

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Gender identity in this era has become a commonly debated topic in everyday life by people because of the stigma that comes with the word 'gender identity' itself. According to Butler (1990), gender identity is not gender expression; gender identity is something that is performatively constructed and expression is said to be a result of it. For this reason, the process of searching for true gender identity has become a long and very complicated and challenging path for people, especially in this modern era where diverse gender characteristics that sometimes can no longer be clearly classified are beginning to be discovered, which for individuals often creates conflict between their struggle to fit what they want to show themselves to the world with what is expected from their family and the environment in which they live. For these individuals, they have grown up without expecting to be different, but the environment they live in, whether it is a higher, middle, or lower social class, expects them to look the same in order to fit into the group of that social class, causing them to constantly question how, why, and who they should be within that social class.

Social class is a deep social structure formed for the position of individuals in society, which is determined by various factors such as economic factors, education, work, and even power to gain recognition from society. The higher the factors owned by individuals, the higher the recognition received and the opportunity to enjoy resources in society by these individuals, such as health services and legal interests, and vice versa

(Crenshaw, 1991). However, while social class, particularly the upper class, offers advantages not enjoyed by the lower class, it also imposes limitations that serve as disadvantages for individuals from these upper classes, particularly in expressing gender identity within the social environment. This aligns with Kimberle Crenshaw's theoretical framework, developed in 1989, on the intersecting relationship between gender identity and social class, known as intersectionality.

Intersectionality is a form of oppression and discrimination related to racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and various other hierarchical pressures in oppressive cultural groups. These forms of oppression do not operate in isolation but are interconnected, forming a complex experience of oppression. In the case of someone experiencing gender identity issues and coming from an upper social class, intersectionality influences their experience in a complex way that differs from the experience of someone coming from a different social class (Crenshaw, 1989). Social class and gender identity are interconnected. People from upper social classes enjoy privileges such as access to education and a wealth of information, financial advantages that facilitate access to healthcare, and the ability to purchase physical materials for their desired gender expression (access to items that allow them to appear as male or female, regardless of their actual gender identity). They can also easily find or move to relatively safe environments if their original environment does not accept them. Unfortunately, despite these privileges, they often also face pressure and burdens, particularly from the upper classes.

In a society that places such high importance on image and social class for achieving the aforementioned well-being, individuals are inevitably pressured to

conform to the negative aspects of society, even to the point of gender identity, which is conservatively regulated by society. However, it is not uncommon for these pressures to take the form of pressure to uphold the family's reputation or pressure to maintain the family legacy in the proper manner, which if not met will result in these individuals receiving punishment, even if it is subtle, such as rejection, threats of being cut off from financial support, exclusion from family events and social interactions with people of the same social class, or even emotional pressure such as emotional manipulation to obtain guilt from individuals who commit violations. These pressures ultimately make individuals lose direction and become confused in determining who they are; they cannot even determine exactly what their gender identity is. This is when gender identity issues arise, when there is no stability regarding who they are and what they will become, which stimulates the desire to try to resist and rebel against the conservative norms that build society in order to gain recognition for who they really are and no longer be marginalized by their social class group.

An example of novel that talks about gender identity and social class is *Symptoms of Being Human* by Jeff Garvin. This novel was published in 2016 by Balzer + Bray, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, USA. The novel deals with the pressures of society and the media, causing a teenager's life to crumble under the pressure of norms simply because they face identity issues, the pressure being bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Garvin tells a story about Riley Cavanaugh, a frightened and confused teenage girl who faces complicated and complex issues in figuring out and trying to understand their true gender identity. The story delves into the difficulties faced by Riley in navigating the complex and distorted landscape of their personal identity in today's world. Riley, who was biologically born a girl but feels

uncomfortable with their traditionally assigned gender identity, finds themselves at the intersection of self-expression and societal expectations.

The constant pressure on Riley to accept and identify themselves as part of the traditional society that is considered the so-called normality makes Riley, who feels their identity is more complicated than just one identifying word, “girl,” confused and sensitive. They struggle to be accepted by their family and the society around them, which has the potential to destroy the image of themselves and their family that was well established long before the realization of their deviant identity. Garvin portrays Riley’s struggle in a very sensitive, profound, and touching way, describing the disturbing conflicts that Riley faces that they have to go through in secret until they can finally do it openly. Although their gender identity seems to contradict conventional norms, they decide to continue expressing themselves in the way they think is right. However, the struggle to be accepted and recognized by those around them became a considerable source of conflict that they had to face.

As a writer, raising the topic of gender identity and social class will provide a better understanding if gender identity is not a separate thing from other factors, especially not from social class factors. Gender identity and social class are interrelated with each other, which will affect how someone with identity issues positions themselves in seeking opportunities, support, and their rights as individuals with non-binary gender identities. Then, by using the intersectionality theory by Kimberle Crenshaw, it will allow us to see how gender identity and social class are related to each other and how it is projected on individuals who have problems with their gender identity. It is hoped that by raising the topic of gender identity and social class using this

intersectionality theory, we can know the importance of being aware of gender identity issues and their relationship to social society and accepting that there are many forms of human diversity with their experiences.

The writer chooses the novel *Symptoms of Being Human* as a main object for this research because this novel raises the theme of gender identity and social class as the main theme. The main characters named Riley Cavanaugh, who comes from a high-class family, experienced gender fluidity, and struggles to express themselves amidst the various pressures they get from their surroundings. The novel presents experiences from Riley's perspective, bringing readers along with their various emotions, such as confusion, fear, and the courage to be open amidst their struggles as someone from upper-class society.

1.2 Identification of the Problems

This research problem focuses on the conflict that arises from the intersection of gender identity and upper class in the novel *Symptoms of Being Human*. This novel presents the conflict of identity construction of Riley Cavanaugh, a gender-fluid teenager from the upper class, showing that their gender identity and social class are not two separate issues but rather a complex and mutually shaping experience. As part of a highly respected political family, Riley is in the awkward position where the class privilege they have received, which gives them access to resources such as private counselors or a platform to speak, actually becomes a tool of control that intensifies the pressure to suppress their gender identity to maintain the family's reputation. This conflict is demonstrated through the challenges that Riley faces, which arise from the intersection of their gender identity and social class expectations. Using an

intersectionality approach (Crenshaw, 1989), this study will analyze how these two identities constitute, or shape, each other to create a specific and complex experience of oppression and privilege for Riley, which is not experienced by those who only share one identity (only experiencing gender fluidity or only coming from the upper class).

1.3 The Review of Previous Studies

In confirming this research, it will be assisted by journals and articles from official sites that are related to the research object, among these sources the writer finally found some valid data related to this topic.

The thesis that the writer reviews discusses Jeff Garvin's novel *Symptoms of Being Human* entitled **Multiplicity and Movement: The Construction of Genderqueer Identities in *Orlando*, *Middlesex*, and *Symptoms of Being Human*** by Manon Reuling (2018). This thesis explores gender identities that transcend binaries in Woolf's *Orlando*, Eugenides' *Middlesex*, and Garvin's *Symptoms of Being Human*. The researcher analyzes gender identities using Butler's ideas on gender and Linstead and Pullen's ideas on multiple gender capacities that can be seen as interrelated. The researcher analyzes how these novels appear to highlight the idea of genderqueer. Influenced by feminist theory based on Simone de Beauvoir, Reuling tries to convey that literature has now become a medium for projecting more diverse gender identities, no longer just male or female, that society uses to recognize individuals. Reuling analyzes the character of Riley Cavanaugh in the novel *Symptoms of Being Human*, who has a shift in identity from a woman to a neutral or non-binary character who has experienced pressure from society to return to complying with the norms that apply in society. Reuling's analysis of Riley's character, described as a neutral character, tells

readers that this novel, although introducing what gender fluid or unusual gender identity are, also allows readers to have a better understanding of complex gender as part of society's life. Then, Reuling also analyzes that Riley's way of expressing themselves using a blog as part of digital can also be considered a safe place for people who are depressed because of identity shifts that they do not understand. Then, based on the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler, Reuling projects that identity is something complicated that cannot be permanently determined to meet the expectations of traditional society. Reuling states that Jeff Garvin's novel is a work that truly conveys the reality of life from gender identity issues that are often ignored. What this novel reflects, according to Reuling, is a way for people who may experience similar experiences like Riley to be free from pressure.

Another article that discusses the novel *Symptoms of Being Human* is an article titled **A Psychoanalytical Study of Transgender Trauma in Garvin's *Symptoms of Being Human* and Hennessey's *The Other Boy*** by Zainab Mukhtar and Hafsa Zafar published in 2024. The writer will focus on the novel *Symptoms of Being Human*. This article analyzes the experience of the main character in the novel *Symptoms of Being Human* by Jeff Garvin, who experiences deep trauma. The researcher uses a psychoanalytic approach from Jacques Lacan's theory to examine how Riley's character grapples with their inner confusion due to rigid social norms and a lack of acceptance from their surroundings. The shift in their identity into something that cannot be confirmed in the gender binary that is accepted by society is the main source of Riley's psychological distress. Garvin, as the author, presents Riley as someone with an identity that is constantly changing, where Riley is finally forced to struggle to withstand the pressure and try to challenge the rigid norms in society just to get the recognition that

Riley thinks they deserve. The mental pressure that Riley faces can be seen from how they dialogue with themselves and how they interact with others. From their internal dialogue, it can be seen how hard it is for Riley to find their true identity that they don't know, coupled with the lack of support from those closest to them who they hope will be able to understand them. The researcher of this article seems to convey that the novel *Symptoms of Being Human* has succeeded in presenting how complex and difficult the experiences are for someone with gender fluidity and states how much understanding and support from society, especially those closest to them, are needed so that individuals with gender fluidity do not feel abandoned and isolated. The researcher wants to state that gender diversity is not wrong, and society should support it regardless of how different it is.

Then, another article that discussed novel *Symptoms of Being Human* by Jeff Garvin, titled **Queering Digital Literature and Digital Well-Being in Jeff Garvin's *Symptoms of Being Human*** by Semhayu Sapuh and Nigamananda Das (2024). In this article, both researchers discuss the importance of the role of digital space in literature, especially literature that carries the theme of genderqueer. The researchers bring novel *Symptoms of Being Human*, as examples of literature that are very open in discussing genderqueer. These researchers highlight that the development of technology as an information medium has provided a wide path for queer literature to be published easily and has become a space where the queer community can be open about their identity to get recognition and support. Digital space has been used as a platform to express themselves and convey their views on genderqueer by queer authors because society is too conservative to understand them if they are conveyed directly without any media. The researchers see that through this novel, Jeff Garvin has tried to balance how real-

world life is seen by one's own eyes with the world in digital space, where we can show ourselves without fear of being judged by those around us. It can be seen that digital space is not merely a place to escape from the real world but a place to acknowledge oneself and build interactions with a wider public. According to the researchers, the method used by Garvin in writing his novel has broken boundaries that were previously unattainable by traditional literary writing. In other words, digital is a new space to further explore literary works.

Then, the next book that discusses social class and gender is a book entitled **A Companion to the Brontës** by Tara McDonald, which was published in 2016. In the chapter *Class and Gender in the Brontë Novels*, Tara MacDonald analyzes how the novels of Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë depict social class and gender as forms that are not static, where individuals can move social status through hard work, luck, or marriage, but are often still bound by the strict gender boundaries of Victorian society. Through characters such as Jane Eyre, Lucy Snowe, and Shirley Keeldar, Brontë suggests the possibility for women to challenge strict gender norms and take up the right to engage in economic autonomy, although in many cases, their advancement in social status remains dependent on external factors such as family or relationships with wealthier men. The self-help concepts introduced by Samuel Smiles also play a role in constructing explanations of social displacement, but Brontë does not consider them definitive, as they also show that luck and social background often determine one's fate more than effort. MacDonald shows that social class is often indicated in material terms by showing characters in Brontë's novels who are often misunderstood simply because of the way they talk or dress. This is seen in society's treatment of Jane Eyre or Lucy Snowe, whose class status is unclear and difficult to define. There is also the character

of Shirley Keeldar, who deliberately ignores gender and class boundaries by acting like a man who can run her own business. There are also the characters of Louis Moore and William Crimsworth, two men who work as home tutors, who have violated conservative norms of masculinity and show that men can also experience social uncertainty in an unstable class structure. It can be concluded that Brontë's novels not only depict the realities of social life at that time but also demonstrate her critique of the rigid social class boundaries imposed on women and men and reveal the tension between the idea of social mobility and the structural limitations that still bind in a complex class and gender system.

Then, the article **Transgressing Purity: Intersectional Negotiations of Gender Identity in Swedish Schools** by Irina Schmitt was published in the Journal of LGBT Youth in 2023. Irina Schmitt, affiliated with the Department of Gender Studies at Lund University in Sweden, is the researcher of this thought-provoking article. This study investigates the experiences of gender non-conforming youth in Swedish schools and how these schools deal with them, using an intersectional framework to analyse the complex politics of cisnormativity and the notion of purity based on Lugones' analysis, to critique how schools usually impose norms on students in order for them to grow and develop as expected which leads to overt or hidden acts of discrimination based on the righteousness of elders. Based on interviews with individuals such as Rakel, Robin, and Mika, this research highlights the challenges that trans and non-binary youth face in educational settings, the discrimination they face, the norms followed by whiteness, and the biases that are not hidden. Schmitt's work contributes to the existing literature on gender identity negotiation within society especially in educational settings and calls for

more inclusive and supportive practices in schools to create a safer environment for all students to be able to express themselves as they should.

Other research examines more deeply what gender identity issues is and how a person does not define themselves in a certain group such as whether they are not a man or a woman, as written in the article entitled **A Qualitative Exploration of Gender Identity in Young People who identify as Neither Male nor Female** written by Ellen Boddington (2016). This research focuses on exploring how young individuals who identify as non-binary, meaning their sex is neither male nor female and in other words their gender cannot be confirmed, understand and describe how their gender identity works, as well as investigating the influence of the relationship on their gender identity with the support they seek from community services that they should be getting. Six participants aged 15 to 18 years were interviewed, revealing that they frequently turned to the internet to search for and obtain information while navigating the process of exploring and discovering their true gender identity. Interacting with others, especially within the transgender community, was considered very important for the validation and acceptance of their non-binary identity. This study highlights the impact of gender uncertainty and bodily distress on the emotional well-being of these confused young individuals, suggesting that the support they receive from others can significantly affect their well-being, either exacerbating or alleviating the challenges they are currently facing. Participants expressed keen awareness of the stigma and discrimination faced in their communities and societies, which was attributed to the lack of understanding and education about non-binary gender to the general public. They expressed a strong desire for activism and social action to reduce the stigma that hinders their development and improve the lives of those with non-binary identities.

This problem for non-binary identities is also discussed in the article **Not Man, Not Woman: Psychospiritual Characteristics of A Western Third Gender** written by Ingrid Sell (2001). This study explored the lives and experiences of 30 North Americans who identify as third gender (non-binary), neither male nor female, through interviews and qualitative analysis research. The research addressed how many participants reported involvement in transcendent spiritual events, possession of unique abilities, and inclination towards artistic or healing professions. The research highlights the lack of societal recognition of gender diversity and intermediation in the United States and the absence of formal training for individuals with special abilities associated with third gender experiences. The research makes clear that gender deviance does not necessarily indicate a desire to transition to the opposite sex and suggests that elements of third gender difference may be cross-cultural and inherent to gender intermediation. The paper also mentions the Radical Fairies, a group of gay men who celebrate self-expression and creativity, as an example of non-traditional gender attribution. Additionally, the research notes that while Western societies often attribute gender to biology, other cultures may attribute gender to occupational or spiritual roles. The research revealed that some of the participants faced chronic health conditions, addictions and depression, indicating the challenges they faced in their lives.

Next is an article that discusses the theory of intersectionality. The first article is an article by several authors, namely Flora Cohen, Sarah R. Meyer, Ilana Seff, Cyril Bennouna, Carine Allaf, and Lindsay Stark, published in 2022 under the title **Intersectionality: Experiences of Gender Socialization and Racialization for Iraqi Students Resettled in the United States**. This article focuses on analyzing how Iraqi students who were resettled in the United States, focusing on their experiences and what

they did in dealing with gender socialization and racialization in their new environment. Using intersectionality theory as a reference, the researchers tried to describe how different identities and genders influence social interactions, especially when in the school environment, to find out whether schools are late to become places to support or oppose discrimination against these different identities and genders. With Texas and Virginia as the destinations for the arrival of Iraqi students who were resettled as sources, the researchers found that Iraqi students, both male and female, faced challenges and discrimination from fellow friends both at school and outside of school, as well as teachers. This discrimination is in the form of ethnic discrimination for male students, where they are called terrorists. Meanwhile, for female students, they get discrimination because of the use of the hijab and the bad stigma about Muslim women. After conducting in-depth research, it was found that unhealthy interactions with discrimination everywhere have a huge impact on the mental health of Iraqi students. Discrimination is getting stronger along with the “Muslim Ban” political policy that was in effect during the Trump administration for immigrants from countries with a Muslim majority population. This research for the researchers is used as a voice so that an approach is carried out, especially in education, which recognizes that students have differences in race, gender, and identity and must be treated equally.

The next article that still discusses the use of intersectionality theory, especially in educational settings, is an article entitled **Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality: Race, Culture, and Identity in the ESL Classroom** by Shaden S. Attia, published in 2023. What is discussed in this article is the application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and intersectionality when teaching English as a Second Language (ESL), especially in K-12 classrooms. Critical Race Theory is a theory that explores

how race and racism explicitly and implicitly influence social structures, including the education system. Based on the intersectionality approach, it can be seen that the various social identities of ESL students, such as race, culture, and language, interact to shape their experiences in the classroom. It is known that ESL classes have students from various ethnicities and cultures who are often discriminated against directly or indirectly. The researcher's suggestion to overcome this problem is to use a teaching method based on culturally responsive teaching and social justice education. This method emphasizes that it is important to recognize and respect each other's backgrounds, whether ethnic, cultural, or different identities. In addition, according to the researcher, students in ESL classes can search and explore their own identities with the use of counter-storytelling and critical literacy. This provides the possibility for minority students to tell stories to the majority group that often suppresses their voices that want to tell who they are and what their stories are. In addition, as a language learning class, the researcher argues that it is important to teach students what the concept of linguistic is, where English should not be the only language that can be considered as the highest linguistic capital and then ignore the students' native language, so that there is no misperception in the views of students who are developing who assume that their language and culture are not valued by the school. Therefore, intersectionality can help this problem with support from teachers to prevent further discrimination so that students can interact well.

Lastly, an article that discusses intersectionality is an article entitled **Understanding Intersectionality through Tequila Leila's Experience in 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World (2019)** written by Diah Putri Ayu Wandira, Rizal Octofianto Datau, and Nur Wulan, published in 2023. This article analyzes the character

of Tequila Leila in the novel *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* (2019) by Elif Shafak, using Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. This article analyzes how the character of Tequila Leila, a woman who lives in a patriarchal Turkish society, Istanbul, often experiences discrimination because of her identity as a woman and her job as a sex worker. Leila gets social stigma and neglect and also experiences terrible violence and harassment. This article shows how the treatment of patriarchal society under the guise of religion often worsens the situation for women who are in the same situation as Laila, where society considers sex work as an immoral act that deserves to be punished and suppressed by social norms. In addition, this article also shows two aspects that are analyzed in depth related to the theory of intersectionality, namely structural and representational intersectionality. Structural intersectionality refers to how a person's various social identities, such as gender, class, and occupation, interact to shape their experiences. It can be seen that based on the case of Laila, whose identity is considered a woman from the lower class, she is someone who is always the target of hatred from society and always gets various forms of violence and harassment. Meanwhile, representational intersectionality is a method to talk about how women like Leila are constantly subjected to unfair discrimination and are often considered incorrect in conservative societies. The researcher highlights how literature can be a means of opening up to draw public attention to the injustices faced by women like Tequila Leila.

Based on the writer's review of the studies above, the writer found that there was no study that specifically examined the novel *Symptoms of Being Human* from the perspective of the main character's journey when committing gender identity issues using intersectionality theory to examine the forms, responses, and impacts of social

class pressure and the main character's environment on the main characters themselves. Likewise, the use of intersectionality theory that the writer reviewed from the studies above discussed more about the response of social society to people who commit identity and gender identity issues from the lower class or colored race. The writer did not find any research that specifically discussed the forms and responses of the upper class to fellow upper-class people who commit gender identity issues as reflected in the novel *Symptoms of Being Human* because the main characters comes from an upper-class family. Therefore, the writer wants to analyze the main characters of the novel *Symptoms of Being Human*, who comes from the upper class and commits gender identity issues using intersectionality theory.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does the novel *Symptoms of Being Human* present the conflict in the construction of gender identity experienced by the main characters?
2. How does social class position affect the main characters to express their gender identity?

1.5 The Scope of the Research

The scope of this research will focus on analyzing the conflict that arises from the intersection between gender identity and upper-class position experienced by the main characters in the novel *Symptoms of Being Human*. Using intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989), this research will not only examine Riley Cavanaugh's gender identity conflict separately but will also analyze how this conflict intrinsically arises and becomes complicated by the privileges and pressures inherent in their upper-class status. Thus, this analysis will ultimately answer how the pressure to comply with binary

gender norms not only originates from the wider society but is specifically reinforced by the obligation to maintain the reputation and stability of the family that is part of the social class hierarchy. This scope allows us to understand the complex form of conflict experienced by Riley, where the resources they get from their social class status that should be an outlet for their ease in expressing themselves actually become the most effective means of control to make them hide their true identities.

1.6 The Objective of the Research

Using intersectionality theory to analyze it, this study has two main objectives: The first objective is to analyze how the conflict of Riley Cavanaugh's gender identity construction in *Symptoms of Being Human* cannot be separated from and is actually exacerbated by their upper social class context. The second objective is to analyze how Riley's gender identity expression is simultaneously shaped and limited by the privileges and demands inherent to their social class position.