

# CHRISTIAN GREY'S SEXUAL DEVIATION IN E. L. JAMES' *FIFTY SHADES TRILOGY* NOVEL: A PSYCHOANALYSIS APPROACH

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## Abstract

This research aimed to (1) find the type of sexual deviation suffered by Christian Grey and to (2) find and analyze the causes of Christian Grey's sexual deviation. This research used a qualitative study applying content analysis method. The data were some phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs and expressions used to convey the type of sexual deviation suffered by the main character, and the psychosexual development of the main character and the impact of it to his sexual deviation. To obtain credibility of the analysis, the researcher used triangulation method. The results of this research show first, the type of sexual deviation suffered by Christian Grey is sexual sadism. The second result shows Christian Grey's sexual sadism which is caused by the unsuccessful completion of his psychosexual development stages.

**Key words:** sexual deviation, paraphilia, sexual sadism, psychoanalysis, psychosexual development

## INTRODUCTION

The world and universe work in a systematical way. There are cycles and stages that have to be passed through in order to achieve stability. Every cycle and stage has its own result and aim, and it has to be done properly in order to achieve stability and normality of the result itself. When one or more phases in a cycle or a stage are disturbed or not done properly, then there will be an error or an abnormality of the end result. The more significant phase is disturbed, the bigger error will happen to the end result.

Human psychology also has its own stages in the development of human personality. One example of personality development theory is *psychosexual development*, a theory found by Sigmund Freud which explains that human sexuality is developed through stages as long as they are alive. Freud called these stages as psychosexual stages because each stage – the

oral, the anal, the phallic, the latent, and the genital – represents the fixation of libido on different areas of the body at different stages of growth. Like any other cycles and stages, obstructions can also happen in psychosexual development. If one or more significant stages are disturbed, the person will have abnormal and deviant behavior in the end stage. Deviation in human behavior can be non-sexual and sexual. Abnormal or deviant behavior is behavior which “violates prevailing norms of a morality in a society” or “behavior which disturbs the regular course of his everyday life, or that of other people” (Statt, 1998: 1&39).

According to *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology Online* (Tewksbury, 2007: 1), sexual deviation refers to “behaviors that involve individuals seeking erotic gratification through means that are considered odd, different, or unacceptable to either most or influential persons in one's

community." The way of achieving gratification or the state of being satisfied of a sexually deviant person is different from that of a sexually normal person. A person who suffers from sexual deviation finds pleasure in unusual sexual practices that are often seen as abnormal, unnatural, or even abusive at times, such as exhibitionism, pedophilia, or sadomasochism. If the stages of a person's psychosexual development is disturbed or not done properly, this deviant behavior will accumulate in the end stage and causes a person to suffer from it (Strachey, 2000: 90).

The psychoanalysis theory says that childhood experiences and unconscious desires influence behavior. Humans' personalities have memories, beliefs, urges, drives, and instincts that they are not always aware of and that make up this unconscious. Sigmund Freud proposed that psychological development in childhood takes place in a series of fixed stages called *psychosexual stages*. He believed that life was built around the concept of tension and pleasure, and that the buildup of tension could cause a lot of conflicts. The major driving force behind Freud's instinctual theory is the concept of *libido*. *Libido* is natural energy source that fuels the mechanism of the mind (Freud, 2010: 13). *Libido* is centered in different area of the body at each stage and the area which becomes the center of libido is called the *erogenous zone* (Hall and Lindzey, 1957: 51). Our libidinal impulses are what want to be gratified. When they are either over-gratified,

not gratified at all, or partially gratified, *fixation* occurs at a psychosexual stage and we face either *conflict* or anxiety that have lifelong effects (Freud, 2010: 29). *Conflict* here means the battle between these three mental structures of our mind – the id, the ego, and the superego – which are all competing for demands. *Fixation* at a particular stage is what predicts adult personality according to this theory.

There are 5 stages in psychosexual development theory. First is oral stage in which the libido is centered on a baby's mouth. Second is anal stage in which the libido is centered in focusing and controlling waste and expel by using bladder and sphincter muscles. Third is phallic stage in which the libido is centered on genitals. Fourth is latency stage in which the libido is dormant and the kids are focused in intellectual and social pursuit. Fifth is genital stage in which the libido is centered back on genitals.

## THE RESEARCH METHODS

This research used qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a research in the form of narrative that describes a certain phenomenon under the study (Vanderstoep and Johnstone, 2009:7). In addition, according to Moleong (2010: 11), the forms of the data using the qualitative method are words and pictures. Therefore, since the data of this research were words, clauses and

paragraphs, the researcher used a qualitative method to analyze them.

Content analysis is used as technique of analysis to the novel. Stone, Dunpy, Smith, and Ogilvie (in Neuendorf, 2002: 10) define content analysis as “any research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specific characteristics within the text.” Therefore, the researcher plays a central figure as the interpreter of the selected texts in attempts to discover the meaning embodied within them.

The source of the data for this research was taken from E. L. James' *Fifty Shades* Trilogy which consists of three novels: *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Fifty Shades Darker*, and *Fifty Shades Freed*. The key instrument of the research was the researcher herself. The researcher acted as the planner, main data collector, and data interpreter or reporter of the research result.

In collecting the data, the researcher took four steps. First, the researcher read the novels which were *Fifty Shades* trilogy several times carefully and comprehensively. Second, the researcher collected the data by taking simple notes of the important words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs related to the topic. The notes that the researcher took were arranged as documentation for further analysis. Third, the researcher re-checked the data to find out whether there were mistakes or irrelevant data to support the analysis or not. The last step was categorizing the data.

There were several steps conducted in this research to analyze the data. The steps were (1) Identifying the data from the novel by making some notes, (2) Reading and re-reading the whole data to obtain a thorough understanding, (3) Coding and categorizing the data in the table into thematic categories, (4) Sorting the data by selecting the relevant data and excluding the irrelevant data, (5) Making the interrelation between the description of the data and the theory to get the findings based on the objectives, and (6) Making interpretation of the findings based on her understanding about the theory. The triangulation process is accomplished by consulting the research and the findings to the supervisors as the experts and by asking two students from English Literature Study Program as the peer-reviewers.

## **THE RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The data related to type of sexual deviation suffered by Christian Grey and the causes of his sexual deviation are explained further in the following.

### **Christian Grey's Sexual Deviation: Sexual Sadism**

The DSM-V identifies 8 specific paraphilic disorders; one of them is sexual sadism which is suffered by Christian Grey. Sexual sadism is the condition of experiencing sexual arousal in response to the pain, suffering, or humiliation of others (APA, 2013: 695). The first characteristic of sexual sadism is

recurrent and intense sexual arousal from the physical or psychological suffering of another person, as manifested by fantasies, urges, or behaviors (APA, 2013: 695).

He places his hand on my naked behind, softly fondling me, stroking round and round with his flat palm. And then his hand is no longer there... and he hits me – hard. Ow! My eyes spring open in response to the pain, and I try to rise, but his hand moves between my shoulder blades keeping me down. **He caresses me again where he's hit me, and his breathing's changed – it's louder, harsher.** He hits me again and again, quickly in succession. Holy fuck it hurts. (James, 2011: 193)

Christian Grey gains his sexual gratification through the infliction of pain and humiliation by spanking his partner. His changing breathing into a louder and harsher way implies that he is turned on and gets excited in witnessing how Anastasia Steele undergoes physical and psychological pain, suffering, humiliation, and helplessness through his merciless assault.

The second characteristic of sexual sadism is that oftentimes individuals who are sadists seek some kind of complimentary partner (masochists) and they are engaged in a sadomasochistic and/or dominant/submissive relationship.

“Have you been like this for a while?” I ask.

“Yes.”

**“Is it easy to find women who want to do this?”**

He raises an eyebrow at me.

“**You'd be amazed,**” he says dryly. (James, 2011: 75)

Anastasia Steele asks Christian Greys about the availability of women who are willing to be his submissive. He then answers that she would be amazed if she knew how many women who enjoy this kind of abnormal relationship.

The third characteristic of sexual sadism is that this deviant sexual behavior must exist for at least 6 months.

“How many women?” I blurt out the question, but I'm so curious.

“**Fifteen.**”

Oh... not as many as I thought.

“For long periods of time?”

“Some of them, yes.” (James, 2011: 75)

Your email for example: I have read and re-read it countless times trying to understand your point of view. **Three months is an arbitrary amount of time.** We could make it six months, a year? How long do you want it to be? What would make you comfortable? Tell me. (James, 2011: 278)

The first quotation is the scene where Anastasia Steele asks Christian Grey the number of his ex-submissives. The second quotation is Christian Grey's email to Anastasia Steele stating that every submissive usually has three months of trial. From those quotations above – with him having fifteen ex-submissives and three months trial each –

it can be concluded that Christian Grey has been indulging in sexual sadism for more than six months.

The fourth characteristic of sexual sadism is the significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning caused by the sexual urges or fantasies (APA, 2013: 695).

**"I've never felt the way I felt when you left, Anastasia.** I would move heaven and earth to avoid feeling like that again." He sounds so sad, dazed even. (James, 2012: 60)

The absence of Anastasia Steele becomes the turning point of Christian Grey's life. Before he meets Anastasia Steele, Christian Grey has never felt that it is wrong to feel the joy of inflicting pain and humiliation on others. After he falls in love with Anastasia and loses her because of his abusive behaviors, he starts to feel guilty about his sexual kinkiness. He starts to feel the guilt and the distress which are triggered not because of the society's pressure and values, but from within himself; a realization that what he did has brought harm the woman he loves. It is up to the point where he willingly hedges his sexual sadism preference, lifestyle, and needs in order to avoid losing her again. This is where Christian Grey's sexual sadism becomes a disorder. By turning it into a disorder, his sexual sadism is now enabled for treatments, thus opening a wider possibility for it to be cured.

## The Failure Of Christian Grey's Psychosexual Development

Christian Grey has a very harsh, cruel, and unhappy childhood. His mother was a drug-addict prostitute and the identity of his father remains unknown. He grew up in a very abusive and uncaring household. Christian Grey spent most of the crucial time in his childhood with improper parenting and childcare. This is what causes the unsuccessful completion of his psychosexual development stages and this is what causes him to have deviant behaviors in his adult life.

His fixation in oral stage is caused by unstable source of food. He often left famished because his neglectful mother did not fulfill his needs. Too little gratification he received when he was a baby made him unable to develop a sense of trust towards the people around him and caused him to have an oral receptive personality. The distinct features of this personality are his suspiciousness, fear of rejection, and abandonment issue.

"This is going to sound cold, but—**they're an insurance policy,**" he whispers steeling himself for my response.

"Insurance policy?"

"Against exposure."

The penny drops and rattles uncomfortably round and round in my empty head.

"Oh," I murmur, because I can't think of what else to say. I close my eyes.

This is it. This is Fifty Shades of Fucked-Up, right here, right now. (James, 2012: 353)

Christian Grey's idea of relationship is the one which involves a set of rules, contract, and non-disclosure agreement. He cannot stand being in a normal relationship because there will always be a possibility of rejection, betrayal, and abandonment in it. Contractual dominant/submissive naturally becomes his preference. With a contract and a set of rules, he can avoid the liabilities of a normal romantic relationship. His suspiciousness has even reached a whole new level when he feels the need to keep sexual pictures of his submissives for an insurance policy against the exposure of his sexual deviation.

Christian Grey's fixation in anal stage is caused by the disturbance in his toilet training. During this stage he received severe physical abuse from his mother's pimp that he had to hide himself away. This condition made him often delay his need to go to the toilet and it causes him to develop anal-retentive personality. The distinct feature of this personality is the boundless controlling tendency he has. In addition, he also experienced a trauma that causes him to have haphephobia or the fear of being touched.  
**"It's about control, Anastasia. How helpless would you be if you were tied up and couldn't speak? How trusting would you have to be, knowing I had that much power over you? That I had to read your body and your reaction, rather than hear your words? It makes you more dependent, puts me in ultimate control."**

I swallow.

"You sound like you miss it."

"It's what I know," he murmurs, gazing down at me. His gray eyes are wide and serious, and the atmosphere between us has changed as if he's in the confessional. (James, 2012: 271)

Being in an ultimate control is what excites Christian Grey the most. He likes it when everything goes according to his plan, when something runs exactly in its order, and when people obey and do not defy him. His obsession towards control is not limited in how he handles his business and company, but he also applies control in his sexual life. 'Vanilla' or regular sexual activity is not something he is keen on. The one that gives his kick is a sexual activity that involves bondage and discipline. This kind of sexual activity accommodates his obsession for control and his fear of touching; disciplining his submissive satisfies his need to be in command and tying them up makes them unable to touch him.

Christian Grey's fixation in phallic stage is caused by the improper identification process. Boys at this age adopt the characteristics of their father; they imitate, copy, and join in masculine dad-type behavior. Unfortunately, Christian Grey's father was non-existent and the only adult male to be identified with was his mother's abusive and violent pimp. Thus, instead of growing up as a gentle and gallant man like other kids, he grew to be abusive and violent

just like his mother's pimp. This is the stem of his sexual sadism.

**"I want to hurt you. But not beyond anything that you couldn't take."**

Fuck!

"Why?"

He runs his hand through his hair, and he shrugs.

"I just need it." He pauses, gazing at me with anguish, and he closes his eyes and shakes his head. "I can't tell you," he whispers. (James, 2012: 349)

Vanilla relationship is not Christian Grey's thing. Besides, his impulse to inflict pain on his sexual partner makes a regular sexual activity infeasible option. Thus, for him to have a satisfying sexual intercourse, sadomasochistic relationship becomes his preference. With this kind of relationship, his need to inflict pain on others is fulfilled, he gets a maximum sexual satisfaction, and his partner will not report his 'crime' because she gets the equal satisfaction as well.

Christian Grey's fixation in latency stage is mainly caused by his haphephobia that affects his relationships with the people around him. He cannot bear it when someone touches him, not even his own parents, whereas skinship is an important part in developing emotional intimacy. In addition, his ambition to accomplish things in order to be able to fit into his new family and society made him focus too much in intellectual pursuits rather than social interactions. This is

what caused his self-imposed exile and isolation.

"Anastasia, I'm not a hearts and flowers kind of man, **I don't do romance. My tastes are very singular.** You should steer clear from me." He closes his eyes as if in defeat. (James, 2011: 54)

Christian Grey has spent his adult life trying to avoid any extreme emotion. Ever since he was a kid, he has been detaching himself from the people around him. He does not hang out with other boys and he does not have any real friends. He has always been so distant and aloof even with his own family. He has spent so much time living in his own bubble that normal human relationship is something that feels so alien for him. It is only natural that regular romance is not something he knows of. He even admits it himself that he is not a hearts and flowers kind of man. He understands enough how dominating, controlling, and violent he can be in a relationship. Thus, a regular relationship with a regular kind of woman is not something he pursues.

With all kinds of deviant behaviors accumulated in the last stage, it is only natural for Christian Grey to indulge in BDSM lifestyle. BDSM – which is an overlapping abbreviation for Bondage/Discipline,Dominance/Submission, and Sadism/Masochism – accommodates all kind of deviant behaviors which exist within him. BDSM is usually started off with a set of rules and agreement, which becomes a relief

for his over-suspiciousness. It involves bondage and discipline, which fulfills his obsession for control. It includes dominance and submission, which quenches his thirst for domination. It also contains sadism and masochism, which satisfies his need to inflict pain on others. BDSM is like a piece of puzzle that fits perfectly into his jigsaw. It is an asylum for his depravity, a sanctuary for his aberrancy, and a safe haven for his sexual fantasy.

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