

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

*Speak* written by Laurie Halse Anderson tells about Melinda Sordino, a student at Merryweather High School in Syracuse, New York who becomes traumatized after she was raped in one party she attended. In *Speak*, Melinda was raped by her senior and became his sexual pleasure but she is unable to tell everyone about the incident. After the sexual abuse, she chooses not to speak with anyone else about what has really happened to her. *Speaks* which raises the issues of rapes by portraying the situation nowadays intrigues the writer to analyze sexual abuse presenting in the novel.

*Speak* not only exposes how rape cases can happen in school environment but also shows how the victim becomes isolated from the society. The novel shows how Melinda Sordino, the victim, drastically changes into an outcast. Melinda's traumatic experience after sexually harassed causes psychological trauma to her, she becomes a mute; she refuses to talk to anyone. Melinda practically stops talking, and increasingly disconnects herself to events around her. Melinda begins to skip school, withdraws from her parents, and loses herself. She hides away in an abandoned janitor's closet during the school day, where she goes to sleep or hides when she is feeling anxious. Her only sanctuary is her art class, where there is a kind teacher who encourages her to express herself.

All symptoms Melinda experience lead to a severe post-traumatic disorder (PTSD). Her struggle to overcome the traumatic experience is the biggest conflict the character has

to go over. Melinda is in a really bad condition until she finds a way to overcome her sadness and comes to terms with what happened. She has been raped by her senior and is unable to tell everyone about it.

The fact that the rapist studies in the same school and that the memory of the incident is haunting her, makes her trauma worse than before. Melinda's trauma affects her life in several ways. Melinda chooses to say nothing rather than to respond to other people's questions, concerns, or anger. Not only does she tell no one about the rape for months, but she also communicates almost none of her other thoughts and feelings.

Melinda is not alone in experiencing sexual abuse because sexual abuse is a kind of abuses often experienced by women in real life. There are several kinds of sexual abuses, such as molestation, rape, prostitution, pornography, exposure, incest, or other sexually exploitative activities (Dworkin, 1987). One kind of sexual abuses is rape.

Indonesian newspapers, television news, magazines often publish stories of a true story of a friend or family member who sadly has become a victim of rape. Even at school, where it supposedly become a second home for children can not guarantee women's or girl's safety against sexual harassment or sexual assault. Students up to university students often deal with sexual assault. The victims are usually afraid to deal with the societal judgments from their peers which may once again harass them.

According to Indicators of School Crime and Safety released in 2013, the number of rapes in school and college campuses has increased and some of the perpetrators had gone unpunished by school or local authorities. The U.S. federal Department of Education shows the data on sexual assault in 2011, where 3,300 sexual abuses were reported on campuses across the US. It increased from 2,200 reported sex assaults a

decade earlier (Statistics, 2013). The same survey conducted by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) reveals that sexual harassment among students in middle and high school is common. Questions were asked to 2,000 students from public and private schools whether they have encountered with sexual harassment. Nearly half of the 7th through 12th graders said that they had experienced some kinds of sexual assault and harassment (Hill & Kearn, 2011).

The sufferings that have to be overcome by Melinda and the facts about sexual abuse in school environment attract the writer to know in depth about 1.) the way the incident affect Melinda's life as a high school student, and 2.) the way Melinda copes with the traumas she has

## **1.2 Field of the Study**

The field of this study is literature especially Gender Studies.

## **1.3 Scope of the Study**

The writer concentrates on the sexual abuse in school environment that happens to Melinda Sordino, the main character in the novel.

## **1.4 Problem Formulation**

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does the incident affect Melinda's life as a high school student psychologically and emotionally?
2. How does Melinda cope with the traumas she has?

## **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To find out how the incident affect Melinda's life as a high school student psychologically and emotionally
2. To find out the ways Melinda cope with the trauma she has

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to provide information about sexual abuse in school environment and how the victim can overcome the trauma she has. Since the main character in the novel is a victim of sexual violence, the writer hopes that readers can relate to what happen to her in real situation. Since sexual assault can be a frightening experience, one individual may feel shocked, feared and confused. Throughout this study, it can show how the victim does not have to be afraid to show who she is. She does not have to change to anything to become what the society wants. The writer hopes that the information from this study can be useful for those who studies Gender Studies, especially those who studies sexual violence that can happen almost everywhere.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

1. Sexual abuse: any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work (Wellings & Mitchell, 2012)
2. Radical feminism: a perspective within feminism which entitled for a radical reordering of society in which male dominated culture is eliminated in all economic and social contexts (Willis, 1984)

3. Rape: physically forced or otherwise coerced penetration – even if slight – of the vulva or anus, using a penis, other body parts or an object. The attempt to do so is known as attempted rape (Jewkes, 2002, hal. 149)

4. Rape culture: a complex of beliefs that encourages male sexual aggression and supports violence against women. It was designed to convey the ways in which society more likely blamed victims of sexual assault and normalized male sexual violence (Spencer-Thomas, Bollinger, & Nicoletti, 2001)

5. Trauma: an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. Psychologists can help these individuals find constructive ways of managing their emotions (Association A. P., 2016)

6. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to an event or ordeal involving actual or threatened physical harm. Traumatic events that may trigger PTSD include violent personal assaults, natural or human-caused disasters, motor vehicle crashes, and military combat. Patients with PTSD have persistent frightening thoughts and memories of their ordeal and feel emotionally detached or numb, especially with family and friends. They are easily startled and may experience sleep problems (Kaye, Liu, Fox, Baluch, & Sutker, 2012)