
ASPERGER'S SYNDROME AS SEEN IN KATHRYN ERSKINE'S *MOCKINGBIRD*: A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This graduating paper examines about abnormal personality of Caitlin as the main character from Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird* as the sign of Asperger's syndrome. This study is entitled "Asperger's Syndrome As Seen in Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird*: A Psychological Approach". This study is mainly intended (1) to know the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome, (2) to describe the problems as the result of Asperger's syndrome sufferer in the novel *Mockingbird*. This study belongs to descriptive qualitative research. The research subject is the novel *Mockingbird*. The research object is the Asperger's syndrome. The method in collecting the data is observation and the technique in collecting data is taking notes. This study uses psychology approach through library research to help researcher analyze the symptoms and the problems of Asperger's syndrome in order to conclude that Caitlin is a character with Asperger's syndrome. This research concludes that Caitlin is suffering from Asperger's syndrome based on the characteristic (qualitative in impairment social skills, restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviours and interests, and disturbance in important area of functioning) found in her behaviour and personality throughout this novel.

Keywords: *Asperger's syndrome, Mockingbird, Personality*

1. INTRODUCTION

Human is a social being who needs interaction with others. A social creature would not be able to survive without having social interaction. Social interaction begins with communication. Every individual, naturally, has something in him that is wanted to be shared with others, and it is all lead to one basic point of social living creature, fulfilling their needs, information, and experiences.

Unfortunately, the ability to communicate properly is not easy for everyone. Some people fail to use language, so that language cannot work its function. There are number of person who has difficulties in social communication, for case in this point is people with autism.

Asperger Syndrome (AS) was introduced by Hans Asperger, a pediatrician from Austria. This syndrome, also known as little professor syndrome because people with Asperger often shows unique behavior, way of thinking, and communication. According to Frith (2001) Asperger syndrome is a mild form of autism, which is often undiagnosed until late childhood or even adulthood. Gold, Faust, and Goldstein (2010) mentioned: "Asperger Syndrome is characterized by social impairments, difficulties in communication, and a set of circumscribed interest and/or rigid adherence to routines."

Baron stated Asperger Syndrome shares three core diagnostic features: difficulties in social development of communication, alongside unusually strong, narrow interest and repetitive behavior. People with Asperger has awkwardness in social interaction, pedantry in speech, and preoccupation with very narrow interest or repetitive actions. People who suffer from Asperger Syndrome does not mean that they will be less productive. Many of them can be successful person. Wolfgang, Amadeus Mozart, Albert Einstein, and much more are the examples. As for distinguishing features, a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome requires that the child spoke on time and has an average IQ or above (Baron, 2008). Those who have this syndrome usually have a normal or above normal IQ, and many of them even appear as a genius person. According to Ritvo (2006), in his book *Understanding the Nature of Autism and Asperger's Disorder*, this syndrome occurs in about 30 to 40 in every 10.000 people. Four to five more often appear in males than females.

People with Asperger has awkwardness in social interaction, pedantry in speech, and preoccupation with very narrow interest or repetitive actions. They have problems communicating with others because they

do not naturally learn the rules of conversation (Centre for Development Disability Health Victoria). They cannot deliver their opinion as well as a normal person. To get in touch with society, they use several body languages as their means to communicate, they tend to be somewhat socially immature and may be seen by others as odd and eccentric. The main character of *Mockingbird*, Caitlin Smith, who has an interesting personal identity problem with her Asperger syndrome, gives a different strong reason for the writer to analyze this novel. In Caitlin's world, everything is black or white. Things are good or bad. Anything in between is confusing. That is why Caitlin is always dependent on her older brother, Devon. Devon has always explained everything. But now Devon is dead and Dad is no help at all. Caitlin wants to get over it, in fact, as a ten-year-old girl with Asperger's, she does not know-how. When she reads the definition of closure, she realizes that is what she needs. As a novel, *Mockingbird* has an uncommon theme. Behaviors of somebody with Asperger's Syndrome, which are applied in the novel make this novel quite different from any other novel. Apart from the unusual theme, Kathryn is able to build empathy among her readers towards Caitlin. The empathy is built by putting Caitlin as the narrator so that the readers can see Caitlin's perspective. By reading the book itself, readers can feel that Caitlin thinks and reacts differently from any other common people towards circumstances around her. Caitlin's different reaction can be seen in some cases, such as she tends to groan or scream for a long time when she gets anxious or when she cannot get what she wants.

The writer intends to dig deeper on the main character of Caitlin Smith on the novel *Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine to find out more about her symptoms as an Asperger's syndrome sufferer and the conflicts she faced as the result of Asperger's syndrome as life lessons. It is interesting to analyze how a ten-year-old girl can find a solution to overcome her problems through her Asperger syndrome special condition. Therefore, *Mockingbird* should give us deep insight into Asperger, representing how people with Asperger act in reality.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

According to Kothari (2004: 1), research in common parlance refers to a search for knowledge. Research also can be defined as a scientific and systematic search for pertinent information on a specific topic. In this chapter, the researcher presents some research methods. There are types of the research, subject and object of the research, data collecting method and data analyzing method.

A. Type of The Research

This study is grouped into a library research, since most of the sources are taken from the library and other electronic sources. The sources are divided into primary and secondary sources.

1. The Primary Data

The primary data is the main source of the research. Kothari (2004: 95) stated that the primary data are those which are collected afresh and for the first time, and thus happen to be original in character. The researcher takes *Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine as the primary research.

2. The Secondary Data

Secondary data function is to support the primary data. In this research, the secondary data are taken from some books or reviews, electronic sources, and reference theories which are related to the subject and object of the study.

B. Subject and Object of The Research

1. Subject of The Research

In literary works, there are many things that can be studied, because a literary work itself is very wide to describe. In this research, the researcher discusses a novel as one of the literary works. The subject of this research is a novel with the title *Mockingbird*, written by Kathryn Erskine. This research conveys the theory of Asperger's syndrome, the theory of social interaction, and theory of bullying especially related to the title of the research.

2. Object of the study

The object of the study is the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome in Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird*. The researcher tries to analyze the work objectively in order, the researcher can make a reasonable analysis.

C. Data collecting method

In writing this thesis, the writer used a library study. Since this study was a literature study, it was done by using references from various sources on the field of psychology. In the library research, the study was done by reading and collecting data from certain books and other writings as materials that support the subject of the research. The primary source that was used in this study was a novel entitled *Mockingbird*, written by Kathryn Erskine. Besides, the secondary data were taken and summed up from some books. There were some steps that the writer took in doing this study. The first step was reading summaries of several novels before deciding which novel to analyze. Then, the writer started to read and understand the selected novel several times, looked for information, and took notes of things that would be analyzed in this study. After that, the

writer focused on the main character in the story, namely Caitlin. Next, the writer decided to analyze the Asperger's syndrome as seen in Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird*, and also formulated problems into questions. Having decided the topic, the writer had consultation with the thesis consultant in order to discuss the topic.

Second, the writer looked for some related theories and references. In order to gather references to answer the formulation of the problem, the writer reviewed some books, theories, and researchers that are related to the topic. After collecting the references, the writer began on the theories and elements of literary work that were needed to analyze the novel.

The last was summing up all of the discussion of this study and drawing a conclusion based on the problems formulation analysis, and some suggestions for the readers.

D. Data Analyzing Method

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative study. Descriptive research does not provide treatment, manipulation, or alteration to variables the variable under study, but describes what conditions are existence. The only treatment given was the research itself, which is done through observation, interviews, and documentation. It means that the data explanation given by the researcher uses some statements, sentences, quotations, or descriptions. It aims to get a clear description of the study by choosing, defining, and arranging the fixed data.

Data analyzing method, which is used in this research, is based on the data obtained in reading and understanding the novel *Mockingbird*. This method is intended to describe the Asperger's syndrome represented by the main character in Erskine's *Mockingbird*.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS (10 PT)

Mockingbird is narrated by a ten-year-old girl who suffered from Asperger's syndrome. It is Caitlin Smith, the main character in *Mockingbird* who would be analyzed here. Caitlin had several symptoms which were able to differentiate her from any other people in the story of the novel. In the novel, there were some problems were caused by Caitlin and she did it unintentionally because of her Asperger's syndrome.

While reading the data, one might notice how random words are capitalized. In a normal sentence within the novel words are formatted with capital letters, even if rules of writing normally would not suggest doing so. Most of the concepts of communication that are capitalized serves to index what we as readers learn about Caitlin's way to relate each concept to herself.

The writer would describes some aspects of Caitlin one by one. The writer would describes the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome and the problems faced by Caitlin as the main character of the novel *Mockingbird* and the descriptions were followed by explanation of how Kathryn emphasis the fact that Caitlin had Asperger's syndrome.

A. The Symptoms of Asperger's Syndrome

Caitlin smith is the main character in Kathryn's *Mockingbird*. She lived with her father, Harold Joseph Smith in a city named Virginia. Caitlin have to deal with the recent death of her loved older brother named Devon at a shooting accident in his high school. They both has very close relationship as a brother and sister. Devon is a person who always helped his sister to deal with the complex and confusing world around her. Caitlin Smith challenges many of these assumptions, preoccupied with arts and drawing and interested in finding closure for her community in aftermath of a school shooting. Asperger's syndrome which suffered by Caitlin makes she is completely differed from any other characters in Kathryn's *Mockingbird*

The researcher would describes specifically one by one of the symptoms suffered by Caitlin as the main character which emphasis Asperger's syndrome in Kathryn's *Mockingbird* and put several The researcher would describes specifically one by one of the symptoms suffered by Caitlin as the main character which emphasis Asperger's syndrome in Kathryn's *Mockingbird* and put several quotations as the proof to reinforce the statement. They are explained as follows:

1. Qualitative Qualitative Impairment in Social Skill

It is clear that someone who suffered from Asperger's Syndrome had social impairment. Some of Caitlin behaviours could be identified in social impairment. There were two symptoms of Caitlin and some of her behaviours which indicated her Asperger's syndrome.

First symptom is a cold person. Caitlin's character of being cold indicated that she suffered from Asperger's syndrome because once in a while, she did not response properly circumstances which she has to do it to show an empathy or a sympathy to people. This also could be seen as an inability to reading social cues. Readers could see from how Caitlin treated her father and people around her. In chapter eight, after the death of her brother, Caitlin did a group project. She drew a heart with gun shot and showed it to her father. It can be seen as follows.

- (1) *When I finished my last drawing I go to the sofa where Dad is sitting and show it to him. He reads it and his head droops almost to his knees. The bump on his throat goes in and out every time he swallows. He sniffs several times which means at least three times and actually he sniffs five times before I say, What's wrong with it?*

Nothing, he says. It's—it's very well done. I ...need to go to take shower. You can pick out a video and watch it.

Yay! And I don't even have all the stickers I need for a video! I run over to the shelf with videos and stop. Why are you taking a shower at night? You always take a shower in the morning.

He is already out of the living room. *I'm little sore ...* and I don't hear what he says after that except he must be really sore because I hear him crying even before the shower turns on.

I don't want to hear the crying so I focus on my favorite videos. (Erskine, 2010: 47)

Caitlin was not aware for mostly all of the things around her. Instead of sad or showed any emotional reaction, Caitlin's reaction was just flat. Caitlin only focused on herself and completely gave zero attention towards people.

The second character is being logic. This character is strongly relevant to Caitlin's disability in interpreted jokes and metaphors. Someone who think concretely and trouble with catching on to indirect symbolic meaning, they will keep missing the point of such jokes, sarcasm, metaphors are similarly difficult for the same reason that is why Caitlin disliked jokes and metaphors because it was hard for her to understand them.

(2) *Mrs. Brook says you can talk with her anytime because her door is always open, I tell Mrs. Johnson. Actually it's almost always closed. But if you knock then she remember to open it.* (Erskine, 2010:17)

Caitlin thinks logically, when someone told her that "the door is always open" she interpreted the words literally as a door that always open actually it is defined as the one who always available to be of guidance, support, aid, or assistance whenever needed.

2. Restricted, Repetitive, and Stereotyped Patterns of Behaviours and Interest

The second category of Asperger's Syndrome is restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviours and interest. This category of symptoms could showed people easily whether somebody they knew suffered from Asperger's syndrome. Erskine enriched Caitlin with some behaviours which were explicitly show that Caitlin was different from any other people in general.

First symptom of restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviours and interest could be seen in how Caitlin interest wer. Erskine emphasized this stereotyped pattern by representing Caitlin as a person who was fond of drawing and her special interest for words and their meanings.

Caitlin has special interest in drawing. Caitlin even realized that she is good at drawing and she is so confident with her capability in drawing. It can be proof at quotation below.

(3) *I draw them and also a dogwood—the state tree AND flower—with a cardinal in it—the state bird. Everyone thinks cardinals are red but actually that's just the male. I don't do colors so my cardinal is a female. When I'm done I show my group.*

Brianna shakes her head. You traced that.

No I didn't.

No one can draw like that.

I can. I told you. I'm probably the best artist in the state.

Yeah right.

I've seen what Caitlin can draw. Emma says. It's awesome. And anyway it doesn't matter. It can be traced or drawn for this project.

I drew it, I tell her. (Erskine, 2010: 193)

Second symptom in the category of restricted, repetitive, stereotyped patterns of behaviours and interest was having inflexibility to specific and non functional routine or rituals. This symptom could be seen in how picky Caitlin was and how inflexible she was with things in order. Caitlin chooses what she wear, she always wear sweatpants and a long-sleeved T-shirt everyday, she is persnickety and has a lot pretensions that can be seen below.

(4) *The T-shirt can be any color. I don't care as long as it's not yellow or gold or mossy green or pukey green or poopy green—That makes Michael start giggling—or any kind of pink because those colors make me feel sickk. And it can only be one color because I don't like colors running into each other. And there can't be writing on the T-shirt or people will read it and I don't want them looking at me. And the long-sleeve T-shirt can,t have scratchy cuffs. And none of the T-shirts have tags in the back or collars. Or stripes. Or pockets. Or zigzag stitching. Or double stitching.* (Erskine, 2010: 93)

Another symptoms in category of restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviours and interest appeared in Erskine's *Mockingbird* is seen when Caitlin presenting repetitive motor mannerisms such

as groaning, screaming, shacking, sucking her sleeve, and having a temper tantrum. These behaviours were portrayed couple times. Caitlin needed to try hard to stop doing these behaviours. They were done usually when Caitlin tried to get rid of negative thoughts. She performed these behaviours in order to calm herself down and to feel secure in her personal space. As the narrator, Erskine provided enough description about these atypical behaviour of Caitlin that can be proof below.

- (5) *DEV-ON! DEV-ON! DEV-ON!* And I hear Dad's voice screaming like at the hospital and I don't want to hear it because I don't want any part of The Day Our Life Fell Apart to happen again so I focus and become the Heart Louder and louder and harder and harder but then I fall out of the chest because there's no way to close it and I feel Dad grabbing me but all I can do is scream the words from the green hospital people, *I TRIED BUT THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO!* Caitlin! Caitlin! I hear Dad yelling but I can't stop crying. (Erskine, 2010: 65)

3. **Disturbance in Important Area of Functioning**

Asperger's syndrome created disturbance in important area of functioning belonged to people with Asperger's syndrome. This also happened to Caitin Smith. Some aspects in her life were affected by Asperger's syndrome.

Erskine showed some significant aspects in Caitlin's life which Caitlin's characters and behaviours messed up. First area of functioning in which Caitlin caused problem was her family. Caitlin struggling to know how to behave around her family member that they have left, in this case with her Dad. Whilst, Caitlin's Dad also hides his emotion and fails to communicate with her. This condition often caused misunderstanding between both of them. Sometimes she triggered her Dad to feel extremely sad because of what she had done or said.

The disturbance of family functioning could be seen from how Caitlin treated her Dad. Caitlin's disability to read social cues made her become so insensitive toward her dad's feeling. She never stated in Erskine's *Mockingbird* that she made mistakes to her parent.

- (6) I sit on the sofa and start talking about Devon a lot except I don't call him Devon anymore. I call him Devon-who-is-dead. I say it until Dad asks me to stop.
But that's his name.
No. His name is Devon.
No. His name WAS Devon. Now it's Devon-who-is-dead. That's different from the other Devon. That Devon was alive and you thought I was confused but I'm not because I know that Devon is dead and that's why I'm calling him Devon-who-is-dead and you'll get used to it.
No I won't. I'll feel like crying every time you say it.
Even if I say it fifty times?
Yes.
Even a hundred times?
Yes.
Even a thousand times?
Caitlin. I get upset even thinking about it so I'll definitely feel like crying every time you say it. I'm only saying it because you're upset that I think Devon is still alive so I'm showing you I Get It that Devon is dead.
Dad shakes his head and leaves the living room. (Erskine, 2010: 109-110).

B. **The Problems of The Main Character as A Result of The Asperger's Syndrome**

One of the important conflicts of the novel is Caitlin needs to find "closure" after her brother died at the school shooting. The closure is introduced to Caitlin, and the storyline constructs her developing knowledge of what this concepts means. The problem of closure is solved when Caitlin finally "Gets It", or gets the meaning of it. However there are some problems that Caitlin had to faced to overcoming the obstacles of living as an Asperger's syndrome sufferer that can be seen below.

To get along with normal people in social life, people with asperger syndrome has some difficulties which is need to be trained to improve their social skills. To make a goal in social interaction, people do personal orienting to others and acting in response to each other's behaviour. Although Asperger's syndrome sufferers has a normal IQ, but their degree of functionality and their naivete are often viewed as eccentric or odd and can easily become victims of teasing and bullying, even discrimination in society.

1. **Lack of Social Skills**

In solitude, the child does not have a qualitative impairment in social interaction. At least two people are needed for there to be a social interaction. Lack of social skills is most dysfunctional aspect of Asperger's syndrome. The essential feature of Asperger's syndrome is a qualitative impairment in social interaction, which is acknowledged in all diagnostic criteria. The criteria also refer to a lack of social and failure to develop peer relationship. The child with Asperger's syndrome typically has fewer friends, playing with other children

less often and for a shorter duration in comparison to peers. It can be seen in Caitlin's daily life in her school. She has no friends in her class because the kids in the class always told her to leave them alone, so Caitlin did it.

(7) *I already have friends.*

Tell me about your friends.

My dictionary, TV. Computer.

Mrs. Brook shakes her head. *I'm talking about people and learning how to get along with others. I know how. I leave them alone.* (Erskine, 2010: 41-42)

2. Bullying

People with Asperger's syndrome are often the target of bullying, as an Asperger's syndrome sufferer, sometimes they are rejected by their classmates simply because they are different and stand out from the crowd. For the person who do not know the signs of Asperger's syndrome behaviors will assumed that she is odd or unusual even weird, or the worst thing, they call them with rude words. To be called "freak" is a significant personal insult and likely to create considerable distress. The act of bullying portrayed from Caitlin's life Erskine's *Mockingbird*, is she being called freak by her classmate.

(8) *Ew!* he yells. *You're like a dog! Slobbering all over your sleeve!*

I stop sucking my sleeve even though I don't know why he says *Ew*. I like dogs. Dogs sit next to you and put their chin on your lap. Dogs are sweet and and kind. I'm happy if people think I'm dog.

What do you want? Freak! Josh says, and I remember why I'm there.

You shouldn't get in someone's Personal Space.

What's it to you?

I don't know what that means so I say again, *You shouldn't get in someone's Personal Space.*

He puts his hands on his hips and his nose wrinkles up. *What of it?*

He must mean, What IS it? *Personal Space is this.* I step right in front of him –I even step on his toes –to show him where Personal Space is.

Get off me you freak! He yells. (Erskine, 2010: 29-30)

Caitlin often make an odd behaviour and mannerism, this situation affects to society and cause a "special" perception about her. It is often happen in our society that someone with this kind of syndrome often categorized as someone with mental disorder because of her odd mannerism. Bullying toward Asperger's syndrome sufferers often happen because of atypical behaviour in society. Some people who understand the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome will not do kind of these discrimination such as teasing and bullying. This is why the information and description of this case should be spread up to give better description and definition.

4. CONCLUSION

From the analysis, the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome had by Caitlin as the main character in Erskine's *Mockingbird* are seen through in three categories, which are qualitative in impairment social skills, restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviors and interests, and disturbance in the important area of functioning. These symptoms show how Caitlin as an Asperger's syndrome sufferer in her life and all the problems that happened throughout the novel.

The first categorization is social impairment. Caitlin portrayed as a cold person. There were two characters, and two behaviors belonged to Caitlin, which could show impairment in social skills. The characters which indicated impairment of social skills were being cold and being logic. Caitlin had no empathy and sympathy at all. Erskine emphasized this by showing it through how Caitlin behaved to others and how she performed her unawareness.

Second categorization is restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behaviors and interest. These three points were restricted and repetitive interests, inflexibility to specific and non-functional routine or ritual and also motor mannerism. Caitlin's behaviours which included into motor mannerism were screaming, shacking, sucking her sleeve and having a tantrum. These behavior's happened when she felt discomfort because of too much sounds or too much lights around her.

The last categorization was disturbance in important area of functioning. Areas of functioning in which Caitlin mainly had social interaction problems with her family and her friends in the school. These two areas of functioning were difficult to handle because most of her symptoms of Asperger's syndrome affected them.

As an Asperger's syndrome sufferer, Caitlin lives with some difficulties in social interaction. Lack of social skills and bullying also by people is often happened in her life. Although Caitlin has a social skills dysfunction, she is still having a good division of mind as a human being.

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