



DEPRESSIVE MASOCHISTIC PERSONALITY DISORDER IN *EVERYTHING I NEVER TOLD YOU*

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Article History	Abstract
Submitted date: 2021-11-27 Accepted date: 2021-12-04 Published date: 2021-12-28	This study entitled “Depressive Masochistic Personality Disorder in <i>Everything I Never Told You</i> ” aims to identify how depressive masochistic personality disorder issues are depicted in the novel and reveal the main character’s depressive masochistic tendencies. <i>Everything I Never Told You</i> by Celeste Ng (2014) presents the grief of a biracial family facing the death of the missing daughter. Lydia, the second child of James Lee and Marilyn Walker, was found dead drowning in a nearby lake. The girl’s death mystery brings the family’s secrets to the surface, including the depressive masochistic personality disorder she suffered. This study was conducted in the qualitative method by evaluating the narrative elements and interpreting the text with the application of psychoanalysis corresponding to Otto F Kernberg’s theory of personality disorder regarding depressive masochistic personality (1988). The result of this study is that the main character’s depressive masochistic ensues from childhood trauma associated with her background being a biracial child, which has put her in years of intergenerational conflicts and unbearable trauma. The trauma gives rise to her personality disorder marked by the existence of guilty and faulty syndrome. During the struggle, she shows over-conscientiousness, over-dependence of support, love and acceptance from others; also, difficulties expressing anger. The traits influence the main character’s behavior to overcome her distress. The case in the narrative portrays the importance of revealing thoughts communicatively for an individual. It also underscores that behavior speaks values.
Keywords: biracial; depressive masochistic; personality disorder; psychoanalysis; trauma	
	Abstrak
Kata Kunci: ras campuran; masokis depresif; gangguan kepribadian; psikoanalisis; trauma	Gangguan Kepribadian Masokis Depresif dalam <i>Everything I Never Told You</i> Penelitian bertajuk “Depressive Masochistic Personality Disorder in <i>Everything I Never Told You</i> ” bertujuan mengidentifikasi gangguan kepribadian dan motif masokis depresif tokoh utama. Novel <i>Everything I Never Told You</i> karya Celeste Ng (2014) menyajikan kesedihan keluarga ras campuran saat mendapati kenyataan bahwa putri mereka yang hilang ternyata sudah meninggal. Lydia, anak kedua dari James Lee dan Marilyn Walker, ditemukan tewas tenggelam di danau dekat rumah mereka. Misteri kematian putri mereka ini lalu menguak rahasia keluarga ke permukaan, termasuk gangguan kepribadian masokistik depresif yang dideritanya. Penelitian dilakukan menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan mengevaluasi elemen naratif dan menganalisis teks menggunakan teori psikoanalisis yang terkait dengan gangguan kepribadian, berfokus pada gangguan kepribadian masokis depresif dari Otto F. Kernberg (1988). Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa gangguan kepribadian masokis depresif tokoh utama muncul dari trauma masa kanak-kanak terkait dengan latar belakangnya sebagai anak dari pernikahan ras campuran, satu kondisi yang menempatkannya dalam konflik panjang antar generasi dan trauma yang tak tertahankan. Trauma tersebut memunculkan gangguan kepribadian ditandai dengan adanya sindrom rasa bersalah. Dalam pergumulannya, tokoh utama menunjukkan sifat-sifat terlalu hati-hati, ketergantungan terhadap dukungan, perhatian, dan penerimaan dari orang lain, serta kesulitan mengekspresikan amarah. Sifat-sifat tersebut mempengaruhi sikap tokoh utama dalam mengatasi kesulitannya. Kasus dalam novel menyatakan betapa

	pentingnya mengungkapkan perasaan bagi setiap individu. Narasi itu juga menggambarkan bahwa setiap perilaku memiliki makna.
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Introduction

As a family grows from individuals who can come from different races along with his/her racial identity, a term interethnic is given to the family whose background is a mixture of two races or more, while biracial goes for the one who comes from two different races. Some studies proposed that biracial individuals tend to have more psychological problems, including perceived stress, anxiety, and depression which come from internal oppression (Tull, Sheu, Butler, & Cornelious, 2005; Tull, et al., 1999 in Chong & Kuo, 2015). Biracial individual, especially the minority one has to straddle age-old racial divides and challenges because the shaping of their perception is contrived by the social environment and social forces around them (Chong & Kuo, 2015) which the closest are the parents and siblings, then goes broader to those with different relationships. Cultural change and acculturation are never easy for biracial people. The condition makes biracial parents become inflexible and try to adhere more strongly to traditional values when those very values are being eroded by mainstream cultural values, particularly concerning matters of personal freedom and individuality (Chung, 2001). As a result, there are clashes between the parents and their children. When conflicts of values happen for a long time, the individual needs to cope with them. Concerning that, their personality is impacted. The issue is interesting to be explored; therefore, this study discusses how biracial depression occurs, impacts and shifts the personality.

Studies suggested that biracial children may hold self-hatred and embarrassment about one parent, usually the minority one (Poston, 1990 in Chong & Kuo, 2015). The painful clashes between parents and their adolescent children called as intergenerational conflict (Chung, 2001) can be resulted from value contrast between individualism and collectivism (Zhou & Bankston, 1998 in Chung, 2001) over degree of autonomy in making important life decision; thus, it can be rooted from the discrimination accepted by the parents whose background is formed minority race. For instance, Asian-American parents' views on racial and ethnic differences; also, their expectation of the schools for helping their children expand healthy racial and ethnic identities are infrequently asked (Adler, 2001). Therefore, the descendant gets more challenging problems regarding themselves. At a point, internal oppression can make the descendant hold hatred and grudge against his/herself and build a depressive personality. In the view of psychoanalysis, a depressive personality links to a person who is contending depression. In the case of all depression is suicidal tendencies and behavior (Kernberg & Yeomans, 2013). The tendency to attribute adverse events to global and other internal conflicts gives rise to depression in an individual. In adolescents, suicidal behavior is commonly caused by emotional states: depression, hopelessness, and anger over family, school, and peer problems (Spirito, et.al, 1989). Many times, it connects to the existence of guilty feelings, which also appear as characteristic of masochism.

Masochism relates to *Sacher-Masoch*, a psychoanalytical study by Lenzer in 1975, which refers controversially to the phenomenon in which sexual pleasure and physical or mental pain are associated (Grossman, 1986). The version is rooted in Krafft Ebing's views on sadism and masochism in *Three Essays* published in 1905 consisting of the triad: erotogenic pain, idealization and gratification of sexual fantasies, and sexual activity; also, the triad became the basic version of masochism, namely erotogenic masochism, moral masochism (sexual bondage) and feminine masochism (Grossman, 1986). However, the term evolved as some psychoanalysts discussed the issue. The discussion grows to some phases. The basic

version changes from sexual pleasure and physical or mental pain into conscious and unconscious fantasies then to pleasure and unpleasant relations. Unpleasure/pain mentioned refers to various values such as excitement (Freud in Grossman, 1986), relief from the tension of excitement (Reich in Grossman, 1986), avoidant of other pain (Eidelberg in Grossman, 1986), different kinds of satisfaction (Horney in Grossman, 1986) or avoidant of real pain (Keiser in Grossman, 1986). The concepts are significant to Sigmund Freud's formula of the Id component: the sexual and the death instinct.

Freud uses the triad and develops it into his theory of psychosexual development stages. He proposed that masochism relates to the oedipal conflict that is raised by the guilt associated with oedipal fantasy. Furthermore, Freud expands the version of masochism regarding the presence of aggression mentioned earlier by Loewenstein and Stoller; also, the usage of superego function mentioned previously by Sandler (Grossman, 1986) and came out with a conclusion, not only caused by the oedipal conflict, traumatic experiences and vicissitudes of aggression may construct guilt syndrome or depression and masochistic personality. Later on, the dimensions of masochism are proposed by Otto F Kernberg regarding the individual's benign to malignant behavior and superego functions (1988).

Kernberg defines that depressive masochistic personality disorder shows both well-integrated ego identity and superego, establishing well-differentiated object relations (1988). He states that the condition is connected to masochistic behavior that directly delivers unconscious guilt over oedipal impulses. The disorder can be seen through the dominant types of behavior: traits reflecting excessive superego functions/over-conscientiousness, over-dependence on support, love, and acceptance from others, and difficulties expressing aggression (Kernberg, 1988). Depressive masochistic individual sets an extremely high standard of him/herself and concerns about work performance and responsibility which unconsciously put him/her in suffering condition or exploitation; however, unconsciously, it will end up in his/her sense of being mistreated, demeaned, or humiliated (Kernberg, 1988). The individual has the guilt syndrome for the over-dependency on support, love, and acceptance by others. Frustration hugs the person as he/she fails to meet the need/expectation, and rejection by others or the loss of love triggers his/her depression (Kernberg, 1988). Also, the individual has the faulty syndrome, which shows the incapability of expressing anger adequately; instead, he/she becomes depressed by it. Depression may cause suicidal behavior, usually a result of minor depressive episodes or mild chronic depression extending over many years (Kernberg & Yeoman, 2013).

The condition is widely discussed and can be found in literary works such as novels. One study showing the existence of masochism in a novel is done by Dwiandhesti (2011) from Universitas Sanata Dharma. Her paper, "Masochism as Appeared in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*", proposes how masochism depicted in a narrative can be examined using historical and psychological approaches. One of the findings is that masochism appears in the characterization of Silas, one of the Opus Dei members, which is caused by guilty, anxious and unloved feelings. Another study, conducted by Larson (1995) from Iowa State University in her retrospective theses and dissertation, "*Marya, A Life*, by Joyce Carol Oates: Masochistic Behavior as a Recovery Strategy of the Abuse Survivor", explains Marya's masochistic behavior as her strategy against her mother, the one abused and neglected her and her brother since they were in their earlier age. Larson used two theories to analyze Marya's masochistic behavior. She collaborated with Benjamin's (1988) view of masochistic behavior patterns, which stated that it is motivated by the psyche's desire to be known, defined, and recognized. Herman's (1992) theory of trauma and recovery mentions that abuse survivors are more likely to seek a mighty, idealized savior to rescue them from themselves. Larson's finding presented that the novel's protagonist develops a masochistic personality caused by the traumatic

incidents in her life and uses it to help herself cope with her distress. The studies mentioned are similar to this one, which discusses masochistic personality and the cause of its occurrence. However, another term is related in this paper, biracial. An instance of a study done regarding biracial and its psychological effect was by Hapsari and Soelistyarini (2015) from Universitas Airlangga, "Negotiating Biracial Identity as the Effect of Double Consciousness in Durrow's *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*". They used Du Bois' (2006) double consciousness theory to analyze Rachel's biracial identity and its matters. The finding stated that as a biracial, Rachel experiences anxiety as the effect of her double consciousness. The state has put her in a struggling condition whilst living in America and Europe. Their research is similar to this one as both discuss the struggles of a biracial individual.

Both terms, biracial and masochistic personality, can be found in narratives in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You* (2014). The novel that is written alternately between past and present portrays the grief of a biracial family for losing its family member and the depression of a biracial child. It tells the struggles of Lydia Elizabeth Lee, first daughter to James P. Lee, a Chinese professor who works as a lecturer in a university, and Marilyn Walker, James' wife, who is an American. Lydia is described to have experienced a depressive masochistic personality disorder. All are rooted in the fact that she is biracial, whose father comes from a minority race. Lydia's battle against the disorder flows to the surface after she is found drowned in the lake near their house after days of searching. The condition she suffered can be abstracted from her thoughts and behaviors found in the narrative. Therefore, this study aims to identify how depressive masochistic personality disorder issues are depicted in the novel and reveal the motive of the main character's depressive masochistic tendencies. The depressive masochistic personality disorder is explained in the discussion.

Methodology

The data for this study are all gathered from Clara Ng's novel, *Everything I Never Told You* (2014). The traumatic events related to the main character's biracial identity, the impacts, and how she faces them were marked, observed, and evaluated using Kenberg's (1988) psychoanalytic theory regarding depressive masochistic personality disorder. The discussion is a literature review by assessing the narrative elements relied on the interpretation of the texts (Creswell, 2014). Psychological approaches were also used to support the analysis.

Finding and Discussion

The problem of the family flows to the surface as Lydia is found drowned in the lake after days of searching. The cause of the drowning reveals the psychological problem faced by Lydia.

"Like everything; with mothers and fathers. Because of Lydia's mother and father, because of her mother's and father's mothers and fathers. Because long ago, her mother had gone missing, and her mother had brought her home. Because more than anything, her mother had wanted to stand out; because more than anything, her father had wanted to blend in. Because those things had been impossible." (Ng, 2014, p.27)

It can be abstracted from the passage that the major cause of the drowning comes from years of depression she faces connected to intergenerational conflict; the conflict she has with her mother and father who also once hold a conflict over their parents. The sentence *her mother had gone missing, and her mother had brought her home* marks the event that is powerful in influencing Lydia's thought and behavior. The phrase *because more than anything* implies Marilyn's and James' psychological problem because they have to overcome the

things that had been impossible. The conflict stays in between her parents and makes her mother, Marilyn, leave the family once when Lydia was young which hurts her so deep and later on gives rise to the disorder.

Marilyn at one point in her marriage to James has come to the event where she could no longer face the fact that being in the marriage and parenting world is her passion (Ng, 2014). She had unfulfilled dreams to catch that has made her leave the family for months until finally James finds her checking on her pregnancy in a hospital and takes her home. From the moment she promised herself, “[she] would not be like her own mother, shunting her daughter toward husband and house... She would help Lydia do everything she was capable of ... To encourage her, for the rest of her life, to do more than her mother had” (Ng, 2014, pp. 122-123). The passage implies that Marilyn is so disappointed about her mother and everything she had made her into. It shows that she has been in subjection of her mother’s will. It implies that Marilyn is tied to her mother’s thoughts and sayings “[i]t would bother Marilyn, for the rest of her life, that her mother had been right” (Ng, 2014, p. 30). She tries so hard following her mother’s words and finds that she loses herself in it; therefore, she does not want to do the same to her daughter.

Her leaving has done a great change in Lydia for she experienced the emptiness. Lydia needs her mother, but she left without saying words. The event has hit Lydia very hard and given her the fact that she is completely alone because she has no real friends (Ng, 2014) so family is all she got, therefore when her mother left, it says she has got nothing in life. Despite that, not knowing her reason has made Lydia feel guilty. “They’d done something wrong, she and Nath; they’d made her angry somehow. They hadn’t been what she wanted. If her mother ever came home ... [s]he would do everything her mother told her. Everything her mother wanted” (Ng, 2014, p. 114). The sentence, *they hadn’t been what she wanted* implies the thought that crossed Lydia’s mind as the reason her mother left the house. This thought puts her in suffering being exploited by her mother for her unconscious desires. The event has made Lydia say *yes, yes, yes* to all Marilyn’s words.

Marilyn’s dreams have made her change Lydia’s way of thought and behavior because she is so afraid of losing her mother again. Whilst Lydia thinks the best thing to keep her mother is by following her will, Marilyn thought she is helping Lydia for she never says no. It is seen in the passage “[a]ll her life she had heard her mother’s heart drumming one beat: **doctor, doctor, doctor.** She wanted this so much, Lydia knew, that she no longer needed to say it. It was always there. Lydia could not imagine another future, another life” (Ng, 2014, p. 136). The passage also tells that Lydia does not have a life of her own because she thinks her life is making her mother’s a better one. Her mother’s thoughts and her words have really taken her life. It is implied in the word *desperate* in the passage “[e]ach afternoon she rushed home, desperate to see her mother’s face, to make her mother smile” (Ng, 2014, p. 138). The word *desperate* shows that actually Lydia is suffering, she holds a conflict within herself doing so, for she thinks that is the best way to keep both her mother and the family united. She is depressed.

For Lydia, missing the figure of a mother has built the conscientiousness about her responsibility to hold the family together. The event drags her to sharpen the superego functions, raises the empathy for each of the family members and builds stronger need of love from them. It connects to depressive masochistic personality which is connected to the superego functions that show tendencies to be very serious, concerned about work performance and responsibility (Kernberg, 1988). Lydia’s depression can also be seen from the narrative “she had been afraid so long, she had forgotten what it was like not to be –afraid that, one day, her mother would disappear again, that her father would crumble, that their family would collapse once more” (Ng, 2014, p. 222). This passage shows the core of her

behavior of living a fake life. Lydia has made her life look wonderful in front of her family just to make them happy, to keep them united for she is so afraid they will collapse. Lydia pretends as if she had many friends by making fake calls in front of her parents, and they do not know the truth until her funeral (Ng, 2014). She had a miserable life that was only seen by her one and only brother Nath. Therefore, losing him has become her biggest fear, “[a]nd after a while, the biggest fear of all: of losing Nath, the only one who understood the strange and brittle balance in their family. Who knew all that had happened. Who had always kept her afloat” (Ng, 2014, p. 223). Nath has become her only guardian angel as she struggles over the depression she is struggling with. That is why she cannot bear to lose him when he is accepted by Harvard. She will have no one to hear all the things she does not say.

The words that are never said but meaningful, like the words which are written by Marilyn’s mother in her recipe book. The words that take control of both Marilyn and Lydia, “[a]nd there, on one page: alone drawn down the side. She sounded out the words. What mother doesn’t love to cook with her little girl? Beneath that: And what little girl doesn’t love learning with mom?” (Ng, 2014, p. 114). The words written tell the mother's will that is left unsaid and raises a different perspective on the children that finally takes their freedom. Marilyn has been told to manage herself being a good wife for all her life because her mother failed and got left by her husband, but she has dreamed of being a doctor. When she read the words, she felt guilty. It is the same with Lydia, when she read the words, she put herself under the thought that she must learn and learn, to not disappoint her mother. She lets her mother push her to the limit.

Lydia can manage the learning until it is too hard and she cannot handle the failing. She failed many times and to her standard is wrong, because failing does not make her mother happy. She feels bad and it is worsened by the fact Nath is accepted in Harvard and both her parents feel proud of him. They shower him with attention once hers. She feels terrible so she confronts her mother since she hides the letter receives for Nath from the university. The fear of losing him even harder, but when he pushes her out by the call and asks her to spill all her things to Jack, Nath’s school mate which he is against, she gets angry and feels disappointed. Then she joins Jack and his bad habit to get Nath’s attention back and deliver her anger. Jack has been teaching her to drive and being the other person who would listen to her, that she finally has a different feeling towards his attention and sweet behavior. At a point of her anger toward Nath, she decided to give herself to Jack for she thinks Jack would take it. However, to her surprise Jack refused the offer for a shocking fact that actually he has kept feelings for her brother, Nath. The rejection done by Jack hurts her pride, hence her sexual desires. Lydia feels depressed even more.

In addition, at her sixteenth birthday, the family has prepared a special day for her along with a special gift, differ from the usual. She has got books as her birthday gift for years, but that day she receives a gold necklace from her father and he will take her to take a test for a driving license after school hours. She feels wonderful until she sees a Chinese woman sitting next to his father in the car while he is picking her up. Not only that, to her conscience she is aware that the woman and her father have something special by their behavior in the car. She knows his father has been facing years of problems with her mom and the society regarding their racial values. The values she is finally affected too, the one that makes her biracial and need to struggle in the society. The thought of her father cheating on her mother triggers her anger, and to reflect the disappointment she deliberately failed the driving test.

The events have taken her to an event where she felt free. An event with Nath at the lake, “[w]hen his palms hit her shoulders, when the water closed over her head, Lydia had felt relief so great she had sighed in a deep choking lungful. She had staggered so readily, fell so eagerly, that she and Nath knew: that she felt it, too, this pull she now exerted, and didn’t want

it. That the weight of everything tilting toward her was too much” (Ng, 2014, p. 128). This passage refers to Nath’s act when he was trying to make Lydia drown for he was so angry and jealous of all the attention their parents have on Lydia. He felt neglected because Lydia has always become their favorite child. The passage implies at the time Nath finds out that actually Lydia is suffering for not having a real life and she has struggled but she cannot do it again because it is too painful.

The thought made Nath save Lydia, “It would always feel too big. He pushed her in. And then he pulled her out. All her life, Lydia would remember one thing. All his life, Nath would remember another” (Ng, 2014, p. 129). The word *all her life* means as it leaves a message to Nath that if he loses her, he will have to struggle alone, it leaves a thought in Lydia’s mind that she can have her freedom by drowning herself in the lake. It can also be taken from the line, “[s]he knew at last where everything had gone wrong. And she knew where she had to go” (Ng, 2014, p. 221). This is finally what takes Lydia’s life. She drowns herself for her freedom, from all the depression. Lydia keeps guilt and anger as faulty feelings; she is unable to show it accordingly. She transfers the aggression to suicidal thoughts after years of depression. She is also vulnerable to being rejected and disappointed by others that she acts opposite her normal behavior or thought to get others’ sympathy and love. It is all connected to the behavior of depressive masochistic personality explained by Kernberg (1988).

Conclusion

Lydia’s depressive masochistic personality disorder has put her in years of depression, which becomes significant depression and finally takes her life. The struggles described in the novel as one rooted in intergenerational conflict and clashes of values of the races. Poor communication has misinterpreted each individual’s thoughts and behavior. The lack of good communication, as mentioned in the title, *Everything I Never Told You*, portrays that expressing and revealing thought communicatively is very important for an individual. It also underscores that behavior speaks values.

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