

Statutory Rape Victimisation: A Psychoanalytical Study of Kate Elizabeth Russell's *My Dark Vanessa*

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Abstract

This study aims to analyse the aspects of statutory rape victimisation in Kate Elizabeth Russell's novel *My Dark Vanessa* through Freudian psychoanalytical aspects of id, ego, superego, conscious mind, unconscious mind, and trauma. It seeks to consider the mechanism behind the projection of desires and emotions involving statutory rape victimisation in order to highlight its impact. It tends to emphasise the ways through which an ephebophile, the antagonist of the novel, controls the whole narrative of the statutory rape by being in a power position and his role in manipulating a victim's perception of trauma-tied reality in *My Dark Vanessa*. The ephebophile's psyche plays a significant role in fulfilling his unusual desires. His urges originate from the unconscious mind; however, it is the conscious mind that becomes a source of gratification of his desires. As far as the victim, the protagonist of the novel, is concerned, she defends her abuser for her own survival from the abuse-associated trauma. Yet, her failed defense guided by the unconscious mind, leads to the revelation of traumatic symptoms. However, through free association with the help of a therapist, she then succeeds in liberating herself from the trauma that has been buried in her unconscious mind all those years. Thus, this study analyses the actions and consequences concerning the statutory rape victimisation on both the victim and ephebophile in Russell's *My Dark Vanessa* by using Freudian psychoanalytical theory.

Keywords: Defense Mechanism, Ephebophilia, Psychoanalysis, Statutory Rape
Victimisation

Introduction

This study intends to investigate statutory rape victimisation in the postmodern text *My Dark Vanessa* written by Kate Elizabeth Russell. To achieve this purpose of investigation, Freudian psychoanalytical theory is being utilised in this study. Moreover, this study tends to scrutinise the stereotypical understandings of statutory rape by providing alternative perspectives through major characters. The statutory rape victimisation occurs as a result of psychologically motivated desires, which then trigger certain parts of an ephebophile's psyche to either suppress or act upon those desires. While being a part of the social settings, an ephebophile dominated by his desires usually finds a way to act upon these desires by finding a socially acceptable way. However, as far as the victim is concerned, she usually subordinates and becomes defensive in social settings for being a minor. Thus, for this purpose, deeply rooted psychological motives, effects, coping mechanisms, and narratives of rape are being analysed in *My Dark Vanessa* through the psychoanalytical approach.

The novel *My Dark Vanessa* is the debut novel by Kate Elizabeth Russell, a native American born in Eastern Maine in 1984. It was written in 2020 and revolves around the subject of victimhood and child grooming while shedding light on its impacts. The novel explicates the fact about the emergence of the statutory rape victimisation and then its culmination into being detrimental to one or both the individuals involved. The term 'statutory rape' is defined by Walsh (2024) as "nonforced sexual relations between an adult and an individual who legally is not old enough to consent to the behavior" (para.1). This represents that it is an erotic relationship, which is legally acknowledged as a process of victimisation of an underage victim regardless of his consent and can cause long-term physical as well as psychological consequences.

The novel is a first-person narration. The plot of the novel revolves around two main characters, Vanessa Wye and Jacob Strane, and their illegitimate relationship. Vanessa Wye, the protagonist of the novel, a fifteen-year-old girl who is legally regarded as a minor, gets herself sexually involved with a man thrice her age. Jacob Strane, the second most important character, an ephebophile, is a teacher of American Literature at Browick School and has an ill reputation; he has a history of being involved with several students there. He achieves this purpose by being a man of authority at school by manipulating his students. Vanessa, being a minor, becomes a victim of his sexual misconduct. The term 'ephebophilia' is defined by

Blanchard et al. (2008) to refer to “men who prefer adolescents around 15–19 years of age” (p.336).

Significant aspects of Freudian psychoanalytical theory, including the id, ego, superego, conscious mind, unconscious mind and trauma are being applied to Russell’s book *My Dark Vanessa* to explore the dynamics of the statutory rape victimisation. Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, aimed to understand the underlying mental phenomena behind physical actions. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, humans have instinctual desires and they struggle to fulfil these desires through varied means. However, the operation of these instinctual desires depends on the id, ego and superego part of the psyche and there always remains a constant conflict between these.

Literature Review

This section of the research sheds light on the studies done on Kate Elizabeth Russell’s novel *My Dark Vanessa* along with the specific work done on Freudian psychoanalysis. Kate Elizabeth Russell, aged 39, is an American writer and *My Dark Vanessa* is her debut novel, written in 2020. Through the book *My Dark Vanessa*, Russell has attempted to represent the post-modern debate dealing with the subject of consent and rape. The book narrates the story of a girl named Vanessa and her affair with her English school teacher, Strane, while she is still underage. This makes it statutory rape. Their affair is more of a victimisation kind and makes Strane an ephbophile due to the fact that she is underage. Thus, for this reason, various narratives of rape concerning their relationship keep on circulating throughout the novel.

The understanding of differentiation between consent and coercion can be explored in Baker’s (1999) article ‘What Rape is and What it Ought not to be,’ in which she claims that rape is a social construct and sex is a biological construct demanding mutual communication and understanding. She explores the causes leading to men attempting rape by asserting that men rape not because of biological causes alone but because social causes contribute too. She further talks about the flawed socially constructed definition of rape and blames stereotypical thinking for either allowing victim blaming or releasing the perpetrator based on his looks or his social status. (pp.235-237).

Another major critical analysis of the process of victimisation through rape can be found in Schroot’s (2016) dissertation *A Culture of Rape: In Twentieth-Century American Literature, and Beyond*. She utilised feminist theory in her work to criticise the systematic

rape culture in various literary works. She condemns patriarchy's share in promoting rape culture and asserts that "when rape functions as an instrument of power and control, certain similarities arise, such as victim blaming, consent, and the use of rape to demoralise and subjugate women, all of which are primary features of rape culture" (p.2). This proves the point that rape is such a huge social issue and has been discussed in different literary contexts all around the world. Contemporary literature, more specifically, is now criticizing the romanticisation of rape culture in phallogentric literature.

Rape victimisation has majorly been given a feminist perspective through literature since the modern age. Brownmiller (1993) being a feminist author, in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, in Chapter 1 'The Mass Psychology of Rape: An Introduction', while putting rape into a historical context, states that biological capacity and vulnerability of men and women respectively became the basis of "creation of a male ideology of rape" and that rape worked as a tool to control women. Rape in a patriarchal society was not only a portrayal of physical power, but men also do it to subjugate women in every possible way, be it emotional, psychological or physical. For a man, assaulting multiple women becomes a "triumph of his manhood". "Rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear" (pp.14-15).

Tener et al. (2014) in the article, 'It All Depends on the Guy and the Girl', describes the youths' complex perception of a statutory relationship. It is described that "there were youths who did perceive their relationships as exploitive and abusive . . . For others, it was not always initially obvious to them that the relationship was abusive, but as it progressed, or in retrospect, the youths saw themselves as having been manipulated and exploited by the offender" (p.950). This variety of perceptions among youth represents that not all statutory relationships are initially recognised by them as victimising. However, with time, the dynamics of such relationships become clear.

My Dark Vanessa is essentially a fiction as well as a memoir asserting the presence of ideally flawed characters with a brutally honest plot. Social and personal human errors become a subject of such fictions. This fiction as well as memoir portrays a statutory rape victimisation in which manipulation plays a huge role. "My Dark Vanessa is about a victim so psychologically shaped by her abuser that she needs to see herself as his accomplice, fully complicit in the things he did" (Gilbert, 2020). It shows that a victimiser keeps control of a minor victim to such an extent that he even starts remodelling the victim's consciousness. However, this process of revamping does not stop here. The victim also plays her part in self-

subjugation. This is the power of manipulation over the consciousness of the victim to a degree where even the victim starts complying.

Furada (2021) in her research paper explores the novel *My Dark Vanessa* with a feminist perspective. She portrays the character of Vanessa as well as the other girls of the same school as victims of sexual abuse by Strane in a patriarchal society (p.27). These girls do not have control over their bodies and their sexuality. Initially, when the girls are faced with sexual abuse, they are powerless. They are unable to expose Strane. However, under the influence of radical feminism, they still have the desire to stand against the system. There comes a time when these victims expose Strane through social media (pp.36-37).

Persson (2023), in her article, 'Giving Lolita a Voice: A Feminist Reading of *Lolita* and *My Dark Vanessa*', has provided a similar perspective to that of Furada's. She asserts that the female characters of both of the novels, *Lolita* and *My Dark Vanessa*, are similar as they both go through sexual abuse. They both have internalised the patriarchal ideology. The character of Lolita from the fiction *Lolita* is provided no voice. She is silent. Humbert, the abuser, himself narrates the whole story. However, in *My Dark Vanessa*, the character of Vanessa does have a voice. Nevertheless, she complies with the patriarchal ideology and imitates it with her own language (p.17).

Putri (2023) has discussed three forms of sexual abuse the character of Vanessa goes through. These are visual, verbal, and physical abuses. Vanessa's visual abuse begins when Strane recommends her books with the theme of sexual relationships between a minor and an adult. He does this to normalise such kinds of relationships. Verbal abuse of Vanessa happens when he calls her erotic and affiliates his sexual desires with her. He utters sentences "full of explicit sexual meaning" (p.607). Moreover, her physical abuse begins when he first touches her thighs and does not even say sorry. His touch makes Vanessa uncomfortable and it is apparent from her facial expressions. However, Vanessa's direct sexual abuse happens when she visits Strane's house, where he forces her to engage in sexual activities. As a result, she cries but is ignored (p.608).

Batnes (2022), in her article 'A Portrait of Grooming and Educator Sexual Abuse in *My Dark Vanessa* and *Boy Toy*', has explored the differences between grooming processes adapted by a male and female abuser in the novels *My Dark Vanessa* and *Boy Toy* respectively. Vanessa, being a lonely girl In *My Dark Vanessa*, becomes a likely victim from a perpetrator's view; however, the character of Josh in *Boy Toy* has a personality of an outgoing boy that makes him an unlikely victim. Nonetheless, they both end up being the victims regardless. Batnes further discusses the different nature of social consequences of

sexual abuse for male and female perpetrators. When a female teacher becomes a sexual predator, she benefits from the gender stereotypes that label women as emotional and compassionate beings. However, when a male teacher turns into a sexual predator, gender stereotypes do him more harm (p.15).

Zohdi & Bahador (2015) have discussed the relationship between the unconscious mind and dreams in Alice Munro's book *Runaway* by utilising the Freudian theory. They have asserted that dreams, being affiliated with the unconscious mind, are a depiction of suppressions and desires. Moreover, the researchers have exposed the functioning of the id, ego and superego through the characters of Clara, Flora, Clark and Sylvia. Clara, the protagonist of the novel, is unhappy with her marriage to Clark and desires to escape it. She finds this escape through her dreams. She dreams of Flora, her goat, escaping, which represents her own suppressed desire to escape. Therefore, Flora represents Clara's id, as the escape of Flora promotes a sense of pleasure and desire within her. Moreover, Clark in Munro's *Runaway* represents the ego, the id controlling part of the psyche, as he is believed to be the reason behind Flora's disappearance. It is suspected that he killed her. Additionally, Sylvia represents the superego, as although she is initially concerned about Clara's happiness and convinces her to escape, she later on changes her stance and asks Clara to comply with marriage morals and not to leave and asks for forgiveness for interfering in her personal matters. Thus, the researchers have represented that the id urges to overcome every social norm but is overpowered by the ego and superego eventually. (pp.169-175).

Nurtjahyo (2016), too, has utilised the psychoanalytical approach in Elizabeth Hand's book *Anna and the King* to reveal the conflict between the id, ego, and superego parts of the psyche through the character of Anna. Moreover, the functioning of the Freudian ego-driven defense mechanism in alleviating causes of anxieties caused by the conflict is also exposed. Among the various ways through which the defense mechanism is enacted, repression and redirecting the rage into more acceptable ways are considered the marrow of it and are primarily focused (pp.17-26).

Besides this, Moosavinia & Bavarsad (2018) have shed light on another form of the Freudian defensive phenomenon known as 'displacement' in their article 'The Illusory World of a Peculiar Man: A Psychoanalytical Study of Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*'. They have explained the clash between the madman's ego and superego. The madman, as a result of his superego, praises people of higher positions in his office and dreams of being at their spot one day. However, soon after realising that he is part of an aristocratic society and would not be able to reach a higher position in his office, his ideal self, he starts hating people of

higher authority at the office. His hatred towards what he cannot have, is a defense mechanism led by his ego to hide his frustration and powerlessness. This powerlessness over situations causes an affected person to create an imaginary world to soothe his sufferings (pp.30-31).

This research provides a comprehensive study of the concept of statutory rape victimisation in light of the psychoanalytical theoretical framework. The literature review above demonstrates the relevant studies done on Kate Elizabeth Russell's novel *My Dark Vanessa*. Apart from that, different perspectives of statutory rape victimisation can be witnessed here. However, this study specifically focuses on providing the psychological grounds for an ephebophile's actions along with discussing the impacts resulting from such victimisation relationships. Moreover, it is evident in the literature above that psychoanalytical theory has already been applied to many other earlier pieces of literature. Still, the psychoanalytical theory has not been applied to Russell's *My Dark Vanessa* yet. Thus, this literature review is working as a foundation for shaping a suitable theoretical framework to conduct psychoanalytical research in order to understand certain phenomena within the given text.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach used in this study is Freudian psychoanalysis, which will help interpret, analyse and comprehend the text *My Dark Vanessa* by Kate Elizabeth Russell. For Freud, the primary aim behind the production of psychoanalytical theory was to create a solid framework to study the human mind in all possible contexts. His psychoanalytical theory yielded three layers of mind: conscious, pre-conscious and unconscious (Freud, 1961). For Freud, all three layers held importance for human behaviour, and he believed in the importance of bringing unconscious content into consciousness. He, then, affiliated the unconscious mind with the id. The id is considered the most stubborn component of one's personality and is operated by the unconscious mind. According to Freud, it is majorly based on the pleasure principle and considers no restriction in the way of fulfilment of its desires. Along with the id, there is another component of the human psyche, known as the superego. It is an id confining phenomenon and operates mainly through the construction of guilt and shame. It is based on the morality principle and can be directed by the both conscious and unconscious mind.

In addition to the id and superego, another significant part of the human psyche explained by Freud in his psychoanalysis is the ego. According to him, it is a psychical phenomenon that lies between the id and superego and ensures that both of these remain satisfied. It can be guided by both the conscious and the unconscious mind. It works as a mediator between the id-led desires and the superego-driven fears and works on the reality principle. For this purpose, the ego sometimes consciously provides alternative ways to satisfy the id provoked desires while keeping the superego-driven fears at the core simultaneously. Furthermore, Freud (1955) explained that the ego sometimes adapts an unconscious mind-guided defense mechanism through different means, including repression, displacement, denial etc., so that the id or superego cannot dominate the human psyche and lead towards self-harm. However, at times when defense generated by the ego fails to protect the human mind from trauma and harm, traumatic symptoms begin to appear. These traumatic symptoms include hysterical as well as other post-traumatic symptoms.

The traumatic symptoms, then, can be reduced by bringing repressed content into consciousness through different methods, among which the free association stands prominent. It is a therapeutic procedure utilised in psychoanalysis to get to the root of issues. In the view of psychoanalysis, free association points to a method of discovering an individual's repressed memories and desires by facilitating unrestricted expression of every random thought that comes to his/her mind. Generally, by providing cues like an image or a word, one is asked to express his/her mental associations with it. Then, to understand how the brain connects ideas, the individual guiding the activity, generally a therapist, attempts to build connections between the cue and the response provided by the person. Through this procedure, relief from the mental trauma is attained. Thus, personality development by bringing the unconscious into the conscious is an outcome of this theory.

Methodology

This study intends to use a qualitative research method to offer the interpretation and inquiry of the primary text, *My Dark Vanessa*, through Freudian psychoanalytical theory. The fiction *My Dark Vanessa* will be utilised as the primary data source. At the same time, the Freudian theory of psychoanalysis will be used as secondary data to evaluate the traumas caused by a statutory rape in the primary text. This study will attempt to shed light on traumas involved with the rape crime and explore the purpose behind professional misconduct by a teacher. The novel's central characters, who are involved in directly dealing with rape scenarios, will be investigated considering the psychoanalytical phenomena mainly

including, the conscious mind, unconscious mind, id, ego, superego, and confessions led by free association.

Discussion

Psychoanalysis of the Ephebophile

This part of the discussion section exposes the statutory rape victimisation by specifically focusing on the reasons behind the ephebophile's pleasure-seeking desires and his ways of dealing with them through the use of unconscious mind, conscious mind, id, ego and superego of Freudian psychoanalysis in the text *My Dark Vanessa* by Kate Elizabeth Russell. The ephebophilic desires, according to Freudian psychoanalytical theory, under the influence of pleasure principle lead the id and make the ephebophile victimise underage girls for his satisfaction.

The novel begins in 2017 with the character of Vanessa Wye, the now thirty-two-year-old protagonist, getting flashbacks of her affair with Jacob Strane, her former teacher, now a fifty-nine-year-old man, since she was fifteen. In the first chapter, Vanessa is seen to be hearing rumours regarding allegations of sexual misconduct against Strane by his other former students. The ongoing series of allegations expose Strane's ephebophilic nature. Strane has attributes of a heterosexual ephebophilia. He preferably targets younger girls aged fifteen to twenty for his erotic desires. His erotic desires are mainly caused by Pleasure principle that is then operated by the id. His id provokes him to "risk everything for a little bit of something beautiful" (Russell, 2020, p.84). He has an impulsive desire to engage in sexual activities with adolescent girls, and his id puts his sexual desires on priority. He calls himself dark romantic, which refers to him having aberrant intimate desires. His unconscious sexual drive compels him to hunt over his students, disregarding the respect associated with his profession. It makes him a monstrous man who is "pathetically in love with" Vanessa (Russell, 2020, p.81). This drive, in turn, is a source of his pleasure. However, out of fear of society's disapproval of his desires, he cannot fulfil them openly. His current social status as a teacher at Browick School is proving to be a hurdle in the way of his erotic wish fulfilment.

Freud (1961) asserted that the id alone working for the gratification of desires can cause violent reactions from the outer world. In such scenarios, the ego can foster uninterruptedness caused by the outer world by building a connection between the external world and desires (p.25). Thus, the presence of the ego provides Strane with realistic ways to fulfil his libidinal desires. As a result of a conscious, activated ego, he plays certain tricks to

trap adolescent girls. He traces them and then manipulates them with either deception or power. Manipulation becomes another conscious tool of the ego for his ephebophilic, erotic desire gratification. Vanessa seems to be another docile, underage victim to him. Strane spies over Vanessa throughout the Browick campus to make sure she is isolated. He complements her poetry, compares her hair with a red maple leaf, touches her intimately behind the class desk, makes her feel special initially and then ignores her altogether. He consciously plays manipulative trickery on her. He calls her a “dark romantic” just like him (Russell, 2020, p.45). He does this to build an association with her in an attempt to gain her trust. She becomes another opportunity for him to fulfil his libidinous desires leading towards his survival. He calls her a perfect woman, who is perfect for him as long as she is in her teenage years because of his obsession with younger bodies. He initially violates Vanessa’s corporeal boundaries without her realising the fact that she is somehow being unconsciously manipulated into it. He says to her, “You’re in charge here, Vanessa. You decide what to do” (Russell, 2020, p.91).

The Ego part of the personality makes Strane work through many manipulation strategies to hunt over his targets and satisfy his instinctual desire. One of which is through the deliberate provision of direct allusions. He does this to lure Vanessa into being someone she is actually not. His use of conscious allusions works as a source of deception for him to trap Vanessa. At the inception of their relationship, he asks Vanessa to read Sylvia Plath’s poem *Lady Lazarus* as the character of Lady Lazarus reminds him of her. He deceives Vanessa by creating a false sense of association between Lady Lazarus and her. Through direct association, in the guise of agency, he actually robs her of it. Apparently, in addition to both Lady Lazarus and Vanessa having red hair, he wants Vanessa to be repulsive and outspoken like Lady Lazarus. He does this to gain emotional leverage and to impose a fabricated sense of identity on Vanessa so that she can take all of the blame for their illicit relationship on herself when the time comes.

The ego, in addition to helping him pour out his sexual tension on Vanessa, also helps him avoid any responsibility afterward. He plays the victim card and shifts all the blame over Vanessa to justify his wrongdoings and to satisfy his ego. He thinks that his behaviour is not inappropriate, rather “It’s just my luck...that when I finally find my soul mate, she’s fifteen years old” (Russell, 2020, p.5). He keeps on reminding himself and Vanessa that what happened between them was a mutual romance and if they get caught, both should be held accountable. Moreover, he tries to rationalise his ephebophilia by arguing that Vanessa is mature enough to know what is happening to her. He says to her, “I am not attracted to

children, . . . I mean, look at you, your body. You're nothing like a child" (Russell, 2020, p.138).

Furthermore, although ego aids Strane in escaping his declining years and puts him in a state of timelessness, it is the superego that turns out to be dominant eventually. He eventually commits suicide out of fear of being rejected by society for being a nonconformist. The memories associated with his past relationships, which once were pleasing and for him, lead him to self-destruction. People constantly remind him of his wrong deeds, which activates his superego. He is consciously being made aware of his bad reputation, which brings him public shame. The school administration conducts an investigation regarding the rumour of him assaulting the school girls. He says, "These are my colleagues, people I've worked with for twenty years. That history means nothing now that my name has been dragged through the mud. Everyone assumes the worst about me. I've got eyes on me at all times, constant suspicion" (Russell, 2020, pp.303-304). It is the presence of the superego that causes him conscious shame and guilt, which is directed inwardly along with the absence of any other means of emotional discharge. The absence of emotional discharge then results in the accumulation of emotional tension within him. Thus, this accumulated emotional tension results in his suicide, and he becomes a victim of his own misery.

Psychoanalysis of the Victim

This part of the discussion section pivots around the psychoanalysis of the victim in the novel *My Dark Vanessa*. Freudian psychoanalysis of the character of Vanessa, a minor victim, helps here in this section in revealing the psychological transformational phases that she goes through as a result of being in a victimisation relationship. The psychoanalytical perspectives being employed are the ego-driven defense mechanism, trauma, and free association.

Vanessa, the victim, due to the ego-led unconscious defense mechanism, refrains from confessing her state of victimhood for so many years of her life to defend herself from self-harm. The techniques she uses as a defense mechanism include repression, fantasisation, denial, displacement, and intellectualization. Her defense puts her in survival mode. Freud (1961) further states that when a person goes through traumatic events in his life, his ego tries to defend the events altogether for his survival by repressing memories of traumatic events. It is then an analyst's duty to bring unconscious repressed memories back to a person's consciousness (p.17). Vanessa, too, is unable to identify herself with other victims of assault

and denies all the accusations made against Strane. She believes that Taylor Birch, another victim of Strane's abuse, is manipulating the truth to scandalise Strane, as his name is already being associated with many other students, making him vulnerable. Vanessa holds the opinion that Taylor is exaggerating things and that she, too, was not abused as "all interesting women had older lovers when they were young. It's a rite of passage" (Russell, 2020, p.192). She tries to rationalise her abuse.

Apart from rationalisation, Vanessa tries to escape reality by fantasizing. Her consciousness is moulded in such a way that she becomes incapable of understanding the difference between a consensual romantic relationship and a manipulatively sought rape. When Strane provides her with *Lolita*, the novel, to read, she internalises the relationship between the main characters. This is evident when she says, "He's like Humbert Humbert" (Russell, 2020, p.138) and I am "looking like a Lolita and knowing exactly what I wanted, what I was"(Russell, 2020, p.234). She starts romanticising abuse. Although Strane initially tries to provoke her sexually by touching her inappropriately, she starts fantasizing about intimacy with him while he himself apparently plays dumb. She starts consuming books and movies about romantic relationships between an adult and a child so much that she becomes unconsciously defensive.

Furthermore, Vanessa displaces and distorts reality through intellectualization under the influence of the ego-provoked unconscious defense mechanism. She tries to justify her abuse by asserting that she was not abused and that they were in a relationship, as abuse does not feel like this. She says, "Not that I have been raped. Not raped raped . . . He loved me, he loved me" (Russell, 2020, p.194). She describes her relationship with Strane as harmless and a course of nature. She unconsciously chooses to overlook the distress that Strane caused her. Apart from that, Vanessa forms a trauma bond with Strane due to her persistent abuse by him and his constant efforts to make her believe that the things going on between them are a representation of love. She relies on him for her emotional needs. However, later in life, when she fails to get her emotional needs fulfilled by Strane, she redirects her emotions associated with Strane onto Henry, another English professor who looks a little like Strane. This is evident in Vanessa's remarks of him, "He's Strane in the pupal stage, still soft" (Russell, 2020, p.272).

Vanessa keeps her sexual trauma hidden from her conscious mind and the people by employing different unconscious defensive techniques. However, her defense mechanism fails to completely protect her, and this then results in traumatic symptoms. The most dominant traumatic symptoms that Vanessa has, due to her adolescent sexual abuse

experiences and failed defense, are indicative of hysteria. Freud and Breuer (1955) state that “the psychical trauma - or more precisely the memory of the trauma - acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work” (p.6). This psychical trauma is repeated in the form of hysterical symptoms before its complete disappearance. These hysterical symptoms then demand the verbalisation of the traumatic experiences (p.6).

Hysterical symptoms that Vanessa has are hallucination, forgetfulness and loss of sense of self. She is unable to remember the complete sequence of her trauma and utters, “So many memories from back then are shadowy, incomplete” (Russell, 2020, p.7). These blurred memories associated with the unresolved conflicts, resulting from the direct encounter of abuse, cause her psychical trauma and become a source of hysteria. As a result, she superimposes the faces she wants to see onto strangers, the faces of Taylor, Strane and her younger self. In addition to that, oftentimes, she hallucinates about a woman with blond hair, signifying Taylor, staring at her, which makes her body shiver. Vanessa utters, “The nightmares—they come in waves” (Russell, 2020, p.258). Moreover, she dissociates from herself and says about her own cry that “it feels like observing someone else cry, a woman playing the role of me” (Russell, 2020, p.188). Every little detail associated with her trauma triggers her. She even gets triggered by cues as minor as maple trees, flannel sheets, and movies set in boarding schools. They all remind her of her trauma. She says, “I know to stay away from any books or movies set in a boarding school, but then I’ll be blindsided by something as benign as a reference to maple trees, or the feeling of flannel against my skin” (Russell, 2020, p.258). Even cues as diminutive as watching the movie about a paedophile priest make her hands sweaty, and she starts to whimper. Thus, her failed defense mechanism leads to hysterical symptoms until she lets them out through consideration.

Vanessa until the later part of her life remains unaware of the dynamics of the statutory rape. It remains a part of her unconsciousness until she confesses. Freud & Breuer (1955) further state about language being a source of confession and catharsis by saying that, “language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an affect can be abreacted almost as effectively... speaking is itself the adequate reflex, when, for instance, it is a lamentation or giving utterance to a tormenting secret, e.g. a confession” (p.8).

Vanessa’s confessions come through free association therapy she takes from Ruby, her therapist. Ruby, through free association, tries to bring Vanessa’s unconscious content into her consciousness, to make her experience catharsis and to acquire insight into her current state of mind. Ruby asks Vanessa questions triggering her impulsive responses.

Through these impulsive responses providing the information in bits, Ruby makes Vanessa remember the events in smaller chunks, where she is humiliated. Language turns into a source to drag unconscious blurred ideas into consciousness. Vanessa's confessions, through free association, to Ruby end up liberating her from her traumatic memories. Free association invokes moments of realisation within her and she starts confessing the truths she never even believed in the first place. This is evident when at another moment, she mumbles, "the same thing he did when I was twenty-two, when I was sixteen. It's a truth so blatant and bitter, not even I can sweeten it into something easier to swallow. He only wanted to make sure I'd stay quiet. He used me again" (Russell, 2020, p.108). Her confession helps her in self-discovery. By the end of the novel, Vanessa ends up being liberated and transformed. She becomes ready to overcome her symptoms and succeeds in gaining her identity and sense of subjectivity.

Conclusion

This study focuses on the explication of statutory rape victimisation in the text *My Dark Vanessa* by employing Freudian psychoanalytical theory. It concludes that both the major characters of Kate Elizabeth Russell's *My Dark Vanessa* are being controlled by the unconscious mind for a significant part of their lives. Their actions, desires, denials, and suppression involving statutory rape victimisation are all majorly operated by the id and ego-led defenses which work under the influence of the unconscious mind. The portrayal of Vanessa as a submissive, defensive minor and Strane's ephebophilic desires in the beginning of the novel are a proof of dominance of the unconscious mind. However, the unconscious mind rules until unconscious matter is brought into the consciousness. This is when the conscious mind comes into play, too, and one begins to liberate himself. This can be witnessed in Strane's activated ego and superego and Vanessa's coming to consciousness through confession in the text *My Dark Vanessa*. Sigmund Freud also emphasised the importance of consciously channelling the energies associated with instinctual desires in his psychoanalytical theory.

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