

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Psychological issue, commonly referred to as mental disorder, is a condition characterized by certain disturbance in an individual's thinking, emotions, or behavior. These disruptions frequently reflect hidden impairment in psychological, biological, or developmental processes. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2022), one in every eight people in the world suffer from a mental disorder. Those people include teenagers, adults, even mental illness can develop since the age of childhood. The origins of mental illness involve a complex combination between genetic, environmental, and psychological factors. People who are likely to struggle in mental health issues are mothers, especially new ones. Two-thirds of women with mental illness are mothers, and they might give disadvantages for children (Nicholson, et al., 2001). Mental disorder is related to the increased risk of child maltreatment. For instance, children of parents with indeterminate mental issues are also 2 times more likely to get abused and neglected (Brown, et al., 1998). Child maltreatment from mentally ill parents can create a domino effect to children, potentially causing them to also develop a psychological problem, whether they were abused or neglected.

Child neglect is the inability of a parent or caregiver to provide a child's essential needs, such as physical care, emotional support, education, and proper supervision (WHO, 2006). Child neglect is characterized as physical, medical, educational, and emotional neglect (CAPTA, 1996). Physical neglect involves abandonment, insufficient supervision, and failure to provide child's basic needs. Medical neglect refers to the disregard of a child's essential health care. Educational

neglect is not providing proper education. While Emotional neglect includes rejecting psychological support and emotional affection, permitting harmful behaviors. Child neglect is a form of abuse that is often less obvious than other child maltreatment, but it can seriously impact the child's growth and overall well-being in the long term equally (Dubowitz, et al., 2005). One of the types of neglect experienced by children is emotional neglect, often identified by the inability of caregiver to form a secure and meaningful interpersonal relationship with the child. This type of neglect is just as damaging as the other neglects to children's growth and overall well-being. Bowlby (1982) concludes that in order an infant's development to proceed normally, a specific, one-on-one bond with a single caregiver is needed, and this type of relationship could not be obtained in an institutional setting.

According to Dhingra, Boduszek, and Sharrat (2015) child maltreatment has been linked to a range of psychological and behavioral problems, such as depression, destructive tendencies, academic struggles, and inappropriate sexual conduct. In other words, children who experience neglect or abuse tend to struggle in psychological issues and they may develop maladaptive personalities. Personality is shaped consistent patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior formed by early experiences (APA, 2023). Initial parental rejection can disrupt these patterns, resulting to maladaptive personality traits such as insecurity, low self-worth, or emotional detachment.

As the reflection of real life, literature portrays uncountable concerns derived from human experiences, including parental issues. Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is one of the narratives that delivers to the audience regarding parenthood and child maltreatment. This novel follows the story of Eva Katchadourian's marriage and her experience of being a mother. This novel consists

of several letters Eva wrote to her husband, Franklin. From being a workaholic woman who loves to travel around the world by herself, Eva conveys about how her life completely changes after marriage and having children. In the novel, Eva's parental experience was focused on raising her first son, Kevin, that she did not want at first. Eva never really intended to have a child, but she ended up having a son and a daughter.

Kevin shows unusual behavior since he was a toddler, which Eva considers he is just being annoying. However, this behavior eventually gets worse in his early teen age. Kevin tends to irresponsibly disadvantage people around him many times, especially his mother. Eva herself has always been grudgingly doing her responsibility to raise Kevin, she secretly blames him for the loss of her old life that was full of freedom. Even though Eva never blatantly said that she never wanted to be a mother, Kevin somehow can sense her rejection, which influences him to constantly tests her love with his destructive behavior. However, he took it too far, Kevin commits a mass murder in his school as a form of revenge for how Eva treats him in his whole life. From psychoanalytic perspective, this kind of behavior that Kevin exhibit signifies disruption of psychosocial development. Presumably, Kevin's aggressive behavior is influenced by Eva's emotional neglect that is rooted from her reluctance of giving up her old life to be a mother.

We Need to Talk About Kevin is not just about parental experience and morality. In this novel, the author also brings relevant issues in real life such as child maltreatment, conduct disorder, and the debate about natural and environmental influence on an individual's behavior. The topic of this research makes the novel suitable to be discussed through psychology and sociology perspective. By connecting literature and psychology, this research provides new insight on the portrayal of child

maltreatment in fiction and how it resonates with the phenomenon of psychology, sociology, and moral responsibility in human experience. This research is necessary because it presents a deeper understanding about the consequences of neglect to a child's growth and how it influences psychosocial development.

The deceitful, manipulative, and remorseless behavior that Kevin manifests is due to his severely disrupted psychosocial development, rooted from Eva's emotional disconnection in raising him. He appears to see himself as a superior being, often causing harm to others for his own pleasure, especially Eva. As a toddler, Kevin smears ink all over Eva's map collection, intentionally after learning that it means a lot to his mother. This foreshadows his future manipulative and destructive behavior. Several years later, Kevin commits a massacre, killing eleven people with his crossbow, including his father and sister. After executing the crime, he shows no signs of remorse while calmly waits for his arrest. Woven to its epistolary styled narrative, Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* offers a compelling and nuanced portrayal of the prevalent issue of child neglect along with the devastating consequences to children's growth and state of mind.

1. 2. Identification of the Problems

The novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* brought the theme of family, parenthood and morality. Eva experiences ambivalence and resentment towards motherhood, which results from unresolved inner conflict of having to reluctantly give up her old life to be a mother. Meanwhile, Kevin is shown exhibiting traits that defies societal norms such as deceitfulness, manipulative and destructive behavior towards people in his surroundings. Their emotionally distant relationship reflects how neglectful parenting and lack of emotional connection, which are crucial factors

in psychological disruption and personality development during child growth. This research investigates the underlying causes of emotional neglect towards children and its impact to psychological and personality development as portrayed in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* through psychoanalytic approach.

1. 3. The Review of Preview Studies

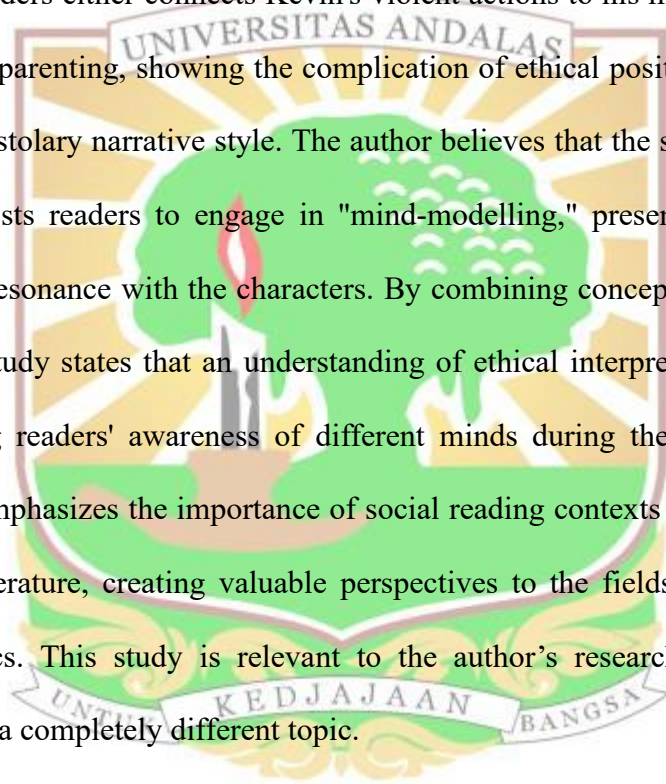
In order to support the writer with this research, insights from previous related studies on the same topic, object, and approach are required. These studies provide a deeper comprehension and offer a basis for the analysis. The following are reviews of relevant studies that examines related themes.

The first journal is titled "An Analysis on Antisocial Personality Disorder of Kevin in '*We Need to Talk About Kevin*' Movie Directed by Lynne Ramsay," written by Suhendar and Agung Hermawan (2018). The study presents a thorough analysis of antisocial personality disorder experienced by the character Kevin from the movie "*We Need to Talk About Kevin*." The writers highlights the characteristic of antisocial personality disorder, sourcing from scholars such as Frederick and Dobbert. The experts theorizes that antisocial personality disorder involves distorted thinking patterns that result to destructive actions without remorse, which is disadvantage to society. The authors utilizes a qualitative descriptive analysis to examine Kevin's character through a psychological perspective, focusing on his dialogues and behaviors that indicates antisocial personality disorder symptoms. The writers concludes that Kevin exhibits several criteria of antisocial personality disorder. It includes deceitfulness, irritability, and aggressiveness. In addition, the findings emphasize how Kevin's character causes emotional and physical harm to people around him. Overall, the journal combines psychological perspective with qualitative

analysis to study antisocial personality disorder through a cinema, presenting the complexity of sociopathic behavior and its impact to surroundings. This study relates to the author's research because of the same choice of novel as the object. However, this study focuses on a slightly different topic.

The second study is a journal article by Sellawati Djaya Gunanda and Ika Destina Puspita (2022), entitled "Persona and Shadow of Kevin in Lionel Shriver's Novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin*." The writers examine the representations of persona and shadow through the main character Kevin, as suggested in Carl Jung's psychological theories. Alongside John Murphy's characterization theory, the writers analyze Kevin's complex personality, specifically his psychopathic traits and contrast identity. Carl Jung states that the persona is the social mask an individual wears, showing personality that is accepted by society. Meanwhile, the shadow is the hidden and suppressed sides of one's personality, including undesirable thoughts and behavior. When a person is overly attached to their persona, they will risk in abandoning their shadow, which can result to psychological instability. The research presents several findings regarding Kevin's character, under the persona, he is portrayed as an adored child. Under the shadow, the authors find Kevin manipulative. The writer argues that his inability to balance his persona with his shadow is what leads to Kevin's destructive behavior. By analyzing his traits through these archetypes, the authors present a deep understanding of the role between identity, manipulation, and violence. This study shares the same object as the author's research, yet it distinguishes itself by addressing other topic.

The third study is an article titled "Online readers between the camps: a Text World Theory analysis of ethical positioning in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*," written by Louise Nuttall (2017). The author investigates how readers engage with and understand the ethical issues of Lionel Shriver's novel by employing Text World Theory. The study analyzes 150 online reader responses from the social network Goodreads, resulting a division of readers consists of two interpretative camps regarding the nature versus nurture debate about the character Kevin. The findings presents that readers either connects Kevin's violent actions to his malicious nature or to Eva's flawed parenting, showing the complication of ethical positioning influenced by Shriver's epistolary narrative style. The author believes that the stylistic choices in the novel interests readers to engage in "mind-modelling," presenting perspectives and emotional resonance with the characters. By combining concepts from Cognitive Grammar, the study states that an understanding of ethical interpretation can benefit from examining readers' awareness of different minds during the reading process. This research emphasizes the importance of social reading contexts in shaping ethical responses to literature, creating valuable perspectives to the fields of stylistics and cognitive poetics. This study is relevant to the author's research even though it concentrates on a completely different topic.



The fourth study is titled "Psychoanalytic Study on Kevin's Character in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* Movie," by Alifia Sifriliana and Euis Kurniasih (2022). The authors utilizes Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalysis theory, particularly the id, ego, and superego, to analyze the Kevin's behavior in Lynne Ramsay's film adaptation of Lionel Shriver's novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. The study examines certain scenes and dialogues to categorize Kevin's behavior according to Freud's framework. The findings reveal that Kevin's actions mainly exhibited based on the id, which is

the most dominant (50%), followed by the ego (33.3%) and superego (16.7%). The authors underline Kevin's specific manipulative behavior and his resentment towards his mother, as well as his criminal action, which roots from his id-driven impulses. Finally, the study concludes that Kevin's character exhibits traits of deception and impulsiveness, mainly influenced by the dominance of the id, leading to tragic aftermaths. This study corresponds the author's research by analyzing the same literary text.

The fifth journal article is titled "Child Abuse in Meg Elison's *Find Layla*," authored by Dinda Novia Alfareza and Y. B. Agung Prasaja (2023). The research examines the issue of child maltreatment depicted in Meg Elison's novel, *Find Layla*. To analyze the abuse experienced by Layla and Andy, the main characters, this study employs Sigmund Freud's personality theory, Martha Nussbaum's objectification theory, and Joyce Shannon's theory on violence against children. This research finding presents four types of abuse portrayed in the novel. It includes neglect, physical abuse, psychological abuse, and sexual abuse. Additionally, this study analyzes the main causes of the abuse of Darlene that are related to her role as a divorced single mother, her childhood trauma, and her mental disorder. The consequences of this abuse are depicted to be both physical, such as malnutrition, and also psychological, such as anxiety disorders showed by Layla and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) developed by Andy. The study emphasizes profound and enduring impact of child abuse on the victims' psychological development and overall well-being. This study relates with the author's research topic of child maltreatment, providing different insight on how parenting affects children's psychological development.

The sixth study is titled "The Effect of Parental Rejection on Children's Personality Depicted in *The Willoughbys* (2020)", authored by Dian Ari Safitri, Mia Fitria Agustina, and Ririn Kurnia Trisnawati (2023). This research uses Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory) to examine how parental rejection influence the character Tim Willoughby from the animated film *The Willoughbys*. The research findings shows that parental neglect contributes to children's social and emotional development. In Tim's case, his experiences of being neglected leads to a distorted perspective towards his environment, dependency, struggles in forming relationships. Tim also develops mental health issues, such as anxiety and low self-esteem. This study contributes to the researcher's study by providing other valuable perspective on the impact of neglect in shaping children's personality, despite the difference on theories and object.

The seventh study is journal article titled "A Psychosocial Development of a Young Adult Character in *Thirteen Reasons Why* Novel" by Raden Nur Prasetyo Wibowo, published in 2019. The study applies Bucher and Hinton's (2010) developmental characteristics of young adults to examine the psychosocial development of Clay Jensen, the protagonist in Jay Asher's novel *Thirteen Reasons Why*. The findings shows that Clay suffers in severe psychosocial issues, including anxiety, low self-esteem, and emotional detachment with his parents. Despite these challenges, Clay shows that he can overcome his fears, reach out help from his friends, and changing to the better, from an egotistical person to a more sympathetic character. The study brings up the importance of friendship and support systems in fostering psychosocial development during young adulthood. By applying different theory and object, this study adds to the author's research with further perspective on the exploration of an individual's psychosocial development.

The eighth journal article is titled "Psychosocial Development Portrayed in Jane Austen's *Emma*" authored by Ali Sabri Abuhassan and Mohd Nazri Latiff Azmi (2019). The study employs Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as a framework to explore Emma, the protagonist of Jane Austen's *Emma*. The study shows that despite her privileged family status and chances for personal improvement, Emma struggles in psychological or emotional growth. The study reveals that Emma's relationship with her father, Harriet Smith and Mr. Knightley, represents her failure to develop a stable identity and form emotional bonds. This leads to a flawed understanding of maturity. The study concludes that Emma's journey is different from the traditional bildungsroman genre, as she supposed to positively develop growth, not showing stagnation and regression. This study differs from the author's research by examining different novel as the object, yet also enriching it by employing the same theoretical framework.

The ninth study is titled "Jesse's Psychosocial Development in the Novel *My Sister's Keeper* by Jodi Picoult" was authored by Lilik Kosiaroh, Dyah Sunggingwati, and Chris Ashanty (2017). The study employs Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as the framework to analyze the character Jesse in Jodi Picoult's novel *My Sister's Keeper*. The study reveals that Jesse goes through multiple phases of psychosocial development, indicated by family conflict and obvious behavioral changes. Having a caring and affectionate personality as a child, Jesse's character begins to change as the aftermath of emotional neglect and the family's attention shifting to his sister Kate's illness. In early childhood, play age, school age, and adolescence stages, Jesse acts rebellious and shows signs of emotional instability that later leads to into harmful actions. Eventually, Jesse shows character development as he grows into a young adult and reunites with his family, indicating emotional

maturity. The research emphasizes how Jesse's character development is mainly influenced by familial bond and the decent attention he receives. Even though it explores a different literary work, this study provides the researcher a new insight by employing the same theoretical theory.

1. 4. Research Questions

This research's purpose is to analyze the impact of Eva's emotional neglect to Kevin's psychological development and personality. Main purposes of the research are these questions below:

- 1) What are the possible causes of Eva's neglectful parenting towards Kevin?
- 2) How does Eva's emotional neglect contribute to the development of Kevin's psychological issues?

1. 5. The Scope of the Research

This research focuses on examining the causes of Eva's neglectful parenting towards Kevin and its influence on his psychological and personality development. This research explores Eva's psychological state in order to identify the underlying sources of her emotional detachment with her son, alongside the psychosocial development of Kevin by conducting intrinsic analysis on the novel. In order to find the causes of Eva's neglect and how it affects the psychological and personality development of Kevin, this research is limited to the novel's narrative context. Psychological approach is used to analyze how the character presents the personality disorder.

1. 6. The Objective of the Study

The research aims to analyze the catalyst of emotional neglect and its impacts to a child's psychosocial development in Lionel Shriver's novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* that is presented through the character Eva and Kevin. From the perspective of psychological approach to literature, this study will present the analysis of Eva's psychological state and neglectful acts, also the psychosocial development and personality disorder that Kevin exhibits as the result of his mother's emotional neglect.

