

Paranoid Personality Disorder of the Main Character Seen in Edgar Allan Poe's *A Tale Tell Heart*

Ana Widiyanti

anawidiyanti@unsiq.ac.id

Universitas Sains Al-Qur'an, Wonosobo, Indonesia

Abstract

This study aims at analyzing the paranoid disorder reflected in Poe's A Tale Tell Heart. The researcher conducts a qualitative research by applying psychological approach. This study uses Freud's theory to explain the personality of the main character. The finding of the research shows that the main character has a mental disorder in form of personality disorder. The main character perceived paranoid and eventually as paranoid sufferer, the main character commits to be a murderer of another character.

Keywords: *paranoid, personality disorder*

Introduction

Human body consists of physic and psyche that governs a person in doing something. Psychological experts divide the psyche into two types, the conscious and unconscious mind. Some of them agree that human psyche is more powerful than physic, it is said that 80% of human power is in their psyche, while the rest 20% is the power of psychic. Besides, since the power of the psyche is bigger than the physic, the experts suggest one to be aware of his psyche. In other words, the psyche plays important role in human life. It can govern human to do both positive and negative things, depend on how human manage their psyche and how far human try to understand it.

The founding father of psychoanalysis theory, Sigmund Freud, implies that human psyche consists of three elements, namely the Id, Ego, and Superego. The three elements mention before will react like a chain reaction every time human want to do something (Thruschwell, 2009) Id, ego, and superego in Freud's idea are something that is inseparable, thus, it should work in harmony to create harmony, otherwise, human will experience anxiety. A person who is not able to

adjust his id, ego, and superego is called a maladjusted person. A maladjusted person usually will find difficulty in adjusting himself to the society (Hall, 1956: 28). In the world of psychology, a maladjusted person also can be called as having a personality disorder. Someone with personality disorder tends to do something impulsive, or on the contrary, becomes an introvert or antisocial person.

A maladjusted person or someone who experiences personality disorder does not only exist in the real-life but also is exists in the literary world. He is often depicted as the main character in literary works or film. In literary studies, representing human character or human problem in literary works is a kind of smart thing both to fill the aspect of entertainment and education. Freud as stated by Devardhi (2009:1) believed that artists, poets, novelists, dramatists, etc., use their creativity as a sort of therapy.

They blaze their neurotic strain through their creative work. Such creative work provides the reader, audience some insights into social phenomena and the people who exist in it. Thus, psychoanalyzing a literary text gives the reader a profound understanding of the 'unconscious' of the author which is supported by Freud's first theory "Primacy of the Unconscious".

Edgar Allan Poe's A Tale Tell Heart short story is one of literary works that succeed in stealing the readers' attention by presenting a story of a person with a personality disorder. Although Tale Tell Heart has been written into many versions, its charm is not fading yet. This research is aimed to reveal the personality disorder of the main character presented in the short story. How he deals with it, and how it influences his action in life.

Literary Review

The word 'personality' refers to the pattern of thoughts, feelings, and behavior that makes each of the individuals that they are. Rachel Robitz, M.D. (2018) defines personality as the way of thinking, feeling, and behaving that makes a person different from other people.

The way people think, feel, or behave is not always similar to others, people may react differently depending on the situation or condition they are in. However, most people psychologically behave in fairly predictable ways or

patterns that a person can be described as introvert or extrovert, and so on. The way a person behaves in a certain way then will make up his personality.

Someone's personality will develop as he grows up and confronts a different problem in life. Alwin et.al, stated that people differ in the ways that they view themselves and others, engage in relationships, and cope with adversity. People with a normal problem usually will have a normal or healthy personality, but people with extreme difficulties in social interaction, moreover the difficulties are persistent that lead them to significant personal and /or social problems, the people are described as experiencing a personality disorder.

Personality disorders form a class of mental disorders that are characterized by long-lasting rigid patterns of thought and behavior that cause serious problems with relationships and work (Grohol, 2015). Rizeanu said that personality disorders usually begin in the teenage years or early adulthood and causes significant problems and limitations in relationships and social encounters. Bienenfeld (2013) argued that the most common origin for personality disorders is multifactorial, but it can be because of biological, developmental, or genetic abnormalities. According to the American Psychological Association, the following are etiologic factors in developing personality disorder (www.apa.org):

- a. Genetics, such as a malfunctioning gene that may be a factor in obsessive-compulsive disorder or genetic links to aggression, anxiety, and fear traits that can play a role in personality disorder;
- b. Childhood trauma, this is something that associated with borderline personality disorder (Gunderson et.al, 2000);
- c. Verbal abuse in childhood, which is associated with borderline, narcissistic, obsessive-compulsive, or paranoid personality disorders in adulthood;
- d. High reactivity children
- e. Peers: a strong relationship with a relative, teacher or friend can offset negative influences.

Cloninger (2000) conducted a study with the result that the general criteria for the diagnosis of personality disorders are provided based on rating a few items describing four core features, namely: a low self-directedness, low cooperativeness, low affective stability, and low self-transcendence. American

Psychiatric Association, 1994) classified the personality disorder into clusters A, B, and C. The description of the three clusters are as follows:

Cluster A	Cluster B	Cluster C
Paranoid distrusting and suspicious interpretation of the motives of others	Antisocial disregard for and violation of the rights of others	Avoidant socially inhibited feelings of inadequacy, hypersensitivity to negative evaluation
Schizoid social detachment and restricted emotional expression	Borderline unstable relationships, self-image, affect, and impulsivity	Dependent submissive behavior, need to be taken care of
Schizotypal social discomfort, cognitive distortions, behavioral eccentricities	Histrionic excessive emotionality and attention seeking	Obsessive-compulsive preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and control
	Narcissistic grandiosity, need for admiration, lack of empathy	

Paranoid Personality Disorder

Paranoid personality disorder (PPD) is one of 10 diagnosable personality disorders that appear in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition (*DSM-5*), all of which are retained from the fourth edition of the manual. PPD is grouped with schizoid personality disorder and schizotypal personality disorder to form the cluster A personality disorders, which share the appearance of eccentricity and oddness. (<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.693.6921&rep=rep1&type=pdf>)

The specific criterion for PPD is a deep and persistent distrust of others, including assuming that the intent to cause harm is present. To be diagnosed, at least four of seven specific criteria must be met. These are unfounded suspicions that others are out to exploit, harm, or deceive the individual; preoccupation with doubts related to the loyalty and trustworthiness of others; a reluctance to confide in others out of a fear of being used; interpretation of hidden threatening messages

in benign comments or events; holding persistent grudges; perception of attacks on a character that are not apparent to anyone else, with quick counterattack; and recurrent suspicions related to the fidelity of one's partner without justification (<https://www.ebscohost.com/assets-sample-content/SWRC-Paranoid-Personality-Disorder-Quick-Lesson.pdf>)

Signs and symptoms include broadly held distrust and suspiciousness, a formal and businesslike manner, poor eye contact, projection of blame for difficulties in life, extreme concern about the emotions and attitudes of others, difficulty in interpersonal relationships, social isolation, hypersensitivity, jealousy, rigidity, hypervigilance, antagonism, and aggression. Some signs and symptoms may appear contradictory (<https://www.ebscohost.com/assets-sample-content/SWRC-Paranoid-Personality-Disorder-Quick-Lesson.pdf>)

Research Methodology

This study is descriptive qualitative research. The researcher uses some supporting data in written text, chosen data, and analyzed it structurally by some theory which has been mentioned previously. This descriptive study is chosen because it is appropriate to help the analysis, as Cresswell (2014:342) states:

"Qualitative methods demonstrate a different approach to scholarly inquiry than methods of quantitative research. Although the processes are similar, qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on the diverse design."

The purpose of qualitative research is to explain the phenomenon or issue of the research subject. Theory in qualitative research functions so that research is more directed and also as a research background. The results of qualitative research are more descriptive in a language in the form of words. The results of this research will produce more words than numbers.

Findings and Discussion

Edgar Allan Poe is well-known with his critics, most of his literary works are written to criticize the society or to show human's problem. *A Tell-Tale Heart* is one of his famous literary works written in a form of a short story. It was first published in James Russell Lowell's *The Pioneer* in January 1843. The Tell-Tale

Heart is widely considered as a classic of the Gothic fiction genre. Since it is written in a type of dramatic monologue, the conflict of the main character remains distinct. The story is told by an unnamed narrator who committed murder as the impact of his sanity. The victim of his murder is an old man with his "Vulture-eye" or "Evil Eye", as the narrator calls it. As the result, the narrator is haunted intensely by the old man's heart beating under floorboards.

A Tell-Tale Heart consists of some characters, they are the nameless narrator, the old man, the three police officers, and the neighbor. Poe uses the unnamed narrator on purpose. It seems that he wants the reader to focus only on understanding the action of the narrator, like commonly happen in a real-life that a murder usually someone unknown, someone with a dark secret that the people should not know. The old man, the three police officers and the neighbor describe in the short story are the supporting characters to strengthen the message of the story.

A. Paranoid Personality Disorder Symptom Experienced by the Unnamed Narrator

Poe, through A Tale-Tell Heart, describes the condition of a person with a personality disorder. How the character deals with it is told beautifully in an intent narration. The paranoid personality disorder experiences by the narrator is clearly describing through some symptoms as follows:

- Self Debate or Inner Conflicts

The story begins with the narrator's claim about his action. He tries to convince others that he is not insane, he is normal and healthy, as described in the following quotation:

“True! Nervous -- very, very nervous I had been and am! But why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses -- not destroyed them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily --how calmly I can tell you the whole story (Poe, 1843:1)

For the reader who read the story for the first time, he may think that the narrator is normal, he is not insane, but if the quotation read closely, the reader will find that the narrator's statement above is a mix of fear, nervous and mad. He is afraid of being revealed by others that he is wrong.

The narrator keeps claiming his innocence, his nervousness, by saying something logical as describe in the below quotation:

“Now this is the point. You fancy me mad. Madmen know nothing. But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded — with what caution —with what foresight — with what dissimulation I went to work! I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him.” (Poe, 1843:1)

The narrator’s words “I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him”, prove that there is an inner conflict, a self debate in him, for normal people, killing someone, no matter what is the reason is something wrong. Something that should not be done. But, since the narrator is not psychologically normal, he tries to find some reasonable claim to cover what he has done. According to a psychologist, someone with a personality disorder often acts something that governs by his unconsciousness. Even most of them are the ones who are self-centered, the words “But you should have seen me. You should have seen how wisely I proceeded — with what caution —with what foresight — with what dissimulation I went to work!” is the narrator self-centered personality.

Also, the words "I was never kinder to the old man than during the whole week before I killed him" shows the true color of the narrator. He does not quite care about the old man, in the contrary, it shows his intention to harm him. It also shows that the narrator's action governs by his unconsciousness that leads him to have inner conflicts.

- Experience of extreme fear

Beside experiencing self debate or inner conflicts, someone with paranoid personality disorder usually will experience a great, intimidating, or unreasonable fear toward something or someone around him. He believes that something or someone around him will do any harm to him. It happens because his extreme mistrust to others. The condition is captured perfectly through the narrator's condition. He is described to be haunted by the eye of the old man continuously that lead him to have a psychological problem. The following quotation shows how he feels intimidating by something around him.

“It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his

gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! Yes, it was this! He had the eye of a bird, a **vulture** -- a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell on me, my blood ran cold; and so -- very slowly -- I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and free myself of the eye forever.” (Poe, 1983: 8)

The above quotation shows how the narrator is being intimidating, and feeling a great fear because of the old man’s eye. The words “Whenever it fell on me, my blood ran cold; and so -- very slowly -- I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and free myself the eye forever”, prove that the main character considers that the old man’s eyes are harmful, so it makes him change his mind to finally plans to kill him.

The great fear or intimidating situation keeps happening toward the narrator as describes in the below quotation:

“And this I did for seven long nights -- but I found the eye always closed; and so it was impossible to do the work; for it was not the old man who was a problem for me, but his Evil Eye.” (Poe, 1843: 1)

Again, the above quotation describes how the narrator considers the old man’s eyes. He said it is “Evil Eye”. People believe that an evil eye usually scary, harmful, ugly, etc. So, when the main character said that the old man's eyes as an evil eye, he thinks that it is really scary. What the main character feel is something unreasonable because he said in the previous quotation that he loves the old man. He has no desire to kill him, but only because of the old man's eyes, he feels haunted and getting angry every time he sees it.

At first, it is the old man's eyes that haunts the main character, but then, the main character also feels paranoid about other things like described in the following quotation:

“Then I heard a noise, and I knew it was the sound of human **terror**. It was the low sound that arises from the bottom of the soul. I knew the sound well. Many a night, late at night, when all the world slept, it has **welled** up from deep within my own chest. I say I knew it well.” (Poe, 1843:

In the previous quotation the main character said that because of his disease, his senses are sharper that he can hear heaven and hell's voice. The above quotation shows how the main character finally can hear a scary sound that he considered it as a sound of human terror. The word terror in the above quotation is something

obvious to describe the main character's great fear. For the normal person, the sound described in the above quotation is something very common, it is the sound of a person who sleeps at night, but for the main character who experiences personality disorder, the sound is something haunted.

The psychologist said that personality disorder happened because of the persistent extreme problem faced by someone, that those persistent problems finally lead to one's problem. That is what happens to the main character. The extreme fear he feels every time he sees the old man's eyes it leads him to have a paranoid feeling and become his psychological problem.

- **Aggressive Action**

Someone with paranoid personality disorder usually will be aggressive or even demonic. It happens because he can not control his feeling, mind, or logic that he feels inner conflict.

In this short story, the narrator is told to finally did something evil. He eventually takes the old man's life. The ending action of the narrator is evidence of the aggressiveness, the proof that the narrator is not in the normal condition, he can not differentiate what is real and what is unreal. He is like to have a hallucination about the old man's eye, he also feels hallucinate that he hears the sound of terror from the old man.

“Presently I heard a slight groan, and I knew it was the groan of mortal terror. It was not a groan of pain or grief — oh, no! — it was the low stifled sound that arises from the bottom of the soul when overcharged with awe. I knew the sound well. Many a night, just at midnight, when all the world slept, it has welled up from my own bosom, deepening, with its dreadful echo, the terrors that distracted me. I say I knew it well.”
(Poe, 1843: 2)

The above quotation describes how the narrator starts to do his aggressive action. Because he is obsessed by the old man's eye, he plans to do an act of killing. It is told that before he finally takes the life of the old man, he aggressively did a kind of observation. Every night, he will enter the old man's room to watch his 'vulture eye'. He does his acting like a professional. He does killing plan smoothly yet aggressively.

“...And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty

tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night. So you see he would have been a very profound old man, indeed, to suspect that every night, just at twelve, I looked in upon him while he slept.”(Poe,1843: 1)

The above quotation shows how abnormal person behaves. The one with a personality disorder often not feeling guilty to do something wrong or bad. The words "And every morning, when the day broke, I went boldly into the chamber, and spoke courageously to him, calling him by name in a hearty tone, and inquiring how he had passed the night" clearly describes the genuine personality of the narrator, how he can easily pretend that nothing has happened. He tries to cover his evil desire in his good manner.

The narrator aggressive action continues, he keeps watching the old man until a week. He is waiting for the reason to finish his action.

“Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch’s minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night had I felt the extent of my own powers — of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph.” (Poe,1843: 1-2)

A view words at the end of the quotation "I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph" are another evidence that the narrator is in personality disorder. How can that a normal person feeling triumphant while doing a demonic action?

The aggressiveness of the narrator is getting bigger and strong until he finally successfully kill the old man. It is described in the following quotation:

“ If still, you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence. First of all, I dismembered the corpse. I cut off the head and the arms and the legs. I then took up three planks from the flooring of the chamber and deposited all between the scantlings. I then replaced the boards so cleverly, so cunningly, that no human eye — not even his — could have detected anything wrong. There was nothing to wash out—no stain of any kind — no blood-spot whatever. I had been too wary for that. A tub had caught all — ha! Ha.” (Poe,1843: 3)

For the one with a personality disorder, aggressiveness can lead them to do something psychopathic. The above quotation also proves that the narrator is insane. He is the example of a maladjusted person whose psyche is mostly governed by his id.

B. Paranoid Personality Disorder Factors

According to the American Psychiatric Association, paranoid personality disorder happens because of many factors, that can be social or biological or genetic. A Tale Tell Heart does not explore the narrator's childhood or early life, but it clearly describes the factor of the narrator's personality disorder action. The narrator's personality disorder happens because of his madness. He suffers from intense unreasonable extreme fear. He fears the old man's eye.

“I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. For his gold I had no desire. I think it was his eye! yes, it was this! One of his eyes resembled that of a vulture—a pale blue eye, with a film over it. Whenever it fell upon me, my blood ran cold; and so by degrees—very gradually—I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever.” (Poe, 1843: 1)

The intense fear leads him to acute paranoid conditions that shape his personality and action. This anxiety became even more pronounced when the narrator was being questioned by the police.

“Oh God! what could I do? I foamed — I raved — I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder — louder — louder! And still, the men chatted pleasantly and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! — no, no! They heard! — they suspected! — they knew! — they were making a mockery of my horror!—this I thought, and this I think.” (Poe, 1843:4)

His increasing anxiety led to his confession when he believed he heard the beating of the old man's heart.

“Villains!” I shrieked, “dissemble no more! I admit the deed! — tear up the planks! — here, here! — it is the beating of his hideous heart!” (Poe,1843:4)

Conclusion

In Poe’s short stories The Tell-Tale Heart, paranoid personality disorder is represented through some inner conflicts of the narrator. The short story shows the main signs and symptoms of paranoid personality disorder. Primarily, the main characters suffer from a simple that is the eye of the old man, but because it happens so intense, the narrator finally becomes paranoid. He can not differ what is real and what is a hallucination. The condition getting acute that the narrator

can not control his thinking. He finally commits a crime by taking the old man's life.

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