

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Jordan Peele's *US*

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ABSTRACT

At some point in their lives, most people will experience traumatic events. Traumatic stress can trigger a variety of response patterns, ranging from a temporary disruption of functioning to chronic conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). A variety of methods and criteria are used in epidemiologic studies to assess trauma and PTSD, which vary in prevalence. Throughout this study, qualitative descriptive methods are used. The writer uses the trauma approach of Sigmund Freud and the theory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD to describe the symptoms experienced by Adelaide and also analyses how the survivors' families respond, especially when helping survivors calm themselves. This study aims to depict PTSD symptoms in *US* and reveal the effects of PTSD on the family survivor. By using the trauma theory approach by Sigmund Freud, the writer concludes that someone who experienced traumatic events as a child can affect their adulthood. The symptoms experienced also affect the people closest to them. As a result of this trauma, Adelaide still feels haunted by dark shadows from her past and panics when triggered by places where she experienced terrible incidents.

Keywords: posttraumatic stress disorder, psychoanalysis, trauma symptoms

INTRODUCTION

The experience of traumatic events in one's life can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is essential to avoid stimuli associated with a traumatic event so that one does not experience excessive arousal after experiencing the event. (Pervanidou & Chrousos, 2007) .

Additionally, (Pervanidou & Chrousos, 2007) states that PTSD occurs when a person experiences events or circumstances that cause intense fear, helplessness, or horror as a result of an actual injury or death or a threat to their physical integrity, causing them to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A clinical diagnosis of PTSD was first made in 1980, and it falls under the anxiety disorder category. A psychoanalytic approach is employed since PTSD is related to human emotions. The unspoken emotions of the heart never die, as Sigmund Freud once said. There is no way to save them as they are buried alive and will surface later in an unsightly form.

As in (Altstein, 2020) Psychoanalytic writing can challenge us in a more urgent way, by bringing our thinking into places that need it the most, thus it make a powerful impact on the world. Alstein continued, changing at full-speed, the world is a wonderfully complicated, terribly complicated place. There are many people there who are thinking and feeling, ripe for deep understanding, with conscious and unconscious minds in the mix. A method of treating nervous disorders has been proposed by Sigmund Freud. In psychoanalysis, unconsciousness plays an important role. (Becker et al., 2015)

Throughout the film, literature is reflected. Literature is therefore reflected in the film. Recent years have seen the popularity of this literary masterpiece grow (Rusyidi, 2022). Film is literary since it is a modern drama. Derived from (Jeffries, 2020) *US* is an engaging movie about a family's nightmare vacation that is well worth the matinee price. After the Wilsons arrive at their vacation house on the second night of their trip, two black families of four show up. Adelaide and Gabe, their young son Jason, and daughter Zora are terrorized by them.

The satirical comic edge of this movie is much more pronounced than that found in other works within this tradition. Aspirational living, a staple of slapstick films and sitcoms, is one of the satire points in this film. Generally, it sits between horror and comedy and sometimes falls uneasily between the two stools. Because each narrative depends on characters being unable to leave, their narratives would be redundant if they had an option to leave. Nonetheless, *US* goes beyond social satire. It meets every definition of a black comedy. There are, however, striking structural similarities between comedy and horror, notably how characters are entrapped, whether literally or metaphorically. By making *US*, Peele builds upon the legacy of blaxploitation horror, a film movement that represents horror from a racial perspective. Prior to Jordan Peele's *US*, this subgenre was largely racialized. An Other's dangerous body is not the source of Peele's body horror. It is a dangerous privilege that controls an Other's dangerous body. In Francisco Louis and Gil Moncayo analysis black body horror movies usually present close-up

shots of black people under white rule. For example, Daniel Kaluuya's (Daniel Washington) wide-eyed horror as he sinks into a "sunken place" or Lupita Nyong'o's (Adelaide) trauma. The traumatic memories of his underground captivity made her cry (Luis & Moncayo, n.d.). Therefore, this film has a strong connection with the world of psychology, especially in terms of the post traumatic disorder experienced by the main character, Adelaide.

Judging from Adelaide's behaviour, she shows one mental illness, namely PTSD, which stands for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In psychological science, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is enclosed collectively of anxiety disorder. It's a disorder that develops when some body is exposed to a traumatic event related to debilitating physical and psychological health declines. It exaggerated anxiety, rejection of stimuli related to the trauma, and symptoms of exaggerated arousal (19, 2021). In accordance with the American Psychiatric Association website, PTSD is a mental disorder that affects people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, for example, a natural disaster, an accident, terrorism, war or combat, rape, or have been threatened with death, sexual abuse, or severe injuries. The defining characteristic of trauma is the ability to induce fear, helplessness, or terror as a consequence of injury or death. Stated by (Yehuda et al., 2015) Thus, PTSD can lead to distressing and intrusive memories, nightmares, irritability, poor sleep, and difficulty concentrating. When trauma has been experienced, people with PTSD avoid places, sports, and other things that might trigger a memory. Another Yehuda study that explains PTSD is that individuals who are exposed to such events are at a greater risk for developing PTSD, primary depression, panic disorders, generalized anxiety disorder, and substance abuse. Those who do not experience annoying circumstances are more likely to suffer from these conditions (Yehuda, 2002). Hypertension, asthma, and chronic pain syndromes are also possible somatic symptoms and illnesses. Traumatic events or emotional stressors must have led to the development of PTSD. Three distinct symptoms must be exhibited over a period of at least one month in order to achieve recovery: reliving the event, avoiding reminders of it, and hyperarousal.

Understand what trauma is to comprehend the impacts of trauma. Trauma is a significant condition that has been continuous and has a steady situation in human brain research. Psychological stress and its enthusiastic effect have acquired consideration and have advanced into broad communications and been promoted. A large number of individuals have encountered trauma here and there or another. Many causes can trigger trauma like cataclysmic events, pestilence infections, calamitous wounds, danger to one's very own life. As stated in (Sasikumar et al., 2021) that psychological trauma is a psychological response to horrendous or upsetting events that emerge independent of actual damage or trauma. Trauma and its mental impact are connected to the substantial importance or effect of awful

encounters; however, it is likewise a different and particular piece of trauma that goes farther than external harm.

Sigmund Freud (1892–94a) writes: The term trauma refers to an accumulation of excitation in the nervous system that is incapable of disposing of adequately with motor reactions (p. 137). He interprets trauma in the same way 24 years later, for instance 'an experience in which within a relatively short period the mind is confronted with a large amount of stimulus which is too powerful to be handled in a usual manner. Trauma is the relationship between an event and its experience, the experience of a violent and unpredicted break-in within the individual's biosphere that has not occurred yet. When a person is faced with trauma, they cannot predict what will happen to them in the future; they are only capable of making realistic assumptions. As a consequence, they are defenceless and unprepared. There were no suitable means to control events and their effects, so it led to a regressive state analogous to the moment of birth, in which the individual had no complete control over his own life (Zepf & Zepf, 2008). Additionally, in (Rottenberg, 2014) stated as a result of Freud's theory of wish fulfillment (a particularly striking example), traumatic symptoms are often found in (conscious) waking life as well (e.g., flashbacks).

Sefa bulut on his mini review regarding Freud's thought on trauma, symptoms of hysteria generally result from childhood abuse or molestation, which left unconscious memories. Later, those memories were reactivated during adolescence when faced with situations that reminded them of the original trauma. (Bulut, 2019).

Several previous studies used Freud's Psychoanalysis and trauma studies as the approaches. However, they have different sub-topic and concerns.

The first study is *The Impact of Traumatic Experiences on Seo Jin-Woo Character Remember Korean Drama* by Benazir Isna and Dr. Bima Prana Citra (Becker et al., 2015). This study examines the characterization and psychology of the character, based on Freud's theory, and their traumatic experience and moral values in the Korean drama *Remember*.

The second study is from I Made Sonia in her thesis entitled *Lily Bloom's S Trauma and Defense Mechanisms Seen in Colleen Hoover's S It Ends With Us* (Made Sonia Purwita, 2021). By applying a psychoanalytic approach, Sonia exposes Lily's defensive mechanisms and illustrates how they play a role in helping her overcome her trauma. The trauma that Lily has experienced is evident in her behavior. She acts and thinks differently based on how Lily Bloom is portrayed in the novel.

The third study is entitled *Traumatic Disorder as The Impact of Child Abuse Portrayed in No Place To Hide* By Aimee (Hartanto, 2019), written by Gery Hartanto. Gery applies Freud's Psychoanalysis to analyze the childhood

trauma portrayed in the novel. The story depicts the main character's symptoms of the traumatic disorder. Fear, depression, anxiety, re-experiencing the trauma, and concentration problems are among them. Additionally, the main character's father abused him as a child, resulting in traumatic stress disorder.

The fourth study focusing on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is An Analysis of Hannah Baker's PTSD in Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, written by Maulana (19, 2021). Hannah Baker exhibited four symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Symptoms of intrusion, avoidance, mood, cognitive changes, and arousal include intrusion and avoidance of the situation. Additionally, Hannah Baker's post-traumatic stress disorder was characterized by psychological and social factors related to her life, such as her family finances and social support.

The last study is from Yanady Ayubrata (Ayubrata, 2016) named Revealing Charlie's PTSD through his behavior in Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Through Psychoanalysis and PTSD approaches, the writer revealed the impacts of the Main Character's trauma, leading to destructive behavior as portrayed. As a result, this behavior creates symptoms that are recognized as PTSD symptoms.

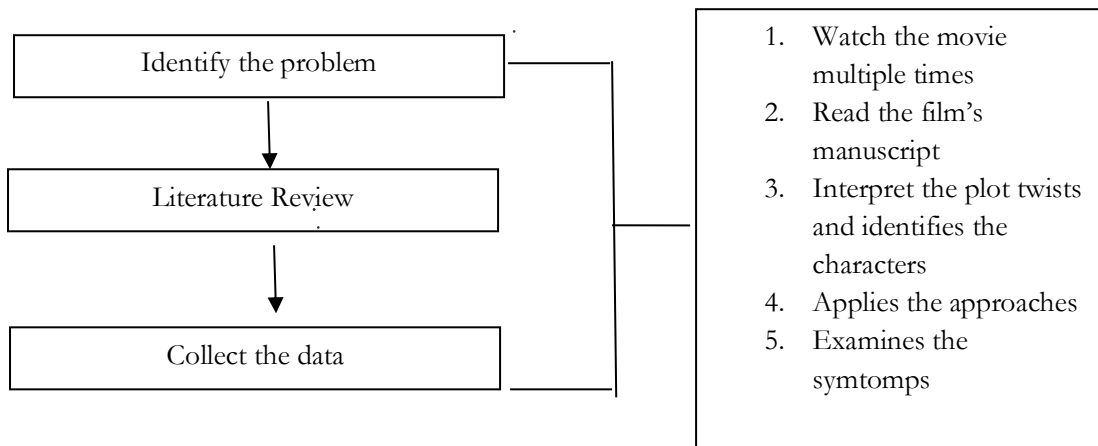
The similarity between this study and the previous studies is in analyzing psychological sides and trauma through the character. The differences are in the trauma approaches, the investigated object, and the step involved.

This research focuses on how childhood trauma can turn into PTSD and affects Adelaide behaviour. The first purpose is to discover Adelaide's characteristics when she was a kid and when she became in the future. By understanding, Adelaide's personality will help the researcher understand deeply about Adelaide herself. Also, it can compare between the past and the present Adelaide. By then, the author will examine the symptoms of PTSD. The second purpose is to find out how Adelaide rejects that she has trauma in her future. This sign can be analyzed by determining Adelaide behaviour before she met her doppelganger. Although *US* brings so many complex concerns such as doppelgangers, race, and class until a country issue, the researcher only focuses on mental health issues, which as PTSD.

METHOD

This study employs qualitative analysis. By textual evaluation and pictures taken from the movie scene, the author method every phrase or word included in the movie script and scene is visible as a certain that means whereas a few functions delivered. In analyzing the data, the author explores the movie to know the content and interpret the plot twist scenes; there will be some steps to use. The first step is describing the synopsis of the *US*

movie. Then, it identifies the main character's strange behavior by applying the Psychoanalysis approach. The next step is to examine PTSD symptoms caused by a traumatic experience that happens to the main character by proving from the script and scenes. The last, concluding the data based on the data analysis.



There are two formulated questions that the researcher intends to analyze in this research, which are:

1. How is PTSD depicted in *US* through Adelaide's behaviour?
2. What impact of PTSD reveal in *US* toward Adelaide's family?

The result of this study is expected to influence people to be more concerned with someone's psychological state. Moreover, to be used as a reference for the students interested/ analyzed in the movie. To provide an easier understanding for the readers and keep the author away from an overboard analysis, the study focuses only on Adelaide's behavior to find out strange behavior caused which is found in the *US* movie. This study employs the Psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud's theory in terms of the approach.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

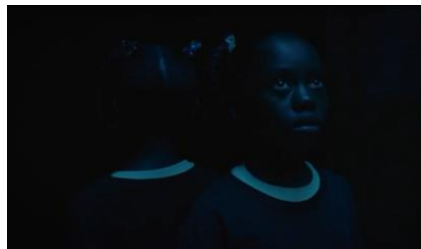
In the *US* movie by Jordan Peele, many moviegoers do not realize that the main character, Adelaide, has PTSD symptoms. The author identifies the symptoms of PTSD from Adelaide's daily life, primarily how she responds to similar events that she experienced again as an adult. Overall, PTSD can be divided into three symptom groups: reliving stressful events, avoiding stimuli that remind the individual of the stressful event, and numbing the emotional response. As described above, these symptoms have a link to the identified stressful event that is thought to be responsible for the disease.(Breslau, 2009).

The author divides the stages of the findings into three parts: the causes, symptoms of PTSD, and the Adelaide family's reaction, to make it easier to describe the analysis results.

The Causes

This discussion starts from the beginning of the story, where young Adelaide experiences a mysterious event. When Adelaide was playing on the Vision Quest, she entered the Hall of Mirrors and saw her reflection, but little Adelaide did not realize that she saw tethered or the shadows of humans living underground.

Picture 1.
Young Adelaide at Hall of Mirrors



When another whistle from the halls overtakes hers, she stops abruptly in panic. She begins whistling "itsy bitsy spider" again to make herself feel at ease. Somebody is whistling in the mirror labyrinth to mimic her song. Something of her size scampers across the hallway in a hurry. As she slowly spins 180 degrees to face the mirror behind her, her reflection does not change. This is the back of another girl's head, not a reflection. Adelaide is unable to shout when the other girl takes her by the neck and screams in her face merrily.

The Symptoms

From (Brandes et al., 2002), PTSD symptoms are often followed by cognitive impairments involving memory and attention. The study involved 48 survivors that experienced traumatic events in less than ten days. (Brandes et al., 2002) evaluated the symptoms to determine the relationship between early PTSD symptoms and cognitive memory. The data that has already been taken does not show the relation between early PTSD symptoms and cognitive memory. Every survivor had a different level of symptoms. Those on the high level of trauma have poorer attention and lower IQ. The rest of them are not. In the *US* movie, Adelaide also showed significant symptoms

in her adult life. She didn't feel the significant symptoms the days after she had the worst experience, yet it took several years.

After experiencing this incident, Adelaide is diagnosed with PTSD by a psychiatrist. Right after that incident, Adelaide was already showing symptoms of PTSD

Picture 2.
Adelaide's Parents at Psychiatrist Office



Adelaide, sits still and intently on a sofa. She can see Russell and Rayne talking with Dr. Foster through the sliver of open doors. "I think she has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," he said. "I think we ought to push her to draw, write, dance, whatever it takes to let her tell us her experience... but we should be patient," he added. This incident is some time after Adelaide disappeared from her parents. Adelaide was missing for approximately 15 minutes before being found again. Shortly after being found, she looks shocked and does not want to talk to her parents. Finally, she was examined by a psychiatrist and diagnosed with a mental disorder, namely post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD. From Dr. Foster's reaction, Adelaide's parents should persuade her to do something she likes, hoping that she wants to retell the experience. People with PTSD have trouble retelling the stories because they are still shocked, like Adelaide's condition.

The plot of this US movie goes back and forth, making the audiences have to be clever in combining each plot. After meeting with a psychiatrist, the plot of this movie immediately changes when Adelaide is married and has a family. Even so, the traumatic incident that she experienced as a child, she still carries into adulthood without realizing it. Here is the evidence to show that the dark shadow is still following Adelaide. The trauma still haunts her.

Picture 3.

During their time at Santa Cruz beach, Adelaide hugs Jason after he is gone for a while.



Adelaide runs faster, and she shakes Jason. "No! You don't do that. You don't run off without asking me.?" Jason's shoulder is hurt. He looks scared. Adelaide looks around, and everyone nearby watches. She hugs him after catching her breath. Adelaide then confronted him, "Don't do that to me, understand?!" (Peele, n.d.)

This scene takes place on Santa Cruz Beach, where young Adelaide is separated from her parents. At this time, Adelaide and her family are on vacation with colleagues, but while enjoying time, Jason, Adelaide's second child, separates himself because he wants to pee. The toilet on the beach is at the end, which makes Jason go a bit far from where his family gathers. Knowing the child was missing, Adelaide panic. She screamed and ran away from his colleagues to find Jason. At this stage, we know that Adelaide looks afraid and panicked. She has a panic attack because Jason went where the young Adelaide experienced terrifying events. Without her realized she is being triggered. She shows one of PTSD symptoms: avoiding the place where that event happened. Based on ((Yehuda, 2002)) symptoms of avoidance include attempts to keep away from reminders of the event, along with persons, places, or maybe thoughts related to the incident.

Picture 4.

Adelaide attempts to explain to Gabe, her husband, about her childhood trauma.



Adelaide tries to explain her anxiety to her husband, Gabe, that she feels uneasy. She begins to open up to Gabe that she has a childhood trauma

that continues to haunt him into adulthood. As mentioned in ((Pervanidou & Chrousos, 2007)Symptoms of adolescents can be better expressed since they can confront their internal state. This conversation shows that when Adelaide is at the position, she is triggered. In addition, her surroundings, such as the beach where she went by, remind her of that night when that girl screamed at her. Cited from (Sartika, 2020)) The victims also can come to be numb to matters, experience excessively anxious, or seeking to keep away from matters which could stimulate them to recall the demanding events.

Picture 5.

Adelaide looks anxious and panicked because she is triggered, one of the symptoms of PTSD.



Adelaide opens up to Gabe. "She threatened to kill me." She attempted to grab me. I was able to escape; I ran as quickly as I could. I've had the feeling my whole life that she's still seeking me."(Peele, n.d.) From Adelaide's statement, it can be seen that she shows other symptoms of PTSD. It turns out the shadows still haunt Adelaide. She sounds panicked. This situation might indicate that the trauma remains. Her childhood trauma is real. Co-occurring conditions can encompass substance abuse, temper and tension disorders, impulsive or risky behavior, or self-harm (Yehuda et al., 2015). According to (Bulut, 2019) during repeated traumas, the victim's capacity to cope with other challenges is disrupted, and repressed materials are embodied as recent experiences; this phenomenon is referred to as "repetition compulsion." Also in,(Bulut, 2019) freud believed repetition led to mastery.

Family's Responses

Those who suffer from PTSD symptoms, at the very least, will have an impact on the people around them. As stated in (Galovski & Lyons, 2004) what he/she does, thinks, and feels has a direct impact on those around him/her. People with PTSD may appear disconnected from the outside world, unavailable to their families, and may sometimes be perceived to behave in strange ways (e.g., flashbacks). As a result of behavioral avoidance symptoms associated with PTSD, it can be challenging to participate in typical

everyday activities such as going to friends' places or school events (Dekel & Monson, 2010). Living with someone who has PTSD is quite challenging. Family members who live with someone who has nightmares avoid social situations or is easily startled and sometimes have to deal with these challenges. The effects of trauma can be so severe that family members feel hurt, excluded, and discouraged. It is common for family members to neglect their own needs to care for those they love. Social support is essential for preventing and helping with PTSD. Family members need to take care of themselves; both for their good and to help the person dealing with PTSD. Below is the response from Adelaide's family in dealing with the symptoms of PTSD that Adelaide felt.

Picture 6.

Adelaide looks anxious and panicked because she is triggered, one of the symptoms of PTSD



Adelaide's voice is still trembling as she tells Gabe about her trauma, and Gabe says, "whatever happened, it was a long time ago."

This scene occurs when Adelaide and her family are returning from Santa Cruz Beach. Adelaide felt restless because she suddenly remembered the traumatic incident that happened to her as a child. Adelaide tries to express how she feels. However, his husband, Gabe, seemed to take it lightly because it had happened in the past. According to Freud (Bulut, 2019), the unconscious memories of childhood sexual abuse or molestation caused all the hysterical symptoms. Adolescence later, memories were reactivated when exposed to situations evoking the original trauma. Gabe looks doubtful about Adelaide's story; he does not seem to believe what his wife tells him. Adelaide's story sounds strange and unlikely. This response is wrong because Adelaide will be even more panicked and depressed with a response like that.

Picture 7.

Gabe tries to lighten the mood by joking, but that doesn't help.



Adelaide, while looking at Gabe and narrowing his eyes, "you do not believe me". Gabe denied, "it is not like that; I was just digesting it all", and then turned his gaze to Adelaide. "You know I am here? I could have kicked his ass if he looked like you", Gabe broke the mood "okay sorry, I was trying to cheer you up". From this, Adelaide's husband, Gabe, seems to be trying to understand what Adelaide is saying. Adelaide also realized that what she was telling might sound far-fetched. Gabe also did the right thing by joking about calming things down and calming Adelaide down. However, it seems that what he did was in vain, as Adelaide felt that her feelings were not validated.

Since this movie has back and forth plots, let's look back on the day Adelaide experienced that horrific incident. When Adelaide disappeared from her parents' watch that night.

Picture 8.

On the night Adelaide was found, Adelaide's parents talked to a psychiatrist



From this, it can be concluded that Adelaide's parents doubt that their child has PTSD symptoms. They assumed that their daughter was missing in no time, only 15 minutes, which was not a problem. This phase is where Adelaide's trauma began to carry over into adulthood. The parent's response sounded dismissive of what was experienced, even though they did not know what was going on. Indeed, the Family is the closest person who will help the victim recover from his trauma. The defense mechanism is one of the results of trauma that affect mental health care workers(Collins & Long, 2003). Collins and Long have analyzed the effects of interactions between mental health care workers and the victims. Mental care workers also suffered from what is known as "secondary traumatic stress." They showed several

symptoms of relational disturbance, burnout, and compassion fatigue. From these findings, the author concludes that what the victim feels also affects their closed relation. Trauma could affect everything in the victim's life. The victim needs their close one's concern to create a healthy and supportive environment. A healthy and supportive environment is what Adelaide gets from her family.

CONCLUSION

Based on the author's analysis by applying the trauma theory of Sigmund Freud and the PTSD theory, it is true that the main character in the US movie, Adelaide, has PTSD. The trauma experienced as a child carries over into adulthood. This trauma depicts how Adelaide still feels followed by dark shadows from her past and how she panics when triggered by the place where she experienced a terrible incident. PTSD is a mental illness that is often underestimated. It looks trivial but has a significant impact on everyday life, especially in terms of character development. This fact depicts families' responses, ranging from parents to Adelaide's husband, who seem not to believe that Adelaide has a psychological disorder due to terrible experiences in the past. Living side by side with people with PTSD is not easy because the closest people will feel the impact too. Dealing with people living with PTSD is also quite tricky because they need special handling to be able to escape from the shadows of the past. The people closest to them must also be able to control their emotions when the sufferer is triggered—judging from the response of Adelaide's husband. The latter was confused about what to do when his wife had a panic attack. The main character's fault, Adelaide, is that she does not communicate her trauma to her husband because she thinks that everything is fine when it is not. Survivors should communicate their mental illness to the closest people so that one day if it relapses, they know what to do. After all, the one who should be responsible for the trauma is ourselves. Everyone may have a bitter past that remains forever. Facing the world after trauma is terrible, but if we can overcome the darkness, we can escape the dark shadows.

The author has analysed how childhood trauma is carried over into adulthood. This study could be suggestions to analyse how character development formed when the shadows of trauma still haunt. Furthermore, to analyse the survivor's formed characters socialise even though their fear remains.

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