

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Bullying is defined as a long-lasting and systemic form of interpersonal aggression from the perpetrator, where the victims are persistently exposed to negative or violent actions from the other individual/s over a period and struggle to defend themselves from these actions (Olweus, 1993, p. 98). In America, one out of every five (20, 8%) of 12-18 years old students reports being bullied. A mean prevalence rate of 35% for traditional bullying involvement and 15% for cyberbullying involvement. Based on those who reported being bullied at school, 13% are made fun of, called names, or insulted; 12% are subject of rumors; 5% are pushed, shoved, tripped, or split on; 5% are excluded from activities on purpose (Bullying Statistic, 2017).

Based on the action, bullying is divided into three types; physical, bullying, and social. On the other hand, based on the setting, bullying is divided into in-person bullying and cyberbullying (Types of bullying, 2020). Family First Aid statistics revealed that bullying is more common in younger teenagers rather than older teenagers. This can be caused by the majority of bullying actions among younger teenagers which are physical bullying easy to identify. Meanwhile, older teenagers are likely more involved in other types of bullying. Physical bullying is more popular among boys, but girls often become targets of verbal and emotional

bullying especially involving sexual gossip (School Bullying Statistics, 2013). Researches revealed bullying experiences are associated with emotional difficulties, including loneliness, anxiety, depression, low academic performance, and low self-esteem (Plexousakis, Kourkoutas, Giovazolias, & Nikolopoulos, 2019, p. 2).

A research stated 57% of bullying victims reported significant symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Mattiesen & Einarsen, 2004, p. 1). PTSD is a disorder that may develop after being exposed to a traumatic event, severe physical or mental harm, or terrifying and threatening event. PTSD may also involve a person's death, a threat to someone else's harm, and severe physical or psychological injury (Canales, 2011, p. 30). Another study at the University of Illinois revealed experiencing bullying affects long-term psychological trauma and be the strongest predictor for developing PTSD as severe as physical abuse, neglect, and exposure to the community of violence (Wounds from childhood bullying may persist into college years, study finds, 2016).

Elizabeth A. Brett develops the concept of PTSD based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis. She stated Freud's repetition compulsion is the classical model of traumatic symptoms (Brett, 1993, p. 61). Symptoms of PTSD are categorized into three main symptoms. First, a person's exposure to a traumatic event and re-experiencing the event through repetitive images, thoughts, flashbacks, and nightmares. Second, a person's difficulty of sleeping and concentrating and the use of violence as 'the escaping way' to lessen his/her feelings of anger, sadness, or low self-esteem. Third, a person's emotional numbness and impairment at social,

occupational, and personal levels that result in social withdrawal (Canales, 2011, p. 31).

There is increasing evidence that people with PTSD are commonly associated with the panic attacks – intense period of fear with physical sensation such as breathlessness, dizziness, palpitations, trembling, nausea, and sweating and cognitive symptoms such as fears of dying, going crazy, and doing something uncontrolled. A person who experiences panic attack frequently or who worry excessively about the occurrence of these attacks is diagnosed with panic disorder (Antony, Brown, & Barlow, 1992, p. 1).

Meanwhile, it is known that both mental and physical health impact upon each other; an individual's mental health effects on physical health, and vice versa. It is obvious that physical health is not enough; a good balance between physical and mental health is required (Ohrnberge, Fichera, & Sutton, 2017, pp. 3-4). To help clients with PTSD, there are some types of treatments that can be chosen, and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the options.

CBT is an evidence-based treatment approach shown to help children, adolescents, and their parents (or including caregivers) to overcome trauma-related difficulties. The CBT therapy draw element combination from multiple approaches and theories; (1) Cognitive therapy aims clients to change their negative thinking, address painful feelings of guilt, shame, and blame; (2) Behavioral therapy aims to modify habitual responses to identify situation or stimuli (e.g. anger, fear, and so on) by practicing healthier relaxation and coping skills; (3) family therapy aims to

examine patterns of interactions among family member to identify and alleviate the problem; (4) Attachment theory emphasizes the relationship between parents and child; (5) Developmental neurology provides insight on the developing brain during childhood (Children Bureau of USA, 2018, pp. 1-2).

As bullying significantly impacts the victims' confidence and self-esteem, many people believe the complementary therapy method is a good solution to improve their sense of self-esteem and well-being. It is essential to learn the appropriate tools for rebuilding a positive perception of themselves. Some strategies to help people with bullying trauma may include exercising, finding a meaningful relationship, finding meaning in career, and living in a safe and supportive environment (Arzt, Victim of Long-Term Bullying or Harassment & PTSD, 2019).

As the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud created several types of therapy as a medication to help or cure several mental disorders. The types of therapy including free association where the patients talk about everything that can release their repressed emotions and experiences. By examining the unconscious and conscious aspects in mind, the therapist will make the patients released their unconscious mind to gain patient's insight – the awareness of the source of emotion and traumatic experience, and find solutions for the problem (Freud, 2003, p. 47).

With his partner, Dr. Joseph Breuer, Freud developed two levels of mental life, unconscious and conscious mind (Freud, 2003, p. 96). Located in the unconscious mind, there is basic instincts called 'id' that divided into life instinct called 'eros' which sense basic needs to survive such as hunger, thirst, avoidance

to pain, and sex (libido) and death instinct called 'thanatos' which reflects our desire for peace, alcohol attraction, escaping from our routines, and other escapist activities such as reading books, watching movies, and craving for sleep. In the extreme case, thanatos can lead to suicidal wishes and attempts or shift into aggression, cruelty, murder, and destructiveness toward other people (Freud, 2003, pp. 97-98).

In the conscious mind, there is 'ego' related to reality through its consciousness. As the reality principle, ego becomes the decision making process of personality since its function to control the path in activity. Ego assesses and decided the most harmless option to deal with id's urges in a moral accepted way (Freud, 2003, p. 105). Ego can cause anxiety when it placed between id and superego – a control component that comes from social, cultural, and moral norm. To protect from anxiety, ego uses defense mechanism such as repression, regression, denial, displacement, and so on (Feist & Feist, 2009, p. 16).

Freud also stated there is stages of sexual development that contribute to our personality and character. Sexual development divided into five stages, begin with the oral stage (birth to 18 months) which means infants seek pleasure in the mouth by sucking and biting, anal stage (1-3 years) which means the focus of pleasure is in the anus, phallic stage (3-6 years) which means the focus of pleasure is the genitalia and masturbation, latency stage (6 to puberty) which means sexual impulse is suppressed in service of learning, and genital stage (puberty to adult) which means the focus of pleasure is sexual intercourse (Freud, 2018, pp. 19-23).

As experiences that have been through definitely contribute an individual's personality or identity, Freud believed traumatic experiences had remarkable and unique impacts on the individual. For instance, people may develop infantile or childish behavior as fixations due to difficulties and traumas while achieving each stage of psychosexual such as weaning, potty training, and finding sexual identity. Fixation gives long-term effects on identity construction (Freud, 2018, pp. 23-24).

Self-identity construction of bullying PTSD survivor is portrayed in 2016's *Holding up the Universe*, which is one of the novel written by Jenifer Niven, the author of the New York Times and international bestseller *All the Bright Places* and *Holding Up the Universe*. Published in 2016 by Ember Publishing, *Holding Up the Universe* is the second young adult novel written by Jennifer Niven. The novel is narrated by two main characters, Libby Strout, a fat girl who three years ago was titled as the fattest teen in America, and Jack Masselin, a boy with prosopagnosia or more well known as face blind. This research will focus on the character of Libby who had been bullied at school and developed several mental health issues including anxiety, panic attack, and PTSD symptoms.

Libby Strout is a 16 years old girl who came back to school after isolated herself inside of her house. At the age of 10, she experienced bullying because of her weight by being isolated at the playground by a group of bullies that she called "Moses Hunt". As the bullying took time when she was mourning her mother's death, Libby's condition became more complicated. After developing panic attacks, she refused to go to school and got involved in binge-eating until she weighed 653 pounds (296 Kg). She had to be rescued by partially destroying her roof and

carrying her with helicopter and truck. News TV reported the rescue event; she received hate mails from all around America and nasty comments online. After she did several treatments, behavior training, and counseling, her mental disorder got better, and she lost 302 pounds (132 Kg, she is 160 Kg). Moreover, she realized her panic attack never came back.

However, the situation got changed when Libby came back to high school. She encountered Caroline Lushamp and Kendra Wu, her former classmates at school that were interviewed when she was rescued. Both Caroline and Kendra reminded her of traumatic trauma in her past. The situation was exacerbated when Libby became a victim of physical bullying called “Fat Girl Rodeo”. Her past trauma constantly came back, and she became target of several types of bullying including physical, social, verbal, and cyberbullying. Libby tried to be strong and never told her bullying to adults including her Father, her former caregiver named Rachel, and teachers. As punishment for fighting and vandalism, she had to attend Conversation Circle – a counseling class supervised by Mr. Levine. Therefore, she revealed her past and new traumas, forgave her bullies, search her own identity, and showed a body acceptance movement by using bikini in the main hall of the school with a sentence “I AM WANTED” in her stomach.

The writer of the novel, Jennifer Niven depicted realistic experiences of bullying and its consequences. She captured the experiences, feelings, and conflicts of a bullying victim who developed PTSD symptoms. By using Brett’s concept of PTSD, Libby’s cause and symptoms of PTSD are examined. In the novel, Libby developed several symptoms of PTSD including re-experiencing traumatic events

through repetitive images, thoughts and flashbacks, sleeping and concentrating difficulties, emotional numbness, self-blaming, being easily irritated and angered, and social withdrawal by isolating herself inside of her house. However, in the end, Libby achieved to solve the majority of her problems and gained insight. Therefore, through Libby's contestation of mind between id, ego, and superego, her self-identity construction is revealed.

Jennifer Niven is an award-winning author and screenwriter. She is well-known for her young adult novels that captured mental health issues including *All Bright Places* (2015) and *Holding Up the Universe* (2016). Both of them considered as her key works which received the New York Times Bestseller and nominations of Goodreads Choice Award for Young Adult category. Moreover, *Holding Up the Universe* was inspired by the author's own experiences of weight problems and bullying due to her weight. She stated the issue in acknowledgement of the novel. *I did not have to be rescued from my house the way Libby was, but I have struggled with weight issues and anxiety over the years – particularly when I was Libby's age – I know how it feels like to be bullied* (Niven, 2016, p. 390).

There are several previous related studies of this research. In 2011, a study by Gustavo Sánchez Canales entitled "Prisoners Gradually Came to Buddhist Positions": The Presence of PTSD Symptoms in Rosa in Cynthia Ozick's "The Shawl" aims to examine contributed factors and symptoms of PTSD experienced by the main character of Cynthia Ozick's *The Shawl*, Rosa, a survivor of Holocaust concentration camp. The study is analyzed by using *APA's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder* of PTSD symptoms and Paul A. Boelen's

concept of 'centrality of event' in PTSD symptoms. It is found that Rosa suffered from the tragic loss of her baby daughter at concentration. She developed PTSD symptoms including the reluctance of sleep, re-experience traumatic event, using violence as 'escape valve', and social withdrawal. Rosa who migrated to Miami, USA after the Holocaust had a lack of command in English and insisted to read in Polish which is her first language. These actions and conditions led her into isolation and estrangement from the Miami community.

In 2017, a study by Aimee Pozorski entitled "'about people like you": PTSD and the Ethical Relation in Roth's *The Human Stain*' examined the main character of Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* named Les Farley, a Vietnam War veteran who returned with PTSD that takes a form of violent tendencies. By using Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis, the research revealed the importance of trauma stories to be told and duty for listening to the victim of PTSD which appears in term of 'ethical listening'. As an emphatic listener or another individual who can hear the anguish and the memories of the trauma exist, the traumatic individual can affirm and recognize the realness of their problem, thus annihilates the trauma.

Last but not least, a study in 2008 conducted by Bethan Jones entitled "Traces of Shame: Margaret Atwood's Portrayal of Childhood Bullying and its Consequences in *Cat's Eye*" revealed the significant effects of childhood trauma. By using Freud's psychoanalysis, Lacan's mirror theory, and Barthes' intertextuality theory, the study examined two main characters, Elaine as a victim of bullying and Cordelia as the aggressor in the novel *Cat's Eye* written by Margaret Atwood. The analysis depicts childhood bullying trauma and its consequences.

Being excluded from girlhood, Elaine's tomboy behavior came from play along with her brother. Meanwhile, Cordelia's aggressive action toward Elaine was interpreted as a consequence of her older sisters' patronizing behaviors.

Differing from the three previous related studies, this study aims to analyze the female main character of Jennifer Niven's *Holding up the Universe*, Libby Strout who suffered mental issues including PTSD due to traumatic events as a victim of bullying at her school at the very young age. By using Elizabeth Brett's concept of PTSD, this study examines the causes and symptoms of PTSD which are experienced by Libby, and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis is used to reveal Libby's contestation of mind and self-identity construction.

1.2 Research Questions

How Libby's self-identity is constructed as a bullying PTSD survivor?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze Libby Strout's self-identity construction as a bullying PTSD survivor in Jennifer Niven's *Holding up the Universe* by using Elizabeth Brett's concept of PTSD and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses to examine PTSD caused by bullying that Libby had been experienced by using Elizabeth Brett's concept of PTSD. Therefore, the analysis examines how Libby's self-identity is constructed based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis viewpoint.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to be a useful insight for researchers who want to develop similar studies in the future. The result of this study is hoped to extend knowledge and understanding of the writer and the readers for the issue of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder due to bullying. The writer hoped that this study will be useful for her and the readers who want to get a better and thorough understanding of Elizabeth Brett's concept of PTSD and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis theories and how those theories applied to literary works.

