

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The Background of the Study

The expression "I'm glad my mom died" is a sentiment seldom uttered by a child in reference to their mother (Moor & de Graaf, 2016). While at first glance, the title appeared startling or provocative, this phrase served as a testament to the complex and deep emotions inherent in the mother-child relationship. McCurdy's honest narrative delved into the subtle dynamics often concealed beneath societal norms. This title initiated an exploration into the emotional landscape of a daughter dealing with her mother's influence, expectations, and, ultimately, her absence.

The mother-daughter relationship, often acknowledged as the most powerful bond in a woman's life, encapsulated a complex interplay of emotions, expectations, and societal dynamics (Thompson & Walker, 1982; Troll & Fingerman, 1996). The mother-daughter relationship had long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, often explored through the lens of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis, a field pioneered by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th century, delved into the unconscious mind's influence on human behavior and was applied extensively in literary criticism (Suprenant, 2006). Foundational essays by Freud, such as "The Uncanny," established connections between literature and psychoanalytic theory, unraveling the depths of the human psyche through literary analysis (Tambling, 2021).

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Within this realm, psychoanalytic theories have provided valuable perspectives on the multifaceted nature of the mother-daughter bond. Nancy Chodorow's object-relations theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding this dynamic. Central to Chodorow's theory is the idea that early interactions with caregivers, especially mothers, profoundly shape an individual's self-perception and interpersonal relationships (Chodorow, 1978). Chodorow challenged traditional psychoanalytic notions by emphasizing the enduring bond between mother and daughter and its implications for female identity formation.

Building upon this foundation, Chodorow's work departs from Freud's emphasis on the Oedipus complex (D'Agostino, 2019). Instead, she underscores the prolonged and intricate nature of female identification within the family structure. While Freud focused primarily on the male child's rivalry with the

father, Chodorow broadened the discourse to highlight the ongoing intertwining of a daughter's identity with her mother—a concept rooted in object-relations theory.

Jennette McCurdy's memoir, "I'm Glad My Mom Died," released in 2022, exemplified the embodiment of Chodorow's theories on the mother-daughter relationship. McCurdy's relationship with her mother revealed an intricate interplay of influence, identity, and the perpetuation of maternal aspirations. Much like Chodorow's assertion that a girl must confront her entanglement in familial relationships before fully developing extraneous commitments (1978), McCurdy's narrative unfolded in the shadow of her mother's unfulfilled acting dreams. McCurdy's mother, driven by her own ambitions, steered her daughter into the world of acting, a reflection of her deferred desires and a clear manifestation of her influence on Jennette's trajectory.

The narrator's mother in the provided excerpt significantly influences the daughter's aspirations, aligning with Chodorow's psychoanalytic theory.

"I want to give you the life I never had, Net. I want to give you the life I deserved. The life my parents wouldn't let me have."

"Okay." I'm nervous about what's coming next. (McCurdy, 2022, p. 8)

The mother's projection of her unmet aspirations onto Jennette revealed her significant influence on Jennette's aspirations, aligning with Chodorow's emphasis on the mother as a primary source of identification (Chodorow, 1978). Debra projects her own experiences onto Jennette, treating her as an extension of herself rather than as a separate individual. By framing Jennette's life as a continuation of

her own unfulfilled dreams, she reinforces Jennette's identification with her. The mother's assertion of the daughter's strong desire to act echoed Chodorow's concept of maternal influence on aspirations. It emphasized the mother as a significant force shaping the daughter's ambitions, potentially impacting her identity formation.

In previous studies on the topic of mother-daughter relationships, researchers explored this complex dynamic from a variety of perspectives, shedding light on its portrayal in literature and other media.

Dawar (2020) explored the mother-daughter relationship in Marsha Norman's play *'night, Mother*, applying Chodorow's theory of the reproduction of mothering to highlight the distinct developmental journeys of girls and boys shaped by their interactions with their mothers. This study, like others, contributed to the broader understanding of the intricate and evolving nature of mother-daughter dynamics.

Fan (2021), in *An Analysis of the Mother-Daughter Relationship in the Film Turning Red from a Feminist Perspective*, examined the portrayal of mother-daughter relationships in the animated film *Turning Red*, drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. In contrast, the current research focuses on the analysis of Jennette McCurdy's memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, exploring the mother-daughter relationship within a nonfictional context using psychoanalytic and object-relations theories. This study emphasizes the psychological impact of maternal abuse on identity formation.

Kitanovska-Ristoska (2020), in her paper *The Discourse of Motherhood and Mother-Daughter Relationships in the Novel Sula by Toni Morrison*, analyzed the discourse of motherhood in Morrison's *Sula* using a combination of discourse theory, sociological perspectives, and feminist theories. While drawing from Chodorow's psychoanalytic theory as well, her study centers on fictional literature. In contrast, the current research applies similar theoretical frameworks to nonfiction, offering new insights into the real-life psychological implications of the mother-daughter bond.

These studies laid the groundwork for understanding the subject, but this current research built upon their insights by adopting Chodorow's theoretical framework to delve deeper into the intricacies of mother-daughter relationships in both literature and real-life contexts.

In this study, the investigation of the mother-daughter relationship portrayed in the narrative "I'm Glad My Mom Died" and its profound influence on the life of the central character, Jennette McCurdy, was undertaken using textual analysis as the primary research method. Textual analysis provided a methodical and structured approach for examining textual materials, enabling the identification and categorization of patterns, themes, and underlying meanings within the content. Through the application of this method, the examination focused on the nature of the mother-daughter relationship depicted within Jennette McCurdy's narrative. Various aspects of McCurdy's life, such as her experiences, emotions, and actions, were meticulously analyzed to understand how her relationship with her mother influenced her life. The use of textual analysis aimed to extract

valuable insights from the narrative, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the complexities inherent in mother-daughter relationships and their impact on individual experiences and identities, as portrayed in this particular literary work.

B. The problem of the study

Two questions underlining this research are:

1. What are the scenes containing the mother-daughter relationship as described by Chodorow in the memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*?
2. How are the mother-daughter relationship as described by Chodorow presented in these scenes in the memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*?

C. The objective of the study

In line with the problems of the study, the objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the scenes that contain the mother-daughter relationship as described by Chodorow in the memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*.
2. To examine how the mother-daughter relationship as described by Chodorow presented in these identified scenes in the memoir *I'm Glad My Mom Died*.

D. The scope of the study

The scope of this research was twofold: firstly, to unravel the intricate dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship in Jennette McCurdy's memoir through a psychoanalytic lens; secondly, to explore the literary dimensions of McCurdy's narrative, drawing parallels with psychoanalytic concepts. The study positioned McCurdy's portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship as a literary exploration, delving into the profound depths of the unconscious and its impact on

characters and situations. By integrating psychoanalytic concepts with a discerning literary lens, this study contended that it was an exploration that not only enriched but also deepened our understanding of literature.

The overarching goal was to contribute to both theoretical advancements in psychoanalysis and literary studies, fostering a nuanced understanding of the complexities embedded in McCurdy's portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship.

E. The significance of the study

- 1) In the realm of theory, this study aims to contribute meaningfully to the academic field by deepening the understanding of memoir as a literary form, particularly through the lens of psychoanalytic theory. It offers a nuanced application of Chodorow's object relations theory to Jennette McCurdy's *I'm Glad My Mom Died*, providing a reference point for future scholarly analysis. Within the English Department of Universitas Negeri Medan, this research aspires to enrich the discourse in literary studies and serve as a foundation for further psychoanalytic literary exploration.
- 2) Practically, this research may serve as a helpful resource for writers—both academic and creative—who seek to explore mother-daughter relationships in their work, whether fictional or autobiographical. By illustrating how psychoanalytic theory can uncover complex emotional dynamics within such relationships, this study can offer insight and inspiration for writers looking to craft more psychologically nuanced narratives involving maternal figures and identity formation.