

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Family is considered as the most important component of a country since it is regarded as the society's primary unit. This comes from the fact that family is the first foundation where one is being prepared to be part of society, such as getting early socialization and education from both parents or the other family members (Saikia 2017, 445). An ideal family refers to the idea of a relationship where both parents and children have mutual care and affection. This condition is able to create a sense of home, which is the feeling of being safe, comfortable, and secure that are included in the safety needs, the second level of the basic human needs in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod 2020). The second level is also supported by the third level, also known as the love needs, in which feelings of love and belongingness are required to perfectly complement the previous level. However, there is no way to deny the fact that misunderstandings would eventually come across life. Divorce is one of the issues that happened when one of the parents decides to give up while the other has no choice but to accept and let go.

Parental divorce is one of the main factors where a family is considered to be broken. According to Saikia (2017, 445), a broken home is a situation in which a family's life is in jeopardy as a result that came from the act of mistreatment, misunderstanding, and misacceptance, which leads to family members' separation, such as divorce, child disownment, and the leave of any family members from

home. A broken family, one in which the parents experience divorce, can create a negative home environment for children due to a lack of parental role and support for their mental growth. The parental role itself is a complex responsibility committed by parents and other carers in order to aid the upbringing of children (Dekovic 1992, 24). Without parental roles, children no longer feel loved nor secure, that is to say that their basic needs of parental care are not met. This can be fatal since children will eventually need to explore and discover their true identity with the help of their parents when they reach early adolescence (Thomas 2020, 3).

Due to this, the state of being in a post-divorced family serves as a constant challenge for early adolescents during their period of self-discovery. If being in an intact family can help establish a good psychological development in children, this does not apply to children who grow in a non-intact family where the role and presence of primary caregivers are non-existence. Many adolescents cannot develop their mental wellbeing at the given time because of the lack of parental roles in their early adolescence phase. Whereas, it is supposed to be a very important stage as early adolescents' psychological health is emphasized and encouraged to be established (Thomas 2020, 4). It is also during this period that they not just need the most guidance and assistance from their parents, but to build a deep understanding of the parent-child relationship to understand the changes of the children and their maturity (Lalmuanawma and H. Elizabeth 2020, 163). Therefore, when this stage in early adolescence is neglected by primary caregivers, it can create a trauma that will affect behavioral development in children into the adulthood (Briggs-Gowan 2019, 2).

To deal with the trauma, children might build a certain defense mechanism, such as repression, which is preventing unpleasure-provoking thoughts from entering the conscious but may continue to influence one's behavior (Tyson 2015, 13). In this case, when children are approaching adolescence, their behavior can manifest into different things, some of which are social anxiety and attachment disorder that are developed by the deficiency in self-identity and self-confidence growth. In this regard, literature has contributed to a better understanding of the importance of parental role and family, with an American musical play entitled *Dear Evan Hansen* being one of the literary works that addresses this issue. The script is written by Steven Levenson, while the song lyrics are written by Benj Pasek and Justin Paul.

Being a contemporary play that presents mental health issues to its audiences, *Dear Evan Hansen* has won seven awards from 2016 to 2018, which some of them are Tony Award for Best Musical, Grammy Award for Best Musical Theater Album, Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Lyrics, Obie Award for Musical Theatre, and Drama League Award for Outstanding Production of a Broadway or Off-Broadway Production. This musical takes on the theme of a found family, but also provokes trauma to the main character. The story was about Evan Hansen, a senior high school student who strives to be accepted in society while battling his mental health issues such as anxiety that limits his ability to completely socialize with others.

Dear Evan Hansen has been chosen as the object of some studies. By using the dramatist and postmodern theory, the article titled *Rhetorical Theory in the Age*

of *Social Media in Dear Evan Hansen* by Quick (2019) found that the lyrics of the song “*Waving Through a Window*” in the musical was intended to be a critique, a satire of current society. Meanwhile, through the lenses of the paratextual theory, in “*Tap, Tap, Tapping on the Glass*”: *Generation Z, Social Media and Dear Evan Hansen* (2020), Doherty discovered that *Dear Evan Hansen* has successfully advertised itself, in which it created enthusiasm and awareness by harnessing the generation Z audiences’ participations to build paratexts to elongate the appealing moment from the post-performance, thus resulted in creating large fan groups. In this study, the writer decided to choose *Dear Evan Hansen* as the main object of analysis because it has a conflict that is thought-provoking. There is the contradiction in the behavior of the main character in establishing relationships with the supporting characters; Evan needed the Murphys—the family of Connor Murphys, his admittedly deceased best friends—to fill his need for parental care and affection, but by sticking with them, it made his anxiety recurred since it would remind him of being not taken care of by his parents.

According to this, the writer brought the issue of parental role absence in this study since Evan’s behavior was arguably stemmed from the lack of parental care he received in his childhood. As his father left the house when he was seven, Evan spent most of his childhood only with his mother, Heidi Hansen, who was more dedicated to her job than her son’s need for care and affection. This fits with the finding of the research by Daryanai et al. (2016, 1415), which showed that single motherhoods were more likely to engage in less involved parental behavior. It was unfortunate that this had to happen as it could affect the growth of psychological

well-being and adjustment in adolescents, making them vulnerable to anxiety and depression, low self-esteem, and academic failure (Størksen, et al. 2005, 737)

On top of that, Evan's characteristics correspond to the findings from the research conducted by Kulka and Weingarten (1979) that shows men with divorced families backgrounds in their childhood were more likely to report a high level of anxiety, feel like things are difficult to handle, and have experienced a nervous breakdown than men who grew in an intact family. This happens because the effect of post-traumatic stress causes nervousness and fear in adolescents, thus leads to anxiety. According to the American Psychological Association, anxiety is "an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure" (Kazdin 2000). Meanwhile, as written in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, anxiety disorder is a term referring to a group of mental disorders that has the same trait of causing severe dread and anxiety (American Psychiatric Association 2013, 189). One of the types of anxiety included in this disorder is social anxiety, a mental health issue experienced by Evan Hansen. Some social anxiety symptoms can be found in this musical, such as the discomfort feeling of being embarrassed, the fear of being humiliated and rejected in public, or being looked down on in any social interactions (American Psychiatric Association 2017).

Based on the issue presented in the text, it was considered fit to use psychoanalysis criticism to conduct this study. The psychoanalytic criticism in this study particularly used Freud's theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms, core issues, and psychosexual development. This theory was suitable to be applied in an

attempt to analyze the causes of Evan's behavior and its changes given to his broken family background through a psychological perspective. It could help reveal the underlying meaning behind his behavior that corresponds with Freudian psychoanalysis basic tenet, which is that a person's development was influenced not by inherited characteristics, but rather by often forgotten events in childhood (Fromm 1992, 12). In addition, the theory of core issues that still falls within the Freudian psychoanalytic theory was also used to further explain the basic problem that fundamentally defines Evan's behavior.

The following was the reason why Evan's behavior was noteworthy to be analyzed using Freud's theory of anxiety and defense mechanisms, core issues, and psychosexual development. The discomfort feeling Evan felt when he met the Murphys was his anxiety alarming him of the potential threat that would bring back his painful memories in his childhood. At the same time, he had a desire to be loved and taken care of after years of growing in a divorced family. Here, it can be noted that anxiety is conceptualized as a cognitive signal, hence the discomfort (Weiner 1985, 26). Relieving this anxiety can be done by blocking or mitigating it with the defensive mechanism employed by the ego. Therefore, when faced with such situation, it made Evan did repression to suppress his anxiety and id's desire while still being expressed in disguised forms on the later occurrence (Feist, Feist and Roberts 2018, 39). In this case, it would affect his behavior in the musical play, which is continuously lying to gain the Murphys' trust so he could be close with them every day. It can be known from those characteristics above that Evan's anxiety might later reveal his core issues that related to the lack of parental role.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, a statement of the problem is presented:

1. How do Evan's broken family condition and childhood trauma contribute to shaping his mental health issues?
2. How do Evan's mental health issues affect his behavior in the play?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the objective of the study is formulated as follow:

1. To reveal how Evan's broken family condition and childhood trauma contribute in shaping his mental health issues.
2. To reveal how Evan's mental health issues affect his behavior in the play.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study are expected to be of benefit to many people. The significances of this study are as follows:

1. To add and enrich scientific insights in the psychology field and the study of literature regarding understanding the importance of parent's role and families for children's psychological growth, all by referring to Freudian psychoanalytic theory that concerns anxiety and defense mechanisms.
2. A contribution to the English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga, as one of the studies that use Freudian

psychoanalysis theory. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help and inspire other English Department students from the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Airlangga, to study Freudian psychoanalysis criticism, especially about defense mechanism and anxiety.

3. To support people who suffer from mental illness. To date, stigma against people with mental illness remains a serious societal concern for affected individuals. Although awareness of physical disorders is widely seen as useful, knowledge of mental illness is often ignored. As a result of the lack of public awareness, many individuals suffering from mental illnesses may not receive adequate social help (Mannarini and Rossi 2019, 1). This is coupled with the amount of stigma that surrounds people with mental illnesses which makes them feel reluctant to ask for help. By examining the connection between Evan's anxiety with his family condition and childhood trauma, this study brought awareness to the readers that people with mental illnesses are not just sad or paranoid. Mental illness is formed by trauma, and by sticking to the old stigma, it is the same as telling to those people that their trauma is not real. While everyone has a different way to cope, it is important not to judge people about their past unfortunate events, but to listen and support them.

1.5 Definition of Key Term

- Parental role : A complex responsibility committed by parents and other caregivers in order to aid the upbringing of children (Dekovic 1992, 24).
- Trauma : An unexpected, potentially fatal event that typically leaves enduring, painful memories (Figley 2012, 321).
- Anxiety : A distressing emotional state characterized by stress, apprehension, and concern that arises in response to a threat (Arkin and Rucks 2007, 42).
- Low self-esteem : Negative evaluation of the self (van Zyl, Cronjé and Payze 2006, 197).
- Fear of Abandonment : A feeling in which the person is afraid to be abandoned or neglected by their loved ones (Octaviani and Saraswati 2016, 16).