

Analyzing Coping Mechanisms in “The Whale”: Charlie and Ellie’s Psychological Realism

¹Yosephine Flowrina Sumitro, ²Maria Vincentia Eka Mulatsih

¹Sanata Dharma, Jl. Affandi No.198, Mrican, Demangan, Gondokusuman, Yogyakarta City, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55221, Indonesia

²Sanata Dharma, Jl. Affandi No.198, Mrican, Demangan, Gondokusuman, Yogyakarta City, Special Region of Yogyakarta 55221, Indonesia
e-mail: mv_ika@usd.ac.id

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji kesehatan mental dalam kehidupan nyata yakni mengatasi stres dalam film "The Whale". Studi ini mengatasi dua permasalahan terkait mekanisme penanganan stres yang digunakan Charlie dan Ellie dan perbedaan mekanisme penanganan stres mereka dalam mempengaruhi pencarian individual mereka untuk hidup yang lebih baik. Penelitian kualitatif ini menggunakan analisis dokumen dan pendekatan psikologis pada mekanisme penanganan stres berdasarkan model Lazarus dan Folkman, yang Stuart dan Sundeen kategorikan sebagai adaptif dan maladaptif. Peneliti menemukan bahwa mekanisme penanganan stress maladaptif mendominasi kedua karakter, menyebabkan masalah kesehatan pada Charlie dan kegagalan akademis pada Ellie. Film berakhir dengan kematian Charlie karena masalah kesehatan, sehingga hubungan positif dengan Ellie datang terlambat. Sedangkan Ellie yang tidak suka sekolah, tetap bercita-cita untuk lulus namun gagal. Pencarian mereka akan kehidupan yang lebih baik bergantung pada kemampuan menghadapi dengan cara yang lebih sehat. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa mengandalkan metode penanganan stres tidak sehat menghambat pencapaian hidup yang lebih baik. Penulis berharap bahwa penelitian selanjutnya dapat membahas karya sastra berisi penanganan stres adaptif, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penanganan maladaptif bukanlah solusi terbaik.

Kata Kunci: Mekanisme penanganan, realisme psikologis, stres.

Abstract

This study examines real-life mental health which is coping mechanism in “The Whale” film. It addresses two issues, namely: coping mechanisms Charlie and Ellie employ and the differences of their coping mechanisms which impact their individual quests for a better life. This qualitative study employs document analysis and a psychological approach to coping mechanisms based on Lazarus and Folkman's model. Stuart and Sundeen further categorize as adaptive and maladaptive. The researchers find that maladaptive coping dominates both characters, leading to Charlie's health problems and Ellie's academic failure. The film ends with Charlie dying due to health issues, so the positive connection with Ellie comes too late. Meanwhile, Ellie, who dislikes school, still aspires to graduate but fails. Their quest for a better life hinges on being able to confront them in healthier ways. The study concludes that relying on unhealthy coping methods hinders a better life. The researchers hope that further research can discuss literary works containing adaptive stress management, this study shows that maladaptive management is not the best solution.

Keywords: Coping mechanisms, psychological realism, stress

How to Cite: Sumitro, Y. F. & Mulatsih, M. V. E. (2025). Analyzing Coping Mechanisms in "The Whale": Charlie and Ellie's Psychological Realism. *Globish (An English-Indonesian journal for English, Education and Culture*, 14(1). . pages 80-95 <http://dx.doi.org/10.31000/globish.v14i1.12435>

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a crucial aspect of well-being, and various factors can impact mental health. Stress, depression, and social isolation are among the key issues that interact with and influence psychological distress. As a guideline, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which an individual can cope with the challenges of life, realize their potential, work productively, and contribute to their community." It is these issues related to mental health that have served as the inspiration for the development of this thesis. Characters in films are not mere scripted roles; they offer a medium for filmmakers to explore the complexities of human psychology. Cinematic works like "The Whale" deeply explore its characters' psychological aspects. "Analyzing Coping Mechanisms in "The Whale": Charlie and Ellie's Psychological Realism" explores the psychological realism of these characters and their coping mechanisms.

Stress is a significant factor that can trigger mental health issues. Research suggests that stress is closely associated with depression (Stebleton et al., 2014; Vieweg et al., 2011). Neurologists even posit that stress can be a precursor to depression (Van Praag, 2004). When individuals experience depression, they often face fatigue, loss of interest in social activities, and feelings of isolation (Chun et al., 2004). Perceived isolation, or feelings of loneliness and a lack of social support, can exacerbate these issues. Individuals who perceive themselves as socially isolated tend to have fewer social connections, frequent experiences of loneliness, and higher levels of stress and depression (Heikkinen & Kauppinen, 2004). Psychological distress is an emotional state marked by depressive and anxiety symptoms. It includes feelings of inefficacy, emotional changes, and communication discomfort (Nevid, Rathus, & Greene, as cited in Azzahra, 2017). Depression is a severe mood disorder that can affect an individual's daily functioning, including loss of interest in activities, feelings of sadness, and even suicidal thoughts and actions (Arbona & Jimenez, 2014; Vieweg et al., 2011). Therefore, psychological distress is the end result of the interaction between stress, depression, and social isolation.

In Indonesia, mental healthcare confronts substantial challenges concerning service availability and public awareness. With a population of approximately 260 million, the country has only 773 psychiatrists and 451 clinical psychologists, according to Susy K Sebayang, a Public Health researcher from Airlangga University, and her team, as cited in their article in *The Conversation* (2018). This scarcity of mental health professionals is compounded by a lack of awareness and denial of mental health issues, particularly among parents regarding their children. Many parents are unaware of or reluctant to acknowledge mental health issues in their children. Survey results indicate that many parents do not recognize the mental health needs of their teenage children. Even when they do, access to services is often hindered. Mental health needs to be raised to the public's attention and appropriate services made available.

The writer also uses previous research to conduct this study entitled "Gambaran Stres dan Strategi Penyesuaian Diri Mahasiswa dalam Mengikuti Perkuliahan Tatap Muka." The study provides valuable insights into stress and coping

strategies among college students when learning changes from online during the Covid-19 pandemic to face-to-face with lecturers. However, it does not connect these coping mechanisms to the intricate world of psychological realism within movie characters. The significant gap lies in understanding how the coping mechanisms employed by characters like Charlie and Ellie reflect their inner thoughts and spoken words, aligning with the psychological realism in literature. Additionally, there's a gap in understanding how different coping methods affect character development in films and literature. Comparing these mechanisms across various works is also missing. Lastly, the study could relate its findings to real-life mental health challenges, particularly in regions like Indonesia with limited mental health resources. Addressing these gaps would offer a more comprehensive view of psychological realism, coping mechanisms, and mental health in cinematic characters. The writer also uses another study entitled "A Study on Stress Level and Coping Strategies among Undergraduate Students". This study deals with real-life stress experiences of university students. Same with the previous study, this study primarily focuses on real-life stress experiences and coping strategies, while "The Whale" explores the coping mechanisms of fictional characters in a different context. This exposes a gap in connecting coping strategies between real individuals and fictional characters. Moreover, the study investigates stress and coping primarily in academic contexts, whereas "The Whale" presents psychological realism in a literature and movie form. This reveals a gap in understanding how the coping strategies observed in fictional characters could inform real-life mental health challenges. The disconnect between stress-coping strategies in academia and those depicted in fictional narratives signifies an essential area for further exploration.

In relation to this thesis, research has indicated that coping strategies are essential for effectively managing daily stress and decreasing psychological distress (Shukri & Badayai, 2020). Coping strategies help individuals deal with stress and challenging life situations effectively (Shukri & Badayai, 2020). The findings of Morris et al. (2017) reinforce the strong relationship between effective coping strategies and lower levels of psychological distress. Thus, understanding coping strategies can enhance mental well-being and reduce stress, depression, and social isolation in Indonesia.

A lack of awareness and skills can hinder effective coping mechanisms. It is crucial to acknowledge these obstacles and seek help when necessary to develop effective coping mechanisms. People might not know their maladaptive or unhealthy coping mechanisms, inhibiting them from seeking help or making necessary changes. This study delves into the minds of Charlie and Ellie in "The Whale" to explore how their coping mechanisms shape their journey through the lens of psychological realism. Psychological realism reflects actions through inner thoughts and spoken words. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on coping mechanisms within the literature through psychological realism. This study is crucial to be done since it discusses stress coping mechanism that every human experiences. This offers an innovative perspective compared to previous studies primarily focusing on psychological coping mechanisms. It thoroughly examines characters' feelings, thoughts, and actions, providing a detailed understanding of their experiences, challenges, and resolutions. Therefore, there's an opportunity to bridge this gap by translating insights from fictional contexts to help individuals facing similar challenges in the real world. The questions regarding this study are followed up with the following research questions: (1) What coping mechanisms do Charlie and Ellie

employ in "The Whale"? (2) How do the differences of Charlie and Ellie's coping mechanisms impact their individual quests for a better life, as viewed through the lens of psychological realism? Therefore, the objective of this study is to explain coping mechanism for the quest of better life.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applied the document analysis method. Document analysis is a qualitative research approach where the researcher interprets documents to provide insights and context regarding a specific assessment topic (Bowen, 2009). This method involves an examination and interpretation of data to elicit meaning, enhance comprehension, and contribute to empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Fischer (2006) describes document analysis as a systematic technique for assessing or evaluating documents, both printed and electronic. According to Camic (2003), document analysis takes a variety of forms that are cross-cut by various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, media studies, cinema studies, women studies, and so on. Document analysis can be applied to various types of documents, including textual documents, audio recordings, and visual resources.

The writer used Coping mechanism theory. Stuart and Sundeen (1995) classify coping mechanisms into two categories, adaptive coping mechanisms and maladaptive coping mechanisms. To facilitate this study, the writer developed these analytical instruments below:

Table 1. Charlie and Ellie's Coping Mechanism Classifications

No.	Categories of Coping Mechanism	Characters	Quotation	Explanations
1.	Adaptive Coping Mechanism	Charlie Ellie		
2.	Maladaptive Coping Mechanism	Charlie Ellie		

The writer followed several steps to gather data from various sources. During the course of this study, the writer watched "The Whale" film multiple times to understand its plot, meaning, the actors' expressions, the film's transcript, and the characters' traits. The writer read the film's dialogues in the script. Additionally, the writer delved into articles, books, and journals related to the research topic, underlining relevant information from these texts and the film transcript. In the process, the writer identified some issues within the film and attempted to address them. Afterward, the writer proceeded to analyze what prompted certain actions by the characters Charlie and Ellie in relation to coping mechanisms, and how these coping mechanisms impacted their lives.

The coping mechanisms theory, categorized into adaptive and maladaptive types, has been employed to address the research questions through the use of a

table-based analytical instrument. The purpose is to analyze the coping behaviors of the film's characters, namely Charlie and Ellie, in order to gain insights into their respective coping mechanisms.

The psychological realism approach, as portrayed in the study, involves analyzing characters' thoughts, emotions, desires, and motivations employed in the film. Psychological realism was a literary subgenre that gained popularity in the late 19th and early 20th century. As it emphasizes on people's motivations and inner thoughts, this kind of fiction writing is very character-driven (Kennedy, 2019). Psychological realism combines psychological and realism theory. From both of the theories, psychological realism integrated psychology of the characters and the realism of the literary context.

Psychological realism is characterized by complex characters with rich life backgrounds and internal conflicts. These conflicts can be explored using narrative devices such as the narrator's voice, flashbacks, fragmented scenes, inner monologues, and streams of consciousness. Within this approach, the analysis delves into the inner workings of characters' minds, exploring their thoughts, emotions, desires, and motivations as depicted in the film. This method provides a deeper understanding of the psychological intricacies and complexities of the characters, contributing to a more comprehensive interpretation of the narrative.

The writer analyzed the information about Charlie and Ellie's coping mechanisms within the framework of psychological realism. This approach served as a lens through which their actions and behaviors were assessed. Subsequently, the writer explained the research findings by composing a thesis from the perspective of psychological realism. Recognizing the value of constructive feedback, the writer sought feedback from the lecturer regarding the thesis. Following this, the writer made revisions to several sections that were reviewed.

In summary, the research process encompassed several stages, including document and literature review, the identification of key texts through underlining, problem identification, comprehensive problem analysis, and the explanation of both the problems and the research result.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter encompasses the data results, discussion of the findings and answers to the research questions. In part one, Charlie and Ellie are presented as protagonists or antagonists. In part two, Charlie and Ellie's coping mechanisms are divided into adaptive and maladaptive. In the third part, Charlie and Ellie's psychological realism analysis is discussed.

Protagonist and Antagonist Character

In exploring coping mechanisms within the characters, this study delves into the dynamic between Charlie and Ellie, portraying Charlie as the protagonist and Ellie as the antagonist. Analyzing the film and screenplay script reveals Charlie as the main character, with health issues and emotional struggles facing grief, regret, and sadness. Charlie wants to mend his strained relationship with his daughter, Ellie, relying on it as the key to finding peace in his life. Conversely, Ellie is the antagonist who actively hinders Charlie's pursuits. She has anger and resentment toward Charlie for being abandoned. As a result, Charlie's plans are threatened. The evidence supporting Charlie as the protagonist and Ellie as the antagonist is presented in a dialogue within the screenplay script:

CHARLIE: You know, I... I was in a strange place in my life when I married your mom--

ELLIE: Did I fucking ask?

CHARLIE: Sorry, I just... I'm sorry. I understand that you're angry. But you don't need to be angry at the whole world, just be angry at me.

ELLIE: You know what?! You can't throw me away like a piece of garbage and then suddenly want to be my dad eight years later. You left me for your boyfriend; it's really that simple. And if you've been telling yourself anything different, then you've been lying to yourself (p. 57-58).

The dialogue on screenplay script pages 57-58 or at 59:34 until 1:01:20 in the film shows that Charlie is the protagonist, and Ellie is the antagonist. The film's dialogue context centers around Charlie inviting his daughter, Ellie, to visit him in his apartment as he seeks to reconnect with her. Charlie offers to give Ellie some money to encourage her visit. When Ellie went to his apartment, she also asked Charlie to help her write her essay to pass the exam and her school study. Then, Charlie asked Ellie to write something for him. When Ellie gave her writing to her, Charlie asked her to write more. It made Ellie say, "I kind of hate you". Charlie replies to her by saying "Yeah, but you hate everyone. Look just keep going, forget the poem, just write whatever you want, whatever you're thinking...". Then, Ellie replies "Be quiet, just..." and does her work. When Charlie attempts to start the conversation, Ellie is fuming at Charlie. Then she said terrible words to express her disappointment toward Charlie. The conversation above indicates that Charlie was trying his ways to approach Ellie. However, Ellie always opposes Charlie's intention to have a good relationship with Ellie.

Ellie's antagonist characterization aligns with the theories proposed by Truby (2007) and Gaikwad (2016), defining an antagonist as a character opposing the protagonist. This aligns with the narrative need for the antagonist to possess strength equal to the protagonist, fostering a fair and intense narrative competition. Further support for Charlie's protagonist role and Ellie's antagonist role is drawn from the theories articulated by Swain (1990), Harvey (1965), and Rohrberger and Woods (1971), characterizing the protagonist as a character with a defined goal and a richly developed history, immersed in conflicts, whether internal or external.

Adaptive Coping Mechanism

Adaptive coping mechanisms are positive behaviors to solve stress problems and give positive outcomes in the short or long term for individuals. Research on Charlie and Ellie's coping mechanisms from the film shows both characters having adaptive coping mechanisms.

Charlie's Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

Charlie has adaptive coping mechanisms such as seeking social support, intellectual engagement, and humour. According to the American Psychological Association, social support is providing assistance or comfort within one's social network to help individuals cope with stressors, including practical, tangible, and emotional support from family, friends, colleagues, or support groups. These types are a part of adaptive mechanisms because they give a positive impact into Charlie's life. "Look, it's been a long time. I just thought maybe we could--get to know each other" (p. 21) or at 22:55 in the film.

In this scene, Charlie is attempting to establish a connection with someone (Ellie), which can be a healthy way to cope with feelings of loneliness or isolation. By

reaching out to someone, Charlie is trying to build a support system and create a sense of belonging. This can help to reduce stress and improve overall well-being.

“It’s actually an amazing poem, Whitman uses the metaphor of “I” not to refer to himself but to explode the entire definition of self in favor of this all encompassing.” p. 33 or at 36:14 in the film.

In this scene, Charlie shares his perspective on the analysis of Walt Whitman's poem with Ellie. In this case, Charlie's intellectual engagement with Whitman's poem could be considered an adaptive coping mechanism as it provides him with a temporary distraction from his emotional pain.

Using humor as an adaptive coping strategy reduces perceived stress and increases positive emotional states (Simione, 2023) during stressful times. While Charlie struggles, he sometimes shows flashes of humor, indicating that he can find moments of lightness in the midst of his problems. As defined by the American Psychological Association, humor is the ability to recognize or convey humor in situations. Managing difficult emotions can be achieved through humor.

CHARLIE (reading softly, to himself): “This apartment smells. This notebook is retarded. I hate everyone.”

[Charlie thinks for a moment. He reads it again, counting out the syllables on his fingers. (counting to five) This apartment smells... (counting to seven) This notebook is retarded... (counting to five) I hate everyone. Charlie smiles wider. He begins to laugh a little.] (p. 56) on the screenplay script or at 57:45.

In this scene, Charlie reads a poem written by Ellie. At first, Charlie feels confused by Ellie's writing. However, Charlie tries to count the syllables in each line of Ellie's poem. In this case, Charlie being able to laugh and find creativity in Ellie's poem shows that he can bounce back and handle his feelings well. He likes the interesting and unusual parts of Ellie's poem and how she uses different words to express herself. This helps Charlie find some lightness and humor even when he is going through a tough time emotionally.

Ellie's Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

Ellie also has adaptive coping mechanisms shown in the film based on her behaviour, dialogue, and emotion. Ellie demonstrates assertiveness and independence in her interactions with other characters in the film.

“My title's better.” p. 32 or at 35:42 in the film.

In the scene, Charlie gives a suggestion about Ellie's poem analysis title. Her response of "my title's better" is a way of asserting her independence and rejecting Charlie's attempts to control her. Despite the fact that it is somewhat defensive, asserting her title as better can boost her self-esteem and temporarily alleviate the feeling. Asserting her opinion can be a healthy way of setting boundaries and expressing her individuality.

One of Ellie's adaptive coping mechanisms is writing. Writing can also be an adaptive coping mechanism when seen from the positive outcomes of someone who does it. Engaging in writing activities is an effective self-care practice to improve mental health (Sinats et al., 2005). According to Watson (2020), the writing process is a way of surveying feelings and transferring them onto the page. It provides an opportunity to explore feelings.

“Be quiet, just—”. Ellie fumes, then grabs the notebook out of Charlie's hand. She finds a pen, plops down into a chair and opens it up. She stares at the blank page. Finally, she starts to write a little. p. 57-58 or at 59:48 in the film.

In the scene, Charlie asks Ellie to write something for him. Ellie is annoyed by this request. However, she still does what Charlie asks and writes down her thoughts.

Ellie's behavior of grabbing the notebook, finding a pen, and starting to write can be seen as a coping mechanism. It reflects her response to the situation and her need to channel her emotions and thoughts. This coping mechanism can be considered adaptive, as it demonstrates her ability to engage in a constructive activity to manage her emotions and express herself. Writing can be a healthy way for individuals to process their feelings and thoughts, and in this context, it shows Ellie's attempt to cope with the challenging interaction with Charlie.

Ellie's other behavior that shows an adaptive coping mechanism is her desire to make a connection with someone. Socializing with friends is one of the examples of adaptive coping strategies which positively affects life (Javed & Parveen, 2021). "Who are you, really? Come on, tell me! Because I think we have a blossoming friendship." (p. 68 or at 01:09:34 in the film)"

Before this scene, Ellie and Thomas had engaged in a heated argument. By expressing her interest in getting to know Thomas better and suggesting that they are developing a friendship, she may be attempting to fill a void in her own life and find solace in the companionship of another person.

Maladaptive Coping Mechanism

Maladaptive coping mechanisms are strategies to face stress problems and give negative outcomes in the short or long term. The data collected from the film and screenplay script analysis found out that Charlie and Ellie have maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Charlie's Maladaptive Coping Mechanism

Charlie has maladaptive coping mechanisms include overeating, self-deprecation, and isolation. Overeating is one of Charlie's maladaptive coping mechanisms. (Bailey, 2022) Eating can help people avoid feeling sad or stressed (Herman, C. P., & Polivy, 1988). The masking theory proposes that food-related stress distracts people from the source of distress. As a result, overeating is caused by a person's inability to regulate the negative effects they have experienced. Overeating problems are not always caused by negative emotional experiences, but rather by a lack of adaptive emotion regulation strategies to deal with negative affect (Schnepper, et al, 2020).

Charlie quickly opens up the candy drawer and grabs the candy bar from moments before. He eats the entire thing in three large, quick bites. He hastily grabs a handful of candy bars, opening a few, eating them too quickly. p. 18 or at 18:39 in the film.

In this scene, Charlie searches for articles about "congestive heart failure" on his computer's search engine. After typing "congestive heart failure obesity prognosis," his heart beats even faster. After typing "BP 238/134," he finds the results to be worse than expected. He slams the computer shut and quickly opens the candy drawer.

Before this scene, Charlie and Mary, his ex-wife, argued about Ellie. Charlie wanted to meet Ellie, but Mary opposed it because, according to their agreement, Charlie financially supports Ellie, and Mary takes care of her. After Mary left, a few hours later, Charlie ordered pizza and ate it in the evening. In Charlie's case, his emotional eating could be a way of coping with his profound grief, guilt, and isolation. By consuming large amounts of food, he may be attempting to numb his emotional pain and temporarily escape his inner turmoil.

Charlie also shows self-depreciation which indicates maladaptive coping behavior. Self-deprecation can be associated with underlying issues like low self-esteem, unworthiness, or anxiety (Kopala-Sibley, Klein, Perlman, & Kotov, 2017; Owens, 1994). Self-deprecation can be a way to avoid dealing with difficult emotions or experiences. While it might provide temporary relief, it does not address the root of the problem. "Ellie, look at me. Who would want me to be a part of their life?" p. 59 or at 01:02:20 in the film.

In this scene, Ellie is angry and he refuses to look at Charlie because he had abandoned her and Ellie's mother in the past. Ellie wishes that Charlie should have asked her directly in the past. Then, Charlie responds, "Ellie, look at me. Who would want me to be a part of their life?" Charlie's statement is a form of self-deprecating communication that reflects his low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness. This type of self-deprecating communication can be considered a maladaptive coping mechanism.

Charlie isolated himself several times. According to Reed-Knight, B., et al (2018), self-isolation is a coping strategy consistently associated with poor outcomes. Javed, S., & Parveen, H., 2021; Folayan, M. et al (2016) suggest that avoidance through isolation involves delaying or minimizing stressful situations. The avoidance coping process involves denial, minimizing, or avoiding directly dealing with stressful circumstances. (Cronkite & Moos, 1995; Penley, Tomaka, & Wiebe, 2002). The act of avoiding is considered a maladaptive response to fear and anxiety, which contributes to anxiety disorders (Hofmann, S. G., & Hay, A. C., 2018). By not showing his appearance, Charlie shows that he isolated himself from the outside world. "Charlie pauses, waiting for the delivery boy to take the money and leave the pizza. p. 55 or at 54:23 in the film".

In this scene, Charlie orders pizza and does not leave his apartment to pick it up directly from the pizza delivery person. He is still keeping to himself. Charlie's reluctance to interact with the delivery boy and his refusal to pick up the pizza directly from the delivery person can be seen as an attempt to avoid social contact.

Ellie's Maladaptive Coping Mechanism

Therefore, Ellie also has maladaptive coping mechanisms. Ellie shows a lot of anger and resentment in the movie. "You'd be disgusting even if you weren't this fat, you'd still be that piece of shit dad who walked out on me when I was eight. All because he wanted to fuck one of his students" (p. 21 or at 22:33).

Before this scene, Charlie hoped that they could spend time together. However, Ellie refused to spend time with Charlie. Then, in this scene, Ellie gives her statement. Ellie's statement to Charlie appears to be an expression of her deep-seated anger and hurt towards her father for abandoning her. While it is understandable that she would be upset and angry with him, the way she chooses to express her emotions is likely to be detrimental to their relationship and her own well-being. In Ellie's case, her statement to Charlie could be considered a form of externalizing coping. She is directing her anger and hurt towards her father in a way that is likely to be hurtful and damaging. This type of coping mechanism is often ineffective in the long run and can lead to further conflict and emotional distress.

"You're just like my teachers, you think just because I'm not losing my shit over the poem, it's because I didn't read it. I did read it. It's overwritten and dumb and repetitive and even though he thinks his "metaphor of I" is deep, it's actually just bullshit and in reality, he's just some worthless 19th century faggot." p. 33-34 or at 36:36 in the film.

This scene is a continuation of the previous communication between Ellie and Charlie, where Charlie gave advice to Ellie to read Whitman's poetry beforehand. However, Ellie asserts that she has already read the poem and provided her own perspective. Her dismissive and confrontational attitude towards her father, Charlie, reflects a lack of healthy communication and coping skills. Additionally, her use of disrespectful words and offensive terms to describe Walt Whitman's poetry suggests a pattern of negative and judgmental thinking, which can be indicative of maladaptive coping mechanisms. Furthermore, her refusal to engage in meaningful conversation with Charlie and her overall negative outlook on education point to maladaptive coping mechanisms.

Ellie also has a maladaptive coping mechanism by consuming pot in the film. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "pot" is a slang term in the United States and the United Kingdom, referring to cannabis or drugs. Adolescent stress is associated with harmful coping behaviors, including drug abuse (Field & Powell, 2007; Suldo, Shaunessy, & Hardesty, 2008), indicating the use of maladaptive coping mechanisms to deal with stress.

In the scene that starts at 1:05:50 in the film, Ellie takes a hit from the pipe in front of Thomas, making him feel uncomfortable. Then, she said "It's just pot. It's not like I'm smoking meth or anything." p. 63 or at 01:05:56 in the film. Observing Thomas's discomfort prompts Ellie to make the statement mentioned. Her confrontational and dismissive behavior towards Thomas, along with her reluctance to engage in meaningful conversation with her father, Charlie, suggests a pattern of avoidance and emotional distress. Ellie's consumption of pot and her overall behavior can be seen as a maladaptive way of dealing with her underlying emotional struggles. It allows her to avoid confronting the negative consequences of her behavior and continue using substances without feeling guilty or ashamed. It is also making it difficult for her to have healthy relationships with others.

Table 2. Charlie and Ellie's Coping Mechanism Classification Results

No.	Categories of Coping Mechanism	Characters	Amount
2.	Adaptive Coping Mechanism	Charlie	9
		Ellie	4
3.	Maladaptive Coping Mechanism	Charlie	20
		Ellie	10

The study reveals that Charlie is the protagonist because the movie mainly focuses on his life and goal to connect with Ellie, who is portrayed as the antagonist. The data shows Charlie uses both adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms, for instance, including seeking social support and overeating. In contrast, Ellie employs assertiveness, anger, and substance use. In the table above, Charlie's adaptive and

maladaptive coping mechanisms are more than Ellie's. Both characters lean more towards maladaptive coping, totaling 30. Their combined total of adaptive coping mechanisms is 13.

Psychological Realism

Charlie and Ellie's coping mechanisms, when viewed from a psychological realism perspective, are significantly impacted by how they handle stress and emotions for the pursuit of a better life. In the movie "The Whale," Charlie lived with his wife and daughter, Ellie, before leaving for his boyfriend, Alan. Charlie experienced traumatic grief after his partner died. Charlie realizes his mistakes and wants to do the right thing in his life. Charlie aims to reconnect and communicate with his daughter Ellie. Charlie, who mourns the death of his partner Alan, is frequently depicted as being alone at home, looking at pictures of Alan, and becoming sensitive to anything that reminds him of his deceased loved one. This scene occurs at 01:39:32. Charlie delivers a monologue about Moby Dick's journey to kill a whale. This monologue features a supporting scene from 14:39 to 16:49 or in the film script from page 15 until 17 in which he reads a passage from Ellie's eighth-grade essay that showcases his profound sadness while he struggling with his chest ache.

CHARLIE: This book made me think about my own life. This book made me think about my own life. This book made me think about my own life...

This monologue was based on Ellie's essay. This is an example of psychological fiction or psychological realism's stream of consciousness. He repeated "This book made me think about my own life" three times in the scene to emphasize the story's profound impact on him.

Charlie's intention to communicate with Ellie happened when he called Ellie at 19:48 in the scene, inviting her to his apartment. The next day, Ellie visited, and Charlie inquired about her school. She informed Charlie about the chance of not graduating due to her grades. Later, at 22:18, Charlie invited Ellie to spend time with him, but she refused. Ellie said bad thing about school.

Ellie almost left Charlie's apartment. Finally, at 23:03, Charlie offered to give Ellie all the money. Ellie ultimately decided not to leave and turned back to Charlie. This is shown in the dialogue presented on page 21 of the film script below:

CHARLIE: "I can pay you."

[Ellie stops, turns, and looks at him.]

ELLIE: "Pay me to spend time with you?"

CHARLIE: "And I can help you with your work. It's what I do for my job."

After that, Ellie asks Charlie to help her with an essay on English. Her counselor said that she might be able to graduate if she shows improvement in one subject, although this contradicts Ellie's previous words that school is only for idiots. The scene is at 23:30 and the dialogue in the film script on page 22 below:

ELLIE: "My counselor says I might graduate if I show improvement in one subject. You can rewrite these English essays, but they have to be really good."

In the film scene at 01:47:34, Ellie brought the essay. Ellie failed the test, although Charlie helped her in writing an essay to pass high school. She blamed Charlie for ruining her life by making her fail the school test. Charlie said, "It was a really good essay." Ellie initially did not care about school, but about graduating. This is also evidence of Ellie's emotional suppression. This can be seen in this dialogue on page 100 of the script:

ELLIE: "Are you trying to screw me over one last time? I don't care that you're dying, I don't care about you! Do you want me to fail out of high school? Is that why you did this?"

CHARLIE: "I didn't write it."

ELLIE: "This is the essay you gave me yesterday."

CHARLIE: "You didn't read it." p. 100.

Emotional suppression in both characters is a common pattern, hindering open communication and understanding. Both characters displayed maladaptive coping strategies. Both characters struggle to cope with grief, self-esteem issues, and interpersonal dynamics, aligning their coping mechanisms with real-world responses to stress and emotional challenges. To support this fact, Ellie's failure to graduate from school and Charlie's death due to his deteriorating health. After nine years of separation, they eventually rekindled their relationship.

CHARLIE: "You'll help if you read it."

[Ellie turns to the door.]

ELLIE: "Fuck you."

CHARLIE: "Please."

ELLIE: "Fuck you!"

CHARLIE: "Ellie!"

[As Ellie swings the door open, she can no longer hold back her emotions, nearly collapsing into tears.]

ELLIE: "Daddy, please."

The scenes take place at the end of the story, between 01:49:20 to 01:52:22 or in the film script pages 102 to 104. In the beginning, their relationship is terrible. At the end of the story, Ellie shows Charlie her care by telling him to call an ambulance. Charlie refuses to visit the hospital and asks Ellie to read him the essay. At first, Ellie does not want to read it, but she finally says, "Daddy, please." In the previous scenes, Ellie never called Charlie "daddy". Then, Ellie expresses her desire to read her essay to Charlie.

ELLIE: "And I felt saddest of all when I read the boring chapters that were only descriptions of whales because I knew that the author was just trying to save us from his own sad story, just for a little while."

[Charlie takes one last step. The waves reach their loudest level. For the first time, Ellie smiles at Charlie.]

ELLIE: "This book made me think about my own life, and then it made me feel glad for my--"

[Charlie looks up.]

The dialogue in the scenes above depict Ellie reading her essay to Charlie. As she reads, Charlie attempts to stand up from the couch that Ellie had requested during their first meeting at Charlie's apartment. Ellie finishes reading the essay and they both smile at each other until Charlie looks up and sees a bright beam of light. In this scene, Charlie proves that he is now able to stand up, fulfilling Ellie's previous request. However, during their first meeting, Charlie was unable to stand up. These scenes are shown at 24:56 to 26:17 or on screenplay script pages 23 to 24 below:

ELLIE: "Come over here. Walk toward me."

[Charlie pauses, then reaches for his walker.]

ELLIE: "No. No. Without this thing. Stand up and walk over here."

CHARLIE: "Ellie, I can't really--"

ELLIE: "Shut up. Come over here."

At the end of the film, Charlie and Ellie do not end up with a better life. Ellie did not graduate from school, and Charlie's life was cut short due to his health problems. However, progress was finally made in their relationship. He continued to

see the positive side of Ellie and remained optimistic about doing the right things. Unfortunately, the good relationship had to end soon because Charlie died.

In this chapter discussion, Charlie and Ellie navigate their struggles through adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms. The adaptive coping mechanism was Charlie's attempt to reconnect with Ellie. His maladaptive coping mechanisms include overeating and suppressing emotions. Ellie has adaptive coping mechanisms like assertiveness. She has maladaptive behaviors involving anger and substance abuse. However, both characters face setbacks, including Charlie's death and Ellie not graduating. They fail to achieve a better life due to maladaptive coping mechanisms, loss, and personal growth.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion summarizes key insights and contributions. The study examined the roles of protagonists and antagonists in the movie "The Whale," based on their complex characterization. Charlie is the protagonist of the film because it focuses on his goal to connect with Ellie, the antagonist. Both characters, Charlie and Ellie, employed adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms to manage stress in *The Whale*. The purpose of this study is to analyze the consequences of these coping mechanisms by contrasting Charlie's and Ellie's experiences and analyzing how their strategies affected their journeys.

The research process encompassed several stages, including document and literature review, problem identification, comprehensive problem analysis, and the explanation of both the problems and the research results. As a result of the characters' use of coping mechanisms, the film demonstrated how these mechanisms intertwined with their individual quests to live better.

The research uses psychological realism by analyzing the findings through dialogue scripts, personal thoughts, and actions in either film scenes or scripts. During the film, Charlie knew that he would soon pass away and he wanted to connect with his child, Ellie. In contrast, Ellie wanted to pass the grade. Their quests intersect when Charlie helps Ellie write her essay. The film shows Charlie's adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms, including seeking social support and overeating. Meanwhile, Ellie uses assertiveness and anger.

Maladaptive coping dominates both characters, totaling 30. Both characters differ in their coping mechanisms and behaviors, whether adaptive or maladaptive. The film ends with Charlie dying due to health issues, so the positive connection with Ellie comes too late. Meanwhile, Ellie, who dislikes school, still aspires to graduate but fails. Their quest for a better life hinges on being able to confront them in healthier ways. However, they use unhealthy coping mechanisms more than healthy ones. Their attempts to achieve a better life failed.

This study found that two characters tend to have maladaptive coping mechanism. The researchers could not show more adaptive coping mechanism as quests for a better life. Hence, future studies can discuss more adaptive coping mechanism with different objects that underline more adaptive mechanism.

REFERENCES

- Arbona, C., & Jimenez, C. (2014). Minority stress, ethnic identity, and depression among Latino/a college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 61(1), 162.

- Azzahra, F. (2017). Pengaruh resiliensi terhadap distres psikologis pada mahasiswa. *Jurnal Ilmiah Psikologi Terapan*, 5(1), 80-96.
- Bailey, A. (2022, October 18). Coping mechanisms: Everything you need to know. Verywell Health. Retrieved on December 3, 2023, from <https://www.verywellhealth.com/coping-mechanisms-5272135>
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40. doi:10.3316/QRJ0902027
- Cambridge University Press. (n.d.). Pot. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved on December 5, 2023, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/pot>
- Camic, P. M., Rhodes, J. E., & Yardley, L. (Eds.). (2003). *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding perspectives in methodology and design*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
- Chun, C. A., Cronkite, R. C., & Moos, R. H. (2004). Stress generation in depressed patients and community controls. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 23(3), 390-412.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). California: Sage Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452230153>
- Cronkite, R. C., & Moos, R. H. (1995). Life context, coping processes, and depression. In E. E. Beckman & W. R. Leber (Eds.), *Handbook of depression* (2nd ed., pp. 569-587). New York: Guilford Press.
- Feld, L. D., & Shusterman, A. (2015). Into the pressure cooker: student stress in college preparatory high schools. *Journal of Adolescence*, 41, 31-42.
- Field, M., & Powell, M. (2007). Stress increases attentional bias for alcohol cues in social drinkers who drink to cope. *Alcohol & Alcoholism*, 42(6), 560e566. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/alcalc/agm064>
- Fischer, C. T. (Ed.). (2006). *Qualitative research methods for psychologist: Introduction through empirical studies*. New York: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Folayan, M. O., Cáceres, C. F., Sam-Agudu, N. A., Odetoyinbo, M., Stockman, J. K., & Harrison, A. (2017). Psychological stressors and coping strategies used by adolescents living with and not living with HIV infection in Nigeria. *AIDS and Behavior*, 21, 2736-2745.
- Gaikwad, K. B. (2016). Protagonist: A prime mover of the plot of a literary work. *Pune Research Scholar: An International Multidisciplinary Journal*, 2(6), 1-8.
- Harvey, W. J. (1965). *Character and the novel*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Heikkinen, R., & Kauppinen, M. (2004). Depressive symptoms in late life: A 10-year followup. *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 38(3), 239-250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.archger.2003.10.004>
- Herman, C. P., & Polivy, J. (1988). Restraint and excess in dieters and bulimics. In *The Psychobiology of Bulimia Nervosa* (pp. 33-41). DOI: 10.1007/978-3-642-73267-6_5
- Hofmann, S. G., & Hay, A. C. (2018). Rethinking avoidance: Toward a balanced approach to avoidance in treating anxiety disorders. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 55, 14-21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2018.03.004>
- Horwitz, A. V. (2002). Selecting outcomes for the sociology of mental health: Issues of measurement and dimensionality. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 43(2).

- Horwitz A. V. (2007). Distinguishing distress from disorder as psychological outcomes of stressful social arrangements. *Health: 11(3)*, 273-289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363459307077541>
- Internet Movie Database. (n.d.). The whale faq. Retrieved on September 25, 2023, from https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13833688/faq/?ref=tt_faq_1
- Institute of Medicine (US) Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Berg, R. L., & Cassells, J. S. (Eds.). (1992). *The second fifty years: Promoting health and preventing disability*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press (US).
- James, H. (1884). The art of fiction. *Longman's Magazine, 1882-1905, 4(23)*, 502-521. Retrieved on September 20, 2023, from <https://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/artfiction.html>
- Javed, S., & Parveen, H. (2021). Adaptive coping strategies used by people during coronavirus. *Journal of Education and Health Promotion, 10*.
- Kennedy, Patrick. (2023, April 5). Characters' thoughts and motivations in psychological realism. Retrieved on December 6, 2023, from <https://www.thoughtco.com/psychological-realism-2207838>
- Kim, Y. S., Kim, S.-S., & Gil, M. (2020). Journaling for self-care and coping in mothers of troubled children in the community. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 34(2)*, 50-57. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2020.02.005>.
- Kopala-Sibley, D. C., Klein, D. N., Perlman, G., & Kotov, R. (2017). Self-criticism and dependency in female adolescents: prediction of first onsets and disentangling the relationships between personality, stressful life events, and internalizing psychopathology. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 126(8)*, 1029.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Lemire, C. (2022, December 9). Reviews the whale. Retrieved on September 28, 2023, from <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-whale-movie-review-2022>
- McCormick, C., Pantoja, K., & Abdulkaki, M. (2024, February 21). The whale ending & real meaning explained. *Screen Rant*. Retrieved on February 24, 2023, from <https://screenrant.com/whale-2022-movie-ending-explained/>
- Morris, N., Moghaddam, N., Tickle, A., & Biswas, S. (2018). The relationship between coping style and psychological distress in people with head and neck cancer: a systematic review. *Psycho-oncology, 27(3)*, 734-747.
- Owens, T. J. (1994). Two dimensions of self-esteem: Reciprocal effects of positive self-worth and self-deprecation on adolescent problems. *American Sociological Review, 59(3)*, 391-407. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095940>
- Penley, J. T. J., & Wiebe, J. (2002). The association of coping to physical and psychological health outcomes: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 25(6)*, 551-563.
- Reed-Knight, B., Van Tilburg, M. A., Levy, R. L., Langer, S. L., Romano, J. M., Murphy, T. B., ... & Feld, A. D. (2018). Maladaptive coping and depressive symptoms partially explain the association between family stress and pain-related distress in youth with ibd. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology, 43(1)*, 94-103.
- Schnepper, R., Georgii, C., Eichin, K., Arend, A. K., Wilhelm, F. H., Vögele, C., Lutz, A. P. C., van Dyck, Z., & Blechert, J. (2020). Fight, Flight, - Or Grab a Bite! Trait Emotional and Restrained Eating Style Predicts Food Cue Responding

- Under Negative Emotions. *Frontiers in behavioral neuroscience*, 14, 91. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2020.00091>
- Shukri, N. N. M., & Badayai, A. R. A. (2020). The relationships between spirituality, coping strategies, and psychological distress among haemodialysis patients. *Jurnal Psikologi Malaysia*, 34(3).
- Simione, L., & Gnagnarella, C. (2023). Humor coping reduces the positive relationship between avoidance coping strategies and perceived stress: A moderation analysis. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13020179>
- Stebbleton, M. J., Soria, K. M., & Huesman Jr, R. L. (2014). First-generation students' sense of belonging, mental health, and use of counseling services at public research universities. *Journal of College Counseling*, 17(1), 6-20.
- Stuart & Sundeen. 1991. *Pocket guide to psychiatric nursing* (ed. 3). The Mosby Company : Toronto.
- Suldo, S. M., Shaunessy, E., & Hardesty, R. (2008). Relationships among stress, coping, and mental health in high-achieving high school students. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45(4), 273-290.
- Swain, D. V. (1990). *Creating characters: How to Build Story People* (1st ed.). Ohio: Writer's Digest Books.
- The Conversation. (2018, November 2). 260 million people and less than 1000 psychiatrists, Indonesia's mental health worker shortage. Retrieved on October 23, 2023, from <https://theconversation.com/id>
- Truby, J. (2008). *The anatomy of story: 22 Steps to becoming a master storyteller*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Vantage Point Recovery. (n.d.). Adaptive vs. maladaptive coping: Know the difference. Retrieved on December 3, 2023, from <https://vantagepointrecovery.com/adaptive-maladaptive-coping/>
- Van Praag, H. M. (2004). Can stress cause depression?. *Progress in Neuro-Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry*, 28(5), 891-907.
- Viertiö, S., Kiviruusu, O., Piirtola, M., Kaprio, J., Korhonen, T., Marttunen, M., & Suvisaari, J. (2021). Factors contributing to psychological distress in the working population, with a special reference to gender difference. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), Article 611. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10560-y>
- Vieweg, W. V., Hasnain, M., Mezuk, B., Levy, J. R., Lesnefsky, E. J., & Pandurangi, A. K. (2011). Depression, stress, and heart disease in earthquakes and Takotsubo cardiomyopathy. *The American journal of medicine*, 124(10), 900-907. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjmed.2011.04.009>
- World Health Organization. (2004). *Promoting mental health: Concepts, emerging evidence, practice: Summary report*. Geneva: World Health Organization.