

Sublimation as Defense Mechanism in Pandemic Fatigue Today

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Abstract

Today, COVID-19 pandemic has caused such pandemic fatigue for people. Staying at home situation, social and economic uncertainties, and fear of outbreak are walls that limit and restrict everyone's mobility. People are getting tired and bored of prolonged pandemic and it caused anxiety among them. Instead of complaining about the pandemic, transforming the anxiety to other forms is needed now as seen in sublimation as defense mechanism. Then, how sublimation may cope with current pandemic fatigue? By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question. Current COVID-19 pandemic, pandemic fatigue, usage of defense mechanism in literary criticisms, and sublimation as defense mechanism are explanations in this paper. The discussion then includes how sublimation works as a necessary creative way to deal with pandemic fatigue. In health aspects, people doing more to pursuit fitness as reflection of pursuit of good health. In economic sides, being entrepreneur could be a nice way to find more money. In socio-cultural aspect, giving charity to others remains important as signs of being thankful for everything. In individual aspects, starting new hobbies and doing unfinished works at home are necessary deeds to deal with longer time "provided" by pandemic situations. Pandemic fatigue does not mean to neglect all rules, but it is such challenge for people to define another normal condition of everyday pandemic life today.

Keywords COVID-19, defense mechanism, pandemic fatigue, sublimation

1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic is a serious situation today. More than a million people got infected in Indonesia and more than thirty thousand people died because of the virus (Kompas.com, 2021). The world statistic shows more than a hundred million people suffered this virus and more than two millions people have died worldwide (Kompas.com, 2021). Since being announced as global pandemic in the beginning of 2020 until now, Indonesian government has applied several limitations and restrictions of the mobility of people. People are told to study at home, to work at home, and to pray at home. This condition has created such boredom to people. Students could not go to schools and colleges so that parents have to stay longer at home to teach and to accompany them studying online. Formal workers must work from home while informal ones get lesser opportunities to find money due to both macro and micro scale of limitations and restrictions (Kompas.com, 2021). Many tourist and entertainment attractions are also closed to totally block crowd of people staying in a place for a long time. This situation has resulted to such pandemic fatigue. People are getting tired of how more than a year this pandemic has changed every single aspect of life (WHO, 2020:7-8). Mental health becomes such concern today since having fatigue means experiencing stressful day to day life. Anxiety has become such staple food every day regarding to the situation of the pandemic. People seems could not do anything but confront the situation and bear pandemic fatigue.

Facing the anxiety, defense mechanisms are psychological unconscious strategies to protect a person from unacceptable thoughts or feelings (Perrotta, 2020:1-3). In this case, people do defense mechanism to cope with pandemic fatigue. Since this pandemic is inevitable, one option is to

transform the anxiety into another form. This is stated as sublimation in defense mechanism. By converting so, such bad feelings can be turned into better options for individuals and their surroundings (Kim, Zeppenfeld, and Cohen, 2013:640-641). The question is how sublimation may cope with current pandemic fatigue? By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question. This paper would use theories of concepts of pandemic fatigue, sublimation as defense mechanism, and current pandemic situation to show how may the actions deal with current conditions. By writing the explanation as follows, this script aims to enrich study of defense mechanism widely in everyday life especially in today's COVID-19 pandemic conditions. Moreover, this manuscript limits the research only to COVID-19 pandemic situation from beginning of 2020 until now and how pandemic fatigue is faced by every person day by day. This paper then is divided into several parts; introduction, research method, results and discussions (today's pandemic fatigue situation, sublimation as defense mechanism of anxiety, sublimation as a way to deal with pandemic fatigue), conclusion, and references.

2. Research Method

By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Both online and offline scripts are used to explain the connection between COVID-19 pandemic situation, pandemic fatigue, and also sublimation of defense mechanism. Online sources are taken from some recent national website to show the significance of pandemic fatigue and COVID-19 pandemic situations today. Offline sources then are attained from writings by academician to assert the connections between sublimation, defense mechanism, and pandemic fatigue. Online news are used to show update situation of the pandemic while offline scripts are derived from books and journals as tools to understand the shown matters. The steps of data analysis include attaining sources, reading the sources carefully, comparing them with other related issues, quoting them into this paper, and writing them down in the references lists.

3. Results and Discussions

COVID-19 virus has resulted to such pandemic today. Started from the beginning of 2020, this virus has spread and infected millions of people. Some of them face light symptoms while others must bear severe and condition. Some people also have died because of this serious virus. At the beginning of the outbreak, the virus was undermined and stated only as common flu which will be recovered easily by taking good rest (Cdc.gov, 2020). Then, the virus is the key factor of the whole changes in the world. The condition has extremely changed only in about a year.

It is pandemic that many limitations and restrictions to be realized until now. Limitation means prohibition from the inside; people should keep distance from another, stay away from crowd, or and wear face mask any time. Everyone needs to limit himself and herself not to be much involved in the society to keep good health condition intact among people (Lilleholt, Zetler, Betsch, and Böhm, 2021:3-4). Being aware of surrounding and paying attention to own self actions are the main keys in this limitation. Reminding others of the danger of this pandemic is another issue to be included too. On the other hand, restrictions are constrains from the outside; official governments tell people to do many things only from home; from studying, working, and also praying. Those indeed touch both private and public spheres of individuals and societies. Studying at schools and colleges are not allowed to prevent wider spread of the virus. Working from home has become ultimate solution to contain the virus isolated. Praying then has to be done online and inside home to stop the incoming

infections. Individuals and societies have to move from offline to online realms as well as to transform from direct into non-face-to-face encounters.

Moreover, the limitations and restrictions are prolonged until now. From macro (lockdowns and provincial restrictions) to micro (district and residential restrictions) ones (Kemendiknas.go.id, 2020), people are told to be always aware of the pandemic situation every time. More people could not go to work or even get better opportunities to fulfill every day needs. Existing at home condition is always accompanied with fear of being infected by others. Staying alert must be enclosed from time to time while the news always inform about the increasing cases of infections and deaths every day. From how the virus outbreak started until its widespread to now, it seems that the virus has been such furthestmost anxiety for individuals and societies (WHO, 2020:9-10).

Departed from former explanation of evolution of the virus into the pandemic, anxiety becomes such key word today. Everyone, from child to parent, from worker to president, and from the poor to the rich, sees the pandemic as something that shifts everyday life into anything worse. The future is blurred as has been shadowed by the virus. No ending final solution is found until now except allying with self-isolations every time. People are getting tired and exhausted as well because of current condition. Pandemic fatigue has been such normal condition for now.

Experience of having pandemic fatigue is known worldwide through the feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, loneliness, frustration, and hopelessness. Self-discipline of new normal to battle this unending pandemic is tiresome. Depression then becomes such usual disorder now since people always compare today's condition with life it was before. It is said that pandemic fatigue also results into neglecting health protocols which will make the pandemic worse (WHO, 2020:10-11). It may be true because of exhaustion concluded by this pandemic. However, it also reflects true everyday life now where people hope better circumstances as before. The reality of the fatigue is inevitable as the stressful life keeps coming from the sun rises until it sets.

The pandemic fatigue is in line with term of fatigue in psychological realms. Fatigue means subjective feeling of mental or physical tiredness caused by mental or physical exertion, sustained activity, lack of sleep, or health condition (Michie, West, and Harvey, 2020:1). In simple words, fatigue comes more abundant and continuous pressures to individuals. The tiredness then comes to impaired ability to perform mental or physical task as a result of depleted mental and physical resources. The depleted resources then are also affected by prolonged exposure to aversive set of circumstances (Michie, West, and Harvey, 2020:1-2). Loss of motivations, angry perceptions, abundant hopelessness, and passive acceptance are followed by this fatigue.

From the explanation, the criteria of fatigue are matched with the pandemic fatigue since people are limited and restricted to do their usual things that affects less motivations for their mental health issues too. The pandemic fatigue is related to both socio-cultural in subjective and intersubjective matters and economic in financial resilience issues. Changing daily routines and interactions, losing sense of normalcy, and rising of enormous uncertainties are how pandemic fatigue is real.

Pandemic fatigue is an anxiety faced by individuals in this COVID-19 pandemic. It may not be so pathological and neurotic but still its consequences could not be undermined easily. Mental and physical tiredness are results of overwhelming disruptions on routines and activities, social isolation, lack of security, imminent threat to health, and unpredictability of what is ahead (Labrague and Ballad, 2021:1). It is such undesirable and unintentional experience that really decreases motivation and sense of enjoyment. Mental health may also reaches its breaking points in this era of fear and worry so that mental resilience should be cared better and paid more attention in order to face worsened fatigue (Labrague and Ballad, 2021:3 and Humana, 2021:1).

It seems that pandemic fatigue is inevitable but no one desires it. The fatigue has been such unconscious anxiety to be confronted day by day (Labrague, 2021:2). Anxiety is the main reason of people doing defense mechanism. It is the difference between desire of id and reality of ego and superego that makes such anxiety. Id pushes people to go further to fulfill and to satisfy his or her needs. However, the ego as the reflection of common reality does not support that desire. Here, anxiety is not caused by others who suppressed individuals. It is condition that shapes such pressures of adherence to persons (Michie, West, and Harvey, 2020:2). In the case of pandemic fatigue, everyone has capabilities to do better but given less opportunities today because of the pandemic. Roles as father, mother, children, students, manager, or even director could not be fully fulfilled because of pandemic restraints. Moreover, people become anxious about what may come in the future. The condition has become more unpredictable today (Labrague and Ballad, 2021:1). This pandemic has cause people to identify the changes of the deepest aspects in his or her life. People then do defense mechanism to cope with the current pandemic situation.

The main idea of defense mechanism is how human beings manage to face problems which make them anxious about own and surrounding conditions (Phoenix-Talent School, 2018:1 and Kim, Zeppenfeld, and Cohen, 2013:640-641) . In analogy of medieval soldier battles in war, he or she may evade the attack, use better sword and shield to go on, or find weakness of the enemy and shape better strategies to confront it. This analogy is in line with how human beings face anxiety reflected in defense mechanism stated in psychoanalysis. The difference is that defense mechanism works in unconscious level to overcome anxiety (Perrotta, 2020:1-2). People have to face horrible pandemic things but they could not run away. What they can do are preparing themselves better to prevent worse incoming attacks from this abnormal situations (Michie, West, and Harvey, 2020:1-2).

Distorting painful reality to bear mentally is stated by Sigmund Freud in repression, denial, rationalization, displacement, sublimation, and identification (Perrotta, 2020:1-2). Those actions range from denying, feeling suppressed, until transforming the anxiety into something else (Adams in Yuliasuti and Putri, 2018:3-4). The defense mechanism is also widely used in literary criticism to examine whether such actions may reflect unconscious conditions and anxiety. Some of them are stated by Adrianus Aditya Christaldo Bilbo titled Captain America's, Iron Man's, and Thor's Anxiety and Defense Mechanism in *The Avengers* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. This paper examines how super heroes' conditions and human feelings actually intersect each other (Bilbo, 2019). Another writing is written by Agus Hadi Puspito and Agnes Widyaningrum titled Ego Defense Mechanism of The Main Character in Fight Club Novel (1996): Psychoanalytic Study. It is about how a character displaced his anger into boxing to move away his or her anxiety (Puspito and Widyaningrum, 2020). Another one is emphasized by Setya Octaviani and Rina Saraswati titled Sublimation of Charlie in Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. That writing asserts how sublimation works to cope with childhood trauma (Octaviani and Saraswati, 2016). The last is done by Anicleta Yuliasuti and Braga Permata Putri titled Jin Seon's Defense Mechanism in Carnby Kim and Youngchan Hwang's *Bastard*. It is about how personality of such characters could not evade cause and effect tensions between ego, superego, and id in facing anxiety of everyday events (Yuliasuti and Putri, 2018). Those examples show how defense mechanism is related to how unconscious realms speak about everyday life. Some problems may be so usual to be seen as usual anxiety, while others may be so hard to imagine that results into neurotic anxiety.

Sublimation as one of defense mechanisms is about how emotions are displaced and even transformed into constructive reality (Perrotta, 2020:2-3). It is different from displacement which turns anxiety of aggression into destructive deeds (Octaviani and Saraswati, 2016:14 and Puspito and

Widyaningrum, 2020:1-2). A simple instance of sublimation is a father who faced bad day at work then coming home and pour all of his anxiety into playing drums all day long. Example of displacement is that father punches his wife and children to show anger he could not speak to his boss. In simple term, sublimation is about taking energy that is potentially harmful and turning it into something necessary and useful (Phoenix-Talent School, 2018:2-3 and Kim, Zeppenfeld, and Cohen, 2013:640-641).

Once, a problem is faced and human being feels anxious about it (Kim, Zeppenfeld, and Cohen, 2013:640 and Cramer in Bilbo, 2019:428). His or her unconsciousness see that it does not feel right and something has to be done. Instead of running away, he or she faces it bravely, keeps the anxiety, injects creativity into it, displaces the anger, and then transforms it into something else (Phoenix-Talent School, 2018:2-4). In this sublimation case, it is quite different from other defense mechanism which is full of pathological mental health. People would say that anxiety is such severe condition of people (Octaviani and Saraswati, 2016:13-14). However, this paper writers would like to say that anxiety is part of everyday life. The anxiety happens every second in life as pushing people to do something about problems being faced. Indeed it is different from neurotic anxiety which involve mental serious problems.

Sublimation may provide the ways in identifying problems, facing anxiety, and being creative about it. Sublimation touches ordinary people with ordinary feelings of anxiety which happens every single time in human beings' life. Some quotations may say that defense mechanism is bad since it makes people evade inevitable reality (Kim, Zeppenfeld, and Cohen, 2013:640-641). Defense mechanism is said to be only as spontaneous response which will never solve the main problems. However, in this pandemic fatigue case, defense mechanism in sublimation could bring in positive impacts. People may not confront the problems and solve it right away, but they identify the problems, find possible resources, and make other probable solutions. Sublimation is not only about anxiety, but also creativity of people in experiencing poetic conditions of everyday life (Kim, Zeppenfeld, and Cohen, 2013:640-641). It is always better to find another way to deal with the real situation and win rather than confront in front of it and then lose.

Many researches give some tips to deal with pandemic fatigue. Trying a new routine such as doing exercise or experiment of activity is good to tackle the fatigue (Wallace, 2020:1 and Vertus, 2020:1-2). Walking, yoga, and cycling could be nice start. Meditation may also help to lower the stress and to improve mood. Being honest by telling what someone feels with others is another great thing to do. Trying not to ignore frustration and stress is needed to identify which part that can be solved (Vertus, 2020:1-2). Get moving outside, go in own pace, and listen to own body are necessary to stay active from time to time. Limiting news intake is also useful to decrease stress (Wallace, 2020:1-2). Understanding which one is fake or factual while thinking before sharing are good to filter which one is useful and harmful for personal and social life. Another one is stay intact with closest individuals such as family and friends. Expressing kindness, compassion, and gratitude is never wrong as extra hard working to manage the emotions (Humana, 2021:1). Love should be flowered more in today's pandemic situations. Taking care of others just like taking care own self is reflection of good heart that still should be maintained day by day.

The above tips are parts of defense mechanism which could deal with restraint of the superego and the ego into the id. Sublimation means transforming anxiety into something else more constructive behaviors (Perrotta, 2020:1-2). It is needed to prevent more harmful anxiety which could result to anger, frustration, and even neurotic depression. In Indonesia, creativity is the main idea of this sublimation. The main factor is to find other alternatives in everything. People seems to adapt more to this pandemic situation (Lilleholt, Zetler, Betsch, and Böhm, 2021:4). Indeed they do complain about

how pandemic may limit and restrict everything. The shadow of fear and worry because of the virus are still intact. But still people do not surrender to the situation. They still struggle to improve better life every time which will also increase better mental resilience as well (Wallace, 2020:1-2).

Rather than just complaining, people find other ways to cope with this pandemic. There are some aspects that could be asserted regarding to sublimation. First, in health issues, people are getting more aware of the immunity of their bodies. Facing the pandemic does not make people neglect their health but put more concern into them. People try to pursuit the fitness of the body which is quite the same with pursuit of current good health. They consume more nutrition and vitamins to keep the immunity (Vertus, 2020:1-2). Traditional herbal plants and beverages are also consumed to increase health resilience (Detik.com, 2020). Traditional ways to cure diseases are also tried to evade the expanding outbreak of this virus. Paying attention to health protocols are other great points of sublimation. People remind each other to always wear face mask in public area. Many washing hand stations are provided before coming into houses, supermarkets, hotels, or even governmental buildings. Keeping distance around one meter is also done automatically to stay away from the infection of the virus. Instead of being angry in this pandemic situation, people are getting aware of own body and others (Lilleholt, Zetler, Betsch, and Böhm, 2021:4). They know that this virus could not be beaten only by themselves. They need each other to cooperate together to deal with the virus. In sublimation, people know that the virus is the main cause, and by facing it, people turn their anxiety into better hope to gain more immunity. They consider more about nutrition of their food, hygiene of the utensils, and even plant themselves some herbal plants such as ginger and curcumin.

Second, in economic resilience, people are more creative in finding more money. Pandemic situations indeed limit and restrict many things. Formal workers have to stay at home more which also decrease their income. Students, teachers, and lecturers have to connect online more than ever which will need better internet access too. Informal workers who provide goods and services also experience decreasing earnings. More people are staying at home so they fulfill needs at home too. However, complaining about it does not automatically fulfill everyday needs. They need to do something. Social media as well as other online platforms then become such media to make more money. People create more things to be consumed by others. Those who can do crafts create more attractive goods. Unusual food from foreign countries are caused domestically and be sold through photos shared in social media. Foods and beverages vendors expand the market by extending diverse products and carry out more discounts and cashbacks to the customers. Many things that were not formerly imagined before actually can be sold and bought and has become new market today (Cubic.id, 2020). In this case, entrepreneurship is the main sublimation in pandemic fatigue. How people shape new forms of routine in a new business is such sublimation too. In a hand maybe they could not find proper money, but then they find another hand to be creative furthermore. They start to search and to follow current trends, finds best opportunities of famous events and people, and tries to make advantages from those too.

Third, in socio-cultural aspects, living in pandemic situation does not mean to get isolated from others. Even if they do not meet each other so frequently, people still share what they have to others. They do not think that giving something to others will bring in disadvantages. In reverse, more examples of charity actions are rising in this pandemic situation. From collecting money to be shared, giving unused clothes and utensils to those who needs them, to help others in repairing things are actions of personal love in society among people. What people give may not be much, but still it is form of compassion towards others. Logically, when people face problems, they became closed, known, and selfish only for themselves. Interestingly, people share with each other as usual now. People are closely related

to interpersonal matrix of experience (Octaviani and Saraswati, 2016:18-19). Some people even give more to those who do not have. This is a clear sublimation; rather than being angry about the situation, people then give more to the others. Rather than being more harmful, people do more peaceful deeds towards others. In a sense, giving things to others means being thankful to anything (Allianz Indonesia, 2020). Giving to others means sharing happiness to others too. This sense is sense of togetherness as reflected in Indonesian cultural everydayness. This pandemic could not be done only by several people but needed all people to go through this together. Giving to others also means giving more power to others so that they could face this pandemic bravely too.

Fourth, in individual aspects, sublimation touches the feelings inside personally. Seeing things that are unpredictable, people do not come to anger feelings, yet they choose to take good things behind the situations (Octaviani and Saraswati, 2016:19). Staying at home condition is the main fact today. More time could be spent with family. Parents pay more attention to his or her children following materials in online school or college. They could maintain the progress of their children better. Individuals may also explore new things, and even new hobbies, as ways to overcome anxiety of pandemic fatigue (Detik.com, 2020). Some people try new recipes in cooking for their families. Some others are starting hydroponic as a way to help fulfilling daily needs. Some of them are following online course or even language course to understand more languages. Some persons reading more books to dig more information or to find better enjoyment. Some others too getting more active by doing unfinished works. Cleaning the house, repairing electronics, or painting new pictures are ways to explore more abilities and talents by using time provided by this pandemic. The main ideas are using time best for doing unexplored or unfinished explored things.

Those points above show how everyone faces such anxiety in this pandemic situation. Persons also bear such pandemic fatigue due to prolonged limitations and restrictions. However, human beings do not easily surrender. They find more ways to survive this pandemic. They do not put themselves in anger situations, but explore things that may be useful now or in the future. It is sublimation that play parts in those actions. Taking anxiety and transforming it into something else more useful and less harmful is the way how sublimation works. The anxiety may not be totally gone since pandemic situation is still going on, but it becomes such energy to push people to be more creative and transformable to do newer and even unexplored things. In other words, sublimation is to turn negative feelings into positive outcomes. By doing that, clearer minds could be reached and better mental resilience could be attained furthermore. Doing things beside normalcy are needed to transform anxiety into something else but still considering the importance of health protocols. Pandemic fatigue does not mean to neglect all rules, but it is such challenge for people to define another normal condition of everyday pandemic life today.

4. Conclusion

Defense mechanism is not just about pathological and neurotic anxiety, but also actions in everyday life. Pandemic fatigue resulted from pandemic situations today could be borne by people doing sublimation as defense mechanism. Instead of just being angry and complaining things all day long, people think how to find other ways to survive. This nature is parts of sublimation. In health aspects, people doing more to pursuit fitness as reflection of pursuit of good health. In economic sides, being entrepreneur could be a nice way to find more money. In socio-cultural aspects, giving charity to others remains important as signs of being thankful for everything. In individual aspects, starting new

hobbies and doing unfinished work at home are necessary deeds to deal with longer time “provided” by pandemic situations.

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