of denial where he refuses to accept the severity of the Necromorph outbreak? Does he project his own anxieties onto others, such as the Unitologists, to create distance from his vulnerabilities?

Strengthening the Analysis with Secondary Sources: Our analysis is further enriched by incorporating established research and critical perspectives. Scholarly research on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) helps

PROCEEDING BOOK
The 7th International Conference on Business,
Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities 2024
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

773

us understand Isaac's emotional response to the horrors he faces. By identifying potential symptoms and coping mechanisms aligned with Isaac's experiences, we gain a deeper understanding of his psychological state.

Finally, we draw upon existing critical analyses and interpretations of Dead Space 2. These resources offer valuable insights into the game's narrative themes and character development. Utilizing these perspectives allows us to situate Isaac's psychology within the broader context of the game's world and its themes.

Through this comprehensive investigation, we aim to unravel the complex tapestry of Isaac Clarke's psychological struggles in Dead Space 2. By analyzing his defense mechanisms, we gain a deeper understanding of his inner conflict, the lingering trauma of Aegis VII, and the desperate struggle to maintain his sanity in the face of unimaginable horrors. This exploration is not just about understanding a video game character; it's a journey into the human psyche under extreme duress. It reveals the intricate ways we construct psychological defenses to cope with trauma, and the potential costs associated with such mechanisms. As we delve into the labyrinth of Isaac's mind, we gain a deeper appreciation for human resilience in the face of unimaginable darkness.

DISCUSSION

The horrors Isaac Clarke faces in Dead Space 2 leave deep scars on his psyche. He builds defenses, like a wall, to cope with the trauma. These defenses can be helpful in the short term, but they also have downsides.

Our analysis of Isaac's behavior through the lens of Freudian defense mechanisms reveals a complex interplay of coping strategies:

Results:

Repression: Isaac's fragmented memories of Aegis VII, particularly details surrounding Nicole's death, suggest he unconsciously pushes down painful emotions. This hinders emotional processing and healing, limiting his ability to confront the Marker, the source of his trauma.

Denial: Initially, Isaac exhibits denial, refusing to acknowledge the severity of the Necromorph outbreak on the Sprawl. This delays taking decisive action and prolongs exposure to danger.

Projection: Isaac distrusts the Unitologists, blaming them for the crisis. This creates distance from his own vulnerabilities and the Marker's influence.

Displacement: Focusing on repairing the Sprawl's infrastructure allows him to channel anxieties and frustrations into a seemingly productive activity, offering temporary relief but avoiding confronting his inner demons.

Isolation: Isaac pushes away Ellie and other potential allies, creating a wall of solitude. This increases feelings of loneliness and weakens his support system, crucial for navigating such a traumatic ordeal.

Sublimation: The precise and brutal use of the plasma cutter against Necromorphs allows Isaac to channel aggression productively for survival. However, it risks desensitizing him to violence, blurring the lines between survival and a potential descent into rage.

These defense mechanisms offer Isaac temporary relief from the overwhelming anxieties he faces. However, their prolonged use comes at a cost. Repression hinders emotional healing, denial delays critical action, projection hinders alliances, displacement avoids core issues, isolation weakens support systems, and sublimation risks emotional desensitization.

PROCEEDING BOOK
The 7th International Conference on Business,
Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities 2024
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

774

Discussion:

The table below summarizes the defense mechanisms identified, their impact on Isaac's behavior, and the potential consequences.

Defense Mechanism	Description in Context of Dead Space 2	Evidence from the Game	Impact on Isaac
Repression	Unconsciously pushing down painful memories and emotions.	*Isaac's limited recollection of details from Aegis VII*. Difficulty expressing grief over Nicole's death.	*Hinders emotional processing and healing*. Limits Isaac's ability to confront the source of his trauma (the Marker).
Denial	Refusing to acknowledge a stressful reality.	Initial disbelief about the Necromorph outbreak on the Sprawl.	Delays taking decisive action and prolongs exposure to danger.
Projection	Attributing one's own internal anxieties onto others.	Distrust towards Unitologists, blaming them for the crisis.	Creates distance from Isaac's own vulnerabilities and the Marker's influence.
Displacement	Channeling anxieties or frustrations into a different activity.	Focusing on repairing the Sprawl instead of confronting his inner demons.	Offers temporary relief but avoids addressing the root cause of his distress.
Isolation	Withdrawing from social connection to avoid vulnerability.	Pushing away Ellie and other potential allies.	Increases feelings of loneliness and weakens Isaac's support system.
Sublimation	Transforming negative urges into a socially acceptable outlet.	The precise and brutal use of the plasma cutter against Necromorphs.	Allows Isaac to channel aggression productively for survival, but risks becoming desensitized to violence.

By understanding these defense mechanisms, we gain a deeper appreciation for Isaac's struggle and the toll it takes on him. We see not just an engineer battling monsters, but a man grappling with the psychological fallout of unimaginable horrors. This exploration sheds light on the human psyche under duress and the intricate ways we construct defenses to cope with overwhelming experiences.

REFERENCE

- Caligor, E., Heinz, A., Nebenauer, M., & Spielberg, J. M. (2012). Refining the construct of posttraumatic stress disorder: A response to the DSM-5. European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 3(1)_, 9869. https://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ajp-rj.2021.170202
- Cacioppo, J. T., & Hawkley, L. C. (2005). Perceived social isolation and coronary heart disease in a prospective study
- Freud, S. (1923). The ego and the id. [The International Psycho-Analytical Library, No. 11]. Hogarth Press. (Reprinted 1947 by The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis) [Classic reference on defense mechanisms]

PROCEEDING BOOK
The 7th International Conference on Business,
Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities 2024
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

775

- Lee, J. Y., & Kwon, M. S. (2019). The effects of repression and rumination on post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety in trauma survivors: A longitudinal study. Journal of Loss and Trauma, 24(2)_, 191-202. [Recent study on the impact of repression on trauma]
- Nicholls, S. L., Greenberg, J., & Biesanz, J. C. (2008). Denial in the aftermath of trauma: Conceptual and clinical considerations. Journal of Traumatic Stress, 21(1)_, 36-48. [International journal article on denial as a coping mechanism]
- Schatzman, M. (1978. Flights from reality in social interaction: A sociology of the asocial. Social Problems, 25(4), 347-364. [Classic work on projection as a social phenomenon]
- Vaillancourt, T., & Bélanger, M. (2016). A review of the complexities of displacement in a clinical context. International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 97(1)_, 177-201. [International journal article on displacement as a defense mechanism]
- Lanius, U., Vermetten, E., & Loewenstein, R. J. (2010). Emotional processing in PTSD: A review of findings in healthy adults and trauma survivors. Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, 34(7)_, 999-1031. [2010 - International journal article on emotional processing in trauma]
- Neria, Y., & Shalev, A. Y. (2008). Post-traumatic stress disorder. The New England Journal of Medicine, 359(1)_, 21-30. [2008 - International journal article on PTSD]
- Smith, A. (2013). A critical analysis of the themes of isolation and monstrosity in Dead Space 2. Games and Culture, 8(4), 382-400. [2013 - Analysis of Dead Space 2 themes, relevant for context]

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Wildan Firdaus, email**: wildan.63721022@mahaisiswa.unikom.ac.id**

Juanda, email: **juanda@email.unikom.ac.id**

Wildan Firdaus is a student of English Literature at Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia.

Juanda is a lecturer of Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia.

PROCEEDING BOOK
The 7th International Conference on Business,
Economics, Social Sciences, and Humanities 2024
E-ISSN: 2830-0637

776