

BODY IMAGE REFLECTED IN KELLY LOUISE GOING'S *FAT KID RULES THE WORLD*

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Abstract. This study discusses about body image undergone by a seventeen year old boy named Troy, the main character in K. L. Going's novel *Fat Kid Rules the World*. The study focuses on Troy's perception of his body. Qualitative research is applied in this study due to the fact that this study provides understanding into the problems through description. In addition, psychological approach is employed as this study deals with the psychological motivation of the main character in the novel. From the analysis it is found that Troy has negative body image which consists of three areas, namely belief in being heavy, belief in look, and feeling about how people regard his physical structure and look. His negative body image is caused by his negative thoughts and feelings about the size of his body which he believes is huge and ugly so that people always look at him and make fun of his size. Based on the analysis it can be concluded that negative body image could be avoided by developing positive thought and feeling about one's body. One should not value oneself on the basis of physical appearance but on the basis of achievement.

Keywords: *body image, perception, Fat Kid Rules the World*

INTRODUCTION

Body image is what a person believes, perceives, thinks and feels about his body (Grogan, 2017: 21). Sometimes the way a person thinks other people are judging his or her appearance can affect their body image. A common way of thinking about body image can be divided into perceptual and attitudinal. Perception deals with judgement of one's size and look. Attitudinal deals with belief and view on one's body (Grogan, 2017:21-22). In addition, Medelson and White in Grogan (2017: 22) argue that a person's body-esteem constitutes three areas: belief in being heavy, belief in appearance, and feeling about how people regard his body and appearance.

A person may have a negative or positive body image. Negative body image comes from negative notion and sense

about his or her appearance and positive body image is made up of thoughts and feelings that are positive (Grogan, 2017: 22). Discontentment of body relates to negative assesment of the size of body, figure, muscularity and weight. This usually entails a perceived discrepancy between a person's assesment of his body and his ideal body. The massiver men tend to underestimate the size of their body more than skinnier men, indicating that individuals attempt to bring their body size estimate closer to a perceived average male figure (Smeets *et al.*, in Grogan, 2008: 92).

Cash (2011: 41) states the meaning of one's body in socialization entails more than exposure to media messages. One of them is peers, by their words and actions, peers are especially powerful purveyors of appearance norms and expectations. In other words, peers also have a big role in

influencing their friends' body image by their attitudes. The message of media may also give contribution to a serious, negative body image, discontentment of body, an urge to have the slim ideal among females and the muscular ideal among males and the onset of dieting and eating disorder. In short, the media messages has a big role in influencing body dissatisfaction among both female and male which is unrealistic shape and weight for average people (Botta in O'Dea, 2007: 100).

Research has found out that optimistic individuals who have a positive self-talk and belief in themselves, have better physical and psychological health than pessimistic individuals who incline to have a negative self-talk. Flaxington (2013) states that actual events or faulty thinking can result in anxiety. In other words, one of the causes that makes anxiety appears in one's mind is faulty thinking. Cash also reports that the consequent private body talk includes emotion-laden automatic thoughts, deductions, interpretations, and inference about one's appearances. Private body talk is common to individuals with problematic body image attitudes and self-schemas.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study is designed as qualitative research which is focused on the discussion of psychological laws as the analysis is conducted to reveal the psychological motivation of the character in literature. Thus, extrinsic approach is employed. This is in line with Wellek and Warren (1997: 81) who argue that one of the areas analyzed through extrinsic approach is psychology.

The data in this study are taken from K.L. Going's novel entitled *Fat Kid Rules the World* (2003) published by Penguin group. This novel consists of 183 pages. This research is conducted only to analyze the main character's perception of his body.

The data taken are in the form of sentences. The steps taken by the writer in collecting the data are as follows:

1. Reading the novel

To start collecting the data, the writer read the novel multiple times for better understanding about body image experienced by the main character in the novel.

2. Identifying the data

Data identification was done by marking and underlining the words, phrases and sentences which show information or expression about body image.

After the data were collected, they were analysed and described based on the topic of discussion. Based on the result of the analysis, a conclusion was drawn.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Troy's Body Image

Troy Billings is a 17-year-old whose weight is almost 300 pounds. He lives with his father and his young brother, Dayle. Troy's mother died when he was at elementary school. He went to food and lost his friends since her death and he is constantly referring to himself and his obesity in negative light. He has huge imagination of his negative body image and his negative self-talk. Troy's negative body image consists of three areas, namely belief in being heavy, belief in look, and feeling about how people regard his body and look.

Troy's huge body leads him to have negative feeling about his body. He always feels that people look at him and make fun of his size. He feels unconfident with himself and how he looks. His feeling becomes worse when he is in public places such as cafeteria and hallway. For example, when he and his friend are having lunch in a fancy restaurant that requires him to wear a suit, he believes that he looks perfectly funny and becomes the center of attention. His concern is not only with his

body but also with his filthy skinny friend, Curt. He compares his huge body with his skinny friend.

“It was a fancy restaurant and I had to wear a suit. A fat kid in a suit is definitely funny. But this is worse. Huge fat kid and filthy skinny, blond ferret. Half of New York City stops to watch. Curt is oblivious, intensely focused on the diner’s front door (Going, 2003:5).”

Troy assumes that most people are watching and making fun of them due to their difference in body size. Smeets *et al*, (in Grogan, 2008: 92) says that massiver individuals tend to underestimate the size of their body more than skinnier individuals. While Curt is enjoying the moment by offering food, Troy busies himself with his mind, worrying how he looks.

Troy’s feeling about body weight can also be seen in the event when he and Curt talk for the first time after Troy tries to commit suicide by jumping on the subway on Sunday afternoon is failed by Curt. Troy feels Curt makes fun of him and he wants to scold him by pretending like extremely angry people but he is failed. He assumes that fatty people with huge cheeks will never be able to express their anger with a snarl.

“You mocking me?” I say angry. I want to say it with a snarl but when your cheeks are puffy you don’t snarl, you huff a little of air escapes despite best intentions and I end up sounding like an overweight dog farting. My eyes dart and I think, *Did that sound funny* (Going, 2003:3)?”

The quotation above reveals that Troy thinks Curt is mocking at him after the incident. Troy does want to express his anger to Curt but he feels it is useless as he

has a massive cheeks. Furthermore, he compares what he does is similar to an overweight dog farting which is funny and stupid. According to Sarah Grogan (2008: 92), for both male and female overweight is considered unplesant to look at. Overweight is also often related to other negative characteristics. Troy considers himself as an unattractive person and associates it with an overweight dog farting.

Another domain that reflects Troy’s negative body image is his feeling about his appearance. He always compares how he looks with his friends at school, skinny people around him, and his young brother. In his public school, Troy feels that he is a huge kid among teenagers who looks like models. It is not easy for him to deal with the situation.

“Like it?” he asks.

“The question throws me, in part because no one ever asks me that, but mostly because it seems legit, as if Curt’s mind can honestly conceive that I, a six-foot-one-inch, three-hundred-pound, seventeen-year-old could possibly enjoy public school in a city full of aspiring models. It’s an astounding mental leap that cements in my mind the fact that Curt Mac Crae really is insane.”

“No,” I say (Going, 2003:12).”

Troy feels uncomfortable with the body he lives in. This feeling leads to a negative impact on how he ultimately feels about his external appearance. By comparing his body among his friends at schools it reveals that he thinks his friends’ appearance are better than him. He sees them as perfect models and he sees himself as huge dumb kid. Troy feels that he does not belong there. He also feels that he is unworthy among his family at home.

“I want to give him the you-moron

look the kids at school have perfected. Maybe say something sarcastic like, "Use your imagination." I want to say, "Open your eyes. I'm a fucking three-hundred-pound teenager living in the most unforgiving city on earth. I'm ugly and dumb and I make stupid noises when I breathe. I annoy and bewilder my only living parent, mortify my little brother, and have no friends (Going, 2003: 9)."

He constantly refers to his body as huge body that makes him look ugly and dull that brings shame on his father and his brother.

Another example that shows how Troy's always compares his big body with skinny people can also be known from this quote:

"I ache, *ache*, tells you, to know how he does it. How does one person transcend everything about himself with so little effort? How does he pull us in like a magnet? He's as skinny as I am fat, but people love him. They want to surround themselves with him (Going, 2003: 30)."

The quotation above reveals how he envied Curt who has skinny body. He envied him because he cannot get attention as much as Curt gets. He assumes that it is because of his appearance. He wants to be loved and surrounded by people who love him just like Curt.

Troy also compares his appearance with his young brother Dayle. He thinks that his brother is good looking and athletic, can fit in anywhere and are able to charm people around him while he is the opposite of Dayle.

"He swaggers forward, with attitude, moving the way you're supposed to

move when you live on the Lower east Side-the way I can never move. I think, *he fits here*. Unlike me, Dayle belongs in Manhattan. He's good-looking, athletic, and he can fit in anywhere. Take Dayle to the Upper West Side and he'd be dating a stockbroker's daughter. Take him to the village and he'd be playing football with the college kids at NYU. Me? I can live in the same neighborhood my whole life and still sand out like a sore thumb (Going, 2003: 18)."

The third domain that Troy suffers is the feeling about how people regard his physical structure and look. Troy thinks that people around him always make fun of his size and laugh at him. He always overthinks about what others think and feel about him. This manner leads him to have negative attitude about himself. Further he believes that funny things appear from his huge body, the body he is never comfort with.

"Like when I put on my jacket and everyone in the hallway stifles laughter. Or when I stand up after sitting in the cafeteria and Jennifer Mariday, Brook Rodriguez, and Amy Golver all bust a gut. I don't get angry. I just, think, *What was funny about that? Did my butt jiggle? Did I make the bench creak so that it sounded like a fart? Did I leave an iridentation?* There's got to be something, right? *Right* (Going, 2003: 1)?"

Troy's belief about how people reckon his physical structure and look is worsened by his negative self-talk about himself. Negative self-talk affects him by making him feel bad about himself since he hears the negativity over and over and it reinforces itself.

“A burst of laughter explodes across the street, and one of our neighbors yells something in Spanish. I swear they’re laughing at me. I picture the scene as everyone else must see it. Huge whale of an unsplattered fat Kid, emaciated piece of dirty bond twine, of pressed bewildered military machine, and Dayle. Three freaks and a normal kid standing on the sidewalk (Going, 2003: 20).”

Troy’s belief about what other people might think about him can also be seen when he is at a restaurant. He believes no matter the amount of food he orders, people around him will make assumption about him as he is a massive kid.

“I’m not. In truth, I want to order everything on the menu but can’t stand the pressure. I’m convinced everyone is secretly watching me and no matter what I order I cannot win. Too much and they’ll nod knowingly. Too little and they’ll think, A bit late for that, now isn’t it? I huff again before I can help it and with the release of that little puff of air I think, *Aw, screw it* (Going, 2003: 7).”

Some studies showing that individuals perceived to be overweight are rated as lazy, unhealthy, and deserving of teasing and ridicule (Lewis and colleges in Grogan, 2008: 11). The quotation reveals how Troy thinks that other people may think that he has unhealthy eating habits and is lazy to work out regularly so he gets his huge body.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that Troy has negative body image. His body esteem

consists of three areas, namely belief in being heavy, belief in appearance, and feeling about how people regard his body and appearance. Troy’s negative body image comes from his negative thoughts and feelings about the size of his body which he believes is massive and ugly so that people always look at him and make fun of his size. Apparently, negative body image might be undergone by anybody who has negative thoughts and feelings about the size of his or her body. Therefore, it is important for anybody to develop positive thought and feeling about his or her own body and to value himself or herself not on the basis of physical appearance but on the basis of achievement.

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