



## Bullying in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*

**Ana Khairiyah Utami**

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: [anautami2000@gmail.com](mailto:anautami2000@gmail.com)

**Adeline Grace Marianne Litaay**

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

Email: [adelinegrace@untag-sby.ac.id](mailto:adelinegrace@untag-sby.ac.id)

**Abstract.** This study discusses the kinds of bullying that Cassandra experiences, the causes, the effects and how Cassandra overcomes the bullying in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*. The research applies descriptive qualitative method and psychological approach. After analyzing *Nerd Can Fight*, the writer finds there are some forms of bullying experienced by Cassandra such as slapping, threatened by her friends, spreading rumor, and mocking. There are several underlying causes of the bullying on Cassandra, they include the fact that she is a nerd student, the death of Cassandra's brother, Maddison's taking revenge for Bryant's death, and lack of parental attention. Moreover, the effects of bullying on Cassandra are: having a kind of street fighting obsession, feeling hopeless, feeling upset, anxiety, and easily angry. There are several things that help Cassandra overcome the bullying effects: helping other people that can help Cassandra understand her pain, building self-confidence and forgiving everyone who has hurt her.

**Keywords :** *bullying, kinds of bullying, causes of bullying, effects of bullying.*

### INTRODUCTION

Bullying is an act or intentional aggressive behavior, which is carried out by a group of people or a person repeatedly and from time to time against a victim who cannot defend himself easily or as an abuse of power or power systematic. Bullying can be verbal, physical or online (cyberbullying). This behavior is often carried out by a person or group of people who are stronger or stronger than other people who are weaker or less powerful.

According to Schwartz David (2001:725) bullying have detrimental effects on victims such as stress, anxiety, depression, even in extreme cases the victim can commit suicide. Bullying is very common especially in the school environment and almost everyone feels uncomfortable when being bullied around them. In addition, everyday school life is a challenge for every student, especially for a child whose character is different from the others. Factors that cause bullying are environmental and family factors, the environmental factors are school pressure, age and lack of communication at school.

The phenomenon of bullying is a social problem that is the center of attention of all groups, be it the community, government, child protection agencies and even the attention of the world of literature. This is evidenced by the many literary works that

raise social issues, including the phenomenon of bullying. One of the literary works that contains bullying is novel *The Nerd Can Fight* by Michelle Julianto (2016) 22 yearsold. The novel tells about a girl with good nature, nerdy, strong, innocent also a street fighter girl name Cassandra and herspecial nickname Casey and she always get bullying from her friends at school.

As mentioned above, the novel *The Nerd Can Fight* by Michelle Julianto. is used as a research source because this novel has a deeper story and also contains complex problems. In addition, this novel is popular especially among teenagers, because many new novels with more varied nuances of stories have been created. One of them is novel *The Nerd Can Fight* by Michelle Julianto who started writing her work on Wattpad. Wattpad is an application that allows its users to read stories or also create stories and more than 5 million people have read MichelleJulianto's novels. So, itis not surprising that Michelle Julianto's works are popular with teenagers. The interesting stories, Michelle Julianto is good at choosing the theme that contains life lessons that can be used as motivation for readers.

Based on the background of the study above, the thesis writer formulates the problem of statements as follows:

1. What are the causes of bullying on Cassandra in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*?
2. What kind of bullying does Cassandra experience in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*?
3. What are the effects of bullying on Cassandra in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*?
4. How does Cassandraovercomes the bullying in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*?

Based on the problem of the study explained above, the objectives are formulated as follows:

1. To describe the causes of bullying on Cassandra in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*.
2. To describe the type of bullying Cassandra experiences in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*.
3. To describe the effects of bullying on Cassandra in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*.
4. To describe how Cassandra overcomes the bullying in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*.

There are many psychological aspects that can be analysed in bullying on Cassandra in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*. However, this study only deals with the discussion the main character, Cassandra. In discussing the main character here, the study is limited by only discussing the causes of bullying, the type of bullying, the effects of bullying and how Cassandra overcomes the bullying in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*.

After reading this study, the writer expects the readers to deepen their understanding on literary works. It will help them enjoy English literature in order to find out pleasure and values, especially about extrinsic approach. Besides that, the writer hopes that by reading and understanding the research, the readers will get more insight about bullying. In addition, this study hopefully can enrich the reader's knowledge and attract their interest in reading literary works.

## METHOD

In this thesis, the writer uses qualitative research. Qualitative descriptive is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. MacMillan and Schumacher (2001:166) define it as a plan for selecting subjects, research locations, and data collection procedures to answer research questions. The writer takes the data from novel that is written by Michelle Julianto entitled *The Nerd Can Fight*, and several references such as internet and some books that connected to the novel. The writer collects the data by reading novel. Then the writer develops a description and interpretations of the problem of thesis.

The approach used in this thesis is extrinsic approach because extrinsic elements that affects the work can also be used as a portrait of objective reality at the time the work was born. So the readers can understand the psychological mood state of society and author and the time. Besides, that literary work cannot stand without the world outside literary work itself. Extrinsic approach deals with other system, being stray from the world literature. The thesis writer also uses psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud as the approach to analyze which is suitable with the topic of this thesis because the topic of the study concern with Cassandra became a victim of bullying by her friends and seniors and this bullying had various impacts on Cassandra.

Data sources are all information or subject that should be collected and chosen by the writer. The source data in this study is a novel entitled *The Nerd Can Fight* by Michelle Julianto published on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2016. This novel consists of 412 pages. The novel tells the story about Cassandra. One of the main character, who has good nature, nerdy, strong, innocent also a street fighter girl which is causes her get frustration in her life. The writer attempts to focus to find the causes and effects of bullying from Cassandra. There are also supporting resource that can be obtained as references. They are especially about bullying theory. In this process of making this thesis, writer gets some references on Universitas 17 Agustus Surabaya library and global media like journal to more references.

The instrument of the research is the writer herself because it is the writer herself who reads and understands the references which support this study. After collecting the data, the writer starts to analyze the data and also the writer tries to analyze with the theory. The technique of the data analysis such as: Analyzing the data, Interpreting the data, Drawing the conclusion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter provides the analysis of the person who is bullied in *The Nerd Can Fight* and it is causes and effects which is splatted into 4 subchapters. The first part of this chapter discusses about causes the second part discusses about and effects and the third part discusses the kind of bullying of Cassandra. The last part discusses how Cassandra overcomes the bullying.

The Causes of Bullying on Cassandra in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight* such as:

### 1. Cassandra as Nerd Student

Cassandra is a smart and introverted girl who prefers spending time with books and her academic activities over socializing with her peers so she is constantly bullied at school because of her bookish looks and interests. One day, Cassandra decides that she has enough of being a victim and decides to stand up to the bullies, she starts training in

martial arts and quickly discovers that she had a natural talent for fighting with the help of her martial arts coach and a supportive group of friends.

Bullying at school illustrates how people live in their youth. This constant suppression is the reason why Cassandra has decided not to rebel Maddison the bully and school rules. The following excerpt shows how Cassandra being bullied and how she tries not to rebel at that "You bitch! why don't you do us a favor and get the fuck out of this school?" (Julianto, 2016:10-11). It shows Cassandra transforms herself from a nerdy victim into a confident fighter. As Cassandra's fighting skills improve, she earns the respect of her peers and becomes more popular at school. However, she also faces new challenges and struggles to balance her academic pursuits with her new found interest in martial arts.

#### 2. The Death of Cassandra's Brother

Family is the most influential element that affects a person's life. Cassandra's family is good family. Cassandra's positive views of her family reflect development whose context influences cognition, emotion, behavior, and relationships. This situation is similar to what Cassandra experienced in *The Nerd Can Fight*. Two years ago, Bryant, Cassandra's older brother, pass away in a car accident while trying to save. A part from her close friends, not many know that Cassandra is a street fighter. Meanwhile, to her parents Cassandra is just a wounded and lonely teenage girl. However, the statement below is the proof of Cassandra's depression and disappointment "Bry, you gotta listen to me. You have to slow down, we're gonna crash and you won't survive." "Nice try, Case, but I'm afraid I'm immune to your little scandalous tricks." (Julianto, 2016:25-26). The statement above states that Cassandra is depressed because of her brother's passing away, which is why she often has nightmares and is reminded of the accident that happened to her. Depression from the death of her brother seems to be another reason rebellious behavior.

#### 3. Maddison's Taking Revenge for Bryant's Death

Revenge after the death of someone is a complex emotional response that can arise from deep sadness, anger, and a sense of injustice. The loss of a loved one, especially a romantic partner, can be a very painful and traumatic experience, and the intense emotions associated with loss can sometimes translate into a desire for revenge. The novel tells how Maddison is to blame for the accident that result in the death of her ex who is the Cassandra's older brother dies. That is why Maddison started bully Cassandra. The following statement, quoted from the story, proves how Cassandra is bullied by Maddison "Where is my bracelet, you bitch!" "leave the girl alone, Maddison." "Check his pockets, you'll find your bracelet," (Julianto, 2016:30). Cassandra's brother- Bryant gives Maddison a bracelet when they are still together and she loves that bracelet so much. This following statement shows that Maddison is cruel girl at school.

#### 4. Lack of Parental Attention

Lack of parental attention can be one of the factors that can influence the development of bullying behavior in children. When children do not receive enough attention and emotional support from their parents, they may feel lonely, insecure, or frustration. These challenges may be associated with higher levels of aggressive behavior, including bullying. The novel tells about Cassandra is very close to her brother because her parents are good parents from the start, but they are busy with work and often leave her on business trips. As a result, when Cassandra's brother passes away, Cassandra feels lonely because she receives less attention from her family. "Girl you are ready to

go?”“Aw, I miss you, princess.”“I miss you to daddy.” (Julianto, 2016:37). This statement proves that parents come home from a business trip and meet, Cassandra miss them and hugs her daddy.

The Type of Bullying Cassandra Experiences in Michelle Julianto’s *The Nerd Can Fight*

### 1. Slapping

Physical violence in bullying may include hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching and pushing or damaging the property of others somebody. There are also those who do physical bullying slap on Cassandra as stated in the following quote: “That’ll teach you a lesson.” (Julianto, 2016:11). This statement proves that Cassandra experiences physical bullying on behalf of her friend Maddison when she is at school. Cassandra is hit on the left cheek. It shows Cassandra does experience physical bullying. Besides, Adam slaps Cassandra because he knows and is shocked that Cassandra is street fighting girl. Cassandra often gets comments that belittle her appearance, intelligence to her background her bullying has impacts on her mental health.

### 2. Threatened by Her Friends

Friendship is usually based on mutual respect, trust, and equality. However, in some cases, the strengths of friendship can become unequal. When people feel threatened by other members of the friendship group, they may use intimidation to dominate or defend their friends, and intense pressure can influence behavior within the friendship group. When a person feels threatened by peers or fears rejection, they may succumb to pressure to conform and engage in bullying behavior that fits the dynamics of the group. The following statement, quoted from the story, proves Cassandra's threatened by her friends:

“I can’t justify the things my friends did and justifying them is not why I’m here”

“Then why are you here?”

“ The point is, yes, I did befriend you because Sonia wanted something to hold against you but I didn’t give her anything. I witnessed what you did for that old man who swept the road in the middle of the night and what you did for me,” (Julianto, 2016:211)

Cassandra and Penelope's friendship used to be very good but for a while other friends bullied Cassandra because she is a nerd so Penelope stay away from Cassandra and become friends with girls who bullied Cassandra even though Penelope does not bully Cassandra.

### 3. Spreading Rumor

Spreading rumor or gossip at schools is included in bullying and it means sharing or spreading false or harmful information about someone with the intention of damaging their reputation or social status. The consequences of gossip and bullying can be dire. They may face social exclusion, loss of friendships and difficulty forming new relationships. Suppressing rumors can also create a hostile school climate, undermine trust among peers, and create a culture of fear and insecurity. Besides, the story tells that when Cassandra fights unfortunately, Penelope knows and Cassandra thinks that Penelope probably goes to tell Sonia about the shocking news that nerds actually can fight this whole time but does not. By this, Cassandra’s ability in fighting which will probably trigger some bizzarrerumor. It can be seen in the quotation“Well, aren’t you going to tell Sonia and share some juicy gossip with your bestie about how much of a freak I am?”“What – I don’t underst-”“Case, you don’t understand!”(Julianto, 2016:180). The quotation above shows that Penelope is Cassandra’s best friend but she

goes away because Cassandra is a nerd. Then, when Penelope knows Cassandra can fight. It makes Cassandra afraid and angry, that it becomes a rumor.

#### 4. Mocking

Bullying at school also occurs when a student has a target and makes fun of for being a nerd. This type of bullying is based on prejudice and is about intelligence and academic teaching. Besides, Bullying is intentionally belittling or embarrassing someone by teasing, using sarcasm or belittling their appearance, behavior or other aspects of their identity. This can be done directly at the person or behind their back, often in the presence of other people. Bullying includes making fun of a student's appearance, behavior, interests, or intellectual abilities. Bullies often look down on students, use derogatory terms, or give themselves derogatory nicknames based on their interests or academic achievements and imitate or exaggerate students' behavior or interests in order to embarrass and reject them. It can be seen when Cassandra gets mocking "Don't speak to her like she's trash, you bitch." (Julianto, 2016:49).

The Effects of Bullying on Cassandra in Michelle Julinto's *The Nerd Can Fight*.

#### 1. Street Fighting Obsession

Street fighting obsession means as an intense focus or fixation on street fights or physical altercations with other people in public places. Characterized by a strong desire for confrontation, it shows aggression and maintains her superiority with physical violence.

. "Oh, but I do. I know all about your illegal secret and one word to the police, you're screwed." "And that, princess, is where you're wrong. This is going to work to my advantage because now. I have nothing to hide and if you decide to go running to the police about this. What are you going to tell them? That you went to an illegal street fighting place to watch the fight go on? Do you have proof? No, you don't. So if I were you, I'd watch who you yap these things to," "Was that a threat?" (Julianto, 2016:312)

That statement is related to Cassandra's obsession. She begins training in martial arts and quickly discovers that she has a natural ability to fight with the help of her martial arts coach and a supportive group of friends, Cassandra transforms from a nerdy victim into a confident fighter as Cassandra's fighting skills improve.

#### 2. Feeling Hopeless

Hopelessness may have a steady stream of negative internal thought Cassandra has a strong memory of his brother's passing away that make her deeply guilty of it. "I was naive, I wanted to blend in so much. I was an idiot." (Julianto, 2016:106). The story tells that Cassandra remembers the party night at school, when she asks the brother to accompany her because she is challenged by the popular girls in school. They tell Cassandra is a nerd like her would never blend in and would never dare to step a foot in a party. Therefore Cassandra invites her brother and suddenly an accident happens a truck driver crashed into their car that night and take his life and feeling hopeless because of an accident makes Cassandra feeling hopeless of her life.

"He died protecting me."

"It would've been what he wanted. He died a hero. He died protecting his sister from harm. If I was him and my little sister was in danger, I would've done the same thing without having to think twice about it. If he was given a choice on how he would die, I know for sure that he wouldn't choose anything else. He

loves you, Case. That is what matters most. He loved you enough to sacrifice his life for you.” (Julianto, 2016:107-108)

At first, Cassandra feels hopeless, blames herself and does not want her brother to die in an accident. After talking about Cassandra's story, Adam immediately gives some advice and firm words to Cassandra so that she is not always hopeless about her own life.

### 3. Feeling Upset

The feeling upset or sadness when someone dies and people know the real situation is a natural and understandable emotional response to the loss of a loved one or someone care about. When people become aware of the circumstances surrounding their death, it can increase our feelings of sadness and grief. The death symbolizes permanent and irreversible loss of a person from our life. It is a deep and very emotional experience, often accompanied by feelings of emptiness, longing and sadness can be angry or sad when someone dies is a normal and common emotional response to loss. The following statement, quoted from the story, proves Cassandra's feeling upset:

“I am his boss,”

“Wait, hol dup. I thought Dom ordered you to kill Bryant but you work for baldy here?”

“I quit working for Dom after he tried killing me in that ‘set the hit-man’s house on fire incident’, probably to eliminate all witnesses. So I thought, why not go after the girl he’s infatuated with and then I found this filthy rich dude to fund my stunts.” (Julianto, 2016:252)

The quotation above shows that Cassandra is feeling upset, she remembers what happens to her and her brother. She shocks and could not believe that even her closest friend is involved in her brother's death.

### 4. Anxiety

Anxiety can make individuals more vulnerable to becoming targets of bullying. People with anxiety may exhibit signs of nervousness, insecurity, or shyness, which can be perceived by bullies as signs of weakness. Besides, this novel tells about bullying that often prey on those they perceive as easy targets, and individuals with anxiety may be more susceptible to this type of targeting. The following statement, quoted from the story, proves Cassandra's feeling anxiety “I told you it was dangerous, Pix. Think about it and don’t make rash decisions.” “I’m not making irrational decisions, Lev. I’m going to do this and I’m going to do this with my own purposes.” (Julianto, 2016:156).

The novel tells when Cassandra fights, she feels anxiety that her opponent is stronger than her, but she wants to win the fight for compensation that can be given to Carla Adam’s mother so she can continue the medication.

### 5. Easily Angry

People who have experience trauma or bullying in the past may have unresolved anger and resentment that can resurface in various situations, making them more irritable. Traumatic experiences, including bullying, can cause people to experience high levels of emotional responses. They may experience intense anger from triggers or memories of their past traumas. These triggers can produce a strong emotional response, making anger more likely to arise. This statement shows Cassandra’s anger.

"I want a rematch. You obviously cheated."

"What happened in the arena stays in the arena. I don't Want to see you anywhere in my life ever again and even if we cross paths, we have never met and are complete strangers to each other." (Julianto, 2016:243)

Cassandra's bullying and trauma are often accompanied by feelings of betrayal and helplessness. These experiences can lead to feelings of anger, as people harbor resentment toward those who hurt them and a desire to regain control. Anger can act as a protective response for people who have experienced trauma or bullying.

Cassandra Overcome the Bullying in Michelle Julianto's *The Nerd Can Fight*.

### 1. Helping Other People

In the story Cassandra's desire to help other people start from helping Adam's mother disease, Cassandra encourage Adam's young brother because he is sad and hug him to calm him down and she promise herself to continue to help Adam's mother with treatment. Besides, Cassandra's desire to help other people can also be seen in the following quotation shows how Cassandra helps Adam's mother disease.

"You know my mother received another envelope with a bunch of money again last night."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, it's been going great since the money started coming in but I can't stop worrying on where it came from and more than that, who it came from."

I started thingking frantically. He found out. Shit, he found out. He knows it's me. He won't let me fight anymore. Or worse, he won't accept any of the money anymore.

"Stop staring off like that, it creeps me out, you freak!"

"Jerk" (Julianto, 2016:236)

Since Cassandra finds Adam's mother has an illness that about her kidney transplant and helps her secretly send medical expenses out of the money the street fighter make. Cassandra is great street fighter so, when she wins the fight she will get the reward.

### 2. Building Self Confidence

Building self confidence after being bullied can be a difficult but important process. It is important to understand that bullying is not an indication of your fault. Remind that the bully's actions and words reflect his own problems, not your values or values as a person. Identifying and challenge any negative thoughts or beliefs about yourself that might stem from the bullying. Replace negative self-talk with positive, assertive statements. Practice self-compassion, treat with kindness and understanding.

"As I was saying,"

"Not all nerds are pushover. I wanted to be a living proof of that and also to be a living proof that a girl can indeed 'kick ass'."

"I had an older brother to teach me" (Julianto, 2016:100)

From on the quotation above, it can be seen that Cassandra feels tired about her bullying so she decides she would do the best and make her life better.

### 3 Forgiving Everyone Who Has Hurt Her

Forgiving incidents of intimidation against victims can develop from empathy and trying to understand the point of view of the bully. This does not mean condoning their behavior. This can be an opportunity to reflect on the past, understand the factors that led to the bullying, and perhaps find empathy or forgiveness for those involved. However, forgiving is a personal choice and should only be made when you feel ready. The following quotation shows how Cassandra forgives her friend and hug her.

"I'm sorry. I was just so happy and excited that you finally gave me a chance to prove myself to you. God, I won't let you down! I promise,"



“I know you won’t but I have to warn you. Penny. Who I am, my secrets and my past are not the best things you would see or know. I don’t carry the lightest baggage,”

“I don’t care. You saved my life, if that’s not enough reason to stick by you then I don’t know what is.” (Julianto, 2016:316)

It can be seen from the story after several events that make Cassandra trust Penelope again, to the point that Cassandra returns to call her by her special name Penny. Cassandra hugs her tightly and forgive her so that Penny can't say anything but thank you because Cassandra help her a lot.

## CONCLUSION

Bullying is a form of aggressive behavior characterized by intentional violence or abuse that is repeated over a certain period of time and results in an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim. This usually occurs in social contexts such as school, work, or online media. The bully tries to gain control, dominance over the victim or power. Bullying can take many forms, including physical aggression, verbal abuse, social exclusion, manipulation, and the use of technology to intimidate or hurt others. The effects of bullying can be severe and include emotional distress, low self-esteem, academic or work-related problems, and long-term psychological consequences for the victim. It is important to recognize bullying and address it with strategies to prevent, intervene, and create a safe and inclusive environment foster empathy, respect, and positive social interactions.

Problem which is presented by Michelle Julianto through Cassandra in *The Nerd Can Fight* reveals the reasons why teenagers like Cassandra become victims of bullying. In this chapter, the conclusion which is derived from the result of the analysis will be presented. Altogether, there are four points of the conclusion.

Firstly, the causes of bullying on Cassandra are Cassandra is a nerd student, the death of Cassandra's brother, Maddison's revenge for Bryant's death, and lack of parental attention. The writer shows the readers that Cassandra’s friends think she is a weird, nerdy girl who is easily bullied by a popular girl gang. Meanwhile, Cassandra is just a wounded, lonely teenage girl to her parents. Secondly, this chapter as well discusses type of bullying Cassandra experiences in Michelle Julianto 's *The Nerd Can Fight*. They include slapping, threatened by her friends, spreading rumor, and mocking.

Furthermore, there are several effects of bullying on Cassandra in Michelle Julianto’s *The Nerd Can Fight*. Cassandra has a street fighting obsession, feeling hopeless, feeling upset, anxiety, easily angry. The last discussion describes how Cassandra overcomes the bullying in Michelle Julianto’s *The Nerd Can Fight*. She does it by helping other people, building self-confidence and forgiving everyone who has hurt her.

As the conclusion of all, the writer results of the analysis on *The Nerd Can Fight* by Michelle Julianto and find out several types of bullying such as physical bullying, verbal bullying and psychological or social bullying.

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