An Analysis of Aggression in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*

Naning Choirunnisa

* Development of Human Resources Department, Universitas Airlangga, Jl. Airlangga No. 4-6, Surabaya, 60115, Indonesia
E-mail: naninge5@gmail.com

**Abstract**— This article aims to analyse the aggression that is done by the tributes of the hunger games; they are Katniss, Peeta, Cato, Clove, Glimmer, and Thresh. The writer focuses on pointing out two topics, firstly the depiction of aggression in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*, secondly the reason of aggression happened as depicted in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games*. The method used in this article is the concept of aggression by several experts to depict the aggression that is done by the tributes in the hunger games and the psychological approach of death instinct by Sigmund Freud and also the concept of aggression by Anderson & Bushman to find out the situational factors on the action of the aggression. The majority of the factors behind the action of aggression is following by the death instinct for destruction and the aggression is also because of the situational factors, such as aggressive cues, provocation, frustration, pain and discomfort, incentives, and drugs.

**Keywords**— Aggression; death instinct; situational factors.

---

I. **INTRODUCTION**

Violence has become the main issue that has been increased recently in Indonesia. Violence is much related with the act of aggression. Violence defines the violence as an action by using the intentional of physical power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, against a group or community which resulting in harm [15]. Violence is aggression which the goal is serious and extreme harm or death. All kind of violence can be defined as an aggression. But, aggression is not always violent [1]. It might be happened in a profession like a dentist intentionally gives a patient a shot of Novocain (it might be hurt), but the aim is for curing rather than hurting the patient.

In social psychology, the term of aggression is generally defined as any behavior that is intended to harm people who do not want to be harmed. Aggression is an external behavior that is visible, like shooting, hitting, slapping, or threatening someone. Aggression is a social behavior. It needs at least two persons. In addition, aggression is intended to hurt, it is not happened accidentally. Thus, an extreme and serious aggression may refer to violence [2].

Aggression on violence became a serious problem recently. It has several types; they are physical aggression, verbal aggression, and relational aggression. Physical aggression is an actual physical activities that is intentionally intended to harm people, animal, or object, like hitting, pinching, stabbing, threats with a weapon or object, any other rough treatment, or even murdering. Verbal aggression is the use of words to harm another persons, like teasing and threatening. Relational aggression is a nonphysical behavior that is intended to inflict or threaten damage to relationships [9].

In literature, any kind of phenomena in life can be portrayed in an art work, for example novels, poems, and films. In this article, the writer will analyze the aggression in a novel written by Suzanne Collins. She is the author of several novels for young readers [18]. Indeed, some critics are still appreciate the novel. Therefore, the writer will discuss the aggression in the hunger games based on Suzanne Collins’ first trilogy The Hunger Games where she reveals an outsize imagination for suffering and brutality in the post-apocalyptic nation of Panem, which formerly known as North America. In Panem, the hunger games are an annual game which one boy and one girl between the ages of 12 to 18 years from their respective districts around the Capitol compete in a deadly battle until only one winner remaining. The winner will be given a famous and prosperous life [7].
The Hunger Games presents on aggression that refers to violence. Violence is any aggressive behavior to make harm physically, such as injury or death [5]. Therefore, a theory of death instinct (thanatos) by Sigmund Freud and the concept of aggression by Anderson & Bushman are used to explain the reason of the tributes, in this case Katniss, Peeta, Cato, Glimmer, Clove, and Thresh, do the aggression and violence actions. The writer will discuss deeper about the reasons of people develop behaviors intended to hurt others as shown in The Hunger Games.

II. Method

The method used by the writer in conducting the research is by library research. The writer did close reading of the novel to determine the main issue in the novel. The main issues are collected and proposed into a topic of the study. After the topic is selected, the writer makes two statements of problem; first, the depiction of aggression and second, the factors that influence aggression in The Hunger Games. Then, the writer does searching the related information about concept of the topic, they are a concept of aggression and a theory of death instinct (thanatos) by Sigmund Freud and also added with concept of aggression by Anderson & Bushman. The data collected from the novel The Hunger Games including the phrases, dialogues, or monologues in which reveal thought, attitude, speech, and action that reflects the idea of aggression will be analyzed deeper. Therefore, the synchronization of analysis and related concept is arranged to get the conclusion.

III. Results And Discussion

Concept of Aggression

Aggression is an action that harms person or object. Aggression as behaviors intended intentionally to harm another person physically or psychologically or to destroy or to take that person’s property [5]. Aggression can be started from the “low-level” acts, such as being impolite, making minor threats, and violating minor rules that are generally annoying acts. Aggression can also be hostile, instrumental, or reactive. Hostile has the main purpose to harm or suffer the victim. Hostile aggression is driven by arousal, impulsivity, and immediate to situational provocation. It may be closer to the kinds of aggression identified by instinct theories. It includes irritable aggression. Instrumental aggression refers to unprovoked aggression used more force to get non-aggressive actions from the victim. Instrumental aggression is a learned response where aggression is a mechanism for achieving certain goals. In this mode aggression is just another way of getting what you want or avoiding being criticised by authority or gaining normal awards. i.e., a child beats another child to take some money. So, instrumental aggression is not commonly followed by emotional feeling. It is just used as a way to get something else. Instrumental aggression involves defensive action, fight to get authority or want to dominate others [8]. While reactive aggression called as provoked aggression. It refers to an impulsive angry retaliation [4].

Aggression that is used to survive depends on the individual organisms securing environmental resources. i.e., water as resources is freely available in humid country, so it does not need to fight to get it. The predatory species always hunt to get their food, on the contrary the prey (food) may resist themselves. Both predators and prey may engage in aggressive attack and defensive actions in this case. Furthermore, in his term of “intra-specific interactions”, as individuals of the same species often have to compete for resources such as food or shelter. On the other hand, in intra-specific antagonism aggression may occur in competition for social resources, i.e., mating partners or alienating [9]. Aggression has goals to hurt, to harm or to destroy others and to release action of frustration, anger, or bad feeling.

Physical Aggression

Physical aggression is an actual physical activities that is intended to harm another person, animal, or object intentionally. Physical aggression is extremely high end of the aggression i.e., threats with a weapon or object, any other rough treatment, or even murder [3]. The physical aggression in the novel is depicted by Katniss Everdeen, a tribute from district twelve, in the quotation below.

It’s excellent shooting. I turn to the Game makers. A few are nodding approval, but the majority of them are fixated on a roast pig that has just arrived at their banquet table. Suddenly I am furious, that with my life on the line, they don’t even have the decency to pay attention to me. That I’m being upstaged by a dead pig. My heart starts to pound, I can feel my face burning. Without thinking, I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Game makers’ table. I hear shouts of alarm as people stumble back. The arrow skewers the apple in the pig’s mouth and pins it to the wall behind it. Everyone stares at me in disbelief. (ch.7, pp.101-102)

Physical aggression is the most visible violence. Physical aggression uses intentionally physical power to harm or destroy object or person. From the words ‘I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Game makers’ table’ clearly shows the depiction of physical aggression which is done by Katniss. Aggression is an action that harms a
person or object [15]. From the words ‘The arrow skewers the apple in the pig’s mouth and pins it to the wall behind it’ has been the part that are showing the purpose of aggression which is to harm or to destroy something. The object that is destroyed here is the apple that is in the pig’s mouth.

Katniss does her aggression is supported by the presence of weapon, that are bow and arrows. This weapon smoothens her to attack the game makers who do not give attention to her talent. Furthermore, the bow and the arrows were existed in her hand at that time. So it is easy to her to use it. Even it happens beyond her awareness to use the arrows to attack the game makers.

Her aggression is categorized into hostile aggression. Hostile has the main purpose to harm or suffer the victim. Hostile aggression includes irritable aggression [8]. Hence Katniss does the aggression is motivated by her anger feeling and her revenge because she does not get any attention from the game makers. Without thinking any longer she shoots the apple in mouth of the dead pig on the table of the game makers. So all the game makers now give her full consideration.

**Verbal aggression**

Verbal aggression threatens to destroy and use words to harm other people [11].

Verbal aggression includes acts such as insulting with bad language, displaying anger, threatening, swearing and being sarcastic all in order to cause emotional and psychological pain (Sameer & Jamia 2007), while National Youth Violence Prevention Research Centre (2002) state that verbal aggression includes such behaviors as threatening, intimidating others and engaging in malicious teasing and name-calling [16].

Teasing is categorized as one of the type of verbal aggression. Teasing is considered to be “disrespectful form[s] of cruelty”. Teasing can be bullying or harassment [12].

“Forget it, District Twelve. We’re going to kill you. Just like we did your pathetic little ally . . . what was her name? The one who hopped around in the trees? Rue? Well, first Rue, then you, and then I think we’ll just let nature take care of Lover Boy. How does that sound?” Clove asks. “Now, where to start?” (ch.21, p.285)

From the quotation above, the words ‘We’re going to kill you. Just like we did your pathetic little ally’ depict the threatening action which is done by Clove. She says that she wants to kill Katniss like she did to Rue. Those words also explain the purpose of verbal aggression, sarcastic action which is done to cause emotional and psychological pain of the target.

From the words ‘your pathetic little ally . . . what was her name? The one who hopped around in the trees? Rue?’ clearly depict that Clove has insulted Rue as a trifle tribute who is able to kill every time. She says so to make Katniss feels more furious and this will make Clove satisfies herself with her verbal aggression. As we know that the goal of verbal aggression is to harm the target by using some words. Furthermore, Clove also tries to make her target feeling afraid of her. It is shown from the words ‘Forget it, District Twelve’. It means that she makes sure that Katniss will not be able to go home to her district again because she will die. The words ‘your pathetic little ally’ also said by Clove to tease Katniss. She calls Rue not by her name but she makes her own name calling for Rue. It depicts the insulting action which is done by Clove. Besides, she also teases Katniss by giving a name-calling to Peeta with ‘lover boy’. As the purpose of verbal aggression is to make the target furious and hurt psychologically. The words ‘Now, where to start?’ Also depicts her teasing before she begins her aggression to Katniss. The point is she wants to make Katniss being scared with all her actions and it results on satisfying and making pleasure to herself.

**Factors Influencing Aggression**

**Drives and Death Instinct**

Drive derived from a German word Trieb which refers to a stimulus within person. This word is generally understood as instinct, inborn patterns of behavior that are biologically determined rather than learned with its characteristics that are both physical (bodily needs) and psychological (wishes). Drives operate as a constant motivational force. Freud defines that drives consists of two parts; sex (eros) and aggression (thanatos) [17].

Death Instinct is the concept which made by a psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud. Freud thinks that human born with a drive, called the Thanatos. Thanatos is the instinct toward destruction and death [6]. Freud stated that thanatos as “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things”. Thanatos can be directed toward the self that is resulting in self-injury or even death, it can be also directed toward others that is resulting in aggression [14].

There are some ways to shift the strength of death instinct (thanatos). Those are through defense mechanism of sublimation, displacement, and chatharsis. Sublimation as “a
process by which unacceptable drives are channeled into socially acceptable alternatives.” i.e., children can drain or sublimate their aggressiveness drive toward positive activities, such as sports which can train physically. Displacement is defined when a children tend to displace their aggressiveness drive toward other things. This is happened because they can not express their aggressiveness drive directly toward person that caused frustration [10].

Id, ego, and Super ego

To describe the structure of personality, Freud develops three components of human psychic as Id, Ego, and Super ego. The id is the origin of personality. The Id is beyond conscious awareness. It operates based on the pleasure principle, which is aimed to reduce the tension and get the satisfaction of physical drives, involving sex and hunger, or primitive psychological needs, such as comfort and protection from danger. The Id satisfies its needs without consideration whereas it is right or wrong. Id is the place where instincts existed, which consists of instinct toward life, called Eros, and instinct toward destructiveness and death, called Thanatos. The Id is powered by libido, involves sexual instinct or desire [13].

The ego works based on the reality principle. It prevents the fulfillment of the demand of the id until an appropriate object is found that will allow gratification without harmful side effects. The instinctual energy from the id will be controlled based on reality of the individual safety and the social factors. The ego as “a coherent organization of mental process that develops out of the id energy, has access to consciousness, and is devoted to contacting reality for the purpose of satisfying id needs”. The ego operates through secondary process, i.e. thinking, evaluating, planning, and decision making. It is the center of reason, reality-testing, and commonsense [13].

Psychological Factor

In the theory of personality, Sigmund Freud categorizes human’s level of awareness into three types; conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. Freud declares that unconscious motivated a lot of our behaviors. He explains that unconscious is as “a part of the personality of which a person is not aware.” While the conscious is just the upper of our psychological [13]. Thus, instinctual drives that Freud proposed into two parts, eros and thanatos, exist in unconscious. Eros and thanatos are hidden from conscious awareness because they will cause pain in our lives. According to Freud, unconscious considered as “safe haven” of threatening events.

Aggression is firstly depicted by Katniss Everdeen, a tribute from district twelve, in the training season of the hunger games. When she shows her talent in front of the game makers in an excellent shooting, unfortunately she does not receive a full attention from the game makers. This makes her becomes mad and conduct the aggression towards the game makers to express her anger feeling.

It’s excellent shooting. I turn to the Game makers. A few are nodding approval, but the majority of them are fixated on a roast pig that has just arrived at their banquet table. Suddenly I am furious, that with my life on the line, they don’t even have the decency to pay attention to me. That I’ m being upstaged by a dead pig. My heart starts to pound, I can feel my face burning. Without thinking, I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Gamemakers’ table. I hear shouts of alarm as people stumble back. The arrow skewers the apple in the pig’s mouth and pins it to the wall behind it. Everyone stares at me in disbelief. “Thank you for your consideration,” I say. Then I give a slight bow and walk straight toward the exit without being dismissed. (ch.7, pp.101-102)

From the psychological perspectives, Freud states that human born with its death instinct that leads to destructiveness. From the words ‘Without thinking, I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Game makers’ table’ clearly shows the purpose of the death instinct. The words ‘without thinking’, describes her unconscious that Freud said it is the major driving power of death instinct.

From the words ‘Thank you for your consideration’, shows the id of hers. She gets the attention from the game makers. It means this is her purpose to reach the satisfaction and pleasure. As the id works based on the pleasure principle. Therefore, the Id satisfies its needs without consideration whether it is right or wrong [17].

Situational Factors

There are some situational factors which is linked with aggression, they are aggressive cues, provocation, frustration, pain and discomfort, drugs, and incentives. Aggressive cues are related to objects that influencing on aggression. Aggressive cues are exist in human memory. Therefore, the existence of weapons or any other things that can be used to harm can automatically prime aggressive thought that causing on aggression in reality. Interpersonal provocation is one of the factors that influencing on human aggression. Provocations involved unpleasant treatment such as any rough treatment of verbal aggression and physical aggression and one’s interfere to reach the goal. Frustration is an obstacle to
reach the goal. Most of the actions of provocation can be the type of frustration. Furthermore, frustration will identify someone who causes its failure and it is succeed to increase the aggression against someone who is responsible of this frustration and even someone who is not responsible for this failure too. Next factor is pain and discomfort, any discomfort feeling or ‘non social aversive condition’, i.e., hot temperatures, noises, and unpleasant odors can increase aggression. Berkowitz et al. state that the worse unpleasant condition such as pain will also produce on aggression. Then, drugs is also one of the factor to the aggression. Any kind of drugs and alcohol lead to aggression. This kind of aggression tends to be indirect rather that direct. Incentives almost have the same purpose with instrumental aggression. It is an urge to own someone’s things. More valuable the object, more people want to get it. Therefore, it produces on aggression [1].

Aggression which is done by the tributes can be caused by the situational factors including the aggressive cues, provocation, frustration, pain and discomfort, drugs, and incentives. This concept of aggression is taken by the explanation of Anderson & Bushman. Situational factors which are influencing the aggression of the tributes is firstly depicted by Katniss Everdeen, a tribute from district twelve. She attacks the game makers because she does not get the attention from them and any other situational factors also can be influencing her indeed. It is shown in the quotation below:

*It’s excellent shooting. I turn to the Game makers. A few are nodding approval, but the majority of them are fixated on a roast pig that has just arrived at their banquet table. Suddenly I am furious, that with my life on the line, they don’t even have the decency to pay attention to me. That I’m being upstaged by a dead pig. My heart starts to pound, I can feel my face burning. Without thinking, I pull an arrow from my quiver and send it straight at the Game makers’ table. I hear shouts of alarm as people stumble back. The arrow skewers the apple in the pig’s mouth and pins it to the wall behind it. Everyone stares at me in disbelief. “Thank you for your consideration,” I say. Then I give a slight bow and walk straight toward the exit without being dismissed.* (ch.7, pp.101-102)

From the quotation above, there are several situational factors of causing violence that will be explained. The words ‘Suddenly I am furious, that with my life on the line, they don’t even have the decency to pay attention to me’ shows the anger feeling that becomes the reason of her to do the aggression. Anger allows person to defend their aggressive intention over time [1]. It is shown from the words ‘I give a slight bow and walk straight toward the exit without being dismissed’. She still feels angry till go out without given a permission from them. It is because she has been furious being ignored by several game makers that should give attention to her.

From the words ‘That I’m being upstaged by a dead pig’ shows her revenge toward the game makers who have compare her with a dead pig while they all are more attentive to a dead pig than to her. Therefore, this feeling influences her to do aggression as a retaliation.

Anger may give a justification of a revenge attack [1]. Thus, they argue that aggressive behavior has the main energy or source from anger feeling. Furthermore, ‘an arrow’ which is provided in the arena with game makers can also be one of the factor that influencing on her aggression. The arrows indicates on the aggressive cues. Aggressive cues exist in human memory and its existence can automatically prime aggressive thought that causing on aggression in reality.

**IV. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the analysis explained in the discussion, there are two main conclusions about aggression depicted by the tributes of The Hunger Games since in the training until in the arena, they are influenced by two factors: aggression because of death instinct and aggression because of the situational factor. Aggression which is done by the tributes is generally influenced by death instinct. Death instinct as behaviors intended intentionally to harm another person physically or psychologically or to destroy or to take that person’s property clearly depicted in the hunger games. Death instinct which has the main purpose of destruction may leads people to do aggression because of their pleasure. Death instinct can be directed toward the self that is resulting in self-injury or even death, it can be also directed toward others that is resulting in aggression. The tributes’ actions from physical aggression until verbal aggression show the purpose of the aggression which is harming others or objects. The tributes do the aggression beyond their conscious. The unconscious part supports their Id works. The Id works based on pleasure principle. It will develop death instinct to hurt others or to destroy anything. Therefore aggression is done to satisfy their desire. By expressing their destructive instinct, they can reach their pleasure and satisfaction.

Aggression which is done by the tributes is also much influenced by the situational factors; aggressive cues, provocation, frustration, pain and discomfort, and incentives. First, the presence of weapon may lead the tributes to do aggression. The game makers of the hunger games provide the weapon supply for the tributes so that they can survive in the arena. It can be seen that the presence of weapon much influence them to be aggressive and attack others. On the other side, weapon can be used as a defensive action, but, they
still tend to use violence to protect themselves from dangerous. Second, provocation may lead the tributes to do aggression. Provocation includes unpleasant treatment such as any rough treatment of verbal aggression and physical aggression and one’s interfere to reach the goal. The third is frustration. Frustration much influences the tributes to do the aggression. It happened if someone is blocked by something to reach its goal, need, want, and hope. The tributes do the aggression as a response toward their frustration. It commonly accompanied by a strong anger feeling. Fourth, Pain and discomfort may also influence the tributes of the hunger games to do the aggression. Pain commonly comes when someone feels discomfort and it urges them to do the aggression toward anything around them. Therefore, pain and discomfort become one of the factors influencing the tributes to do the aggression. The last is incentives. Incentives much influence the tributes to attack others, but, it is not aimed to hurt or destroy other physically or verbally. It generally does because of the desire to own the other’s thing. Hence, they do the aggression to reach their goal. The last factor/reason that much influences the tributes to act aggressive in almost every single aggression is anger. When they feel angry, they must have a feeling of aggressing, slamming, and destroying anything which reflected as bad behavior, so they express it a response of anger feeling. Anger comes from any factors; hurt physically, disappointment, humiliation, threat, and other rough treatments. Those actions can prime an aggression happened. Moreover, anger has five roles in its process; anger as a revenge attack, anger allows person to defend their aggressive intention over time, anger primes aggressive thoughts, scripts, and related with any expressive motor behavior, and anger is the main energy or source for aggressive behavior.

To conclude, the aggression which is done by the tributes lead to violence which has an extreme physical harm as its goal, such as injury or even death. This happened only in physical aggression and their aggression is influenced by psychological and situational factors.

V. REFERENCES