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Machado's "Eight Bites" viewed Through Freudian Concepts & Toxic Societal Views on Beauty

Women are critiqued based on the way they look and are judged. The short story "Eight Bites" is based around the early 2000's and the narrator faces generational trauma from her mother and sisters. The mother passes on the idea of eating small portions of food, which is an unattainable eating standard as the narrator struggles with this. Carmen Maria Machado's short story "Eight Bites" illustrates Freud's concepts of the id: desires, the ego: reality, and the superego: morals; While the narrator goes through difficulty struggling with her weight due to constant reminders of society's toxic beauty standards: to have a slim figure and her mother's policing attitude impacts the narrator's decision to go through gastric bypass surgery.

The mother's policing attitude portrays society's toxic beauty standard it impacts the narrator's super-ego when she feels she has to comply with those standards. The narrator recalls her mother would always repeat "eight bites are all you need, to get a sense of what you are eating" (Machado 3). This goes on to convey how the mother was firm in her extreme beliefs and shows the starting point of the narrator forming bad eating habits. Freud's concept of the super-ego it's our conscious, it acts as a moral compass, and "the super-ego takes the place of the parental agency and observes, directs, and threatens the ego in exactly the same way as earlier the parents did with the child" (Lecture XXXI The Dissection of the Psychological Personality 4).

The super-ego takes influence on what it has learned from parental authority to make decisions. The mother is the parental figure and therefore, takes its morals from the mother. The narrator would be trying to comply with her mother's unattainable eating habits to satisfy the super-ego and then drastically change her body. Society's toxicity towards women's beauty forces her mother to apply it with her daughters by continuing the ideology of "eight bites" and glorifying bad eating habits as she also partakes in it.

The narrator's actions demonstrate she has an unhealthy relationship with food before deciding to have the surgery. There is an instance where the narrator tries to discipline herself by eating "eight bites and then stopped" but then "picked up [her] fork and had eight more bites" She admires the food on the plate "Everything was just so beautiful, and I was still hungry, and so I had eight more. After, I finished what was in the pot on the stove and I was so angry I began to cry." (Machado 4). This action is identified as a Binge Eating disorder eating "an amount of food that is definitely larger than most people would eat...and must be accompanied by a sense of lack of control" (Kusunoki 288). Binge Eating follows "feeling disgusted with oneself, depressed, or very guilty afterward" (Kusunoki 288). The narrator experiences a feeling of guilt afterward and decides at that moment she will have the surgery. This sheds light on how society's toxic portrayal of beauty standards can have a dangerous effect on women as shown by the narrator it pushes her to develop an eating disorder.

The narrator's self-hatred and exhaustion illustrate how toxic the beauty standard is towards women. The narrator makes a big decision regarding her body and decides she is going to have gastric bypass surgery which ultimately will give her the body that sustains eight bites. The narrator says she is "tired of looking into the mirror and grabbing the things that I hated and

lifting them, claw deep, and then letting them drop and everything aching” (Machado 4). This conveys the feeling of exhaustion with having to deal with inadequacy. The narrator also struggles with body dysmorphic disorder which is the “urge to scrutinize, improve, or hide the body part of concern. Mirror checking is the most common behavior” (Neziroglu, Fugen, et al 3). The word “claw deep” emphasizes how the narrator wants to change her body like she wants to take the things she hates off herself. The narrator is describing how she hates her body, and that since she “could not make eight bites work for [her] body... I would make my body work for eight bites” (Machado 4). Freud’s concept of the id is driven by the “pleasure principle” (The Id 1) by doing the extreme of getting surgery it represents her not knowing the consequences it could have on her. The id doesn't consider what is realistic “The id of course knows no judgements” (The Id 1). The id is looking for the desire to have the perfect body the narrator doesn't think of the consequences of this surgery to attain the beauty standard her mother preached. The narrator is clouded by her wants of having a perfect body she can't see that it's excessive and dangerous to her mental health.

The narrator’s ego is represented by her daughter, Cal. The narrator’s relationship with her daughter is strained and seems to be the only one who sees the repercussions the gastric bypass surgery will have on her mother. Cal represents the ego and “the relation to the external world has become the decisive factor for the ego” (The Ego 1). This means that the real world and the ego are connected, the ego is formed by experiences in the world. The ego observes, thinks, and then concludes what is right from wrong. When Cal finds out her mother is getting the surgery she tells her mom “If there's ever a time to swear, it's when your mom tells you she's getting half of one of her most important organs cut away for no reason...you're never going to

be able to eat like a normal human” (Machado 4). This conveys the daughter's strong opinion of how she opposes her mother's decision. Cal knows the consequences of gastric bypass surgery and is concerned for her mother's well-being. The narrator has a last-minute hesitation in the operating room and says “Wait... I trembled, though I didn't know why” (Machado 10). The super-ego is punishing the ego “Our moral sense of guilt is the expression between tension between the ego and the super-ego” (Lecture XXXI The Dissection of the Psychological Personality 3). This implies that the ego—Cal was getting through but the super-ego was gaining more control thus, punishing the ego with guilt.

Ultimately, the narrator goes through the body-altering procedure of gastric bypass surgery as she struggles with her weight and faces society's toxic beauty standards and her mother enforcing strict eating habits. The critique of toxic beauty standards is portrayed as negative in the story “Eight Bites” as the story follows the journey of the narrator it shows her struggles before and after surgery. Beauty standards have always held a lot of pressure on women of all ages and have affected them negatively as it can lead to self-esteem issues and body dissatisfaction.

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