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**Mental Health Representation in Jennifer Niven's "All the Bright Places"**

**Embun Hastina Maharani<sup>1</sup>, Ratu Prayuana<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>Email: [hastinaembunwaqash97@gmail.com](mailto:hastinaembunwaqash97@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**

*This study analyzed the trauma of the main characters caused by traumatic experiences in the novel All The Bright Places By Jennifer Niven. It explained how the trauma portrayed in which it is explained as traumatized responses that the main character experienced. it used psychoanalytic perspectives of trauma from Cathy Caruth and qualitative approach to create the analysis. The theory was used to classify the responses of trauma are Anxiety, Avoidance, and Arousal. The study also aimed to find out how to the main character deal with the trauma that affects her daily life. The result has found out that the main character have shown the three responses of trauma in the novel, and it also has found out the connection of traumatized people in which it leads the main character to use the force on her grief to deal with the trauma*

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**Keywords:** *avoidance, anxiety, arousal, fictional devices, traumatic experiences.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Trauma is an event in a person that is intense, and unable to be assimilated, it creates a psychic upheaval, and long lasting effects, therefore, people usually try to find a way to avoid it, and make a protection from the pain of trauma.

Nowadays, people may find the difficulty in recovery after facing some traumatic events in their life. These traumatic events can be sexual harassment, traffic accident, disasters or any other events that are risky and dangerous enough to take someone's life. For instance, a traffic accident is a traumatic event not only causes physical trauma but also triggers disturbances psychology. Someone who has traumatic experience will hardly forgets about the incident, which may affect their future life. It is also possible for them to not be able to improve their value because of the fear of what happens in the past.

As experienced by the comedian and actor, Tracy Morgan, in 2014 (Lawpartners, 2018) he was in the peak of his career when suddenly the table turned down one summer's night in June. Morgan was on the van along with his fellow comedian, James McNair, when a Walmart tractor-trailer, driven on high speed, hit the back of his van. Fortunately, the 49 years old comedian survived on the accident even though he was in coma for eight days after the accident happened. Meanwhile, McNair was pronounced dead at the scene. From this accident, Morgan did not only suffer a broken leg and ribs, but also the traumatic brain injury. His brain kept playing back kept playing back the memory when the accident happened. It was worsened by the feel of guilty for his friend's death. Morgan was not be able to back the road, driving alone, for some time because of his trauma.

The phenomenon of psychological disorder like traumatic experiences not only found in real life, just like happened in Violet Markey, but also through the fictional character in literary works which usually frame the reflection of human experiences. For centuries, psychological disorder and mental health become the focus of many book authors. Jennifer Niven is recognized as the first female American author who succeed publish her young adult novel internationally Jennifer Niven is one of authors, who through her debut novel, gives a depiction about traumatic event distinctively. *All The Bright Places* was published in February 2015.

*All the Bright Places* portrayed two students, named Violet and Theodore, who have their own problems that related to death. Violet can't escape the bitter fact that her sister was dead because of the car accident and keeps blaming herself for it. Meanwhile, Theodore is struggle with his depression, keep trying to end his life several times, which are mostly stopped because of the small things happen at the moment. Violet and Theodore first meet is at the top of the school bell-tower. Either Violet and Theodore are about to jump from the height because they give up on their life. However, they end up saving each other. They realize that both of them are Struggling to believe that their lives are worth living. Together, they have something worthwhile to share and maybe, through that sharing, they can save each other and also themselves.

The way Jennifer Niven depicts traumatic experiences as a psychological disorder suffered by adolescent like Violet Markey in the era, where psychological disorders barely understood and poorly treated is very captivating. Her sister Eleanor death due to an accident made her regretful. She experienced real changes in her behavior and personality. Everyone including his parents know about violet changes, then try to help for Violet healing but cannot and only through Finch efforts can understand and help her get out of "dark places". Jennifer Niven portrays a raw image of Traumatic event which is very traumatizing and destructive both for the sufferer and the people

around her. Jennifer Niven takes the reader to dive into Violet, which is very obsession Not to mention violet tried to kill herself due to the loss of her sister Eleanor who died in a car accident and would blame herself, prefer her worries, prefer to be alone, and find it difficult to make friends with other people. even only temporarily because her obsessions will return, causing the cycle to play over and over again throughout the day. At the end, the readers will put empathy to Finch for all her struggle to conquer her obsessive thoughts and mental health problem on Violet.

Increasing the writer and the readers' awareness and understanding about psychological disorders, particularly traumatic experiences is the first reason of the writer in conducting this study. Psychological disorder can affect everyone regardless age and gender. However, only less people are seeking treatments to cure her illness due to lack of knowledge and negative stigmas against mental illness. Better understanding towards Traumatic Experiences and other types of psychological disorder, will make people provide helpful support to those affected which maybe can be found in our families and communities. The second reason, the writer sees that All The Bright Places is an inspiring book which contains various topics such as mental health, Romance, Diversity and Tension. The Reason this book is chosen as the object of this study is to raise the people's awareness of the mental health, especially for the young generation. The issue of mental health is only about the physical condition; They forget that mental health is also important. Therefore, this study is hope can convince the people to be more aware with mental issue, and not afraid to get the professional help in order to overcome their problem.

## METHODS

The study used a qualitative and descriptive analysis method because it does not involve numeric or statistical data. The primary data source for this analysis is the novel "All the Bright Places" by Jennifer Niven, which consists of 355 pages and 3 parts. The novel was adapted into a film released on Netflix in February 2020, starring Elle Fanning and Justice Smith. Jennifer Niven is a renowned author who has received several awards, including the 2015 Goodreads Choice Award for Young Adult/High School Literature.

Data collection involved systematically gathering and measuring information to answer research questions and evaluate results. The steps included:

- Reading the novel
- Marking and identifying relevant parts
- Analyzing the marked sections
- Categorizing the data

Data analysis involved interpreting the collected data through analytical and logical reasoning to address the research issues. The steps included:

- Analyzing and interpreting categorized data using Cathy Caruth's theory on trauma
- Arranging the data and information into an essay format
- Concluding the analysis by referring to the theory on traumatic experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Symptoms of Traumatic experience by All the bright places

In all the bright places, Violet Markey, as the main character, the symptoms focused on anxiety, avoidance, and arousal.

a. Anxiety

According to Cathy Caruth (1995, p. 27) that anxiety is a distressing condition that comes with bodily symptoms that alert the individual to approaching danger. the existence of anxiety within Violet creates a conflict in the form of an argument between Violet, and Finch. Violet often felt the Anxiety of losing her sister. The trauma made her afraid to lose someone she loved, without exception Finch. A conflict ensues between Finch, and Violet is very afraid of losing someone that she loves a second time. the conflict they both experienced was triggered by differences in desires. Finch has the intention of committing suicide, while violet does not want anything bad to happen to Finch. This symptom is also found in Violet personality after Finch lost her.

“What the hell? Do you know how scared I was? I searched everywhere. I went as deep as I could before I ran out of air, and had to come back up, like three times” ...She pushes me hard, and then again, so I go jolting backward, but I don’t lose my footing. I stand there as she slaps at me, and then she starts to cry, and she is shaking. (Niven, 2015 p. 208).

The data above also shows that there is trauma in Violet. She does not want to lose the person she loves again, namely Finch. That is the reason why she anxiety so much when Finch did not come back to the surface of the laker water. She looking for Finch surface of the laker water with feeling fear. according to Caruth (1995, p. 351) a person who experiences trauma is anxiety, and feeling fear. her heart is still racing, and my hands are still shaking from being up on that ledge. She has gone cold all over, her want is to lie down. The feeling of fear was approaching her. The feeling far is when Mrs. Kresney to escort her to the nearest mental health facility.

b. Avoidance

Avoidance is another response of trauma that can commonly be seen in traumatized people (Caruth, 1995, p. 27). It is how people with trauma avoid things, places, and thoughts, feeling, and thought that can trigger the memory of traumatic experience they have past. It is used as defensive response to face the trauma. Although, it benefits the victims, it may lead them to have negative effects such as sadness, guilt, shame, frustration, and etc. The avoidance can be seen in the evidences below. The traumatic experiences that Violet had passed affect his behavior. The avoidance of trauma violet explained below.

Since Eleanor died, because what would be the point? It was a site about sisters. Besides, in that instant we went plowing through the guardrail, my words died too. “I don’t want to talk about the website.”. (Niven, 2015, p. 27)

The quotation above explains about the memory of experiences they have past. avoidance is post-traumatic which is classified as a feeling of betrayal guilt ( because survivors are likely to cause harm to other parties for their selfish actions (Caruth, 1995, p. 86). Traumatized people usually try to avoid a similar memory a second time, place or etc. her tend to be overly afraid the cause of the trauma. Eleanor, and Violet moved to Indiana. They wanted to create an online magazine. When her sister died, she didn’t want to create an online magazine and she didn’t want to talk about the website. She was not feeling excited and sadness her trauma. After the incident, violet did not want ride in the car with her parents. Traumatized people usually try to avoid a similar incident.

c. Arousal

Arousal is a kind of trauma responses that makes people with trauma often people in high alert condition on receiving any unwanted feeling (Cathy Caruth, 1995, p. 29). it often occurs because traumatized people feel unsafety about things around them, even though the things they imagine may not happen. Arousal is another form of trauma. This is a strong negative reaction to something inability to cope with depression, and feelings of exaggeration cause by traumatic event. For example, if the patient is unable to control her emotions, this can make a sufferer a temperamental person. As experienced by Violet, as evidenced in the quote below:

“Can we choose our partners?” “Yes.” “I choose Violet Markey. “You may work that out ... with her after class ...” “Violet Markey, I’d like to be your partner on this project.” Her face turns pink as everyone looks at her. Violet says to Mr. Black..Her voice is low, but she sounds a little pissed. “I’m not ready 26 to ...” He interrupts her. “Miss Markey, I’m going ... to do you the biggest ... favor of your life.... I’m going to say ... no.” (Niven, 2015, p. 36).

The quote above describes that Finch, and Violet have the rest of the semester. To complete the project. In team of two person. the project of Violet, and Finch final grade. Him raise him hand when selection partners. Mr. Black choose Violet. to be Finch partner on this project. Violet says to Mr. Black that with her voice is slow. Her face turns pink, and emotions because her not ready. uncontrollable emotions can make people temperamental. arousal experienced by sufferers causing himself to feel in a state of constant threat or danger. Often sufferers encountered experienced unstable emotional turmoil, such as suddenly becoming aggressive, irritable, angry outbursts, restless, difficult to concentrate, lightheaded shocked, panicked, this is done to protect himself. In addition, sufferers too experiencing insomnia (Caruth, 1996, p. 11).

2. The main characters face the problem of traumatic experiences

This part is about the way the main character gets out of the trauma that she has face the problem in the novel. It also explains the way the way they accept the situation, and change her perspectives of the traumatic events that they experienced. According to Cathy Caruth (1915, p. 3) Trauma is human experiences towards the events, usually bad accident, which are threaten both of their physic and mental. Trauma defined as an external event physically threatening and individual self-esteem and considered able causing death thus evokes great fear, a feeling insecure, and feeling helpless when the event happened. The novel shows how the main character try to connect her feelings to others in order face the problem.

I am fine. let’s talk about you. I want to know how you’re feeling.

I am good actually. Better than I’ve been in a long time

Really? She’s surprised

Yes, I’ve even started writing again. And riding in a car

(Niven, 2015, p. 196).

The analysis of this part is about Violet Markey of the main character, who struggle to face the problem with the trauma she has experienced. the beginning of her story struggling with the trauma. Mrs. Kresney talk to her. her want to know how her feeling. She says that she good actually. She feels better than she has been in a long time. Mrs. Kresney surprised. She has even started writing again, and riding a car. According to Cathy Caruth (1915, p. 39), “traumatic

memories are called pathogenic memories refers to memories that cause psychopathic symptoms.” Caruth (1915, p. 11) state that it is unavoidable that someone who has a severe accident that continues happening to him will suffer from trauma. An event that causes trauma is generally an event that brings ongoing feelings of sadness that injure the psychology of the sufferer. traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind (Caruth, 1920, p. 7)..

## CONCLUSION

This study focused an analysis of trauma experienced by the main character entitled *All The Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven novel. The story is about Violet Markey, the main character. The traumatic experiences are narrated from the narration, and dialogues in the novel. The traumatic experiences of the main character can be classified based on the Cathy Caruth approach from her book entitled *Trauma: explorations in memory and unclaimed experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The theory is used to define the trauma and the characteristics. This study analyzed the trauma from Violet Markey. The way the main character struggle with the repeated responses of trauma which came to them unpredictably has been discussed in this study. The trauma is classified by it characteristic in which its repeated response often comes delayed.

In conclusion, *All The Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven represent The symptoms of traumatic experiences responses that are found from the analysis are anxiety, avoidance, and arousal. trauma responses that make people with trauma often people in high alert condition on receiving any unwanted feeling. it often occurs because traumatized people feel unsafety about things around them, even though the things they imagine may not happen. This is a strong negative reaction to something inability to cope with depression, and feelings of exaggeration cause by traumatic event.

The analysis has also shown how the main character face the problem with the trauma by using the characteristic of trauma. It can be seen from the way Violet Markey face the reality. Not to mention violet tried to kill herself due to the loss of her sister Eleanor who died in a car accident and would blame herself, prefer her worries, prefer to be alone, and find it difficult to make friends with other people. even only temporarily because her obsessions will return, causing the cycle to play over and over again throughout the day. At the end, the readers will put empathy to Finch for all her struggle to conquer her obsessive thoughts and mental health problem on Violet.

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