

SOCIOPATHIC PERSONALITY DISORDER IN HUMBERT HUMBERT'S CHARACTER OF NABOKOV'S *LOLITA*

Alifiadita Nindyarini Wirawan^{1*}, Samanik²⁾

Faculty of Arts and Education, Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia, Zainal Abidin Pagar Alam,
Bandar Lampung
Indonesia

*alifiaditanindy2979@gmail.com, stba.teknokrat@gmail.com

Abstract

Every literary work has its own uniqueness in portraying certain society's phenomenon. It can be seen from the creation of a literary work has correlation with the society phenomenon from the elements inside the literary work, like characters and characterization, theme, setting and plot are created. Pickering and Hoepfer (1981) stated that the creation of literature is a uniquely human activity, born of man's timeless desire to understand, express, and finally share experience. Basically, the essence of literary work is where the literary work is used as portrayal media to portrayed or described certain phenomenon in society in which every phenomena has its own story and it become the uniqueness of the literary work. As well as a literary work able to be used to describe certain way of people's thinking and behaviors in particular place and condition which is also add the interesting value of the work itself. In this respect, the writer select one of popular literary works in the world entitled *Lolita*. This research paper aims to investigate a Russian literary work, whether or not Humbert Humbert character of Nabokov's *Lolita* suffer sociopathic personality disorder. By collecting data in form of quotation, statements in the novel and relevant science about the theory of personality disorder particularly sociopathic personality disorder from many sources will reveal the prove that Humbert Humbert is a sociopath in the form of symptoms and characteristic of sociopathic personality disorder. In addition, the paper also analyzes the cause and the impact of sociopathic personality disorder in Humbert Humbert character. The researcher use a sociopathic personality disorder theory by Hare (1997), Loewen (2013), Birnbaum (1910), Yildirim & Dderksen (2013) and psychology of literature approach by Rivaldy (2007) in analyzing the paper. The researcher uses the novel as primary data and relevant journals as the secondary data. Moreover, by using relevant previous studies from many researchers will support the research as well as in gaining precise result of the research itself. The finding of this study are (1) The Symptoms of Sociopathic Personality Disorder; (2) The Characteristics of Sociopath; (3) The Cause of Sociopathic Personality Disorder and (4) The Impact of Sociopathic Personality Disorder toward Humbert Humbert Character in *Lolita*.

Keywords: literary work, phenomenon, society, *Lolita*, personality disorder, symptoms, characteristics, causes, effects

Introduction

Each literary work has its own uniqueness in portraying certain society's phenomenon. It can be seen from the creation of a literary work has correlation with the society phenomenon through the elements inside the literary work, like characters and characterization, theme, setting and plot are created. Pickering and Hoepfer (1981) stated that the creation of literature is a uniquely human activity, born of man's timeless desire to understand, express, and finally share experience. Basically, the essence of literary work is where the literary work is

used as portrayal media to portray or describe certain phenomenon in society in which every phenomenon has its own story and it become the uniqueness of the literary work. As well as a literary work able to be used to describe certain way of people's thinking and behaviors in particular place and condition which is also add the interesting value of the work itself. In this respect, the writer select one of popular literary works in the world entitled *Lolita*.

The most well known novel of Vladimir Nabokov, "*Lolita*" is known as a unique form of literary work which gives the

portrayal of certain social issue related to society's behavior. This piece of work created by a well known Russian author, Vladimir Nabokov describes a life story of Humbert Humbert as a special man who has a different point of view of love. The essence of love from the perspective of Humbert is an endless obsession instead of pure and sincere affection toward someone in life. He thinks that love is something that he should have by all means, from possessing the person until do any kind of actions to keep the love only for himself. It means by doing any kind of actions is included by doing immoral actions such as lying, raping, and killing someone.

In this story, Humbert is deeply in love with 13th year old girl named Lolita Haze, the daughter of Dolores Haze. As a widower, Dolores Haze is easily charmed by the charisma of Humbert Humbert as the European scholar who is very smart in covering his actual personality with his beautiful words of poems. It makes people will give a good first impression to Humbert because of his innocent and charming words that he used frequently. Surely, it is very simple for Humbert to fulfill his lust of love with Lolita by marrying the mother. So, he can stay close with his "*nymphet*" or fairy of love which is a nickname for his love, Lolita Haze. Indirectly, it shows Humbert willingness to lie in order to fulfill his new obsession of love after Annabel Leigh as his childhood first love ended tragically because of a sudden death of Annabel Leigh. Since then, Humbert keeps lying in order to stay close with Lolita as his new love and it shows Humbert is obviously has a tendency in lying frequently.

Unconsciously, it derives him in looking for an identical replacement of his first love without seeing the condition of the person whether the girl is in the same age with him or not. Consequently, he becomes a person who falls in love with an under-age girl who is in the term of psychology. It can be called as "*pedophilia*". This argument in line with the statement of Md. Shafiqul Islam

(2015) explained that pedophilia simply refers to the sexual interest adults towards prepubescent children. Moreover, the story describe Humbert's efforts in being close with his love is not only lying but also have thought of killing anyone who is potentially will be close with his love. It makes him a person that does not have conscience and clear mind because in the end of the story Humbert is finally realizing his thought of killing someone by murdering Clare Quilty as someone who has a special relationship with Lolita. Actually, Quilty has the same characteristic of Humbert that fall in love with under-age girl and use the girl as only a sexual object.

Therefore, the reason of the writer choose Nabokov's works because he portrays the main character of his novel as a character who has uncommon personality and the behaviors are morally unaccepted among the society, such as, liar, pedophilia, and murderer which is in some cases it happened in society environment. There are many complexities toward the personality and the behaviors where Nabokov covers those complexities in elegant ways with sense of arts and literature which indirectly it becomes the other attractive aspects of Nabokov's novel of Lolita. However, the interesting part is actually where Humbert as the main character shows to be more than just a person who has a sexual deviation and an amateur liar. In this case, he also shows a tendency of a person that can transform into a sociopath. These actions done by the main character is included as a character that has personality disorder. The International Classification of Diseases, (1993, p.76). defines personality disorders comprise of deeply ingrained and enduring behavioral patterns, manifesting themselves as inflexible responses to a broad range of personal and social situation which they represent extreme or significant deviation from the manner. Based on the International Classification of Disease (ICD-10) explanation about personality disorder, the

brief description of the main character behaviors are already shows the indication.

Furthermore, the main focus of this research paper is in indicating the existence of other personality disorder which is sociopathic personality disorder toward Humbert Humbert character beside pedophilia and tendency in lying frequently. Therefore, this research uses sociopathic personality disorder theory in order to find out whether Humbert Humbert character has a tendency to become a sociopath. Surely, it needs deep understanding of the theory of sociopathic personality disorder as well before we can indicates someone that probably has a sociopathic personality disorder and becomes a sociopath.

Based on the background of study, the writer arranges the core matter into; how sociopathic personality disorder is seen through Humbert Humbert's character in Nabokov's *Lolita*?

Based on the statement of core matter that has been arranged, the aim of this research is: To get scientific result about the pattern and symptoms of sociopathic personality disorder in *Lolita* novel by Russian author, Vladimir Nabokov through the portrayal of main character behaviors and characteristic

Findings and Discussion

Surely, it needs deep understanding of the theory of sociopathic personality disorder before we can indicates a person who is probably has sociopathic personality disorder and becomes a sociopath. As well as in indicating whether Humbert Humbert's character of *Lolita* has sociopathic personality disorder. Therefore, by knowing the theory of sociopathic personality disorder will ease us in indicating Humbert Humbert character's personality disorder. According to Kelly McAleer, Psy.D, "Sociopath is less organized in his or her demeanor; he or she might be nervous, easily agitated, and quick to display anger. A sociopath is more likely to spontaneously act out in inappropriate ways without thinking through the

consequences." Based on the statement, Humbert Humbert character shows these behaviors, where Humbert clearly does not think of the consequences of loving under-age girl and have atthought of possessing the girl for himself.

She was Lo, plain Lo, in the morning, standing four feet ten in one sock. She was Lola in slacks. She was Dolly at school. She was Dolores on the dotted line. But in my arms she was always Lolita. (Chapter 1, Page 1)

Based on the quotation above, Humbert actually realized that *Lolita* is much younger than him. Certainly, to be in love with someone who is much younger than you, there will be some consequences like social punishment and state law. Since, this action included as violating the law. This is only one of the symptoms of a person who has sociopathic personality disorder when the person does not care whether his or her actions are violating social norm and law.

However, it is not a simple thing in indicating someone has a sociopathic personality disorder by only knowing the definition or indicates one behavior as well as in indicating Humbert Humbert as the main characters of *Lolita*. In order to know Humbert Humbert character is actually has a sociopathic personality disorder, it needs comprehensive study, because the definition only describes some general indications. So, we cannot simply judge Humbert as a sociopath or having the indications. It needs deeper and comprehensive understanding about sociopathic personality disorder theory not only the definition but also by knowing the symptoms, the characteristics, the causes and the effects. By understanding these elements which related to sociopathic personality disorder, it will reveal whether Humbert Humbert characters has sociopathic personality disorder or not. By understanding the symptoms as the first attempt included in indicating someone whether the person has a sociopathic personality disorder or not, it will give a valid clarification toward the argument of the research.

1. Symptoms of Sociopathic Personality Disorder

The theory of sociopathy develop in 1995 by Robert Hare which shows that both psychopathy and sociopathy are under the heading of Antisocial Personality Disorders (ASPD). According to Hare (1995), in order to indicate people is a sociopath or has a sociopathic personality disorder, the people shows at least three or more of a sociopathic personality disorder symptoms which mentioned in the following paragraph.

- a. Failure to conform to social norms.
- b. Deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases.
- c. Excuses or subject changing when caught in a lie.
- d. Feeling no shame when caught in an embarrassing situation.
- e. Display impulsive behavior which is indicated by an inability to plan the future.
- f. Irritability and aggressiveness, as indicated by repeated physical fights or assaults.

Based on those symptoms Humbert Humbert characters shows at least 5 symptoms which convinced the analysis that Humbert has a sociopathic personality disorder. First is inability to abide by the social norms and thus violates law. Humbert's obsession of his love Lolita is indirectly prove the statement that Humbert cannot live among the society because he cannot embrace social norms when he indirectly decided to start having a relationship with under-age girl Lolita which is strongly forbidden in social norms and also violates law.

“And she was mine, she was mine, the key was in my fist, my fist was in my pocket, she was mine.” (Chapter 22, Page 12)

Based on the statement, the word “she” refers to Lolita and Humbert declare statement which shows he was very determine to have Lolita for himself. However, as we know Lolita is underage girl

who is Humbert's step daughter. Clearly, his intention in having relationship with her is forbidden in social norm and law. Since, it morally unaccepted and considered as child sexual abuse. So, for the first, Humbert already show the first symptom of sociopathic personality disorder.

Second is deceitfulness, as indicated by repeated lying, use of aliases, or conning others for personal profit or pleasure. Clearly, the story tells of how Humbert is frequently lying and turns out to be an amateur liar which will cause many consequences. Surely, this kind of action can disharm other people and put someone into arrest.

“Don't cry, I'm sorry to have deceived you so much, but that's how life is.” (Chapter 20, Page 37)

Based on the statement, Humbert keep lying to his wife Dolores who is also as Lolita's mother about his disgrace intention of marrying her daughter. This secret finally revealed when his wife read his personal journal which contains every details of his feeling toward Lolita and his manipulative actions that he did in their entire marriage life included state the reason why he married her. The words “deceived you so much” show that Humbert has many lies to his wife. It shows Humbert use his wife only as his tool to fulfill his personal pleasure or profit.

Third is irritability and aggressiveness. “*She had very vulnerable legs, and I decided I would limit myself to hurting her very horribly as soon as we were alone.*” (Chapter 8, Page 29) Based on this quotation, the word “she” is refers to Valeria who was Humbert's first wife. He was angry to Valeria because she was cheating on him and he really wants to hurt her in order to fulfill his anger and revenge. This quotation shows the aggressiveness of Humbert characters as well. This is the behavior that already can be seen before he meet Lolita and marry her mother, because basically Humbert start to have this aggressiveness

since his dramatic lost of his childhood first love “Annabel Leigh”.

Four is feeling no shame when caught in an embarrassing situation. In this case, Humbert shows that even though his secret of loving underage girl and killing someone which both of them included as disgrace actions or shameful things, he still admits it and does not feel ashamed because of it.

“I love you. I was a pentapod monster, but I loved you. I was despicable and brutal, and turpid, and everything, mais je t’aimais, je t’aimais!” (Chapter 30, page 16)

This is a quotation when Lolita knows about Humbert’s crime of killing Quilty. Humbert does not feel shame or guilty but he feels very afraid of losing Lolita because of his shameful or disgrace action. It shows that he only cares about his obsession.

Finally, excuses or subject changing when caught in a lie. It is proven by having Humbert keep denying on his new obsession of Lolita to his wife, Dolores Haze who is a mother of Lolita. Even Dolores already read his personal journal which tells in detail about his obsession of possessing her daughter. Basically, there are many symptoms that can help us in indicating someone has a sociopathic personality disorder. However, since Humbert already shows five symptoms, it makes Humbert’s tendency of having sociopathic personality disorder is increased or there are high possibilities of Humbert have a sociopathic personality disorder.

2. Characteristics of Sociopathic Personality Disorder

In order to ensure whether Humbert Humbert character has a sociopathic personality disorder, we are not only indicate the symptoms but also indicates the characteristics of sociopathic personality disorder over Humbert Humbert character. According to Stanley (2013) stated that, “Someone who is described as a sociopath

will have several traits that set them apart from those with no personality disorders.” These are characteristics of sociopathic personality disorder:

- a. Lack of empathy; Inability to feel sympathy for others or to understand the emotional consequences of their actions.
- b. Cold, calculating nature; The ability and willingness to use others around them to personal gain.
- c. Charming; While the sociopath is unable to fully understand the emotions of others, they are capable but rather highly adept at mimicking them and might appear to be charming and normal at first.
- d. Manipulative; Sociopaths use their superficial charm and high IQ to manipulate others to get their ends.
- e. Sexually Deviant
- f. Paranoid; They feel a lack of trust and paranoia.

Based on the characteristics above, there are 5 characteristics which reflected in Humbert Humbert’s characters.

First is cold characteristic. “*Quine the Swine. Guilty of killing Quilty. Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with!*” (Chapter 28, page 270) Based on this statement, Humbert Humbert characters obsession of loving underage girl who is Lolita motivate him to do any kind of actions without considering the risks even it can cause problem to other people included harm people or even commit a murder. Indirectly, it makes him a cold person which is willingly to anything in order to gain whatever he wants in his life.

Second is charming. In this respect, Humbert characters is described as a charming person who has a good educational background and has literature skills like write a story and poems. He is also known as someone who is smart in using attractive and persuasive words. For example, the following quotation: “Running in the wind, in the pollen and dust, a flower in flight.” (Chapter 13, Page 3) This is a quotation of Humbert makes poem about Lolita. From the

way he wrote the poem with beautiful imagery language which shows his ability in literature skills and his own way in covering his true side of him by his charm.

Third is manipulative which is described in most of Humbert efforts to be closed with Lolita. For example, in the following quotation:

“We sat on cushions heaped on the floor, and L. Was between the women and me. In my turn, I launched upon a hilarious account of my arctic adventures. The muse of invention handed me a rifle and I shot a white bear who sat down and said: Ah! All the while I was acutely aware of L.’s nearness and as I spoke I gestured in the merciful dark and took advantage of those invisible gestures of mine to touch her hand, her shoulder....” (Chapter 11, Page 45)

Based on the quotation above shows that, Humbert use his manipulative movement in order to get a chance to be closed and touched with Lolita by using tell a joke as his cover protection of his manipulative action.

Fourth is paranoid characteristic which described in the novel about Humbert characters is paranoid, or can be called as when a person feels lack of trust toward anything. “*I had possessed her – and she never knew it.*” (Chapter 28, page 19) it shows that he only concern of possessing Lolita for himself because of his paranoia of losing Lolita.

The last but not least is sexually deviant. One of the characteristics of a sociopathic personality disorder is sexually deviant. In this respect, Humbert characters of Lolita describe him as a person who has sexual deviant because of his traumatic experience of losing his first childhood love. Indirectly, he tries to find the replacement for his first love without considering other aspects like age, because the important thing is that he wants to find a girl who is similar with his first love. The quotation below convinces the stated argument.

“It was love at first sight, at last sight, at ever and ever sight.” (Chapter 29, page 2)

Based on the quotation “she” refers to Lolita and it shows that he completely has sexual deviant when he start fell in love with Lolita and it can be seen that he is determine to keep Lolita for himself, since he said “*at last sight, at ever and ever sight*” which can be called as a firm statement of determination.

3. Causes of Sociopathic Personality Disorder

By knowing the symptoms and characteristics of sociopathic personality disorder will lead us to the next analysis which is the causes of this personality disorder which is in this case is toward Humbert Humbert characters. According to stated that, “a person who has a sociopathic disorder caused by having other mental health disorders like depression or anxiety. Moreover, based on Harvard Health Publications, the cause of a person has a personality disorder included sociopathic personality disorder because of influence from the environment included childhood traumatic experience. In this respect, Humbert Humbert character has a tendency of a sociopathic personality disorder mostly because of these two factors. There are childhood traumatic experience and depression and anxiety.

As we know from Lolita novel tells that Humbert has his first crush with his childhood friend named Annabel Leigh who is suddenly passed away because of typhus sickness. It was a shocking moment for Humbert and it gives a serious injury to his heart. Indirectly, it becomes his darkest and traumatic experience for him. It makes him become anti social person and hard to open his heart to other women. Moreover, when he get cheated by his first wife named Valeria which is only makes his heart more injured and feel traumatize with love. Therefore, when he met Lolita his life is

change, because he sees the portrayal of his first love in Lolita.

“In the course of the sun-shot moment that my glance slithered over the kneeling child while I passed by her in my adult disguise (a great big hand-some hunk of movieland manhood), the vacuum of my soul managed to suck in every detail of her bright beauty, and these I checked against the features of **my dead bride**. A little later, of course, she, this nouvelle, this Lolita, my Lolita, was to eclipse completely **her prototype**.” (Chapter 10, Page 39-40)

Based on this quotation, the word “my dead bride” and “her prototype” shows that he finally found the replacement of his first love. Since then, he is very determine to be close with Lolita and even want to possess Lolita for himself or can be called as his obsession. His obsession toward Lolita make him becomes a person who cannot think rational and logic toward responding something. Obviously, Humbert’s traumatic experience of losing his first love and tragic divorce, actually gives him depression and anxiety feeling. So, when he met Lolita who a person that shows the portrayal of his first love, he considered Lolita not only as the replacement of his first love but also his self – healing. Therefore, every actions and behaviors that he did are considered as his attempts to protect his love without considering the risks from his action, because of his anxiety of losing his love. Clearly, these two causes makes Humbert Humbert characters shows these symptoms and characteristics of sociopathic personality disorder.

4. The Effects of Sociopathic Personality Disorder

The effect of sociopathic personality disorder creates a person who is brutal, aggressive, violent against people and cold hearted. *“I would fight of course. Oh, I would fight. Better destroy everything than surrender her”* (Chapter 32, Page 25) Based on this quotation, it shows that Humbert

turns into an aggressive person who has thought of hurting people or even killing people. Moreover, it makes him become a cold hearted person and brutal murderer. The following quotation can confirm this statement.

“.... before I drove to wherever the beast’s lair was – and then pulled the pistol’s foreskin back, and then enjoyed the orgasm of the crushed trigger.” (Chapter 33, Page 10)

Based on the quotation, it shows Humbert enjoy the moment of murdering someone and his satisfied feeling because of it. In brief, the impact of a person who has sociopathic personality disorder will lead that person to commit several actions that morally unacceptable and restricted by law. In this respect, Humbert Humbert characters shows the effect of the symptoms, characteristics, and the cause of sociopathic personality disorder over Lolita novel through his character, actions and behaviors.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, Humbert Humbert character shows five symptoms and characteristics of sociopathic personality disorder which the causes are because of traumatic experience and depression or anxiety. Since his traumatic lost of his childhood first love and dramatic divorce with Valeria, it gives a big trauma and depression to his life which becomes the main causes of his actions when he met Lolita. The symptoms and the characteristics can be seen from actions and behaviors of Humbert Humbert characters of Lolita. Especially, his attempt to keep Lolita for himself who becomes the replacement of his childhood first love named Annable Leigh. Any kind of actions he did always in the name of his love Lolita included when he manipulate Lolita’s mother by marrying her as a way to be close with Lolita and he also killed Quilty because of his affair with Lolita. He never regrets for every action he did and think that it is only sacrifices to protect Lolita. Therefore, his actions and

behaviors do not only portray the symptoms and characteristics of sociopathic personality disorder but also confirm that Humbert Humbert characters has sociopathic personality disorder and the trigger of this phenomenon is Lolita as his new love and obsession.

Rivaldy, P. Rallie. (2007). *Psychological Approach in Literature*. United States of America: Academia.

The ICD-10 Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders (10th ed.). (1993). Geneva: World Health Organization.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *“Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)”*. United States of America: American Psychiatric Association.

Baskin-Sommers, Arielle R & P. Newman, Joseph. (2014). *“Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment”*. United States of America: Online first Publication.

Hare, R.D. Ph.D. (1995). *Psychopaths: New Trends in Research*. Retrieved from <http://www.mentalhealth.com/articles/1999/04/22/> World Wide Web.

Horakova, Katerina. (2015). *“Men vs. Women: Manipulation in Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita”*. Zlin: Tomas Bata University.

Islam, Md. Shafiqul. (2015). *“Pedophilia: a Psychiatric Disorder or a Perverse Sexual Orientation? Critical Study of Vladimir Nabokov’s Lolita”*. India: Global Journal of Human-social science.

Jones, Heather Menzies. (1995). *“Nabokov’s Dark American Dream: Pedophilia, Poe, and Postmodernism in Lolita”*. New York: University of New York.

Kumar, Ranjit. (2005). *Research Methodology: a step-by-step guide for beginners*. New Delhi: SAGE Publication India Pvt Ltd.

Loewen, C. Stanley. (2013). *“Characteristics of a Sociopath”*. America: HealthGuidance.

Pickering, James H., & Jeffrey, D. Hooper. (1981). *Concise Companion to Literature*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.