

Emily Gold's Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Jodi Picoult's *The Pact*

Sugiarto, A.¹ and Febrinia, P.²

^{1,2}English Department, Faculty of Letters, Petra Christian University, Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, East Java, INDONESIA

E-mails: nyz_octo@yahoo.com, priskafebrinia@peter.petra.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This article aims to discuss Emily Gold's Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, how it affects her way of viewing expectations coming from people around her, and the effects of the failure in fulfilling the expectations. It is found that Emily's conditions as a PTSD sufferer makes her to perceive the expectations as rules to be obeyed and also as her redemption. When she fails to fulfill the expectations, she uses self-injury as her way of shouting out the pain and to punish herself. Later, when self-injury fails to accommodate her pain and anxiety, she decides to commit suicide to end her sufferings. In conclusion, Emily's traumatic experience, and later her mental condition as a PTSD sufferer give a tremendous impact towards her way of perceiving expectations coming from people around her.

Key words: PTSD, traumatic experience, expectation, self-injury, suicide

Young adult literature is one form of literary works which put its focus on "the experience and growth of its teenage protagonist(s), whose dramatized choices, actions, and concerns drive the story, and it is narrated with relative immediacy to that teenage perspective" (Klein, 2009, para 1). Thus, young adult literature takes the point of view of teenagers. Unfortunately, there is a stereotype and prejudice about young adult literature that "books angled at the younger set are simply not quite the same thing as books aimed at adults: not quite as challenging to write, not quite as challenging to read" (Johnson, 2012, para 5). Young adult literature is often underestimated and considered as literary works which has no serious issues in it since it only concentrates on teenagers.

Jodi Picoult herself has written eighteen novels and all of them are bestselling novels. She also has won many awards during her career as an author. One of her books, *My Sister's Keeper* has made into movie and *The Pact* has been made into television movie. Up to now, her books have been translated into thirty four languages in thirty five countries (Picoult, 2012). *The Pact*, among all novels she wrote, is interesting because Emily Gold's struggles are written very well here. Her efforts to cope with her trauma and PTSD, her way of pushing herself to look bright and fine in front of people, her silence during her life regarding her trauma, and her pregnancy which breaks her last defense towards the trauma are all mixed into a heartbreaking story.

In this paper, first, I will talk about Emily Gold's PTSD. Secondly, I will discuss the expectations coming from her parents and Chris. Next, I will also talk about Emily's perception towards the expectations, especially in her condition as a PTSD sufferer. And lastly, I will discuss the effects of her failure in fulfilling the expectations, which are very complicated since she does not react the same way as normal people.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD is a term for an anxiety disorder occurred to people who suffer from a traumatic experience. Usually, PTSD is a result from "exposure to an overwhelmingly stressful event or series of events, such as war, sexual abuse/assault, stalking, captivity, or domestic violence" ("Sexual Harrasment", 2010, para 1).

PTSD sufferers often repress the memories of the traumatic experience they face, and the repression is often relieved through re-experiencing symptoms. They usually "experiencing bad dreams and nightmares about the event" ("Understanding and Coping", 2011, para 13). The survivor might also experience flashbacks, or "Getting emotionally upset when reminded of the trauma" ("Understanding and Coping", 2011, para 13) and "reacting physically when reminded of the trauma" ("Understanding and Coping, 2011, para 13). Another PTSD symptom is avoidance symptoms, in

which the survivor might avoid thoughts, feelings, and sensations related to the trauma. Usually, the survivor also has “trouble remembering important parts of what happened during the trauma” (“Understanding and Coping”, 2011, para 14).

The PTSD sufferers may feel extreme guilt and shame about themselves, as what is said that they may “blame themselves for what happened” (Long, 2012, para 6). Therefore, they usually remain silent about what happened to their lives. They most often “adopt a code of silence about their trauma, fearful of being judged or fearful of re-experiencing the traumatic event” (“PTSD in the Family?”, n.d., para 5). For them, it is hard to speak up and tell somebody about the pain they experienced.

As the result of the accumulation of pain and anxiety, self-mutilation or self-harm is commonly done by PTSD sufferers. Joe Collins (2012) said that “Self-mutilation, which can be burning or cutting of oneself, can be a symptom of PTSD sufferers” (para 56). PTSD sufferers do self-harm because they feel extreme amount of pain. Self-harm can also be said as “way of coping with, and expressing (either to one’s self or to another person), very deep distress” (Abrahams, 2006, p. 2). Many of those who self-injure are doing so as a means to keep their problems to themselves, and to relieve anxiety. According to Janice McLane, “extremity is the only possibility for the expression and ultimate ending of pain” (cited in Mazelis, 2008, para 19).

Usually, someone does self-harm in order to “express emotions they cannot speak about” (Abrahams, 2006, p. 2). Therefore, they do self-harm in order to express what is buried deep down. For some other people, self-harm can be seen as “an escape from certain situations in their lives, or as a ‘need’ to punish themselves because of some associated painful early experience like, for example, abuse in childhood” (Abrahams, 2006, p. 7). They do forms of self-harm to remove the ‘dirty’ feelings they endure which are caused by those painful experiences. For self-harm, blood is seen as “a very visible sign of being alive, being punished, making you ill and losing more blood means being ‘good’ at self-harm” (Abrahams, 2006, p. 8).

Someone who does self-injury can have a greater risk in committing suicide. There are factors which cause the thought of suicide to come up, such as “life history – for example having a traumatic experience during childhood” (“Suicide”, 2011, para 2) and “mental health - for example developing a serious mental health condition, such as schizophrenia” (“Suicide”, 2011, para 2). Having these problems, “one or more stressful events may push a person “over the edge” and lead to suicidal thinking and behavior” (“Suicide”, 2011, para 3). Besides, usually “suicide is a thought to be an exit of hopelessness and despair and if a person is full of hopelessness, suicidal risks increases significantly” (Chatterjee and Basu, 2010, para 2).

Suicidal phenomena in self-injury can be classified into three primary types. As Nock (2010) said, the three types are “suicide ideation refers to having thoughts about killing oneself; a suicide plan refers to the consideration of a specific method through which one intends to die; and a suicide attempt refers to engagement in potentially self-injurious behavior in which there is some intent to die” (para 7). Therefore, someone who does self-injury and has the thought of killing himself will have done these three things besides hurting themselves.

EMILY GOLD’S POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

I will discuss Emily Gold’s posttraumatic stress disorder. Especially, in this case, how her condition as a PTSD sufferer affects her perceptions of expectations given by people around her. I will also talk about the effects of her failure in fulfilling the expectations, in which will be explained why in the end she chooses to end her life.

Emily Gold’s Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

When Emily was still little, she was molested by a McDonald’s worker when she is dared by Chris to enter men’s bathroom. This experience she encounters brings a horror to Emily. After the molestation, she also never tells anybody the fact of it, since PTSD sufferer usually feel ashamed and guilty of what happened to her.

‘Well,’ he said. ‘What have we here?’

Emily felt her legs trembling. ‘I – I must have gone in the wrong one,’ she stuttered. She whirled, heading for the door, but he grabbed her wrist.

‘Oh, yeah?’ he said, his voice curling like smoke about her, pulling her closer. ‘How do you

know it's the wrong one?'

He pushed her up against the door, barring anyone else's entrance. Holding her hands over her head, he slid his hand up her shirt. 'No titties,' he said. 'Might be a man.' Then he slipped his hand under the elastic of her shorts and rubbed his fingers between her clamped legs. 'Don't feel no prick either, though,' he said. He leaned forward, so close that she could smell his breath. 'Gotta make sure,' he said, and he jammed his finger inside her.

(Picoult, p. 220-221)

This traumatic experience is the trigger of Emily Gold's PTSD. She still cannot deal with the traumatic experience and it keeps haunting her for years. PTSD is a result of an "exposure to an overwhelmingly stressful event or series of events" ("Sexual Harrasment", 2010, para 1). Emily Gold, in the story, also has been exposed to a traumatic experience which she can never forget, which is the molestation. It brings horror towards her life. In the end, the molestation impacts her life tremendously since she can never deal with it.

As the traumatic experience is really painful for Emily, she tries to repress memories of the trauma, but the repression itself is relieved through re-experiencing symptoms. People who are PTSD sufferers usually "experiencing bad dreams and nightmares about the event" ("Understanding and Coping", 2011, para 13).

She was wearing something with elastic at the waist; it snapped back against her hips. There were the familiar sensations of his fingernails scratching at her, his palms grinding up against her nipples, the burning between her legs. But this time there was more. The droning whirr of-what?-bees? The tang of disinfectant. And the unmistakable scent of a kitchen, of something being fried in grease.

Rattled, Emily woke up, unable to remember what it was that had left her so alert and tense that going back to sleep was impossibility. (Picoult, p. 215)

From the quotation, it can be seen that Emily still has nightmares about the molestation although it happened eight years ago. The quotation also shows another PTSD symptom which Emily experienced, which is avoidance of thoughts and feelings related to the traumas. The sufferer usually has "trouble remembering important parts of what happened during the trauma" ("Understanding and Coping", 2011, para 14). It can be seen that Emily cannot remember her dream which makes her feel tense. Avoidance is one of the ways for PTSD sufferers to let go of the pain and anxiety caused by the trauma.

When being reminded of the trauma, whether it is by the sentence people say, or a treatment by another person, Emily tends to react emotionally. When she is going to have an abortion, she gets panic when the doctor is a man and he says the exact same words as the one who molested her.

"Well," he said, "what have we got here?"

Well. What have we got here?

Then he reached under the gown, just like the other had, after saying that same awful thing, and slid his fingers into her. Emily began to kick, her ankles knocking aside the stirrups, her foot striking the doctor on the side of the head as he cautiously backed away. (Picoult, p. 253-254)

The quotation shows the way Emily reacts towards the doctor's treatment. As what is stated in the theory, PTSD sufferers are easily "Getting emotionally upset when reminded of the trauma" ("Understanding and Coping", 2011, para 13) and "reacting physically when reminded of the trauma" ("Understanding and Coping", 2011, para 13). Whenever Emily is touched by men, or if there are words said by another man which reminds her to the molestation, such as what is said by the doctor who would have done her abortion, Emily tends to be panic.

Expectations towards Emily Gold

On the previous discussion, it is found that Emily Gold experienced PTSD symptoms. In this part, I will talk about expectations coming from people around her, such as her parents, Michael and Melanie Gold, and her boyfriend, Chris Harte.

The first expectation comes from Emily's parents, Melanie and Michael Gold. They expect Emily to be good in academic and non-academic achievement. As a parent, Michael and Melanie hope that one day in the future, Emily will be successful and has a bright future, especially in

developing her talent in art. 'We were. We certainly praised academic success and helped her further her interest in art,' 'Would you say it was important to Emily to meet your expectations?' 'I think so. She knew we were proud of her.' (Picoult, p. 394). This quotation confirms that Melanie Gold, as Emily's mother always tries to help Emily in developing her interest in art, and also praise her when she is succeed in her study.

The second form of Michael and Melanie Gold's expectations of Emily is in terms of her attitude as a daughter. They do not expect Emily to fall into things which common teenagers easily fall into, such as pornography, free sex, drugs, or alcohol. "On the surface, Em had been busy and bright, a beautiful tempest of a teenager. He'd liked what he'd seen, so he never thought to dig deeper. Too frightening to unearth the specters of drugs, of sex, of adult choices that he didn't yet want her to be making." (Picoult, p. 63) The quotation shows how Michael Gold, as Emily's father, also prefers to see Emily's positive side rather than the possibilities that her daughter might also have been involved in terrible cases, and might have decided to do things Michael and Melanie never want her to do, such as sex, drugs, or any other things.

The last expectation coming from Melanie and Michael Gold is in term of choosing a partner of life. As a parent, Michael and Melanie hope that Emily can get the best man to accompany her in life. 'But I couldn't think of anyone else I'd rather have Emily explore all that with. It was going to happen at some point, and I knew and trusted Chris. I certainly trusted him with the most important thing in my life – my daughter.' (Picoult, p. 436). Both Melanie and Michael believe that Chris will be a perfect guy staying on Emily's side, and Chris will not drive Emily to fall into awful things, such as alcohol, drugs, or free sex.

Chris, as Emily's boyfriend, also has an expectation towards Emily. He wishes, as his girlfriend, Emily will have sex with him. He thinks it is common for a couple who loves each other to have sex, especially they are now seventeen years old, and they have been in the relationship for three years 'I want you so bad, Em,' Chris whispered against her neck, and she nodded. She wanted Chris too. Just not quite in the same way. (Picoult, p. 212)

Emily Gold's perceptions in dealing with the expectations

Previously, it is found that there are expectations coming from Emily Gold's parents and boyfriend. In this part, I will talk about the ways Emily perceives those expectations as a PTSD sufferer, which is different from common people who deal with expectations from their parents or another person in their lives.

As a PTSD sufferer, Emily Gold still cannot deal with the traumatic experience she once encountered. Emily's life is still tremendously affected by PTSD symptoms she has. One of them is in term of seeing the traumatic experience itself. The sufferers of PTSD may "blame themselves for what happened and begin to feel that they could have done something to change the course of the event" (Long, 2012, para 6). The PTSD sufferers usually see themselves as the one who is guilty in the event which caused their trauma. "Her fault because she attracted that disgusting man's attention when she was still so young" (Picoult, p. 254). Emily often blames herself for things happened to her. It is affected by the guilt she feels regarding the molestation. The existence of this 'sinful' feeling also affirms Emily's tendency to hide the truth from any other people.

The guilty feeling caused by the molestation affects Emily's way of viewing herself. Emily continually has a poor image of herself. She considers herself as dirty, and the worst part is that she is the one who lets the molestation to happen. Therefore, it is normal for her to be treated unpleasantly. Also, she considers misery happens in her life as something which should happen to someone like her, who is imperfect and dirty. "She was not perfect, far from it, and what you saw on the outside was not what you really were getting. Deep down, she was dirty, and this was the kind of thing that happened to girls like her" (Picoult, p. 250).

Based on that guilty and sinful feeling, Emily builds two kinds of perception in viewing the expectations given by her parents and Chris Harte. First of all, Emily perceives the expectations given to her as rules which she has to obey, no matter how hard it is to be accomplished. Emily turned to the nurse. 'I can't have this baby,' she said flatly. 'I'm going to college next year.' (Picoult, p. 250)

. In response to her pregnancy, Emily feels that she cannot have a baby or tell Chris about it because she has to go to the college soon after she graduates from high school, as what her parents want her to be. As a person with PTSD, she has a fear to tell the truth about her trauma to anyone,

even the closest one. PTSD sufferers most often “adopt a code of silence about their trauma, fearful of being judged or fearful of re-experiencing the traumatic event” (“PTSD in the Family?”, n.d., para 5). They are too afraid of the consequences that might happen. That is why Emily keeps pushing herself in doing her parents’ expectations. In this case, the best way to avoid the truth to be revealed is to get rid of the baby and go to college, pretending as if nothing happened. She thinks if she becomes a perfect daughter with a good achievement at school, a girl who never falls into drugs, alcohol, or another awful problem, and if she has a wonderful love relationship, her parents will see that her life goes perfectly fine. Therefore, her secret will just be safe. That is why PTSD is often said as a silent disease because it is not easy for PTSD sufferers to reveal the truth to people around them, even the closest one. They are too afraid of the judgments that people may attach to them after hearing the story. Therefore, they usually choose to remain silent rather than telling the truth.

Secondly, Emily also perceives the expectations as her redemption. As the result of Emily’s guilty feeling and poor image of self, she keeps fulfilling Chris’ expectations in order to make her feel better. That is why, even when Chris says bad words towards her, she still feels she can stand it. By always being with Chris and fulfilling what Chris wants, Emily can redeem herself a little by a little. “He’d yelled at her when she pulled away; once he had even called her a cocktease. But Emily didn’t mind, because the alternative was having Chris ask what was the matter. When that happened, she went silent, unwilling and unable to hurt him with the truth.” (Picoult, p.173). Whenever Chris asks her about the truth, Emily chooses to remain silent because the truth is too shameful to be shared. She cannot endure the pain of hurting her parents and Chris when she reveals the truth.

Since Emily perceives the fulfillment of the expectations as the way to redeem her ‘sin’, she tries all she can do to fulfill Chris’ expectation. Emily just follows things that are requested by him. After the day when Emily’s relationship and Chris’ is fixed, Emily agreed to Chris’ request to have sex with him, although deep down she feels that it is not right. ‘Em,’ he said, sweat standing out on his brow. ‘Do you want to do this?’ He would stop, she realized, if she shook her head. But she considered that what she wanted and what Chris wanted were inextricably tangled, and knew that he wanted this more than anything. (Picoult, p. 219) In this quotation, Emily regards what she wanted and what Chris wanted as inextricably tangled. What Chris wants is also what she wants, no matter how awful it is for her. Emily even does not care about her own feelings. Fulfilling what Chris and her parents want makes her feel a lot better, as if by doing so she can forgive herself a little bit.

The effects of Emily Gold’s Failures in Fulfilling the Expectations

Emily uses self-injury as the way to express the pain and emotion she cannot say out loud and also as the punishment for herself. As what is said by Joe Collins (2012), “Self-mutilation, which can be burning or cutting of oneself, can be a symptom of PTSD sufferers” (para 56).

First, Emily uses self-injury as the way to shout out the pain she cannot say to people around her.

Emily glanced down at the sharp pain in her forearm to find that she was still holding the jagged edge of the paper clip. Curiously, she drew it over her skin, scratching the surface. The red line grew brighter when she traced a second time, and a third. She dug deeper and deeper until she was bleeding, until Chris’s initials were carved hard enough into her arm to leave a scar. (Picoult, p. 181)

According to Janice McLane, “extremity is the only possibility for the expression and ultimate ending of pain” (cited in Mazelis, 2008, para 19). For Emily, scratching herself with Chris’ initial is like what Janice McLane said, to shout out the pain she feels for always becoming what her parents and Chris want her to be without even seeing the way to end it.

Secondly, Emily also uses self-injury as the way of punishing self. For some people, self-harm can be seen as “an escape from certain situations in their lives, or as a ‘need’ to punish themselves because of some associated painful early experience like, for example, abuse in childhood” (Abrahams, 2006, p. 7). “She leaned back her head and let the water soothe her scalp. Then she picked up the soap and scrubbed at her skin until some spots were bleeding, but she still could not make herself feel clean.” (Picoult, p. 210) It can be seen that although Emily has scrubbed her skin until bleeding, she still cannot feel clean and she is not satisfied yet. She still cannot let go of the dirty and guilty feeling related to the molestation. For people who are self-injury, blood is seen as “a very visible sign of being alive, being punished, making you ill and losing more blood means

being 'good' at self-harm" (Abrahams, 2006, p. 8). Emily feels that by hurting herself until bleeding, she has punished herself hard enough and thus, it reduces the anxiety in her mind.

When the method of self-injury has failed to be the way of Emily to cope with the pain, she starts to develop the thoughts of killing herself. It is triggered by the truth about her pregnancy, which ruins everything, especially when she knows she cannot do the abortion. There are factors which cause the thought of suicide to come up, such as "life history – for example having a traumatic experience during childhood" ("Suicide", 2011, para 2) and "mental health – for example developing a serious mental health condition, such as schizophrenia" ("Suicide", 2011, para 2). With the complexity of someone's mind suffers from traumatic experience and mental health, "one or more stressful events may push a person "over the edge" and lead to suicidal thinking and behavior" ("Suicide", 2011, para 3). Emily, having the negative thoughts in her mind affected by her traumatic experience and mental health issue, is being pushed over the edge by the truth of her pregnancy and the fact that she fails to get rid of the baby. "Everyone would find out soon enough, anyway. She was well and neatly trapped, with only one small and hidden exit, so dark and buried that most people never even considered breaching its hatch" (Picoult, p. 254). It is also said that "suicide is a thought to be an exit of hopelessness and despair and if a person is full of hopelessness, suicidal risks increases significantly" (Chatterjee and Basu, 2010, para 2). Carrying the baby in her womb, and being failed in abortion, Emily sees no way out of her problem. In the end, she thinks that death will be the only answer of her problem.

As the pressure is getting harder on Emily, she starts to have the thought of killing herself. As Nock (2010) said, one of the three types of self-injury which has suicide intention is suicide ideation in which the person has "thoughts about killing oneself" (para 7). 'What are you thinking about?' 'Drowning,' she said softly. 'Walking in there until it was over my head. Very peaceful.' (Picoult, p. 253). The fact of the molestation is still too overwhelming for Emily. Now, she has to deal with the pressure coming from her pregnancy. It makes Emily start to lose hope and see death as the only option to end things peacefully.

Since no one recognizes Emily's condition, her condition is getting worse. Emily's suicide ideation then develops into a suicide plan which grows in her mind. As Nock (2010) said, another type of self-injury with a suicide intention is a suicide plan which refers to "the consideration of a specific method through which one intends to die" (para 7). Emily, in this case, discusses her grand plan to end her life. 'It might hurt,' Emily said meekly. 'I just want it to be over right away.' Chris looked at her. *Before you can change your mind*, he thought, *or I can change it for you*. 'I was thinking of a gun,' she said. (Picoult, p. 347)

In the end, people who are self-injury and have the tendency to commit suicide will do suicide attempt, which is an "engagement in potentially self-injurious behavior in which there is some intent to die" (Nock, 2010, para 7). In this case, Emily, as what is planned before, asks Chris to be the executor. "She brought up her right hand and settled it over his, her fingers curving over his own to urge him on. She pressed his hand, and it squeezed on the trigger." (Picoult, p. 459). At last, when Chris trembles and starts to feel unsure to do Emily's last request, Emily puts her hands on Chris' hand which holds the gun. She is the one who pull the trigger to kill herself. She at last does it for herself, to end the story, the pain, and the terror in her life.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through *The Pact* and Emily Gold's story which Jodi Picoult wrote, it can be seen that young adult literature can also be very meaningful. It poses many aspects of lives and also issues in it, such as PTSD, which Emily suffers from. Unlike the stereotypes of young adult literature, that it is not as challenging to read and to write as adult novels, it is, in the truth, suitable for the consumption of teenagers or older readers. Besides, using young adult literature, Jodi Picoult successfully exposes the issue of teenage suicide from different points of view. Jodi Picoult shows that teenage suicide is not a random action by emotional teenagers. There are reasons for suicide itself, and it can be big issues, such as the pain caused by traumatic experience and PTSD, which parents or other people might not know. Therefore, the readers can think of the issue deeper and more critical before judging it.

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