

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Humans are social creatures. In a lot of aspects of human life, humans need other people's presence and help. By getting used to other people's presence, humans learn to feel attached. *Cambridge Dictionary* define attachment as "a feeling of love and need for another person." (Cambridge Dictionary, 2025). Attachment is the sense of feeling love and necessity for the presence of other people, such as the relationship between a mother and her child. The feeling of attachment can help people to build a proper relationship with another human being.

Individuals have different childhood experiences depending on the environment. When children feel secure with their parents or other caregivers, they will likely show similar behaviour with their friends or partners when they grow up. The same thing happens to children who are left behind by their own families or are not properly taken care of. Most of the children who experience this kind of childhood will likely feel that they do not deserve to have a proper relationship because they are afraid to be left behind by their friends or partners.

Attachment theory, first presented by Bowlby (1969), explains that early experiences with caregivers influence how individuals build attachments throughout their lives. Furthermore, it also explains that attachment forms in infancy and determines patterns of behaviour and emotional control in adulthood.

Attachment is often seen in different literary works as it revolves around the character's relationship with other characters. One of the literary works that depicts avoidant attachment is a novel entitled *What I Carry*. The novel is written by Jennifer Longo and published in 2020. The story follows a seventeen years old girl named Muiriel who lives in foster care after being abandoned by her mother in the hospital as an infant. Over the course of her life, Muiriel is placed in twenty different foster houses. Her first placement is with a young couple who initially express interest in adopting her. They foster her for three years but continue to delay the adoption process. When Muiriel turns four, the foster parents decide to move her to another home due to the mother's pregnancy. Even at such a young age, Muiriel begins to realize that the people she believes wanted her to be part of their family will one day choose to let her go.

Muiriel's journey in the foster care system does not end there. At the age of eight, a foster family decided to adopt her. However, having grown used to the loud and crowded environment of previous foster houses, where she lived with other children, Muiriel had trouble sleeping in a big room all to herself. Her difficulty adjusting led the foster parents to view her as ungrateful, and they eventually decided to cancel the adoption. From this experience, Muiriel learns not to depend on foster parents. She convinces herself it is better to leave a placement before being rejected, even if she already grows fond of the foster family. Muiriel continues this behavior until she meets Francine, her last foster parent. However, Muiriel eventually learns that not everyone will leave her as she tries to accept the kindness shown by the people around her.

This study covers Muiriel's experiences during her childhood that causes her to have avoidant attachment style. The writer uses theory from Amir Levine theory about avoidant attachment. Furthermore, the study attempts to analyze and describe the avoidant attachment of Muiriel in Jennifer Longo's novel *What I Carry* and the effects of her attachment style on her relationship with other characters in the novel.

1.2 Research Problems

The problems discussed in the study are as follows:

1. What are the symptoms of avoidant attachment shown by Muiriel in Jennifer Longo's *What I Carry*?
2. Why does Muiriel suffer from avoidant attachment in Jennifer Longo's *What I Carry*?
3. How does Muiriel avoidant attachment affect her relationships with other characters in Jennifer Longo's *What I Carry*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are connected to the research problems that have been stated above and are as follows:

1. To identify the symptoms of Muiriel's avoidant attachment in Jennifer Longo's *What I Carry*.
2. To examine the cause of Muiriel's avoidant attachment in Jennifer Longo's *What I Carry*.
3. To analyze the effects of the Muiriel avoidant attachment on her relationships with other characters in Jennifer Longo's *What I Carry*.

1.4 Previous Studies

The literary work used as an object in this research thesis is relatively a newly released work. Therefore, there has not been any similar research conducted using the object. However, the writer will provide book reviews and articles regarding the object.

The first previous study is an online article titled “What I Carry, a YA Novel by Jennifer Long” written by Aja Todd in 2024. The article provides a brief summary of the novel and discusses how Muiriel’s strong sense of justice and independence were crucial to her survival in the foster care system. The article also highlights how the story portrays the power of love that extends beyond biological family ties.

The second previous study is a book review titled “Jennifer Longo Fosters Sense of Home in YA Novel ‘What I Carry’”, published in 2021 and written by Sylvie Manz. Through this book review, the writer mainly focuses on the main character, Muiriel, as a child in the foster care system, and how the author, Jennifer Longo, successfully raised the readers’ awareness about foster care and Pacific Islander heritage through her work.

The third previous study is a book review by Dean published in 2021 titled “Book Review: What I Carry by Jennifer Longo”. The book review provides a brief summary of the novel and highlights the themes of friendship, love, and nature. It also discusses Muiriel’s struggle to survive the foster care system and her life after she ages out that shows Muiriel character’s strength and growth.

The fourth previous study is a book review titled “Book Review: What I Carry” published in 2021 by Ren. The review highlights Muiriel’s interesting characterization. It explains how Muiriel’s character development from her guarded personality to someone who is more expressive shows her character growth.

The fifth previous study is a book review titled “What I Carry by Jennifer Longo, #39 Review”, published in 2020 and written by Elynn Kok. Through this book review, the writer mainly focuses on Muiriel’s relationships with other characters, such as Francine, Kira, and Sean. It explains that Muiriel’s bond with Francine develops very slowly due to her past experiences, while her relationship with both Kira and Sean help her adjust to a new environment.

The sixth previous study is a book review by Sophie published in 2020 entitled “What I Carry by Jennifer Longo” highlights Muiriel’s abandonment and experiences in the foster care system that lead her to put an emotional barrier and makes her anticipate and always expect the worst. However, her final placement with Francine helps her grow and realize that not everyone will leave her.

The seventh previous study is a book review published in 2020 by Kyurenka titled “What I Carry by Jennifer Longo”. The book review focuses primarily on Muiriel’s experiences in the foster care system. Repeated rejection by her foster parents lead Muiriel to believe that she is unlovable and that she is a problem who does not deserve love or affection.

The eighth previous study is a book review titled “What I Carry, reviewed by Laurie” published in 2020 and written by Laurie. The book review provides a

brief summary of the novel and highlights the character development experienced by the main character, Muiriel, who initially resilient and creates a barrier around her, gradually begins to accept Kira, Sean, and Francine into her life.

The ninth previous study is an online interview titled “Happy Book Birthday to Jennifer Longo’s New YA, WHAT I CARRY” written by Erin Dealey in 2020. The interview discusses how the book explores the power of relationship theme, especially for Muiriel, who has never experienced a proper healthy relationship in her life and has only learned to depend on herself.

The last previous study is a book review titled “REVIEW: What I Carry by Jennifer Longo” written by Jaymie in 2020, that gives a brief summary of the novel and discusses how the main character, Muiriel, follows a life principal of packing lights during each foster placement, which serves as a metaphor reflecting a way of surviving in the foster care system. The writer also notes that Muiriel’s experience in the foster care system lead her to build protective wall around herself.

While the ten previous studies focused on review of the novel, none particularly examined avoidant attachment in Jennifer Longo’s novel *What I Carry*. In contrast to previous studies mentioned above, this study attempts to analyze Jennifer Longo’s novel *What I Carry* using Amir Levine’s theory of avoidant attachment, providing a new perspective on the novel using psychological approach.

1.5 Scope of the Study

In this research thesis, the writer explains the symptoms of avoidant attachment depicted through the main character, Muiriel, in Jennifer Longo's novel *What I Carry*, what caused it and its effects. To analyze the intrinsic elements in the novel, the writer uses character, characterization, setting and conflict. In further analysis, the writer uses psychological theory to analyze the symptoms of avoidant attachment, the causes, and the effects using Amir Levine theory of avoidant attachment.

1.6 Writing Organization

In writing this thesis, the writing organization will be structured into chapters and subchapters in the following:

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of background of the study, research problems, objectives of the study, previous studies, the scope of the study, and writing organization.

CHAPTER II THEORY AND METHOD

This chapter describes the theories of character, characterization, setting, conflict, and avoidant attachment theory as a guidance in analyzing the research. The writer gathers data using library research methods and performs the research using a psychological approach.

CHAPTER III DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the analysis of intrinsic and extrinsic elements. The intrinsic elements are character, characterization, setting and conflict. Furthermore, the psychological theory borrowed to analyze the novel is Amir Levine's avoidant attachment theory. The theory involves the symptoms, causes, and effects of avoidant attachment.

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION

This chapter consists of the summary of the study.

REFERENCES