

Myrtle's Self Defense Mechanism Against Bullying In Rosalie Ham's *The Dressmaker*

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to analyze Myrtle's experience of bullying, the impacts of bullying towards her personality, and the defense mechanism she performs in respond to the bullying experience. This research is a qualitative research. The source of data of this research was taken from *Rosalie Ham's The Dressmaker* published in 2000. The data taken from the novel were in the form of particular expressions related to Myrtle's *bullying* experienced and her *defense mechanism*. During this research, the researcher read and re-read the novel, collected the data, categorized the data, and analyzed the data taken from *Rosalie Ham's The Dressmaker*. The data were analyzed by using Schleser's *bullying* theory that focused on the kinds of *bullying* and the impacts of *bullying* towards the character and Freud's *psychoanalysis* theory that focused on the *defense mechanism*. To obtain the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher used peer-reviewing method.

The findings of the study show that Myrtle experience physically, verbal, and social *bullying*. The findings of the study show that Myrtle's personality are affected by the experience of bullying. The impact of bullying to her personality are depression, anxiety, loneliness and isolated. They are triggered by three factors: her friends, her teacher, and how her neighbor treats her. The types of *defense mechanism* reflected from Myrtle's attitude are repression, denial, sublimation, reaction formation, rationalization, and projection.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Bullying, defense mechanism

Introduction

Bullying is not a simple matter. It is an action that is difficult to track, and often preceded by unimportant things. This act cannot be taken lightly, or considered as a natural process of socialization among children. The number of bullying keeps increasing from year to year, and usually occurs at school. One of the examples of bullying at school is a mockery by some students to another student because of the poor family background.

In sociology, bullying is considered as a state of imbalance form of power. It is believed as the ability to affect others to follow what is desired and commanded by a certain party (Olweus,1991). Bullying is similar to the actions in the animal kingdom: "the most powerful will be the one who can live/survive" (Lukmantoro, 2011). Thus, if someone is considered weak, this person is most likely to be the victim of bullying.

The effects of bullying to children can be more dangerous than the effect of

other forces of violence. Australian Research for Children and Youth (2006:151) has said that “Children who were bullied may have experienced mental problems in their future compared with people who were never molested by adults or their parents”. This research observed and compared the long-term effects of bullying at school time and the effects of violence on children committed by adults. It was found that the effects of bullying at school time were more dangerous than the effects of violence on children which are committed by adults. (Peterson, 2013:7)

Justicia and Benitez (2006) reported that “one of three children in 38 countries are victims of bullying”. It may have the same adverse effects in adulthood. A study in Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge says, victims of bullying have a fivefold risk for suffering from anxiety disorder than victims of mayhem. In addition, studies in the United Kingdom reported that the victims of bullying prone to suffer from depression and self-destructive effort compared to a group of children who have experienced domestic violence (Peterson, 2013:9). The victims of bullying from peers generally suffer from long-term effects in their mental health until the time of maturity.

There are two kinds of bullying, physical and non physical bullying (Schleser, 2003). For the nonphysical bullying the victim is usually held up as an object of ridicule. Meanwhile, in the physical one the victim is gets a physical violence. Nonphysical bullying is more harmful than the other forms of bullying.

Both of physical and nonphysical bullying have a different effects in the victim. They depend on the kinds of bullying victim themselves. There are two kinds of bullying victim; aggressive victim and passive victim. The aggressive victims are the ones who own a strong psychologically self defense. Meanwhile, the passive victims, are the weak ones who submit to aggressors’ demands. (Hanish&Guerra, 2004:18)

Aggressive victim encompasses respect for oneself (self-respect) and respect for others. There were several factors already examined about the aggressive victim which affects the individual behavior. Hanis and Guerra (2004) mentioned that “the factors are family, culture, power, and gender”. However, the role of self-concept which against the behavior of the aggressive still has not been much researched. The term self-esteem refers to how far a person believes himself on being capable, valuable,

or important. It is expressed through the attitudes of the individual in a social environment.

To manage the feeling in an unhappy situation and setting, people usually perform defense mechanism. When someone comes to working with difficult people and learn how to feel good about his or herself, there are certain things that he or she can do. There are also things that bullies and other people do to help them to cope with what they do or feel. Therefore, it is helpful to learn about defense mechanism. People should come up with a defense mechanism to deal with things that bother them. Defense mechanism protects someone against anxiety and guilty, which arise because they feel threatened, or their id and super-ego become too demanding.

The novel that will be analyzed in this study is *The Dressmaker* by Rosalie Ham. Ham is an Australian writer whose novel is enjoyable to be read. Her novel contains a deep meaning. She has a desire to become a writer since she was a kid. Her environment inspires her to write this novel. This novel tells about a young girl named Myrtle Dunnage who survives from her miserable life experience. When she was in the elementary school, she accidentally killed her friend, Stewart Pettyman. This

experience brings her to an unstoppable bullying from her friends and society.

The novel describes the personality of every character in an interesting way. It does not only describe Myrtle's personality, as the main character, but also describes Myrtle's neighbours and their social life. The readers can learn various personalities of human being through a literary work. The interesting point from this study is the development of the main character's personality to face her problems from the past. In order to analyze the topic, the researcher has formulated three problems to be discussed. They are (1) the kinds of bullying on Myrtle (2) the impacts of bullying towards Myrtle's personality (3) the types of Myrtle's self defense mechanism.

Research Method

This research is a qualitative research. According to Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009:7) "a qualitative research is a research that produces narrative or description of the phenomena under study". This study uses content analysis to analyze the data. "Content analysis is a methodology that analyzes textual investigation as the data" (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009:7).

In this study, the approach that is used is psychological approach. The researcher did a close reading on *The Dressmaker* by Rosalie Ham and gathered all relevant data in accordance to the thesis topics. Researcher attempted to interpret the collected data using the theory employed in the research to fulfill the objective of the research and present it in a form of descriptive text which is the characteristic of a qualitative research.

Finding and Discussions

The finding will be divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the kinds of bullying experienced by Myrtle. The second part focuses on Myrtle's personality as the impact of bullying experience. Meanwhile, the third part focuses on defense mechanism showed by Myrtle.

A. The Kinds of Bullying as Represented in Ham's *The Dressmaker*

One of the important issues represented in *The Dressmaker* story is bullying. It can be defined as repeated physical, verbal, or social behaviors intended to make another person hurt. The main character in this novel, Myrtle Dunge, experiences some kinds of bullying. She experiences physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social bullying.

1. Physical Bullying on Myrtle

Myrtle gets some physical bullyings from her teacher and also her friends. She is an innocent person, it can be seen from her reaction and also from other character's action to her. Myrtle knows how to react to her friends and her teacher. She remains silent because she knows if she does not keep in silence they will hurt her more than before. The bullying from her teacher is relected from the quotation "Miss Dimm chopped Myrtle's fingers with her rusty steel ruler and cried, 'I did not tell you to uncross your arm!'". Ham (2000:50)

Miss Dimm is the teacher who bullies Myrtle. She does not care about Myrtle's explanation that she does not break any rules, she is the victim instead. Miss Dimm's act to chop Myrtle's fingers is clasifiedinto physical bullying. A teacher should not do any physical warning to a student without any reason.

2. Verbal Bullying on Myrtle

Verbal bullying is the kind of bullying mostly found in the story. Verbal bullying is the most harmful bullying that possibily happens in the social life nowadays.The rumors that Myrtle is a killer is spreaded by her neighbors. It is also the reason why everyone hates Myrtle and refuses her as the member of the society.

Verbal bullying is the kind of bullying mostly found in the story. People around Myrtle try to gain power over her life. It is shown in the quotation "Beula stamped her feet. '...And, that daughter of Mad Molly's is back – the murderess!'" Ham (2000:41)

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Another character makes hurtful statement. Beula spreads rumors that Myrtle is a murderer. She is claimed to kill Steward. This rumor is the reason for Myrtle to escape from Dungatar.

The other evidences that she gets verbal bullying is when she is in school and at home. Myrtle's life has been destroyed by verbal abuse. In her schools, she is verbally abused by her classmate and teacher, while in her home, she gets verbal abuses from her neighbor. It can be seen from the quotation below.

The boys pulled her pants down and poked at her, then smelled their fingers. The girls sang, 'Dunny's mum's a slut, Dunnybum's mum's slut, Myr-tle's a bar-std, Myr-tle's a bar-std.' Ham (2000:51)

The boys' and the girls' practical 'jokes' that results in injury is called as verbal bullying. They call Myrtle using a mean nickname due to her ugly look. But she does not care about her appearance. "I remember her!" said Reginald, and snapped his fingers, 'That's Mad Molly's bastard girl. At school we used to –'" Ham (2000:58)

Reginald speaks hurtful statement to Myrtle. He also thinks that Myrtle is a murderer when they are in a schooldays. He agrees with his friends that she is a murderer because he is also Myrtle's classmate. Other character who is also doing verbal bullying

3. Social Bullying on Myrtle

The last bullying is social bullying. In this case, the bullying focuses on the victim's reputation or relationship and the bullies make a rumor to the society. It can be seen in the quotation, "Beula stamped her feet. '...And, that daughter of Mad Molly's is back – the murderess!'" Ham (2000:41)

Beula is an abusive person. She becomes an abusive person to Myrtle after the death of her friend, Stewart. She often makes hurtful statement to Myrtle. She is also spreading rumors that Myrtle is the murderer. It is a form of punishment for Myrtle. She takes out her anger for the death

of her friends to Myrtle, because when Myrtle was a kid she accidentally killed Stewart Pettyman. The other evidence when Beula bullies Myrtle can be seen in this statement, “‘She(Myrtle) made him(Teddy) jump. ‘She murderer him’. ‘She is cursed’. ‘She gets it from her mother’”. Ham (2000:185)

The rumor that Teddy was killed by Myrtle spreads fast in Dungatar. People of Dungatar sighs and talks in hateful tones, even though they do not know what is happening at the night. The truth is Teddy jumped into the silo with his own will.

A. The Impacts of Bullying Towards Myrtle’s Personality

Myrtle as a victim is seen as weak or unable to defend herself. She is depressed, anxious, and has low self-esteem. It is because she thinks that being alone or isolated from others is safer than having an interaction. Sometimes she has nightmares and feels wary or suspicious of others. She also has an increased risk of depression and a substance abuse.

The student or person who is bullied is more likely to feel disconnected from school, neighbourhood, and lonely. It is shown by Myrtle’s action in the novel that she is lonely. It is because she has no friend in her

school or her social life. The reason that she has no friend is because of her physical appearance. It makes her existence is not accepted by her peer.

B. Myrtle’s Self Defense Mechanism in *The Dressmaker*

Ego would employ some defense mechanisms to protect itself from being burdened by the conflicting demands of id and super-ego. Myrtle, in *The Dressmaker*, experiences some kinds of bullying. The bullying can be defined as repeated physical, verbal, and social bullying. The impacts of bullying towards Myrtle’s personality are depression, anxious, lonely, and isolated. Therefore, Myrtle’s defense mechanism to protect herself from feeling anxious, which arise because she feels threatened, and when her id or super-ego becomes too demanding.

In this study, the researcher analyzes Myrtle’s defense mechanism. According to (Kumar, 2016:198), defense mechanism is psychological strategic brought into play by the unconscious mind to manipulate, deny, or distort reality in order to defend againsts feeling of anxiety and unacceptable impulses and to maintain one’s self-schema. This part focuses on Myrtle’s defense mechanism. In the objective one, the researcher has analyzed the kinds of Myrtle’s bullied experiences of bullying.

From the findings, the researcher can analyze Myrtle's defense mechanism as the action when she can not adjust with the society and face her problems.

1. Denial

According to Buss and Larsen (2002:178) "Denial is the refusal to accept reality or fact, daydreams deny the present situation by focusing on how things could have been otherwise". Myrtle can not accept that her neighbour does not care about her family. She can not hide these feeling and then shows it up to her mother. It is shown in the quotation below.

A body stirred under piled blankets. A skeleton head wearing a tea cosy turned on a grubby kapok pillow. The mouth gaped like a charcoal hole, and sunken eyes gazed at her. 'This is what they've done to you,' said Tilly. Ham (2000:8)

She denies that her neighbour abandons her mother since she left. In fact, she creates fear and anxiety because of the people's ignorance towards her family. Because of these hate feeling, she can not accept others help in any condition. Teddy, the other character who wants to help her is also rejected because she can not believe in him.

2. Reaction formation

Reaction formation, according to Buss and Larsen (2002:182), is an attempt to stifle the expression of an unacceptable urge, a person may continually shows a flurry of behavior that indicates the opposite impulse. Myrtle does an opposite impulse to someone else. She is being overly nice to someone else, eventhough when she does not like them.

'Does anyone know you're coming, Myrtle?' asked the sergeant. 'My name is Tilly,' she said. 'Everyone will know soon enough.' 'I'm a seamstress and dressmaker, Sergant Farrat.' She opened the back door.(p.7)

She shows her own ego structure about her status layer. She is being overly nice to Sergant Farrat to show that she has a social status, "Myrtle sat for the rest of the Myrtle decides to show up to her neighbour. She does not admit morning on the veranda where everyone in the whole town could see her." Ham (2000:51)

Myrtle decides to show up to her neighbour. She does not admit that she is wrong, then it is taken as a different attitude or behavior

3. Rationalization

Ratinalization is another device of defense mechanism used by Myrtle. Myrtle

rationalizes because she encounters conflicts, especially when she decides to be silent while her teacher does a physical bullying. According to Buss and Larsen (2002:182) Rationalization involves generating acceptable reasons for outcomes that might otherwise appear socially unacceptable. Myrtle, in her bad situation tries to prove her action. It can be seen in the quotation, “But I did it yest—” Ham (2000:50)

The researcher also applies the same theory on the impacts of bullying towards Myrtle’s personality. There are several impacts of bullying in the story, such as depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness and isolation.

4. Projection

According to Hall (1979:90) projection helps to alleviate anxiety. It also offers a person an excuse for expressing her real feelings. Myrtle tries to protect herself from any problems. She does not want something bad happens to her life again. It can be seen in this quotation below: The traveller smirked. ‘You’re wasted here-‘ ‘On the contrary, I’m used a lot. And anyway, I’m worth a small fortune on paper but until I’m paid I can’t move to Collins Street.’ The traveller looked at the closed door behind Myrtle. ‘I’d like to see what’s in your

workroom.’ Tilly smiled. ‘Would you let me into *your* workroom?’ Ham (2000:155)

She is in conflict with a traveller. The traveller tries to come in to Myrtle’s workroom. Myrtle believes that there is no one shows their workroom to their rival. She denies the source of feelings of persecution and ascribes it to someone else. It also offers an excuse for expressing her real feelings.

Conclusion

The researcher concludes the answer of the problems that are discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter explains the kinds of bullying experienced by Myrtle, the impacts of bullying towards Myrtle’s personality, and the defense mechanism performed by Myrtle.

The researcher applies Schleser and Olweus’ theories on bullying and kinds of bullying to reveal the kinds of bullying experienced by Myrtle. It can be concluded that Myrtle has all of the kinds of bullying which are physical bullying, verbal bullying and social bullying. She gets the physical bullying from her friends and her teacher when she is in elementary school. Verbal bullying is the kind of bullying mostly found in the novel. The verbal bullying is also the most harmful bullying that possibly happens not only in the novel but also in the

social life today. The third kind of bullying is social bullying, Myrtle gets her social bullying from her neighbour, all the times, before and after her transformation in life.

The researcher also applies the same theory on the impacts of bullying towards Myrtle's personality. There are several impacts of bullying in the story, such as depression, anxiety, feelings of loneliness and isolation.

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