



Will Traynor's Social Isolation in Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You*

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Abstract: Social isolation is a condition when individuals are cut off from social relationships both physically and emotionally. This study aims to analyze the social isolation experienced by the character Will Traynor in the novel *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes. The objectives of the study are to find out the cause of social isolation and its impact on mental health. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a literary psychology approach as a literary approach. The results shows that the social isolation experienced by Will Traynor is not only caused by his physical limitations and the surrounding environment, but also by psychological conflicts and emotional trauma due to the loss of his old life. The effects of social isolation experienced by Will Traynor can be seen from his attitude of withdrawing from the environment, losing his zest for life, showing helplessness, and his desire to end his life because he feels that his life could not be the way it used to be. This representation shows how physical trauma can trigger deep social and emotional isolation in human life.

Keywords: social isolation, emotional trauma, psychological conflict, mental health

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social creatures who need interaction and relationships with others to maintain their emotional and psychological well-being. Healthy social interaction can provide a sense of comfortable and emotional support. Conversely, when a person experiences limitations in interacting with their social environment, either due to internal or external factors, they are at risk of experiencing social isolation, which can have an impact on someone's mental and emotional health.

Social isolation has been linked to mental illness, emotional distress, suicide, the development of dementia, premature death and poor health behaviours (smoking, physical inactivity and poor sleep) as well as biological effects, including high blood pressure and impaired immune function (Cacioppo et al. 2002 and Grant et al. 2009 in

Holt-Lunstad et al. 2015). Social isolation is common in individuals who experience major changes in their lives, such as loss of physical abilities, chronic illness, or severe trauma. Individuals with disabilities often face difficulties in maintaining their social relationships due to limited mobility, feelings of inferiority, and stigma given by society. This condition can lead to feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and even depression, especially if they feel they don't get enough emotional support from the people around them. The concept of social isolation in literary works is often used to explore the condition of human limitations and their struggle in finding meaning or purpose in life in the midst of alienation. Social isolation has a variety of meanings depending on the context, but in many works of fiction including the novel *Me Before You*, it refers to a state in which the main character is isolated or disconnected from his social environment due to certain factors. In literary works, isolation is often used as a means to explore the psychological and emotional aspects of a character. Isolation representations can provide a layer of complexity and depth to the themes raised by the author (Maryani, 2024).

The novel tells the story of Will Traynor, a man who was previously active, independent, and energetic, but underwent a drastic change after an accident that caused paralysis from the neck down. After the accident, Will has difficulty accepting his condition, withdrawing from his social environment, and refusing to interact with those around him, including his family. The social isolation factor experienced by Will Traynor in this novel not only describes the physical changes he experiences, but also his emotional and psychological struggles in facing the reality of his life. He felt he had lost control of his life and refused help from others, including Louisa Clark, his caregiver. Although Louisa tries to restore his spirit in life, Will still feel that his life no longer has meaning, which then leads to his decision to undergo euthanasia.

The researcher chose the novel *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes (2012) as the object of study because this story raises the issue of social isolation that is close to reality. This study aimed to analyze the factors that lead to Will Traynor's social isolation, how it is reflected in his interactions with other characters, as well as his impact on his mental and emotional state. Using a literary psychology approach, this study will explore how physical limitations, and trauma can affect social life of a person as well as how the surrounding environment plays a role in exacerbating or helping an individual's psychological condition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social isolation is a condition in which individuals experience limitations or the absence of meaningful social relationships with others. Individuals who experience social isolation tend to have little or no social interaction, which can lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and decreased mental and physical health.

According to Weiss (1973), social isolation can be understood as the absence of a *supportive social network*, which is generally needed by individuals to meet the needs of affection, self-validation, and belonging. Weiss distinguishes between social isolation and emotional isolation.

Robert S. Weiss in his book *Loneliness: The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation* (1973) explained that social isolation is divided into two main categories, social isolation is the absence of quantitatively adequate social contact, such as the loss of community, friends, or daily social relationships, and Emotional isolation is the absence of deep emotional closeness with others, such as the loss of a relationship full of trust and Compassion. Weiss stated that emotional isolation often causes feelings of emptiness, deep loneliness, and can even trigger depression. Both forms of isolation can be experienced simultaneously and have a serious impact on an individual's psychological state, especially when a person loses social roles and connections.

Abraham Maslow in his theory *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943) arranged human needs in the form of a hierarchy known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. In this structure, the need for love and belongingness occupies the third position after physiological needs and security. Maslow explained that humans have a basic need to be accepted, loved, and feel part of a social group. When these needs are not met, individuals will experience loneliness, alienation, and psychological disorders, such as worthlessness and depression. In the context of Will Traynor's character, this need failed to be met due to an accident that left him with a loss of social connections and meaning in life.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative method. Qualitative methods tend to increase the basic understanding of the context. According to Careswell & Poth (2018) qualitative research is a method of investigation that focuses on understanding complex things in their natural surroundings. The selected qualitative approach aims to allow the thesis writer to detail data extracted from the novel *Me Before You* by Jojo Moyes (2012). The information will include words, phrases, and sentences connected to Social Isolation.

The data collection procedure includes the following steps:

1. Reading the novel and taking notes of the important quotations that related to the research problems.
2. Reads and examines the content of the novel thoroughly to identify quotation, narratives, and dialogues related to the theme of social isolation and its impact on the main character, Will Traynor.
3. Collects the data that is relevant to the causes and effects of social isolation.
4. The collected data is then classified and analyzed based on the statement of the problem and the purpose of the research.

The data analysis procedure involves:

1. The data that has been collected from the novel *Me Before You* is analyzed descriptively by identifying, interpreting, and classifying quotation that are relevant to the theme of social isolation experienced by the character of Will Traynor.

2. Each quotation is analyzed based on the narrative context and is associated with the theory of literary psychology used as the basis for the research.
3. The researcher highlights the emotional, social, and psychological aspects that arise from the behavior and dialogue of the main character, then interprets the meanings contained in them to answer the research problems.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the thesis writer examines the social isolation faced by Will Traynor in Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You*. The examination is split into two sections. The first analysis focuses on the reasons behind Will Traynor's social isolation, while the second examines the effects of Will Traynor's social isolation in Jojo Moyes's *Me Before You*.

A) The causes of Will Traynor's Social Isolation

The social isolation that Will Traynor feels in *Me Before You* is caused by a combination of the physical effects of paralysis, psychological trauma, and changes in how society treats him. Losing control of his life and total dependence on others makes Will feel helpless and lose his identity, so he chooses to stay away from social life. Additionally, the behavior of those around him, who tend to express sympathy or discomfort, further strengthens feelings of isolation and misunderstanding. This isolation results not only from physical incapacity but also from emotional trauma and society's failure to accept Will's new existence.

1) Physical Disability (Quadriplegia)

Will Traynor has a physical disability in the form of quadriplegia, which is total paralysis from the neck down due to the accident he experienced. This condition causes him to lose the ability to move and perform daily activities independently, leaving him completely reliant on the help of others. Quadriplegia not only limits his physical functioning but also affects Will's mental and emotional health, as this drastic change makes him feel confined and causes him to lose his identity as a person who used to be active and free.

“He’s a...a quadriplegic. He needs someone in the daylight hours to help feed and assist. Often in these jobs it’s a case of being there when they want to go out somewhere, helping with basic stuff that they can’t do themselves. Oh. It’s good money. Quite a lot more than the minimum wage.” (Moyes, 2012: 24)

This quotation describes how Will Traynor's physical condition as a person with Quadriplegia is the main cause of the social isolation he felt. His reliance on the help of others for basic activities such as eating and moving places reflects a significant loss of independence, which indirectly reduces his interaction with the surrounding environment. In addition, the way people describe a job as a caregiver with an emphasis on "high salary" suggests that the role of a caregiver is seen as more of a transactional job than a close social one. This shows that Will's social isolation is not only caused by his physicality, but also by social reactions to his circumstances.

2) Loss of Independence

Loss of independence occurs when an individual cannot perform their daily activities without assistance from someone else. This may involve using the restroom, taking a bath, cooking or getting food ready. Loss of independence is frequent with neurological issues.

“My son —Will—was injured in a road accident almost two years ago. He requires twenty-four-hour care, the majority of which is provided by a trained nurse. I have recently returned to work, and the caregiver would be required to be here throughout the day to keep him company, help him with food and drink, generally provide an extra pair of hands, and make sure that he comes to no harm.” (Moyes, 2012: 32)

This quotation above is an explanation from Will Traynor's mother regarding her son's post-accident condition. The sentence reveals the helplessness experienced by Will. The statement that Will needed twenty-four-hour care confirms that he is completely dependent on the help of others, even for the most basic tasks. This indicates a loss of independence, which for someone like Will who was previously described as an active, ambitious, and independent man is a huge loss psychologically. His mother told Lou to make sure that Will comes to no harm is not just a concern about a physical accident, but also hints at the possibility that Will could have harmed either directly or through a desire to end his life. He is no longer part of the life he used to live, and his social world is now limited to his caregivers and family.

3) Fear of Pity

In the novel *Me Before You*, fear of pity is portrayed through how the main character, Will Traynor, feels humiliated if the people around him treat him with pity. From Will's point of view, mercy is seen not as a form of kindness, but rather as a reminder of the weaknesses and limitations he experienced after the accident. The pity of others reminds him of the sense of loss, which makes him feel like a pitied burden.

“You were just looking at my photographs. Wondering how awful it must be to live like that and then turn into a cripple.”

“No.” I blushed even more furiously.

“The rest of my photographs are in the bottom drawer if you find yourself overcome with curiosity again,” he said. (Moyes, 2012: 45)

His sarcasm reveals a deep inner wound and a sense of loss for his active and adventurous past, as depicted in his photographs. The term “cripple” that Will uses sarcastically indicates a defensive and cynical attitude towards the views of others, including Lou, who he may feel sorry for or see differently since he became a person with a disability. Lou's blushing reaction shows guilt or discomfort because she is indirectly comparing Will's figure before and after the accident. This scene highlights Will's inner conflict between the desire to remain valued as a whole person and the bitter reality that the world often sees him only through his physical limitations.

4) Loss of Social Relationship

The loss of social relationship is described as one of the most painful effects of the condition that Will Traynor experienced after the accident. This loss of social relationships is not only evident from the estrangement of Will's old friends, but also from the drastic changes in his social life. Will, who was once active, influential, and surrounded by many people, now lives in solitude and limitations, interacting only with family, nurses, and one or two close people.

“To what do I owe this pleasure? It’s been...eight months?”

“Oh, I know. I’m sorry. It’s been...I’ve been awfully busy. I have a new job over in Chelsea. Managing Sasha Goldstein’s boutique. Do you remember Sasha? I’ve been doing a lot of weekend work too. It gets terribly busy on Saturdays. Very hard to get time off.” Alicia’s voice had become brittle. “I did ring a couple of times. Did your mother tell you?” (Moyes, 2012: 57)

This quote reflects how Alicia, Will Traynor's ex-girlfriend, tried to justify the distance she created after Will had an accident. Her speech looks awkward and defensive, with the pretext of busy work as an excuse to not communicate, which shows guilt as well as discomfort in dealing with Will's condition. The brittle tone or in his voice indicates emotional tension and possible remorse, but it is still not strong enough to mask the fact that he has drifted away. She asked, "Did your mother tell you?" showed as if her absence wasn't entirely her fault. This probably make Will feel excluded, even by those closest to him.

5) Lifestyle Changes

Will Traynor underwent a drastic lifestyle change after an accident that left him paralyzed from the neck down and completely changed his life. Previously, he lived an active life, full of freedom, a successful career, and extreme adventures such as sports and trips to various countries. However, after becoming a person with a disability, he no longer able to carry out his hobbies.

“I want to be in Paris as me, the old me. I want to sit in a chair, leaning back, my favorite clothes on, with pretty French girls who pass by giving me the eye just as they would any other man sitting there. Not looking away hurriedly when they realize I’m a man in an overgrown bloody pram.” (Moyes, 2012: 201)

Will said he wanted to go to Paris as his former self, active, confident, and valued as a whole man. He explained how he misses the little things he used to do but were meaningful before the incident, such as wearing his favorite clothes and feeling wanted by others, which now feels impossible due to her physical limitations. This sentence also contains frustration and bitterness at the way people see him today, not as a whole individual, but as someone who is pitied or even ignored.

B) What is the impact of Will Traynor's isolation on his mental health?

The social isolation that Will Traynor experienced after the accident had a huge impact on his mental health. As a result, he refuses to interact, increasingly gets caught up in feelings of loneliness, and loses the meaning of life, which exacerbates his depression and his desire to end life.

1) Rejecting Interaction

Will Traynor shows rejecting interaction behavior by refusing to talk, being cold, and often using sarcasm when being talked to. He avoids emotional closeness and chooses to be alone, even when others are trying to get close to him or help him. Will also often makes people feel unwanted, such as when he asks Lou to shut up or tells him to leave. This action reflects Will's reluctance to engage in social relationships, as a form of rejection of his new life circumstances.

“No, but he’s sarcastic and mean with it. Every time I say something or suggest something he looks at me like I’m stupid, or says something that makes me feel about two years old.” “He didn’t even want me in the same room as him. I don’t think I can stick it out, Katrina. I really don’t. Honest—if you’d been there you would understand.” (Moyes, 2012: 49)

This quotation shows how much mental stress Louisa experienced due to Will's sarcastic and defensive attitude. She feels ignored and unappreciated, as if every attempt to establish a relationship is responded to with ridicule or subtle rejection that damages her confidence. Feeling like two years old, it shows how small and helpless Lou is when faced with Will's cold response. Will doesn't want to be in the same room with her, it highlights the extent of the emotional distance created, as well as the influence that begins to damage Louisa's spirit and mental resilience. The desperation seen in the quotation above shows that although Lou originally came as a worker, this very difficult relationship has affected her personal life and created emotional wounds. Will not only guards himself, but also unconsciously hurts people who have good intentions to get close and creates a pattern of social isolation that hurts both of them.

2) Loneliness

Although he never explicitly said that he was lonely, his actions, such as choosing to remain silent, being cynical, and rejecting the presence of others showed the emotional emptiness he felt. Being lonely can also result in depression, which can then lead to functional limitations and subsequent work disability. Along this pathway, depression can act as a partial mediator between loneliness and work disability.

“Sometimes, Clark, you are pretty much the only thing that makes me want to get up in the morning.”

“Then let’s go somewhere.” The words were out almost before I knew what I wanted to say. (Moyes: 270)

Will's statement illustrates how loneliness he is, and just little hope he has left in him. Only the existence of a person can restrain him from the emptiness in his life. It also confirms his level of emotional dependence on Louisa, not in a purely romantic sense, but as the only link between himself and the outside world. Louisa's quick response was a spontaneous reaction to Will's statement. She wants to change the course of Will's life, giving him a reason to keep going. This shows that even though Will almost lost his zest for life, there was an effort from others to get him out of the despair.

3) Feelings of Helplessness and Inferiority

Feelings of helplessness and inferiority are emotional and psychological reactions to the condition. This has to do with how Will Traynor feels and responds to the loss of independence, for example feeling frustrated, sad, ashamed, or feeling worthless because he can't do anything on his own.

“You don't know that, Clark. You have no idea how this would play out. You have no idea how you're going to feel even six months from now. And I don't want to look at you every day, to see you naked, to watch you wandering around the annex in your crazy dresses and not...not be able to do what I want with you. Oh, Clark, if you had any idea what I want to do to you right now. And I...I can't live with that knowledge. I can't. It's not who I am. I can't be the kind of man who just...accepts.” (Moyes, 2012: 328)

This quotation shows how frustrated Will is and can't accept his physical limitations, especially when it comes to intimacy and control over himself. He feels that he has lost his identity and self-esteem as a man because he cannot live life as before. He didn't want to be a man who just accepted.

4) Suicidal Decision

Will Traynor's decision to end his life was a form of suicidal decision based on the deep physical and psychological suffering of experiencing Quadriplegic. He feels he loses control of his life, independence, and the meaning of his existence, despite being surrounded by people who care about him. For Will, living in limited and pain-filled conditions is not a life worth living. His decision was not purely out of despair, but as an attempt to restore his rights to himself and determine the end of his own suffering.

“I need it to end here. No more chair. No more pneumonia. No more burning limbs. No more pain and tiredness and waking up every morning already wishing it was over. When we get back, I am still going to go to Switzerland. And if you do love me, Clark, as you say you do, the thing that would make me happier than anything is if you would come with me.” (Moyes, 2012: 328)

Will tells Lou about the culmination of the physical and emotional pain he has felt since becoming a Quadriplegic. He emphatically said that his decision to end his life was not an impulsive act, but a choice made with full awareness due to the deep exhaustion of prolonged pain, physical limitations, and a significant decline in quality of life. Will has mentioned his suffering like pneumonia, pain, and fatigue every day, Will asserts that his

suffering is not only emotional, but also physically real. The decision to go to Switzerland to undergo euthanasia reflected his last attempt to regain control of his life. He asked Louisa to accompany him was not just an expression of love, but also a desire for his choice to be valued as a symbol of individual freedom. For Will, death was the only way to escape from a life that he felt was undignified and not in line with his identity before the accident.

CONCLUSION

From this study, it can be concluded that the character of Will Traynor experiences social isolation stemming from his physical condition after the accident. However, the isolation is not only caused by the physical condition after the accident, but also comes from psychological pressure, a sense of loss, and the character's inability to accept drastic changes in his life. The thesis writer found that the social isolation of the characters is seen through their rejection of social interaction, loss of friendships, and limitations in social activities. Will also feels no longer understood or valued as a person, despite still being surrounded by people who care about him. This is further strengthened by the emergence of pessimistic attitudes and despair that continue to recur throughout the story, pushing the characters to the decision to end their lives. Using a psychological approach, the authors conclude that social isolation can have an effect on an individual's mental health and quality of life. Will Traynor is described as a figure who feels lost in place and finds it difficult to accept the reality of his new life, until he finally decides to end his life because of the suffering and pain he experienced after the accident. These findings show that literary works can reflect real psychological problems and invite readers to better understand the emotional complexity and loneliness experienced by a person, especially those who experience physical limitations and trauma.

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