

# ELIZABETH MARTIN GREY'S DELUSIONAL DISORDER IN HELENA FOX'S *HOW IT FEELS TO FLOAT*

Wulan Cahyaningsih<sup>a.1\*</sup>, Danu Wahyono<sup>b.2</sup>

<sup>a)</sup> Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>b)</sup> Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

<sup>1)</sup> [wulancn11@gmail.com](mailto:wulancn11@gmail.com) <sup>2)</sup> [danuwahyono@untag-sby.ac.id](mailto:danuwahyono@untag-sby.ac.id)

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## ABSTRACT

This study is entitled "Elizabeth Martin Grey's Delusional Disorder in Helena Fox's *How It Feels To Float*". The objective of this research is to examine the mental disorder of Elizabeth or the main character. It uses a qualitative method as the research design and psychological approach as a literary approach. This study aims to explore and find the causes of delusions and their effects and how Elizabeth overcomes delusions. The results show that Elizabeth's delusions are caused by the death of her father. She has subjective delusions where she strongly believes that there is no happiness in her life after her father's death. The effects caused by Elizabeth is experienced disruption on her normal activity, unhappiness in her life, suicidal ideation and self-harm, and also alienation from social life as her delusional disorder's effects. There are several ways to cope her delusional disorder, namely meditation, counseling, traveling, and seeing a psychiatrist. From the results of this study, the findings indicate that Elizabeth successfully overcomes the delusional disorder that plagued her for the past few years by routinely attending counselling sessions with therapy and meditation, taking medicines and trying to be open to people around her.

Keywords: *Delusional Disorder, Causes, Effect, Coping.*

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<b>Submitted:</b> 08 July 2023	<b>Accepted:</b> XX June 20xx	<b>Published:</b> XX July 20xx
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In society's stigma, people with mental disorders are considered taboo, disgraceful, and often associated with mystical things. However, mental illness is influenced by many factors. The existence of a stigma like that makes someone afraid to talk about mental health problems because they are worried about judgment and get discrimination. Sigmund Freud states that delusions, rather than symptoms of the disorder, are part of the healing process (Ramasamy et al., 2014:431). Delusional disorder is a mental disorder that causes a person to believe something that is not really happened. Delusional disorder usually follows a diagnosis of depression or paranoia.

For example, they often hear sounds from objects or things that are actually voices from their heads. By recounting confusing events, delusions on the one hand are adaptive and understandable. The issue of delusional disorder cases is also found in the novel entitled "*How It Feels To Float*" by Helena Fox.

Based on the background of the research, this study formulates three research problems. The writer wants to find the causes of Elizabeth Martin Grey's delusional disorder in Helena Fox's *How It Feels To Float*, and the writer also examines the effects of her delusional disorder and portrays how she copes her delusional disorder. Thus, the writer conducts this study to find out what are the causes, effects, and treatments of delusional disorder in the plot of *How It Feels To Float* by Helena Fox. Delusion is a discrepancy between desires or dreams and the reality experienced (Freud, 2006 :21). Delusional disorder is defined as a feeling of false belief, and cannot be changed through reason and presentation of facts. Delusions are characterized by persistent and often paranoid delusions or hallucination and have clear qualities (Nevid et al., 2005). Delusions are blatantly incorrect beliefs that suggest abnormalities due to the mind of the affected person. False beliefs are not related to one's social or religious background, or degree of intelligence. The extent to which the individual believes it to be right is the distinguishing

feature from delusions. Based on psychopathology research journals, it is explained that pragmatic descriptions of delusions are classified as a diagnosis of an erroneous assessment of reality and tend to be denial (Hoff, 2006: 191). The causes of delusional disorder are divided into three, namely biological, psychological and genetic factors.

Biological factors of delusional disorders are social life (Fear, 2013). Commonly, treatment for the delusional disorder is to use medication. However, delusional disorder is easy to relapse if it is only treated with medication. Therefore, it needs to be treated with a psychological approach like psychotherapies. Clinical experts argue that the best approach is a supportive one in which the therapist provides an empathetic understanding of the patient's concerns (Davidson et al., 2006: 763). To avoid delusions, most medication prescribed to a person suffering from delusions works by preventing dopamine and serotonin receptors in the brain from functioning. In some cases, antidepressants and tranquilizers may be used (Safai & Wade, 2022: 1).

In all previous studies that uses in this research, it just finds the symptoms, causes and the types of delusional disorder. Thus, the gaps of this research is to complete the previous research and expand the topic to more sustainable unity. Therefore, this study aims to answer the research problem; it covers finds the causes, examines the effects and portrays the coping mechanism of delusional disorder in *Helena Fox's How It Feels To Float*.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses qualitative descriptive as research design. Qualitative method aims to understand and interpret the meaning of an interaction event of human behavior in certain circumstances based on the researcher's point of view and observation (Hancock et al., 2009: 7). Moreover, the descriptive method is produces analytical data in the form of a description of issues or phenomena, not numbers or variables with coefficients. The data collected are in words

or pictures, not numbers (Kumar, 2011: 334). It attempts to describe systematically a situation, problem, phenomenon about condition of a community, or attitudes towards an issue (Goundar, 2012: 5).

This research uses psychological approach uses Rene Wellek and Austin Warren theory. This approach has four possibilities: the study of authors' psychology, the study of the creative process, the study of psychological literature, and the study of reader's relation with the literature (Wellek & Warren, 1995: 81). This research focuses on study of the psychological literature, because the data taken from novel as form a literary works. Therefore, this psychological approach focuses on study of the psychological literature is the most suitable approach to this research. Research instrument of this study is the writer herself. The data source in this study is taken from the novel *How It Feels To Float*. The novel was published in 2019 and set in Sydney, Australia. This novel consist of 400 pages.

The writer identifies the data to determine information like underlined words, phrases, sentences, dialogues, and anything related to the research problem. Moreover, the last step is the writer lists and classifies the data that has been collected according to the research problems. To analyses the data that had been found, the writer identifies the actions and behavior of the main character, then classification of the data refers to the theory of delusional disorder. Afterwards the writer explores and interprets the data with the author's arguments and adjusts to the theories and arguments of experts taken from several references. After that, data collection is carried out in the form of excerpts from the novel along with the results of interpretation and analysis. Furthermore, the writer draws and evaluates conclusions according to the delusional disorder theory using a psychological analysis approach.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part discusses Elizabeth's delusional disorder consisting of the causes, effects, and how she is coping and deal with that.

### 3.1 The Causes of Elizabeth's Delusional Disorder

Elizabeth Martin Grey or Biz is a girl of 16 years old. She's a cheerful person before turning into gloomy when she loses several things in her life. Her Dad is characterized by different brain structures in sufferers. Psychological factors occur from mental and thoughts. This can be caused by trauma factors so that a feeling of frustration arises. The effects of delusional disorder are disruption of normal activity, unhappiness in life, the desire to commit suicide and self-harm, and alienation from others when she is seven years old. This event plunges her into a serious clinical depression. The psychiatrist and her psychologist convict her of several complex illnesses like depression, panic attack and complex issues. She never tells to anyone even to her Mum and her psychiatrist. She is not willing and has not accepted the fact that her father already died. She enters a very unhealthy period.

The Martin is for Dad's dad who died in a farm accident when he was thirty and Dad was ten. I was seven when Dad died. Which means I had less time with Dad alive than Dad had with his. (Fox, 2019: 6)

The quotation above tells about Elizabeth's feelings due to the loss of her father. She feels a little bit upset because she cannot enjoy a lot of time with her father. It means she loses the figure of her father. Elizabeth's father is the most caring person that she has ever seen. Many memories that she still keeps from her Dad, for example when she gets sick and her Dad always be there to accompany her. When she is five, her Dad sees her climb to the top and stand up on the edge of the playground. Her Dad runs immediately and she thinks no one can protect her like her Dad does. She likes everything that her father does for her.

Her childhood memory makes her very deep sad. Her past event provides her an unforgettable reminiscence. When she is a child she has a close affection to her father. She often thinks and has flashbacks when her father dies. It means she cannot accept her situation until when she is 11 years old, growing up with her father's shadow. She is floating through her life.

*Yeah. The one just after Mum got her new blood and you fainted and they gave you orange juice. The one where Mum's laughing up at the camera as I sleep in her arms. Yeah I've seen it. Dad smiles again. He reaches across to touch me, but of course he can't.* (Fox, 2019:4)

After her Dad passes away, she often sees her Dad floating in any sides of her place. She sees the shadow of her father every time. However, she realizes that everything she sees is not real. She believes that there is nothing wrong with her eyesight. Even though she often sees her father floating, she still uses logic that it is just a shadow of her father who is gone. The great bulk of Elizabeth's thinking lies in the pre-conscious part which with her efforts she is able to bring to consciousness and the unconscious part which appears only in accidental actions, fantasies, and so on as she experienced when she sees her Dad's shadow floating around her.

*I am stable, I would like to leave so I can go to the creek and go under water. There I will find Dad's dad, whose name is Martin. I will pull him out of the water and reverse time then everything will be better and then Dad won't die.* (Fox, 2019:332).

This quotation above proves that her delusions push her to do things that are beyond reason and tend to be impossible. It implies that she has delusions that she wants to turn back time and return her father to the way it was. She wants to do something she knows that it can never happen. The loss of an important figure is still a major factor in her delusional

disorder. It leads her that if her father is still alive, she will be happy and fine. She wouldn't have to experience the sorrow and grief that keeps her mired in floating mind and body all the time.

### **3.2 The Effects of Elizabeth's Delusional Disorder**

The effects of her delusional disorder are disruption of her normal activities, feelings of unhappiness in life, the desire to commit suicide and harm herself, and alienation from social life.

#### **3.2.1 Disruption of her Normal Activity**

Due to the loss of her father, as a 17-year-old teenager, she should attend normally at school, studying with enthusiasm and bantering with her friends. However, this delusional disorder makes it difficult for her to carry out her normal activities, such as going to school, and interacting with others. Difficulty in establishing relationships with other people is a significant effect that she feels in her life, she tries to live her life till she couldn't stand anymore.

I have not been to school in a while. To sum up: I dropped out. Due to illness. A chronic, debilitating inability to get out of bed. I have been in bed so long, barnacles have had to be scraped off my bottom. I gathered moss in my belly button. I grew mushrooms on my tits (Fox, 2019: 101).

She skips her school for many times and ends up with drop out. She skips class too much because she is lazy to study. Her body and mind feel shackles and imprisons in her room, and it makes her to skip classes. Therefore, she is expelled from her school.

#### **3.2.2 Unhappiness in Life**

Her delusional disorder also makes her feel unhappiness in her life. She feels unhappy and sad for almost every second after her loss of her Dad. She's often wonders about her Dad. She's often reminisced about the past and the

little things she used to get and wishes about the impossible thing. Remembering the past is her way of self-reflection in order to learn from past experiences. But consequently she feels is just unhappiness. She is trapped and stuck in a sad condition. The quotation below is the evidence of Elizabeth's unhappiness after her father's death.

"Dad?" I want to ask him a thousand questions. I want to tell him about The Posse not talking to me. I want to ask him how heartbreak feels. I want to know what it's like to watch and not be seen, because I think I already know, but is it different for him? (Fox, 2019: 72).

She often imagines how her Dad would feel when he finds out that her Mum has a boyfriend. She wants to know how to be transparent like watching other people but cannot be seen. She also wonders how it feels to float in every corner of place all the time. She wants to disappear from the world because she cannot deal much with her delusional mind and also want to meet her father as soon as possible.

#### **3.2.3 The Desire to Commit Suicide and Harm Herself**

The next effect that she experiences is that she harms herself. She often thinks to hurt herself and wonders how if she dead someday. She doesn't want to be alone in this world without her Dad. She feels really lonely and full of grief every day. She really wants to escape all of her pain. She thinks that the death can remove her pain so she often thinks about suicide and meets her Dad as soon as possible and tends not to hesitate in hurting herself. It can be seen in the following quotation.

I have nearly died a thousand times. Okay. Maybe ten. Okay. Maybe six. There was the time I fell off the slide when I was five. From the edge of the playground, dad saw me climb the side to the top and stand up. Why did I

stand? Maybe I was thinking of flying (Fox, 2019: 48).

It can be seen that her imagination before her father died is a natural thing that happens. Since childhood, she has shown the normal behavior of active children, such as falling from a slide. Slightly different and unusual, she once almost died climbing and jumping on the edge of a playground and thinking she could fly. However, after her father died, she is imagining things that doesn't make sense.

#### **3.2.4 Alienation from Social Life**

The last effects of her delusion disorder is alienation from her social life. Aside from having difficulty establishing interaction and communication with others, she also tends to withdraw from social life. She is not interested doing her hobbies. She doesn't care about what the people will say about her. She more often listens to inanimate objects talks rather than joins and socializes with her friends or her family. Withdrawing social sphere and alienated herself can be seen in the following quotation.

I don't want to move forward. I don't want to do digital photography. Those photos won't talk to me. All I want is to be back in the darkroom, to crawl inside and stay. I want the red hush, the clean smell of chemicals. I want to lie inside the back-and-white mess of history. I want to not come out until I know everything. (Fox, 2019 : 153)

She rejects the solution given to her. She enters a phase of denial of the true condition. She doesn't want to move forward. She becomes a close person and tends to alienation from social life. The sadness that she feels dominates and limits her daily activities even though there is no real cause for sadness. She does not want any of remedies

### **3.3 How Elizabeth Cope With her Delusional Disorder**

As it is previously described, Elizabeth

tends to experience delusions. There are some ways to cope her delusional disorder such as psychotherapies and medicine. She gets meditations, exercises and travelling as her psychotherapies step.

#### **3.3.1 Meditations**

Elizabeth gets meditation as a treatment as a coping mechanism for her delusions. It can help her manage negative emotions, such as anger and fear. In addition, it can facilitate to express her emotion. In counselling session, she gets some meditations like poetry meditation, photography therapy and breathing exercises as forms of her treatments. It helps her to pour her emotions into poetry and photo. She undergoes a series of treatments to cope with her delusion and it can be seen in the following quotation.

*My Alter Ego: A meditation/poem, by Elizabeth Grey Consider the Ego / The ego is defined as a person's sense of self/ Which includes but is not limited to self-esteem, self-worth, and self-importance/ Don't we all think ourselves important, that we matter?* ((Fox, 2019: 15)).

She writes a poem as a form of her meditation step. By writing poetry, she can concentrate and train her thoughts, impressions, focus, and point of flow. Writing the poem is also a form of manifestation of her deepest mind that she cannot tell to anyone else. The poetry written spontaneously is permanent as an abstract outpouring of her thoughts. Her poetry is a form of self-reflection and healing. She writes the poems that describe her situation, her feeling and mind which she often finds difficult to control. She hopes with this form of meditation, she can reduce the level of anxiety so that the delusions do not recur at any time.

I have enrolled in a photography course! I say this with an exclamation mark because Mum and Bridgit are thrilled. I tell Bridgit about the class, but not about the floating

two weeks ago. I want here to think I'm getting better. I want to think I'm getting better. Also, I actually want to get better. ((Fox, 2019: 118).

Beside that, to cure her delusional disorder, she also takes a photography course. She is very enthusiastic when she gets a new camera from her Mum even though she doesn't want the camera. She learns to wash film and focus the image against the light in order to get a good picture. She also learns to construct visual versions of reality, including visual representations of pain, emotions, experiences, and thoughts through photography. Photography provides an opportunity for her to create something as a form of compensation for self-deficiencies, assists her in exploring identity, and allows herself to build deeper reflections.

Bridgit sits back. She eyes me, measures me gently.

"Okay, Elizabeth," she says.

"How about I give you some new breathing exercises to do?" I nod. "Shall we try them now?"

We breathe in. We breathe out. In, out, around. Count to four. Hold for four. In. Out. Around. I feel my body, here in the chair. I feel my hands in my lap. I'm back. And our time is up. ((Fox, 2019: 187).

From this conversation it can be seen that she does meditation breathing exercises with her psychologist named Bridgit. When she gets stress, her heart rate beats faster and affects her pulse and breathing. She tries to close her eyes while inhale and exhale slowly in a few counts. This helps her overcome her sudden frantic thoughts that makes her delusional again. With breathing exercises, she can also create peaceful mind and tends calm to face her life forward.

### **3.3.2 Counselling**

To cope her mental disorder, Elizabeth visits some professionals to handle the case. She meets a psychologist named Bridgit who helps

her socialize, grow, and develop herself. Bridgit is an expert who is more focused on providing her solutions from a non-medical perspective, such as psychotherapy practices. Bridgit gives her space to share the things she feels. She tells her everything in her head, something that can distract her focus, Bridgit appreciates it even though she knows that Elizabeth is not fully opened up yet to her. She gives several psychotherapies such as writing poetry and taking photography courses as a medium for meditation. This step is taken so that she can develop a mindset and manage the emotions that exist within her. As Bridgit does not have clinical authority to prescribe medication or other medical procedures, therefore, Elizabeth also visits a psychiatrist who can prescribe medication for her mental treatment and healing.

The next session, she gives up – "Let's focus on now, shall we?" – and we move on. Seeing as I have opted out of school, cancelled my subscription to year 11, moved on to quieter things, Bridgit suggests we find a gentler, simpler Learning Experience for me. Bridgit gives me pamphlets: classes I can take, workshops I can work at, communities I can commune with. Choir. Soccer. Photography. Painting. Et Cetera. ((Fox, 2019)).

After they talk and discuss a lot about Elizabeth's progress and development in the school, Bridgit suggests her patient to try and learn something new. She helps Elizabeth to find her new hobby or interest. This step can distract her mind from the grief of losing her father which makes her delusions appear. This therapy process allows her to develop her cognitive mind and implement it towards positive things and skills. Bridgit offers a pamphlet containing various courses and workshops that Elizabeth can attend. Bridgit suggests

her to take light hobbies and simpler learning experiences for her so that thinking would return to being rational, simple and avoiding impossible and complicated delusional thoughts.

### **3.3.3 Travelling**

Another way to overcome her delusion is going on travelling and searching for the answers she has been looking for. She tries to escape and calm her mind from what has haunted her after her father died. She decides to visit new places to get rid of the stress.

And for a moment, everything felt real. Here I was. On a bike with this boy, passing a house with walls and people inside them. Passing a car before it turned onto the street, the driver going to the movies maybe, or a lover's house. Here is a curve; lean into it, Biz. Feel. (Fox, 2019: 205).

She's travelling with her friend named Jasper. She finds that it makes her feel better. Supporting from family and close friends is very effective in helping the healing process of her delusional disorder. Jasper takes her around town for refreshment. Traveling also tends to make her feel more reflective and introspective. This method makes her withdraw from the environment and situations that makes her depressed. This step will help her to decompress to get some views and refocus her mind. Traveling can make her feel more alive. She feels that everything is so real and there are no shadows or delusions that follow her.

### **3.3.4 Medication**

The last proper way to cope her delusion is getting some medication. To support the success of her therapy, it is necessary to collaborate and synergize the roles of several parties; health professionals like psychologists, doctors, pharmacists, Elizabeth's family and the surrounding environment by using a collaborative treatment model. In this collaborative treatment, Elizabeth's psychiatrist determined medication as

the main treatment modality in the management of her patient's mental disorders because Elizabeth has complex issues. Because of the complex issues that she suffers, the medicine prescribed to Elizabeth must be consumed regularly and required a long process to feel the changes. Elizabeth takes medical action in dealing with her mental health and bonding with her relationship with other people around her. It can be seen in the following quotation

I know how much these cost. I also know how much I've cost in psychologist visits and doctor visits and medication and time off work. With all that money, Mum could have bought a car, a holiday, a new child. (Fox, 2019: 164).

She takes medical treatment to heal her delusion disorder, and she takes therapeutic also healing medication that accompanied by antidepressant or antipsychotic medication. This action was fully supported by her mother because her mother really wants Elizabeth to get well. The medication that takes is routine bi-weekly treatment in the form of doctor visits. Even her Mum takes time off work to accompany her daughter on routine psychiatrist visits. At first glance, sometimes she feels guilty because the costs that her mother incurs are expensive, so she intends and tries to recover through this medication.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Referring to the cause of her delusions, namely the death of her father, Elizabeth experiences several effects from her delusional disorder. This has a drastic impact on Elizabeth's behavior, causes disruption of her normal activity such as school and impacting her mindset. Elizabeth's disturbed mindset also has several effects. Among them are feelings of unhappiness in her life, the desire to commit suicide and harm herself and also alienation from the social life around her.

To equip the coping mechanism for her

delusion disorder, Elizabeth gets some psychotherapies such as meditation, counselling, and travelling. She also sees a psychiatrist because the medication is needed to boost her healing development. Some medicine really helps her, she feels her head more silent, therefore she can think clearly without disruption of hear or see anything unreal.

In sum, the findings of this research is it can be seen that Elizabeth can overcome her delusional disorder with compensates with her own motivation and intention, and also she tries to open up to people around her. This progress is helped by a professional such as a psychiatrist.

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