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## Dysfunctional Family and Toxic Parenting Style in the Autobiographical Novel *The Kid*

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**Abstract.** This study describes a theme of dysfunctional family, toxic parenting style, and main character's development in *The Kid* novel by investigating the representation of dysfunctional family and toxic parenting style. This study also reveals how the protagonist copes with the problems caused by dysfunctional family and toxic parenting style in terms of character development. The research applies semiotic analysis of Saussure and structural approach (Todorov, 1985) requiring the study to focus on syntax, semantic and verbal aspect. As a result, the novel represents dysfunctional family in the way that it is chaotic based on Hunt's perspective (2014) and toxic parenting style (Buck & Forward, 2002). Moreover, the main character Kevin Lewis deals with the toxic parents and develops as a child to adult character. The parents hurt the child in the way that they are toxic instead of caring with proper nurture. The toxic parents are inadequate to support the family, controlling towards Kevin, physically and verbally abusive. Kevin Lewis has some psychological issues as the effect of having toxic parents; struggling, anxious, stress, traumatic, low self-esteem, unhappy, bulimic and suicidal. He wants to be better, and he struggles to change. He can cope with the issues in the way that he is thoughtful, finance-oriented, sympathetic and empathetic. Moreover, he is able to deal with his bulimia well. At the end, he is a happy and functional parent.

**Keywords:** character development; dysfunctional family; semiotic analysis; structural approach; toxic parenting

**Abstrak.** Penelitian ini mendeskripsikan tema keluarga disfungsi, pola asuh orang tua yang kurang baik, dan perkembangan tokoh utama dalam novel *The Kid* dengan menyelidiki representasi keluarga disfungsi dan pola orang tua asuh yang kurang baik. Penelitian ini juga mengungkapkan bagaimana tokoh utama mengatasi masalah yang disebabkan oleh disfungsi keluarga dan pola orang tua asuh yang kurang baik dalam hal perkembangan karakter. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis semiotik Saussure dan pendekatan struktural (Todorov, 1985) pada aspek sintaksis, semantik, dan verbal. Penelitian ini menyelidiki lingkungan rumah tangga dari keluarga disfungsi yang kacau berdasarkan teori dari Hunt (2014), pola asuh yang kurang baik (Buck & Forward, 2002), bagaimana karakter utama Kevin Lewis menghadapi orang tua dengan pola asuh sedemikian rupa dan tokoh utama berkembang hingga dewasa. Orang tuanya menyakiti Kevin Lewis dengan pola asuh yang kurang tepat. Orang tuanya dengan pola asuh seperti kurang mampu menghidupi keluarga, terlalu mengendalikan Kevin, kasar secara fisik dan verbal. Kevin Lewis memiliki beberapa masalah psikologis akibat memiliki orang tua dengan pola asuh tersebut; ia bersusah payah, cemas, stres, traumatis, harga diri yang rendah, tidak bahagia, bulimia dan ingin bunuh diri. Dia ingin menjadi lebih baik, dan dia berjuang untuk berubah. Dia dapat mengatasi permasalahan dengan menjadi bijaksana, berorientasi keuangan, simpatik dan empati. Apalagi ia mampu mengatasi bulimia yang dideritanya dengan baik. Pada akhirnya, dia juga bahagia dan menjadi orang tua yang fungsional.

**Kata kunci:** analisis semiotik; disfungsi keluarga; pendekatan struktural; pola asuh yang kurang baik, perkembangan karakter

## INTRODUCTION

Dysfunctional and functional family are different in terms of parenting. Functional family refers to adults that have important roles making sure that the members have well condition and have good impacts in the family (Leclercq, 2019). Furthermore, he explains that functional family shows support to each family member. Hence the parents give most of the support to the children. The kind of family has physical health concerns, social and emotional qualities, cognitive engagement, developmental characteristics' permissions, and intra-familial relationships (Access Economics, 2010). Moreover, the family has good habits of doing physical exercise. They likely socialize to each other creating intra-familial relationship. They care for each other in the name of social and emotional connection. The parents can try to understand developmental characteristics that children are going through such as psychosocial, cognitive and physical aspects (Bucher & Hinton, 2010). On the other hand, dysfunctional family forms the opposite qualities of functional family.

Meanwhile, dysfunctional family occurs when the adults do not take the important role in taking care of the family's well-being (Hunt, 2014). The parents make the children responsible for themselves, forcing them to be mini-adults (Buck & Forward, 2002). They also state that dysfunctional family refers to parents that have uncontrollable anger, negative critics to the children, are alcoholics and hardly fulfill the children's needs mostly. Seeing such characteristics of parents, it is found that there is another term beside "dysfunctional family" which is "Toxic Parents".

The toxic parents refer to parents that treat the children badly in various ways. It is also stated that the kind of parents affect the children to grow not so well. The parents are potentially "poisonous" in terms of in parents-child interaction (Carlsson et al., 2013) . Hence, toxic parents will bear the family to face its dysfunctional state. The parents also do not like to see the opinion or needs of their children. The parents think that they can do what they like to the children. Meanwhile, it is the right of the children to be loved, to be heard, and to be fulfilled regarding their needs.

When literary study is intended to uncover some psychological events in the literature, we may find the term "psychoanalysis in literature". It is possible to see psychological events in literature (Reed, 1982). The psychological events are inferred through dialogues, monologues, actions, point of view and thoughts as written in verbal aspects (Ogden & Ogden, 2013). Dysfunctional family bears psychological qualities that happen to the children as the victim. It affects their character development to adulthood.

In general, character development occurs when the characteristics of a character changes. The change in character is normally seen from the bad qualities into the good qualities. The transition usually happens when the character has to face the expected or unexpected problems in life. The way the character copes with them makes some changes in terms of traits (Hynes, 2014). As in line with Ogden and Ogden (2013) regarding psychoanalysis in literature, the character development can be discovered from dialogues, monologues, actions, point of view and thoughts as written in verbal aspects. The meanings of those are revealed in structural approach by Todorov and semiotic analysis by Saussure.

Every novel always has a structure of it. The structure of the novel works in syntax, semantic and verbal aspects. Syntax deals with words. Semantic deals with uncovering the meaning of one event to another (Hawkes, 2003). On the other hand, verbal aspects reflect what is being said or written. This study highlights certain narrative events with structural approach and later on, the research data or the selected narrative events are decoded with semiotic analysis.

Semiotics is about interpreting signs. Signs are divided into two: verbal signs and non-verbal signs (Cobley, 2010). Every sign also signifies the direct meaning or indirect meaning. In this context of research, verbal signs in written words only certain narrative events containing verbal signs and in relation with the research problems are being concerned.

This study offers the said approaches as the new approaches in exposing the issues of dysfunctional family and toxic parenting style. The structure of the novel is revealed with structural approach by Todorov. Then, in order to decode the meanings of the selected narrative events related with the dysfunctional family and toxic parents' problem. This study applies semiotic analysis to decode the direct and indirect meaning. Further, the novel *The Kid* has much to be studied since there hardly any studies about the novel. This paper will see how dysfunctional family is presented in the novel. Moreover, how the toxic parents contribute to dysfunctional family, and character development of the boy as main protagonist which happen to cope with problems caused by dysfunctional family are at stake.

There are some previous studies with the relevant psychological event. Specifically, some studies will be overviewed as they are related with issue of dysfunctional family in psychoanalysis, portrayals of dysfunctional family in real life, literature and other academic field of research. There is a study of autoethnography about a boy's gender identity influenced by toxic parents and unexpected social circumstances. Cilliers (2017) has lived in Africa and experience his childhood to adulthood there. Since he was a little, he felt effeminate until he is a grown-up. Then, the social circumstances treat him in the most unexpected way: he got bullied at school and his parents are toxic referring to Buck and Forward's theory (2002) of toxic parents. His mommy indirectly puts him in charge of domestic responsibility. His dad is being rude by saying bad words to him related with gender identity. Such situation makes him think a lot. He likes writing and finds it therapeutic as for healing. He accepts of who he is and decides what he will be. The study concludes that he prefers to anticipate people expectations of him in the way that he is being kept in and conducting avoidance behavior. In addition, a research on the novel *The Lost Child* shows dysfunctional families. The novel represents how happy family is actually a vogue idea, and simply a myth. This study shows the fatherly figures that affect their families to be dysfunctional in parent-child relationship (Leclercq, 2019). The phenomenon of dysfunctional family in the novel exists in the way that the fatherly figures are frequently absent, patriarchal and possessive. Further, he projects his hopes, immaturity, and desires on their children. Another case, there was a time that a little girl has to cut her relationship with his father just because she gets married to someone else.

"Nuclear" and "decline" status for some families in America are similar to dysfunctional family which causes by economic sustainability and lack of responsibility. The representation is found in American novels such as *Couples* by John Updike, *American Pastoral* by Philip Roth, *Herzog* by Saul Bellow, and *The Corrections* by Jonathan Franzen. It is also stated that the causes are not by far different than real-life cases. Dysfunctional family affects individual identity (Bhattacharya, 2016). Family supposes to be an institution emphasizing essentials such affection, authority, care, love, loyalty, trust, care. On the other hand, family can also be the source of abuse, terror and misery. However, some changes in the family can be seen as positivity rather than dissolution of the concept of family in the way that mutual feeling and mutual support are still being met.

The research by Andhika (2021) shows psychological phenomenon of dysfunctional family and behavioral impacts. *Lucy Barton* as the main character lives in a dysfunctional family (controlling and chaotic). The controlling family refers to parents that try to control the children in verbally abusive way. On the other hand, the chaotic family is about disorganized roles in the family that



dictates the children feeling responsible for themselves. She grows with the pain coming from such family, impacting her to be an anxious, hopeless, insecure, ignored, and lonely with guilt feeling. Unfortunately, the writer of the study does not infer how she copes with such issues. Therefore, this study will look for the toxic parenting style issues that main character has because of it and how he copes with them as a matter of character development.

Family systems can bear unexpected kinds of abuse to a child. This is revealed in the novel *A Child called IT* by applying the theory of family systems by Bowen and classifications of child abuse (Fitriyantsiyam, 2018). The child abuse happened because of the family systems phenomenon namely family projection process, nuclear family emotional process, differentiation of the self, and triangling. The classifications are part of Bowen's family systems as in Brown (1999). The story reflects domestic problems and projected the issues of anxiety as a parenting style in abusive way. The circumstances form toxic parenting style abandoning the child's well-being and that reflects dysfunctional family. The father left because he could not concern with the mother's physical treatment to discipline the child. And the child was physically hurt because of his mother's intensive physical exposure to him. Not to mention, the mother also lets him starving in purpose. That concludes physical abuse and neglected nutritional aspect which are basically against the right of children (Haydon, as in Sheehan et al., 2012).

Practically, this paper contributes not only to literary study, but also to social awareness in family systems for society and educational institutions. Literary study will continue reminding the readers that any kind of psychological phenomenon deserved to be exposed and human can choose such options they face accompanied with his or her superego. It is known that family makes system. The system portrayed in the family reflects its functionality or otherwise (Access Economics, 2010). Children are dependent and vulnerable human-being. Hence, people can deepen their comprehension of taking care the family by avoiding toxic parenting style the best they can. After that, the parents can decide which way that may be the functional parenting style for the children. They do not ask to be born and hopefully, by this reading, parents do not let them to extremely suffer in purpose. They deserve proper nurture. Children's rights for affection and needs along with proper parenting style shall be considered.

This study considers the novel of *The Kid* by Lewis (2004). The novel is an autobiographical novel reflecting such issues in written expression that takes the narrator as the first person himself in the story. In addition, the best-selling novel interests the research personnel to see how Kevin, the main character in the novel, develops and grows experiencing various expected to unexpected events in his life. This study investigates the representation of dysfunctional family and toxic parenting style as in *The Kid* by Kevin Lewis. Further, this study also reveals how the protagonist copes with the problems caused dysfunctional family and toxic parenting style in terms of character development.

## METHOD

The research is in qualitative form to uncover the novel's structure. Butina explains narrative inquiry as to see its structure is appropriate as literary research (2015). The structure of the novel is divided into three aspects as proposed by Todorov in structuralism, namely syntax, semantic, and verbal aspect. The data were collected by listing down the sequence of events, composing propositions reflecting cause-effect relationship in context of either dysfunctional family or toxic parents, and designing the graphic of propositions. As for syntax aspect, some parts of sequence and complete

propositions of the novel were presented. As for semantic and verbal aspect, the findings related to toxic parents and main character's development were presented mirroring related theories.

For data analysis, the data analysis was conducted by highlighting certain sequence of events that reflect the qualities of either dysfunctional family or toxic parents, highlighting certain sequence of events that reflect the cause and effect of either dysfunctional family or toxic parents, and listing down the selected certain of events to show the cause-effect relationship and representation of dysfunctional family also toxic parents. After that, conclusion<sup>1</sup> was drawn in terms of dysfunctional family, toxic parents and character development completing the research. The data are presented in the form of selected narrative events and a graphic.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The novel represents dysfunctional family in the way that it is chaotic based on Hunt's perspective (2014) and toxic parenting style (Buck & Forward, 2002). Moreover, the main character Kevin Lewis deals with the toxic parents and develops as a child to adult character. The parents hurt the child in the way that they are toxic instead of caring with proper nurture. The toxic parents are inadequate to support the family, controlling towards Kevin, physically and verbally abusive. Kevin Lewis has some psychological issues as the effect of having toxic parents; struggling, anxious, stress, traumatic, low self-esteem, unhappy, bulimic and suicidal. He wants to be better, and he struggles to change. He can cope with the issues in the way that he is; thoughtful, finance-oriented, sympathetic and empathetic. Moreover, he is able to deal with his bulimia well. At the end, he is a happy and functional parent.

In this research, the researcher will see Kevin's journey in becoming a functional parent. Dysfunctional family is described as family members that do not concern with the safety of the children in many aspects, mainly physical health and emotional health. The victim children will possibly become dysfunctional parents in the future (Buck and Forward, 2000). However, Kevin did not want to exactly like his toxic parents but the opposite. Kevin knew that his family is no good in terms of nurturing. He accepts and manages the wounds also the trauma. At the end, he tried to be the functional parent that is full of care and support towards his children. The combination of structural approach and semiotic analysis offer the new approaches in revealing psychological phenomenon and character development in literature.

To compare with the previous studies, the theory of dysfunctional family by Hunt and Toxic Parents by Buck and Forward provide clearer and more distinctive elaboration towards the corresponding family's condition. Semiotic analysis by Saussure and Structural Approach by Todorov also provide clearer analysis for this study. The mentioned theories are rarely applied to the listed previous studies providing new to possible approaches to uncover psychological phenomenon in novels.

The novel is entitled *The Kid* written by Kevin Lewis (2004). The novel consists of 30 chapters, 242 pages, 355 sequences, and 80 propositions. This paper shows 80 propositions to resolve<sup>6</sup> and the research problems: representation of dysfunctional family and toxic parents along with the protagonist's character development.

The discussion of the findings is divided into several aspects as they are meant to the result of structural analysis by Todorov; syntax aspect, semantic aspect and verbal aspect.

## Syntax Aspect

Syntax aspect deals with the plot and events. Syntax aspect becomes the first step in describing the structure of narrative works. They consist of events. By closely reading Kevin Lewis' work of *The Kid* and listing down the events, sample of the sequence of events and sample of propositions are presented along with their graphic.

### 1. Sequence of Events

From reading the events, readers can know nearly everything about the story such as the important events and other events. In total, there are 355 sequences of events. The samples of sequence from Chapter 1 are as follows:

12. Like many small boys Kevin used to wet the bed almost every night and he'd call out to his mother, scared of telling her but not knowing what to do.
- 12.1 He soon learned not to tell her because she would smack him on his wet skin.
- 12.2 She would push him downstairs and forced him to sleep in the bath with a dirty towel as a blanket to teach him a lesson.
- 12.3 'You dirty, fucking cunt!' she'd scream into his sleep-fuddled ear in the early hours of the morning, furious at being woken up from her own exhausted state.
- 12.4 She pushed, pinched, and slapped him at any part he didn't manage to reach.
- 12.5 Kevin'd do as he was told quickly: lying in the cold hard bath, crept out on the bathroom floor, and finding another towel to lie on as it was warmer than the cold metal bath.
- 12.6 In case Kevin didn't hear her coming back downstairs in the morning, Kevin'd sleep fitfully.
- 12.7 However, if the moment happened otherwise, Kevin'd climb back into the bath-up and pretended having deep sleep.
- 12.8 Kevin learnt not to wake her when he had accident, if he could help it.
13. His nights were often as frightening as the days, haunted by nightmares.

After the sequence of events, there shall be cause-effect relationships that form the important or the very core of the conflicts in the story. The cause-effect relationship is named propositions.

### 2. Propositions

Propositions refer to the cause-effect events forming relationships. It is important to see the propositions in Kevin Lewis' work because there are core events that form the story showing the rising actions, climax and resolution in a much simpler way rather than relying on all events. In total, there are 80 propositions as follows:

1. Kevin lived in a poor family located at New Addington, and he has violent parents.

2. His house is full of clothes scattered anywhere, has no light bulb, not well-painted, and smells of urine because of no light bulb in the bathroom.
3. The parents bear deep mental wounds to heal.
4. His mom, Gloria, is bad tempered, violent, speaks rudely and loudly.
5. Dennis, is hardworking yet he hardly brings the family to a better level economically.
6. Things are so overwhelming for him, he drinks as a means of escape numbing the failure also disappointment, and it costs the household expense to buy drinks and cigars for parents.
7. Even if Gloria got some money from him and Giro money from the government, there would be no food in the house to the following Monday.
8. Not only incapable of budgeting abilities, but she also has no ambitions for the family.
9. The family is always hungry making the children including Kevin to steal.
10. When Kevin wet his bed at night, he called her yet she smacked him saying "You dirty, fucking cunt! You'll get the shit kicked out of you, and you'll be sleeping in the bath".
11. She would also push, pinch, and slap him at any part Kevin doesn't manage to reach.
12. Curbing is his natural instinct when his mother making him frightened.
13. Kevin's hair is dragged after, and he is directed to sleep in the cold bath with a towel.
14. Kevin learns not to wake her and learns to hold fear also misery after the abuse.
15. Next time, Gloria does more punch, kick, scratch, slap, pull Kevin's hair, and bite.
16. She would say "Pathetic", "useless", and "little bastard", doesn't mind to repeat them.
17. Seeing her intensive dislike, she still can't speak kindly, hug, or kiss him, and he thinks about what his crimes are yet it doesn't matter since the reaction would be same.
18. He dreams to get invited to the parties, become popular and not being different.
19. Because of such intensive beatings and well-received reports to the social services, Kevin is moved to one place and another: children's homes, schools, and foster parents.
20. After some time is brought to a new place called Yarborough, another children's home.



21. Kevin goes to school called Baldwin's Hill near the Yarborough home, and he is always happy there: he has everything he has missed at home.
22. He smells like everyone else, he is a part of normal life, no longer different and an easy target for anyone who wants to give a hard time to someone. He felt safe: everything is different than his original house.
23. One day, around Yarborough, the children play on icy surface, included Kevin and one of his friends fell into it.
24. Kevin rescues him and both of them being told off regarding disobedience that evening.
25. On the other hand, Kevin felt pleased doing good things. He feels proud and wonderful. He believes that he is not as useless as what Gloria says.
26. However, what Uncle David says doesn't make sense to him as someone who has spent early years of his life with no one he could turn to for help, and Kevin believed that it was better to follow his instincts and initiatives in a difficult situation.
27. Despite the fact that Kevin is physically safe now, he is not emotionally secured because Gloria and Dennis win the custodian rights at court to have him back.
28. By the age of ten, Kevin hears bad news that he will return to his house, and Kevin wonders why the social workers think if his house is the right place for him.
29. In the next few weeks, favoritism becomes clearer in the way that Gloria gives his new toys and clothes to Wayne, and Kevin knows if he protests, that means she'd go mad and that way he learns to be quiet doing no complain.
30. Dennis likes to escape from Gloria's rants for a moment and the kids would scream to take them, or at least one of them, getting away from the abusive Gloria.
31. At school, he is so hungry so he steals from a girl's lunch box.
32. After that, headmaster's and Gloria are in a meeting at school.
33. When Kevin and Gloria are out of sight from the road and school, she; punches Kevin making his head felt like explosion, smack his legs and pinch his arms.
34. He ran away and it is pleasant to be alone; not to have to deal with anyone else.
35. When the school holidays come around, Kevin works hard to earn money. He is eleven now and able to buy food for himself and other siblings. It is 1980.
36. The physical beatings still happen at home, but this time Kevin put some defense in the way that he kicks and punches back with all his strength.
37. Colin Smith, a teacher at Kevin's school, and the social worker instigate him.

38. Gloria discusses the "child benefit program" with the social worker and Kevin understands if his returns is because the parents can get the benefit. So, he leaves them.
39. When authorities go for his medical check-ups seeing the marks and bruises, Kevin is diagnosed with anemic caused by four years of appalling diet eating only chips at home.
40. Authorities agree the thirteen-year-old needs building up physically and psychologically.
41. He likes the new foster parents which are Alan and Margaret in Coulsdon, and new home which is the opposite of what he has or sees at his original home.
42. However, Kevin is not interested at grades so he focuses on business for money like Alan.
43. His decision affects his foster status, there is no more foster-related matters after.
44. Kevin survives hardly by cars stealing, being a fighter in fighting event and bar stuff.
45. After some moments, Alan passed away and Margaret wants to sell the house.
46. Kevin decides to buy the house with mortgage and that puts his financial stability in less stable making him stress.
47. He hardly contains those things: stealing cars, posing as a gun man, maintaining bar, debts, anxiety and pressures.
48. His bulimia starts in the way he eats double portion of fish and chips to throw up.
49. Kevin'd eat too much to comfort himself banishing hunger he has experienced since he is a child and he is so desperate to succeed bottling up his worries.
50. With the money he got from work and business, he decided to buy a bar but it has so much debts and Kevin doesn't read the contract well.
51. He is so tired of mistakes and struggle since he is a child being all alone by himself.
52. That hardships trigger him to suicide with a handful of pills and water.
53. When he is awake, he feels clear and hopeful in the way he is ready to reach his dream.
54. He sold the bar and returned to demand-and-supply bar transaction instead.
55. When he works, he is seeing this woman named Jackie. He asks her on a date.
56. They have a baby, and Kevin is desperate to do everything right; being the opposite of his parents and making sure that the baby girl is looked for and comfort.

57. Kevin shares his vision with Jackie; Kevin wants to be financially independent, wound down, relax, leave unhappy memories and past getting ready to have a fresh start.
58. At the moment, Kevin feels peaceful, old enough, experienced and settled.
59. Kevin works hard in the office, and the new couple also works on beautifying the house to be sold.
60. In 1993, Kevin lives in the new house and one morning he receives a large envelope.
61. Several years later, he discovers that it contains his parents' background and his own.
62. Reading the large envelope from the social services, Dennis is sent to children's home because his father is killed in the war and his mother is unable to care for him.
63. When he is ten, he sets fire to a haystack and stay in children's home until he is fourteen.
64. Dennis has limited intelligence and also suffers poor health.
65. On the other hand, Gloria deals with separations in her childhood and adolescence.
66. Further, she used to be burned badly and at the age of seventeen, she is admitted to hospital again under section 6 Mental Deficiency Act. She remains there for five years.
67. For Kevin, her behavior makes sense in the light of mental problems.
68. Kevin knows that the parents only show spite and violence in the family.
69. In addition, parents have tendency to have favorites and scapegoats.
70. The social worker confirmed that Wayne is Gloria's favorite putting Kevin as a scapegoat in the way that she hurts him physically and verbally.
71. Kevin has no feeling for his mother, that he hates her.
72. The family has more problems in budgeting and hygienic environment.
73. When they were in New Addington, the house smelled of urine and the kids urinated on the floor.
74. Moreover, the noise level reflects screaming and shouting rather than talking.
75. This noisy and chaotic family provides context for child abuse, in particular, to Kevin.
76. Parents' limited intelligence and lack of understanding of childcare resulted in chaotic and abusive lifestyle declared by the social services.
77. He is able to analyze himself. He is the recipient of abusive family and he learns to fight back. He used to be starved of and desperate for affection.

His basic needs are not being met. The chaos is over-whelming and we need to offer a light at the end of the tunnel.

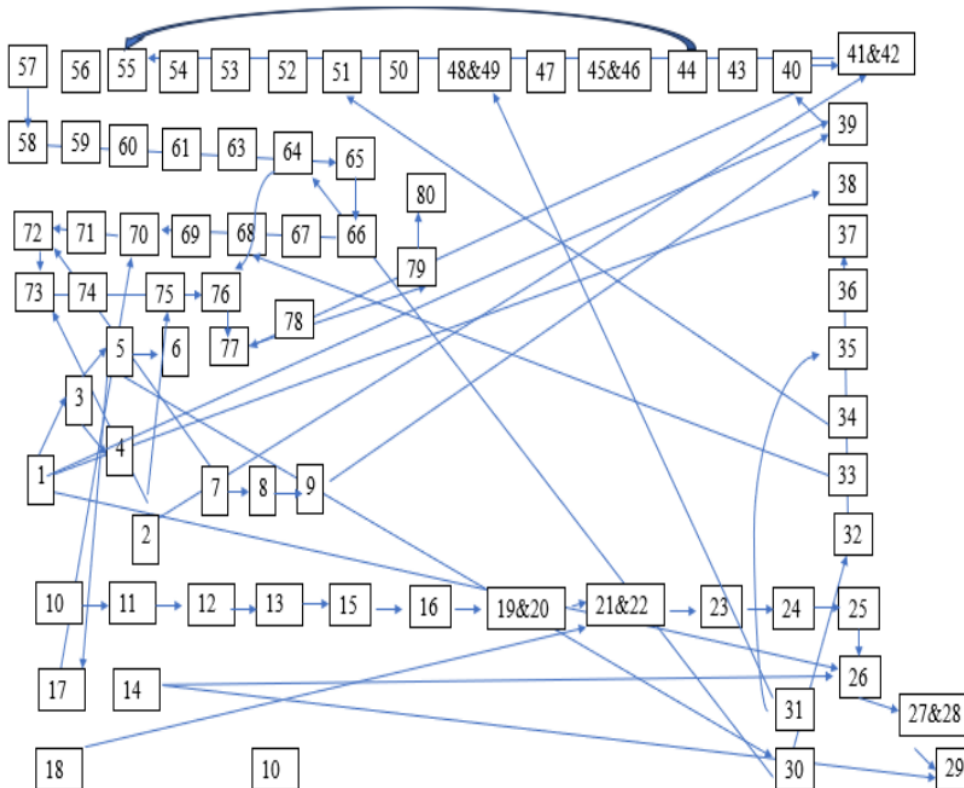
78. Kevin's background is difficult and painful, he pours everything into writing and he enjoys it for things he carefully locked up.

79. Today, he is able to deal with stress and doesn't have bulimia anymore

80. Kevin feels the need to move on, and he likes to be himself in the way that he is happy now.

After the propositions, it is suggested to provide the visual support of cause-and-effect events as the clearer image for the mind (Chandler, 2007). There are 80 numbers with arrows reflecting a connection from an event to another. They are connected in terms of cause-and-effect relationship leading one event to another. Due to the large size the propositions' graphic, adjustment is made as follow.

**Figure 1** Propositions' Graphic of The Kid's novel



The graphic signifies the last step of syntax aspect. However, the meaning and the relationship event are discussed in semantic level.



## Semantic Aspect

It is stated that semantic deals with the meaning. Moreover, in this context of research, semantic aspect helps to describe the meaning of the selected events revolving around characters, characterization, and settings. Characters and characterization reflect: who are the characters in the story, what characteristics do they have and if they have changed in terms of personality.

### 1. Kevin Lewis

Kevin Lewis is a protagonist and a round character in his autobiographical work of *The Kid* novel. By means of a round character, his character develops throughout the story. The character development signifies changes in terms of personality. Kevin comes from a poor and chaotic family. His poor and chaotic condition triggers him to escape from such home. At first, he begins having traits such as innocent, struggling, anxious, stress, traumatic, low self-esteem, unhappy, bulimic and suicidal. However, the more he thinks about life events and wishes to be better, his characteristics changed. He is thoughtful, finance-oriented, sympathetic and empathetic. Moreover, he is able to deal with his bulimia well. At the end, he is a happy and functional parent.

Kevin is innocent and struggling. His innocence puts him in such a difficult situation making him struggling to stay alive most of the time. Since he is innocence, he keeps making mistakes to the new things he knows, and he felt hardships about them. His hardships bear anxiety and stress. Anxiety refers to anxious state in the way that he worries about something. Kevin is not feeling okay most of the time since he has abusive parents making him afraid. Someday, he learns to run away from Gloria his abusive Mom. It is not a pleasant experience to be around her for Kevin. In the future, he decides to survive alone. Then, life turns out to be quite stressful for him.

He is also traumatic and has low self-esteem. Having abusive and inadequate parents make Kevin to be traumatic. His parents are abusive physically and verbally. The inadequate parents make him wanted to be an adequate parent in the future. Moreover, he is traumatic in the way that he feels disturbed or distress emotionally. His traumatic experience also affects his self-esteem in the way that he does not want to be himself, and he wishes to be somebody else. Not to mention, the experience that makes him traumatic leads him to prevent the occurrence of the same event or same condition ever again.

In addition, Kevin feels unhappy, bulimic and actually suicidal. Kevin has been feeling unhappy for so long from his childhood to adulthood. He is surviving at home. When he is trying to survive alone, he is also surviving alone. As previously mentioned, he is innocent who knows nothing, tries everything he can and keeps making mistakes. All of the negative feeling triggers his bulimia into action. After that, he feels that it is the right time for him to leave this world with a handful of pills and water. He survives the suicide.

Knowing that he is innocent, struggling, anxious, stress, suicidal and traumatic, he can survive and becomes a thoughtful also financially-oriented person. He is able to analyze situation and his inner state learning to have himself to be safe. His mom is abusive, and he learns not to disturb her no matter what happen. If he disturbs her or even asks for help, he will get the abuse. She keeps abusing Kevin and Kevin could not figure it out why she thought so because the abuse happens in any circumstances. His thinking about the abusive parent leads him to consider if his home is not the right place for him. When he gets the chance to avoid the abusive situation, he learns to fight back away or run away or leave the place for good. Further, since Kevin comes from a poor family and he

believes that poverty destroys souls, he learns to be financially-oriented person in the way that he becomes financially-settled.

His character development continues, he is getting better in the way that he is able to deal with his bulimia signifying the ability of stress and emotional management. It is stated by Kevin himself that the bulimia happens because of stress, anxiety and the result of being hungry for years. He can overcome the bulimia well by improving his ability in stress management.

The hunger that Kevin experienced for years is caused by the inadequate parents in economic level. The hunger that Kevin felt for years enable him to be more understanding of others who experience the same condition. On the other hand, it is also known that his parents are not only in inadequate terms but also verbally abusive. His verbally abusive parents affect Kevin's self-esteem in the way that he feels useless. However, he wants to prove that he is not useless, and he can prove it well by being empathetic to others. He likes to help his hungry siblings and those in need of help. Therefore, he is empathetic.

He develops into a happy and functional parent. Knowing that he used to be unhappy about his past life, Kevin pours them into writing despite the fact that it is painful to let the locked memories unlocked by now. He is happy and proud to be himself constructing his sense of self. He no longer wants to be someone else but Kevin Lewis. Moreover, he is much happier when he has a baby, and he wants to be the opposite of his parent making himself a functional daddy. The functional parent in Kevin's characterization refers to himself becoming more aware of the baby's comfort making sure that she is looked for and properly cared.

It is known that Kevin's life is full of ups and downs as how the real life could be. As previously mentioned, the difficult and painful life of Kevin's Lewis has changed to be the happy and settled life. Kevin experiences so much difficulty and from those things, he learns to move on becoming a better person. He indeed wants to be a better person not only for himself, but also for his newly-made family, especially his baby girl. His positive changes in terms of character that is based on his new born baby girl signify his functional state as a parent. Giving the baby girl comfort and right things are his priorities. The dysfunctional terms in terms of domestic situation are highlighted since Kevin's biological parents are not so kind to him, and that he does not want to be like his parents. Kevin's biological parents are Gloria and Dennis. It can be seen in Gloria's description as an example.

## **2. Gloria**

Gloria is Kevin's mother which happens to be the person that Kevin mostly anticipates. She is not liked by Kevin because she bears some deep wounds to Kevin. Based on the narrative analysis, it is observed that Gloria is poor, dominant, controlling, abusive, loud, bad-tempered, selfish, mental in terms of limited coping and nurturing ability.

Gloria is the most controlling figure at home. She controls by dominating the children and also her husband in verbal and physical terms. She is loud. She dominates them in the way that she is physically abusive and verbally rude. Seeing her intensive physical abuse, it can be seen that she is bad-tempered. Controlling refers to overpower the other person or control them. Kevin said that she rules the house although some rules are irrational like the bathroom rules. On the other hand, there is also this case when Kevin has bruises and marks because of her abuse. Then, Kevin will get more abuse if he tells this to the social worker in the name of family's privacy. Based on Kevin's

perspective, Dennis could not take it anymore to live with the Gloria. She and Dennis split up because Gloria is too dominant in the way she fights, rants or argues.

She has some mental state in terms of limited coping ability and nurturing ability. Kevin always thinks what his crimes or faults were because the abusive treatment remains the same and intensive. She hardly speaks kindly to him as well. When Kevin went through his parents' background, Gloria is considered as mental patient for some years. It provides more context to understand Gloria in Kevin's thinking. On the other hand, no wonder despite the fact that Lewis family is poor, the parents only think about cigars, drinks, and chips only to eat. Moreover, she also has no budgeting ability or ambition to make the family better in any aspects. The family is always hungry.

Gloria's mental state turns out to be the source of all the domestic problems causing wounds to most of the family members. The house maintenance and her relationships with other family members are not in good states. She is physically abusive and verbally rude. Kevin leaves home, and he does not regret it. Even Gloria's husband, Dennis left her as well because he cannot take the domination in the forms of physical fights, rants and ravings. The children scream if Gloria is around. She has become the most dominating and controlling figure in the house that most of the family members showing dislikes and wounds. Not only Gloria has problems in coping and nurturing, her husband Dennis has them as well.

### **Verbal Aspect**

The discussion of verbal aspect is divided into mode, point of view, and representation of dysfunctional family and toxic parents. The verbal aspect is also described in the scope of psychoanalysis. Verbal aspect is known to be words and phrases. They echo psychological occurrences as written in dialogue, monologue, what other person thinks and action or activities may signify psychological phenomenon in literary works.

Mode refers to level of presence in the literary works. The level of presence takes present moment and flashback moments. Flashback moments reflect events that happen in the past. The level of presence also exists as a form of creative writing. In addition, as many textual evidence are shown previously, it is seen that the novel reflects present moment and flashback moments too based on Kevin's perspective. Observing Kevin's perspective that dominates the whole story, point of view becomes another essential element in verbal aspect.

Point of view can take various forms. However, this novel describes one and only Kevin's perspective. To the readers, Kevin shows what he thinks about himself, what he thinks about other people, what he says and what other people say. In terms of point of view, it is concluded that the novel uses first-person narration in the way that the novel is also basically an autobiographical work. The autobiographical work not only show mode and point of view, but also psychological phenomenon.

### **1. Dysfunctional Family**

Dysfunctional family occurs when the parents do not do their roles properly to take care of the children, and that they become dysfunctional parents. Dysfunctional family creates domestic problems. There are several categories of dysfunctional family consisting of **the controlling family, the chaotic family, the coddling family, and the codependent family**. After careful analysis revolving the selected narrative event, it can be seen that Lewis Family is chaotic.



### a. The Chaotic Family

Chaotic family is disorganized representation of chores and roles in domestic situation. The disorganized representation creates such chaos that can be overwhelming. There are uncertain roles of chores. Since roles and chores are unclear, there is a chance of mess emerge in the domestic situation. Moreover, chaotic family not only reflects disorganized representation of chores and roles, but also indecisive to inconsistent parents, abandoned children and disconnection.

There is unclear role in Lewis family, and no one seems hold certain responsibilities including the parents that make the family's domestic situation is not in good terms. Gloria usually provides the meals for the family, yet the meal is not enough. However, no one is in charge of cleaning, house maintenance, organized items, or even electric and gas. There are scattered clothes. There are no light bulbs in the house, and the house is also not well-cared. It smells of urine. There is a pile of kitchen utensils with their sticky fat. In this case, the basic needs are hardly met.

Knowing the parents do not care enough for Kevin, he faces the condition as the effect of being abandoned and abused. Parents do not really care for Kevin except for the abuses they committed and are interested for cigars also drinks but not the adequate meals for the whole family. He is resulted in bruises, marks, physically weak and in need of emotional support. The social services help him by transferring the kid to the new foster parents.

Seeing Kevin left the home for good, the disconnection starts there. Not only Kevin who is interested to leave the house for the sake of his well-being, but also Wayne and Robert avoid to stay in the house but they still come back home. On the other hand, Dennis split up with her knowing that being alone is much better without Gloria. Gloria becomes the figure that some family members avoid.

Lewis family is considered as chaotic family. The family has indecisive and inconsistent parents who barely cope with the children's right or basic needs. Such situation has gotten worse when physical and verbal abuses are on the plate. The children become abandoned, and some family members choose to stay out of the torments at home. That is the kind of dysfunctional of this family is. On the other hand, seeing the parents that cannot achieve the children's basic needs is one crucial information in the scope of inadequate parents regarding toxic parents' representation.

## 2. Representation of Toxic Parents

The toxic parents refer to Gloria and Dennis who have limited intelligence in coping with domestic and nurturing matters. Kevin, the main character of the novel, is likely the victim of the toxic parents. Their poison affects the children's well-being physically and emotionally. According<sup>3</sup> to Buck and Forward (2002), toxic parents also have several classifications but not limited to one: the inadequate parents, the controllers, the alcoholics, the verbal abusers, the physically abusers, and the sexual abusers. After careful narrative analysis, it is found that Lewis family is led by parents who are inadequate, controlling, physically and verbally abusive.

### a. Inadequate Parents

<sup>5</sup>Buck and Forward (2002) believe that children have right to be fed, clothed, sheltered, and protected. In other words, functional parents concern with them. However, toxic parents in the category of inadequate will not concern with them. Gloria and Dennis are described as inadequate parents in the way that they do not concern children's right, especially Kevin. Kevin is not fed properly, his clothes are given away, his parents hurt him physically and verbally, and he is on the move for good as



instructed by social services. Such inadequate parents affect Kevin's sense of self. He also feels insecure and inadequate when he is about to have a baby because he is scared to be just like his abusive and poor parents.

Kevin's house is not in good terms. The house has no light bulb. Kevin cannot study because of it. The clothes in the house are scattered. The children pee randomly in the bathroom areas making the house also their clothes smell of urine. The kitchen is dirty. Kevin's clothes are taken to Wayne. That explains how some of the basic needs such as clothes and clean or hygienic environment are not met.

Another basic needs that is not fulfilled properly refers to the adequate meal. Despite the fact that the family is poor, the family actually has some money combined together from Dennis and government in the form of Giro. However, the income is likely spent on cigars and drinks. That resulted in family's condition being hungry. In the future, Kevin takes the responsibility to work earning money. Therefore, he can buy food for the siblings.

The last basic needs that become the concern of this family is children's protection. In this case, Kevin and Robert are discussed. Kevin is hurt physically and verbally. He does not even know what his crimes are yet he receives the abuse in the same and intensive way. His parents also do not give more explanation why he needs such beatings. The parents not only beat Kevin, but also Robert. On the other hand, in terms of responsibility, the parents do not seem to concern about what the children do outside until Kevin discovered that Robert plays outside and he is in danger because of a random old man. Kevin tries to protect him.

It is known that the inadequate parents affect the children to have a sense of self in crisis. Kevin was struggling in the way that he does not want to be himself coming from Lewis family. He wants to be somebody else who gets invited to party, who is not different, who feels safe, who have hope and future.

The inadequate parents not only affect the children to have crisis in sense of self, but also make them feeling inadequate and insecure. Kevin feels inadequate and insecure towards the upcoming baby. He makes distance to Jackie his wife and worrying a lot about his fear of becoming just like his biological parents which he does not want.

To conclude, inadequate parents do not concern with children's right affecting them to feel crisis in sense of self, inadequate and insecure. However, seeing all the effects of having inadequate parents, Kevin struggles really hard to overcome his emotional problems. The Character of Analysis of Kevin Lewis provides context of his issue and character development. On the other hands, it is known that the children of Lewis Family are not protected by their parents, and they even hurt them especially Kevin.

#### **b. Physically Abusive Parents**

Physically abusive parents conduct physical aggression to their child. The physical aggression takes form of kicking, punching, biting, and beatings. Such physical aggression bears the children to be in bruises, marks, burns welts, and cuts. The physically abusive parents affect the children to feel unhappy and anxiety. Moreover, physically abusive parents have their own abusive history. Kevin is the victim of child abuse.

Gloria commonly becomes the most dominating figure who hurt Kevin physically. She is kicking, punching, biting, and beating. The physical assaults make Kevin to be covered in bruises and marks. Kevin does have any idea why he receives such beatings.

The physically abusive parents affect the children to feel unhappy and anxiety. It is natural to see people become unhappy or sad if they get beatings. Beatings hurt. Such physical abuse makes the victim anticipates the next abuse triggering the victim to have panic attack and later on forming anxiety.

Gloria and Dennis can be seen as impulsive figures who do the physical aggression. They become physical abusers with direct repetition. The evidence has shown that physical abuse happens multiple times. Previously, it is explained that Kevin even has no idea why the parents beat him. Gloria beats him unreasonably. Dennis joins the beating without thinking just because Gloria told him to abuse him together. In addition, they also do not really concern with such consequence of physical abuse. The social services provide context if the abuse has become worse. Therefore, they asked if Kevin would like to move and he said yes regarding new foster parents.

The abusers usually have abusive history in the past. Gloria has it. She was badly burned. She stays in the mental hospital for a couple of years. This fact makes sense for Kevin who tries to understand her behavior in the light of mental problems.

The physically abusive parents can conduct physical aggression impulsively with direct repetition. They have the chance to make the children unhappy and anxiety. The parents could have abusive history at first and the same thing happen once they are adults. Kevin is indeed not burned badly but he is hurt resulted in bruises and marks. It is stated that Gloria is the parent who dominates Kevin in terms of physical aggression not only at physical, but also verbal one.

### **c. Verbally Abusive Parents**

Verbally abusive parents deal with negative words and negative speech hurting the feelings and mental state. Words and phrases can indeed hurt the feelings and mental state. The verbal abuse takes form of insults and degrading comments. Such verbal phenomenon can make the children feel lonely. The children can feel lonely in the way that it is better at such condition rather than being together with the verbal abuser.

The verbally abusive parents say insults and degrading comments to their children. One night, Kevin wet his bed at night, and naturally a child would call his mother. Yet, Kevin receives swearing from his mother. Further, in another day, Gloria would say the degrading comments of “pathetic” and “useless”. The comments are degrading because it is related to self-worth, and it means to look down upon the self-worth.

Gloria is not satisfied enough with spilling degrading comments, she also says put-down expressions to Kevin. Kevin was so happy to be able to perform well in some play at school. Kevin goes home knowing that Gloria does not watch his performance and suggest her to watch it. She replied with “should”, as if she should watch it. She chooses not to watch it. Kevin wipes his happiness in the form he stops smiling.

After the events of verbal abuse and put-down expressions, Kevin’s feeling was hurt affecting his mental state. The parents bear deep wounds to Kevin as he concludes like so after living with the

parents. Besides the deep wounds occur, Kevin is also physically and mentally abused. The social services and authorities who check Kevin up medically decide if he needs build-up physically and emotionally. In addition, he also feels useless as his mother says so.

The verbal abusers make the children to feel lonely but in a preferable way. Kevin thinks it is better to feel lonely. Being together with Gloria who gives negative comments about him does not seem to be a pleasant experience. He even finds freedom as emotional and exciting experience. Freedom in this case refers to not living with the family, and Kevin is required to survive alone.

The verbal abusers who produce negative speech affect children mentally. Gloria likely hurts Kevin with insults, degrading comments and put-down expressions. Kevin's mental is affected that way: being lonely in a preferable way, being useless, being emotionally hurt so he needs build-up as the authorities suggest it for him. Not to mention, the verbal abuse can be used to control the children as well in order to protect the abusers themselves.

#### **d. Controlling parents**

The controlling parents can do many things in order for their children fulfilling the parents' needs, wants, or even protection. They do not consider the children themselves. Gloria is the rules of the house. Unfortunately, based on Kevin's perspective, she makes irrational rules only to show that she is the powerful figure. To emphasize that she is more powerful than Kevin, when he tried to practice his self-defense towards her abuse laid upon him, Gloria becomes more and more in frenzy making sure that Kevin is powerless, therefore, overpowered. On the other hand, she also asks Kevin not to say anything to the social services or he will get beaten by a fucking stick instead. That can be considered as controlling in the way Gloria wants to feel safe regarding her case of abuse, but do not concern with Kevin's terrible condition because of her.

The controlling parents exercise control in contrast with reality. As previously stated, Gloria makes 3 irrational rules. The first is family members shall not have light bulb in the bathroom when it comes to peeing. The second one is no one shall take food in the fridge for the food is for parents. The children are left with hunger. The last one is Kevin shall not say the truth to the social services because it potentially put the parents in danger despite the fact that the truth leads to Kevin as the victim of physical aggression and verbal abuse.

Knowing that he cannot do anything to free himself from such torments at home, Kevin feels the effects of controlling parents called "helpless" He has no one to turn to for help. He depends on himself instead while learning about self-defense in the way he can. Family is supposed to be the most supportive.

Whenever Gloria feels that Kevin is having his self-defense, Gloria becomes uneasy knowing Kevin can explore choices in the way that he can take control. Gloria tries harder to emphasize the state of powerlessness of Kevin through intensive physical domination making Kevin in bruises and marks. Kevin cannot take it anymore to stand up and he fell down at the end. Hence, Gloria wants to be powerful.

Controlling parents do not concern with the children's needs or wants but theirs. The controlling parents can make irrational rules to protect themselves in the way that the parents do not have to pay more electric bills and hungry even longer. The parents can try to protect themselves by sacrificing

the kid's well-being. The kid receives such mental effects from controlling parents: feeling helpless and sense of identity in crisis.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that Kevin Lewis has toxic parents, and therefore, he is in dysfunctional family. His family is chaotic in every aspect: basic needs are not met, no clean and hygienic environment, disorganized roles and chores, loud, and violent. The parents are toxic: inadequate, physically abusive, verbally abusive and controlling. Toxic parents gave some mental effects. However, Kevin struggles to develop for good. On the other hand, this study also broadens the potential research in the subject since the research using the subject is not many. Moreover, this paper may enrich the body of knowledge with the related issues using theories rather than some research in literature without relevant theories. Not many research that intertwine the toxic parents by Buck and Forward (2002) with literary work. Some papers consider family systems theory at stake but this psychoanalysis study mostly focuses on the main character, surviving in his life. Previously stated, the research with the subject of *The Kid* novel may invite more people to uncover some issues in it since the literary study of the novel is not many to be found. Psychosocial development of Kevin or investigation revolving around parents can be the next issues of research. Hopefully, researchers who are interested in analyzing toxic parents in another literary work may observe the character's development as well.

The results of this research are for theoretical and practical purpose. Practically, this paper contributes not only to literary study, but also in terms of social awareness in family systems for society and educational institutions. It is known that family makes system. The system portrayed in the family reflects its functional state or otherwise. Children are dependent and vulnerable human-being. Hence, it is expected for people to deepen their comprehension of taking care the family by avoiding toxic parenting style the best they can. After that, the parents can decide which way that may be good parenting style for the children. They do not ask to be born and hopefully, by this reading, parents do not let them to extremely suffer in purpose. They deserve proper nurture. Children's rights for affection and needs along with proper parenting style shall be considered.

Kevin develops as a round character in the novel. His character development starts when he has issues as the effects of having toxic parents: struggling, anxious, stress, traumatic, low self-esteem, unhappy, bulimic and suicidal. He wants to be better, and he struggles to change. He believes that his parents are toxic. However, he does not have to be exactly like his parents. He chooses to be the functional parent. Therefore, he can cope with the issues. By now, he is; thoughtful, finance-oriented, sympathetic and empathetic. Moreover, he is able to deal with his bulimia well. At the end, he is a happy and functional parent. In the novel, he shares with the readers of how he wants to be the opposite of toxic parents. After the baby is born, Kevin is more determined to be a functional parent who love and support the child.

The research suggests that a person cannot really choose where or which family to come from but to accept it. However, a person can always choose to be the kind of person he or she wishes to be in the future.

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