



SELF-DISCOVERY IN NICOLA YOON'S EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING

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ABSTRACT

This is about self-discovery in Nicola Yoon's *Everything, Everything*. The novel represents people especially teenagers who want to find themselves with a change in life, where they can do things they really want to do with reasonable restrictions from parents. This is library research and applies mimetic theory proposed by Abrams saying that literature is an imitation of the real world. The analysis is focused on self-discovery through inner self-demands and self-discovery through social supports. People who find themselves through inner demands are represented by Maddy and her mother. Maddy finds herself through her inner desire for change in her life. She wants to experience the outside world that she has never experienced. Her mother finds herself going through inner self-demands as she realizes that what she did to her daughter was wrong to have lied to her daughter that she was not ready to lose her daughter but in the end, she can accept the fact that her daughter deserves to live a life like a normal teenager. People who find themselves through social support are represented by Maddy and Olly. She gets great support from Olly. After Olly came into her life, she desperately wants to fulfill her wish to be able to experience the outside world. Olly finds himself through social support from Maddy. He is a broken home boy who wants to run away to get support from her to dare to persuade his mother to leave his abusive father. In conclusion, the author, Nicola Yoon in her novel *Everything, Everything* vividly portrays self-discovery.

Keywords: self-discovery, inner-self, social supports, trust

I. INTRODUCTION

Nicola Yoon is a Jamaican-American novelist who was born on 1 October 1972, grew up in Jamaica and Brooklyn (New York), and lives in Los Angeles with her husband and their daughter. She graduated from Emerson College and got her Master's Degree from Cornell University. Her husband is David Yoon, a graphic designer and writer, and is the one who illustrates her novel *Everything, Everything*. She has written 4 novels and gets many awards, two of them are National Book Award finalist, and the first Black woman to hit number one on the New York Times Young Adult bestseller list. In 2020, together she and her husband are the co-founders of Joy Revolution, an imprint at Random House Children's Books focused on a romance novel by people of color inspired by the Yoon's love of romance novels and romantic

comedies, and her desire from a very early age to see herself, a Black woman, at the center of these stories. She is also associated with the We Need Diverse Books organization, which promotes the representation of diversity in literature (Peoplepill.com).

Yoon fills her stories with diverse characters and unusual situations and uses her novels to explore different types of love and the ways that people experience them. Her novels offers moments of light in the dark and shows that hope is a decision we can make even though there are boundaries that can drop our hopes at any time. Today's youth are the guardians of the future, but it is difficult for many to find joy or comfort in such a turbulent society. But in difficult times, words are power. She wants children to see themselves reflected in books that make them feel that they can do great and



heroic things in their lives, such as in the sphere of family, friendship, and love, which are close to people's lives. She wants children to have mirrors to see themselves and windows to see those different from them in the books they read. She was inspired to write her debut novel, *Everything, Everything*, after the birth of her biracial daughter. She wanted to write a book that reflected her daughter on the pages so her daughter to be able to see herself in the media (Npr.org).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Clarification of Terms

Self Discovery is fundamental component of personal growth. We must take the time to discovery who we are as a person. The process of self-discovery is one in which a person is guided, through self-questioning and examination of one's own thoughts, words, and actions, in order to reach his or her own conclusions regarding who they truly are (DestinysOdyssey.com). Self-discovery is the formation of thorough awareness of one's personalities by searching for intrinsic nature and value to identify goals, values and beliefs. As part of the process of searching for our true selves, we are ultimately working to identify three things: personal potentials, our purposes for living, opportunities to act upon those potentials and purposes in living. The search for our true selves, therefore: refers to those processes, both intuitive and reasoned, by which those (personal, purpose-related) potentials are discovered and come to attain the status of personally concordant goals that are to be actualized. According to this view, a person's true self basically lies beneath the surface, and our task is to find, recognize, or understand that which already exists. Once you have, you can then make choices about your life and identity that are more consistent with this self-knowledge (Researchgate.net). Clapsself states that self-discovery is an important component of personal development, self growth, and transformation. It helps us to answer fundamental questions about ourselves who

we are, what we want, and why (Clapsself.com).

2.2 Theory and Method

This study applies mimetic theory proposed by Abrams saying that literature is an imitation of the real life. When a literary work is considered to be an imitation or a description of events that exist in the real world, it is called a mimetic theory (8). The method is library research where data are collected from some libraries online, author's website, journal and online resources. The primary source is the novel *Everything, Everything*. Secondary sources are taken from various books and other relevant sources from the internet. After all the secondary sources are collected, the analysis is done by selecting the most crucial episodes from the novel relating to self-discovery. All the data are taken together then interpreted for comprehensive and meaningful result that the novel portrays self-discovery.

III. THE ANALYSIS

Everything, Everything, a novel of 336 pages is a story about a young girl who wants to find her true-self by escaping from her mother's lie about her fake disease for eighteen years. She was diagnosed with SCID which she calls "bubble baby disease" because she is not allowed to leave her house, so she feels like she is living in a bubble. The only people she socializes with are her mother and her nurse. Her days deal with online school, reading books, having a movie and night games with her mother, talking with her nurse, but having no friends. She obeys her mother's rules until one day, her life suddenly changes when the boy moves into the house next door and manages to pull her out of her misery. Knowing about her mother's pretending, she disobeys her mother's rules and finds out the truth that she does not have any illnesses. Her mother has done it because of the trauma of losing her father and brother in a car accident which makes her mother frightened of losing her too. After discovering the truth about who



she is she decides to live her own life and experience new things.

The main characters are Madeline Whittier, Oliver bright, and Dr.Pauline Whittier. The minor characters are Carla Flores, Mr. Bright, Mrs. Bright, Mr. Waterman, Zach, Kara, Rosa, Nurse Janet Pritchert and Dr. Melissa Francis. Madeline Whittier or Maddy, the protagonist and round character is a mixed-race teenager, who has dark brown curly hair, her eyes chocolate brown color, dark chocolate brown skin, freckles, and always wears a white shirt. At the ripe age of eighteen, she has not left her house in seventeen years because of her rare disease known as severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID) which makes her virtually allergic to everything. Because of her illness, Maddy has grown up extremely sheltered: the only people she sees regularly are her mother and her nurse. She is an avid reader and books are one of her only connections to the outside world. She began to distance herself from her mother when Olly moved into the house next door. He was the first boy Maddy had ever liked, especially when they got to meet in person, and started to want and expect things more than she should. When the truth about her illness is revealed, she comes to question and distance herself from her mother's perception of her and the dangers posed by the world outside. She learns to take risks, make her own decisions, and deal with the possibility of being hurt or disappointed.

Olly with the real name Oliver Bright is the boy who moves into the house next to Maddy. He is a tall, pale Californian, has ocean blue eyes, and muscular young man who wears all black: black t-shirt, black jeans, black sneakers, and a black knit cap. Because Olly is nevertheless big enough and headstrong enough to stand up to his dad, Olly is often a target of his dad's verbal and physical abuse. He spends much of his time at home trying to defend his mother and his sister, Kara, from his dad's abuse. As Olly and Maddy get to know each other, he wants to help Madeline experience life. Pauline Whittier is Maddy's mother, who was thin,

had black hair and dark eyes. After losing her husband and son in a traffic accident, she ended up creating a faked Maddy's diagnosis so she could care for her and keep her safe from everything that might hurt her emotionally or physically. Her mental health unravels when Maddy discovers the truth about her illness. In the end, she begins to get the psychiatric help she needs and can let Maddy go. Carla Flores is a full-time nurse for Maddy, her job is to spend eight hours per day monitoring Maddy's vital signs. She has a 17-year-old daughter named Rosa, whom she dotes on and loves dearly. She's been caring for Maddy since Maddy was a toddler and over the years. In her interactions with Maddy, she provides advice and supports Maddy in making bold decisions for herself.

Bright is Olly's father who used to be kind to his family but developed a drinking problem after losing his job when Olly was a child. He has become an abusive person both physically and verbally. Mrs. Bright is Olly and Kara's mother. She finally agrees to secretly move to New York City with Olly and Kara, leaving him. Mr. Waterman is Maddy's favorite architecture tutor, the only one whom Maddy's mother has ever allowed to enter the house and tutor Maddy in person. Zach is a dreadlocked friend of Olly's whom Olly and Maddy meet up with in Hawaii. He helps Maddy come to terms with her choice to lie to Maddy's mother and to Olly, he suggests that sometimes, lying is the only way to be a part of a family, and that it's easier to lie than live one's truth. Kara is Olly's younger sister. She smokes cigarettes in secret and spends most of her time on her cell phone. Rosa is Carla's 17-year-old daughter. Janet Pritchert is the nurse who replaces Carla for Maddy's care. Dr. Melissa Francis is the doctor who treats Maddy in Hawaii.

The novel is set in Los Angeles, California. The story takes place in Madeline Whittier's house, Hawaii and New York. Since Madeline has SCID, she is allergic to everything and is only allowed to be in her house. She specifically stays in this one room she calls her sunroom and there were fake



plants so she can feel like she is outside. As for the Whittier house, the author describes that her house is filled with pure white furniture and white walls. The only color that fills Maddy's room are her books, on her white bookshelves. The air she breathes must be thoroughly filtered so that there is device to sterilize air circulation in her house.

3.1 Self-Discovery through Inner Self-Demands

Inner Self-demands means knowing oneself through self-awareness and introspection. The author creates Maddy as a representation of people who manage to find their self-discovery through their minds. She had locked up for eighteen years and never seen anyone but her mother, and her nurses because she was diagnosed with SCID: a rare disease that is allergic to the outside world and she will not be able to live a normal life. She cannot have normal childhood where she is free to run around outside or playing in the rain or everything children are supposed to do in her age. This influenced her to be aware and not really hope for her recovery and she makes reading books as a hobby to pass the time.

However, when she was eight years old for the first time she begins realizing that she wants to live a normal life like other children. She narrates:

I keeping thinking about the summer I turned eight. I spent so many days with my forehead pressed against my glass window, bruising myself with my futile wanting. At first I just wanted to look out the window. But then I wanted to go outside. And then I wanted to play with the neighborhood kids, to play with all kids everywhere, to be normal for just an afternoon, a day, a lifetime (87).

Maddy's self-awareness initially emerged when she was eight years old but when she turned eighteen, the awareness to start enjoying her life as a teenager became more and more volatile. She says: Maybe it's because I'm eighteen now. Technically, I'm an adult. I should be leaving home, going off

to college (11).

During the teenage stage people have many things to do with discovering who they really are and who they want to be as adults, this is what the author describes in her novel through Maddy. What Maddy really wants as a teenager is to be able to feel the outside world, the desire to be a normal teenager in general like getting permission to learn to drive, first kiss, dance party, first heartbreak, and first minor accident while driving, but she realizes that it is a difficult thing for her to achieve because it is hindered by her illness.

Most teenagers can instill their desires at the age of eighteen but there is one problem: needs parental approval. Often teenagers do not dare to say what they want but it doesn't matter if they continue to struggle with their inner voice because it's a process of finding a way out. In this novel, Maddy manages to find herself by having the courage to act. She acted as she wished even though it had to be against her mother's rules. For her, her life is her own, if she doesn't change it herself, who will? She firmly believes that she is sick just like what her mother says but she realizes that she cannot always be in the house. She finally tries to get up the courage to break her mother's rules. She does that because she wants to know the extent of the risk she will take if she dares to follow her inner self: the extent to which her illness will kill her and find out if she is really sick. Maddy says:

Because of you I'm alive, Mom, and I'm so, so grateful for that. Because of you I've survived this long and gotten a chance to know my small part of the world. But it's not enough. It's not your fault. It's this impossible life (173).

Making own decisions in life is appreciated even if they are risky or not because the biggest risk in life is not taking risks. Maddy dares to take a big risk in her life even though it results in possible death to fulfill her desire in achieving her self-discovery. She manages to find out the fact that she is not sick: she was diagnosed with illness by her mother because her mother was



afraid of losing her like her mother lost her father and brother. At first, she was furious at her mother but in the end, she could understand that it is just her mother's way to love her and was afraid of losing her.

Besides Maddy, her mother, Mrs. Whittier also experienced self-discovery through her inner self. She introspects herself to cover her feels guilty of lying to her beloved daughter for eighteen years. She did this because she was afraid of losing the only daughter she has after she was traumatized by the loss of her husband and son. She is just a mother who loves her daughter too much. The most dreaded loss as a parent is losing a child. Mrs. Whittier says: Loss of love makes people crazy (304). Love here means a child. Children are the most valuable treasure for parents, especially for a mother. She is able to accept the fact that her daughter also has the right to enjoy her life as the way her daughter wants. Mrs. Whittier says: I still love you, Madeline. And you still love me. You have your whole life ahead of you. Don't waste it. Forgive me (299).

As mothers, they have anxiety about the dangers outside the world which will result in the loss of their children but it does not mean mothers can force what they want. Children also have lives and have the right to determine choices when they grow up. The two characters in this novel, Maddy and Mrs. Whittier succeeded in discovering themselves through inner self demands. Maddy succeeds in the process of discovering herself by managing to find out the truth that she is actually not sick and be able to live a normal life as she should be. Moreover, Mrs. Whittier succeeds in discovering herself by accepting the fact that her daughter deserves to live as she should be.

3.2 Self-Discovery through Social Supports

Social support means advice, real help or behavior obtained from close social relationships to solve problems. The author creates Maddy as someone who experiences self-discovery through social support. The

first support she get from Olly: becomes the symbol of her hope to change her destiny. Since he moved to the house next door, Maddy has a new activity by observing him and her family members from her bedroom window. As time goes on, Maddy gets to know him better, especially since he wrote an email at his window to communicate and from their interactions in emails, they slowly became comfortable with each other. She trusts him to tell of her illness without fear of pity or trial. He is also the one who allows her to experience the experience of meeting someone of her age in real life.

Olly also shows his concern for Maddy with an extraordinary sacrifice to be able to meet the girl he loves. Olly has to undergo a disinfection process, which is very cold place like getting a high-speed air bath for about an hour so that he is sterile to meet Maddy. Even when Maddy asks him to come with her to Hawaii, he cannot refuse even though he risks having to leave his mother and sister with his physically abusive father without his supervision. He says: I'm all the way here in Hawaii with you. It's not easy for me to leave them alone with him (234). This proves how valuable the influence of love in her life to change everything, and realizes that she is really alive. Maddy confesses: I was happy before I met him. But I'm alive now, and those are not the same thing (185).

Yoon creates all characters to support each other to get out of problems. Meeting Olly for the first time makes Maddy think of her place in the universe, beyond the confines of her home, and to admit what she really wants. She is able to make a choice in life: to love Olly. She decides to face her love because it has changed her life outlook. Eventually Maddy grows up and begins to make her own decisions about the risks she will take and how she wants to live her life.

Apart from Olly, Maddy's nurse, Carla, also gives support to Maddy, namely support to love, be loved, and live. Carla reassures Maddy about her feelings for Olly because she cares about Maddy. She advises Maddy not to deny her feelings for fear of wanting more. Carla says: "Just because you can't



experience everything doesn't mean you shouldn't experience anything. After all, destined love is a part of life'' (84). She convinces Maddy of her love which needs recognition and struggle not to lose, therefore she must dare to show her love. If she does not want to lose then she never hides love. She supports Maddy to meet Olly because she understands Maddy's feeling who has been lonely for eighteen years. This means that Carla has contributed to support Maddy's life choices by convincing her that understanding oneself is the first step to self-discovery. She says: You don't know this yet, but this will pass. It's just the newness and hormones... You have enough things to be afraid of. Love can't kill you (92).

Overall, both Olly and Carla play important role in supporting Maddy's efforts to find her true self. Maddy's entire existence is determined by her illness and her life is a series of missed events. On her eighteenth birthday, she takes the initiative to change her life and makes a decision about her life. She says: Maybe it's because I'm eighteen now... I have to get away from home, go to college. My mom must be scared of empty nest syndrome'' (10). When there is a choice then there could be a risk can be borne. Maddy decides to love Olly and leaves the house so she has to risk being scolded by her mother and also possibly dying from her illness. She did as Olly and Carla have suggested because she trust them.

Not only does Olly become the portrait of social support in Maddy's self-discovery, Maddy also plays a role in Olly's self-discovery. Olly is a child who has a broken home family, his father often beats his mother and forces his will to his son. He was forced to quit the math competition because his father wanted him to do something more manly like football. He wants to escape from his life too, but his mother and younger sister stop him. He thinks that he is the one who

should be their guardian. Olly often convinces his mother to leave his father, but his mother does not want to. In this case, Maddy feels empathy for him, so she advises him to leave his family if his mother does not want to leave his father. Maddy plays an important role in convincing him to be brave and continues to convince his mother to leave his father. She continues to support him when she feels devastated because of his family. Even when he is beaten by his father, she is willing to leave the house to see Olly, she is willing to risk her life just to show how much she cares for him. He is convinced and tries to convince his mother to leave his father together with him because he cannot afford to run away on his own. This is evidenced by his email to Maddy. She says:

He tells me about trying to convince his mom to get some help and about trying to save Kara from herself. He's not sure which conversation with his mom finally convinced her. It could've been because he told her he couldn't be part of the family anymore if she stayed. Sometimes you have to leave the people who love you the most, he said. Or, he says, it could've been when he finally told her about me and about how sick I am and how I was willing to do anything just to live. He says that she thinks I'm brave (261).

Social support is indeed quite influential in this life because humans will not be able to live life alone. No matter how strong people live their lives, they need social supports from the closest people and from the people they love to change a life. Olly succeeds in his self-discovery to dare to fight his father and take his mother and sister away from his father through Maddy's support.

IV. CONCLUSION

The novel *Everything, Everything* describes self-discovery through inner self demand and social support. It describes how

people, especially teenagers, want to discover themselves because they want to experience life changes, especially being



able to do things that they really want to do without any restrictions from others. People who discovered themselves through inner self-demand are represented by Maddy and her mother. Maddy discovers herself through her inner self-demand because she realizes that she wants a change in her life: wants to find out the truth about who she really is and to what extent her illness will reign supreme over her, moreover she wants to fulfill her wish to be able to see the outside world that she has never felt before. Her mother made up about her illness by forbidding her to leave the house for a second. The mother discovers herself through inner self-demand because she realizes her wrong doing to her daughter. She finally tries to accept the fact that her daughter deserves to live life like a normal teenager.

People who discover themselves through social support are represented by Maddy and Olly. Maddy discovers herself because of Olly's great supports. She initially just accepted the reality of her life and lived her life as usual, but after Olly came into her life to fulfill her desire to be able to experience the world outside. Olly

discovered himself through social support from Maddy. He is a broken home child who wants to run away from his family but realizes that it is impossible because he has to protect his mother and younger sister from his beating father. Olly gets support from Maddy to venture up to persuade her mother to leave her abusive father. In conclusion, Nicola Yoon in her novel *Everything, Everything* succeeds in conveying that this novel reflects Self-Discovery.

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