

# Understanding Everyday Sadism, Dark Traits and Employee Silence at Work: Reflections from the Indian Epic Ramayana

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## Abstract

Everyday sadism represents a significant aspect of the subclinical dark personality constellation, characterized by individuals who inflict pain on others for pleasure or personal gain. Such individuals may derive satisfaction from various forms of abuse: be it verbal, physical, or simply through observing others suffering. These subclinical dark traits are frequently observed in workplace environments, where individuals may hold a range of positions. In professional settings, they exhibit unprovoked aggression, engage in gossip, undermine colleagues discreetly, and partake in various counterproductive behaviors that they attempt to normalize through rationalization. Their lack of empathy prevents them from feeling shame for their actions. While sadists are undeniably deviant by nature, this paper investigates whether they also engage in what can be termed "deviant silence," where they remain silent for their own benefit. Using constructivist grounded theory, a qualitative research method that captures participants' vivid perspectives, we explored this concept further. Our empirical findings reveal two key characteristics of everyday sadists that contribute to deviant silence: self-prioritization and insecurity. Also, we explored characters from the Indian epic Ramayana to understand whether every human has the potential to become an everyday sadist.

**Keywords:** Deviant silence, Opportunistic silence, Employee silence, Dark tetrad, Everyday sadism, Evasive hiding, Knowledge hiding behavior, Prosocial Sadism, Ramayana, Indian epics

## Introduction

For decades, dark personality traits have been a hot topic for researchers, particularly following Paulhus and Williams's seminal work in 2002 on the Dark Triad, which introduced the concept of the "Dark Triad." This Triad encompasses less severe forms of actual personality disorders, specifically narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism. Unlike narcissism and psychopathy, Machiavellianism does not have a clinical counterpart (Rogoza & Ciecuch, 2020).

The subclinical traits are milder forms of true personality disorder that can be seen in the general population. Individuals who exhibit these traits display antagonistic behavior in their daily lives, which is socially acceptable and does not necessitate clinical intervention (Blötner & Mokros, 2023; Hanson & Baker, 2017; Paulhus &

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Dutton, 2016; Turner & Webster, 2018).

Chabrol et al., (2009) were the first to establish the connection between the Dark Triad traits and subclinical sadism and proposed its consideration as the fourth subclinical dark personality, as also mentioned by, Buckles (2012) and Kurtuluş (2019). Later, the concept of soft/mild/subclinical sadism was referred as "Everyday Sadism" (Paulhus and Dutton, 2016), defined as "*the dispositional tendency to engage in cruel, demeaning, or aggressive behaviors for pleasure or*

*dominance*” (Plouffe, Saklofske, & Smith, 2017, p. 166). These traits are collectively known as the "Dark Tetrad".

Turner and Webster (2018) argued that "greed" and "spite" are strong contenders against sadism for being the fourth dark trait. They even proposed the concept of the "sinful six," a cluster that includes six dark traits: narcissism, psychopathy, Machiavellianism, spite, sadism, and greed. However, this proposal intensified the ongoing debate regarding the inclusion and exclusion criteria, along with the number of dark traits that ought to be considered as the subclinical dark personality.

The Dark Tetrad collectively comprises six main characteristics: callousness, reckless behavior, arrogance, deceitfulness, pleasure in causing pain, and unlawful behavior. Among these six features, callousness (lack of empathy) stands out as common to all (Kurtuluş, 2019). Initially, "lack of empathy" was considered the primary criterion for including dark traits in the group of dark personalities. However, researchers were unable to establish a negative correlation between empathy and aggression, leading to a broader understanding that callousness alone should not define inclusion (Ragoza et al., 2022; Spain, Harms, & Wood, 2016). Moshagen, Hilbig, and Zettler (2018) offered a clearer explanation of the criteria for including and excluding certain traits. They suggest that a trait may be classified as dark if it involves a consistent tendency to prioritize one's own benefits—whether in terms of monetary gain or social status—while neglecting or intentionally causing harm, either emotional or physical, to others. This behavior is often accompanied by beliefs that serve as rationalizations for such actions.

Researchers like Johnson, Plouffe, and Saklofske (2019) have confirmed that everyday sadism fits within the dark tetrad framework based on their

empirical studies. Additionally, Buckles (2018) found that individuals who exhibit everyday sadism derive pleasure when shown visual depictions of others experiencing physical or emotional pain, often minimizing the severity of that pain. They justify or rationalize their actions by downplaying the extent of this suffering. This finding aligns with the framework proposed by Moshagen, Hilbig, and Zettler (2018), further supporting the classification of everyday sadists within the Dark Tetrad.

While the traits within the Dark Tetrad share certain characteristics, they are not interchangeable; each has unique features that distinguish them from one another (Gómez-Leal, 2024; Szabó et al., 2023). Narcissists thrive on admiration and attention; psychopaths seek thrills, Machiavellians manipulate, and sadists enjoy others' pain (Buckles, 2018). Also, Bonfá-Araujo et al. (2022) conducted a comprehensive quantitative analysis that revealed measurable statistical differences among these traits.

Individuals with dark personality traits often have different work preferences that align with their unique traits. They employ various tactics based on their personality type to succeed in their jobs. However, psychopaths are an exception; they typically rely on hard tactics, such as threats, to achieve their goals (Kurtuluş, 2019). Psychopaths are often characterized as dominating individuals who prefer to work in isolation without forming affiliations. They are well-suited for realistic and practical jobs, often seeking out challenging and risky tasks that provide a thrill (Furtner, Maran, & Rauthmann, 2017). For personal gain, psychopaths may take risks with other people's finances (Hanson & Baker, 2017). They typically struggle to maintain social relationships (Kurtuluş, 2019). Their lack of empathy and antisocial behavior make them particularly suited for roles such as "employee termination" (Hanson & Baker, 2017). Narcissists, in contrast, thrive in environments where they can receive appreciation and admiration, which boosts

their inflated self-esteem, such as in the case of actors. They use their charisma to seek social admiration and recognition (Furtner, Maran, & Rauthmann, 2017). Although they excel at impression management, they struggle to hide their darker behaviors for extended periods (Kurtulmuş, 2019).

Machiavellians often view others employees as "incompetent" (Kurtulmuş, 2019) and "stupid" (Spain, Harms, & Wood, 2016). They view their workplace as highly competitive (Furtner, Maran, & Rauthmann, 2017) and thrive in unstructured organizations where rules are flexible and not strictly enforced (Kurtulmuş, 2019).

Among the Dark Tetrad personality traits, narcissism and Machiavellianism seem to be more closely linked to career success (Furtner, Maran, & Rauthmann, 2017).

Sadists, a recent addition to the dark cluster, often gravitate towards roles as enforcers, such as in the military or police, where they can exert power over others for their own gratification (Paulhus, 2014).

People who score high in dark personality traits often excel in non-verbal intelligence (Kurtulmuş, 2019) and possess malevolent creativity (Intentionally engaging in some sort of callous activity and executing it creatively) (Lainidi, et al. 2023). Their overconfidence and risk-taking abilities help them overpower competitors (Cohen, 2023). Additionally, their intelligence, combined with physical attractiveness, adds to their success (Hanson & Baker, 2017). They use aggression as a tool to accomplish their work (Pineda, et al. 2022). They also demonstrate strong political skills (Li et al., 2020), which enable them to structure a favorable work environment (Baloch et al., 2017) and climb the ladder of success (Kholin, Kückelhaus, & Blickle, 2020). Political skills help such individuals achieve high performance ratings, resulting in promotions and other benefits (Lainidi

et al., 2023). In short, they know how to sell or present themselves to others, which favors their organizational growth.

While these aversive traits may confer certain advantages to those who exhibit them, they can also have detrimental effects on interpersonal relationships (Rogers et al., 2018). Over time, such individuals have captured the attention of organizational behaviorists due to their counterproductive work behaviors, which adversely affect both colleagues and employers (Cohen, 2016). They tend to prioritize their own interests and focus exclusively on tasks that benefit them (Bonfá-Araujo, Simpson, & Schermer, 2023), often exploiting their colleagues in the workplace (Roeser et al., 2016) and fostering a hostile work environment (Jones & Neria, 2015). This behavior ultimately contributes to increased employee turnover (Baheer et al., 2023). They excel at recognizing others' emotional vulnerabilities - understanding what triggers positive or negative emotions—and use this insight to select their targets. Individuals who are "sad" and "vulnerable" seem to be their preferred targets. They may employ "charm" or "crocodile tears" to manipulate and deceive them (Demetriooff, Porter & Baker, 2017). They also tend to target individuals who remain silent (Fernández-del-Río, Ramos-Villagrasa, & Escartín, 2021).

Silence...Do employees remain silent because of someone else's dark personality, or do they remain silent due to their own dark personality to harm others?

Milliken, Morrison, and Hewlin (2003) found that employees frequently opt for silence as a means of avoiding potential negative repercussions and safeguarding their relationships with their supervisors. Additionally, employees may filter or withhold information before sharing it with their superiors. Kish-Gephart, et al. (2009) emphasized that an angry boss can instill fear in employees,

leading them to refrain from speaking out, even when serious issues arise. Following such experiences, employees become conditioned to believe that their boss is not receptive to their input. In response, they develop defensive and habitual silence as a protective mechanism. Knoll, Hall, and Weigelt (2019) also noted that employees often feel their willingness to voice concerns is largely influenced by their employers.

Research indicates that when employees experience a strong sense of connection and belonging, they are more inclined to contribute innovative ideas and take on additional responsibilities. In contrast, feelings of alienation can cause them to withdraw and disengage from sharing their thoughts (Knoll, Hall & Weigelt, 2019). Silence in the workplace can affect employees' job attitudes, organizational citizenship, and task performance, ultimately impacting the organization both directly and indirectly (Hao et al., 2022).

Furthermore, it is evident that individuals with dark personality traits are increasingly common in modern workplaces, occupying various roles within organizations. This raises the question: Are these traits responsible for fostering a culture of silence in the workplace? Researchers such as Mousa, et al. (2021), Erkutlu & Chafra (2019), and Lainidi, et al. (2023) have respectively highlighted that narcissistic, Machiavellian, and psychopathic leaders can suppress their followers voice and actively contribute in fostering culture of silence in the workplace. However, there exists a notable gap in the existing literature regarding the context of everyday sadism.

With the intention of actively contributing to SDG 8, Decent Work, and enhancing employees' work lives, we propose this research to examine the relationship between everyday sadism—an emerging aspect of dark personality traits—and employee silence. This research primarily focuses

on the Indian context.

Our aim is to raise awareness among employers and employees about dark personality traits, particularly everyday sadism, which is considered the most detrimental among these traits. Individuals exhibiting such traits may be sitting just cubicles away, fostering a culture of silence at work for their amusement. By shedding light on these dynamics, we hope to improve the overall work culture in Indian workplaces. As India is the fastest-growing economy in the world, a better workplace will translate into enhanced economic growth.

We begin this paper by forming a conceptual framework, but before that, we establish their backgrounds which can be helpful in setting the direction of our research.

## Background

### *Everyday Sadism*

Everyday Sadism is the most dangerous trait among the Dark Tetrad; individuals with this trait have an intrinsic motivation to inflict pain on others to seek pleasure, which sets them apart from other traits (Buckels, Jones, and Paulhus, 2013; Chen, Ok, & Aquino, 2023; Fernández-del-Río, Ramos-Villagrasa, & Escartín, 2021). Their inclination to inflict harm for the pursuit of pleasure is rooted in inherent traits rather than being influenced by external stimuli (Buckels, 2012; Bulut, 2017). Everyday sadism is considered a “non-pathological version,” which is similar in characteristics to clinical sadism but differs in intensity, as individuals with this trait enjoy others' pain in an everyday situations (Burris & Leitch, 2016; Erickson & Sagarin, 2021). Buckels, Jones, and Paulhus (2013) confirmed sadists' pleasure-seeking behavior through their experimental findings. They have low scores in animal-reminder disgust, which may explain their willingness to engage in hurtful behavior (Meere & Egan, 2017). This behavior



serves as a way to fill their lack of positive emotion (Buckels, Jones, and Paulhus, 2013).

Everyday sadists often target individuals who do not retaliate against harmful actions directed at them (Chester, DeWall & Enjaian, 2019). They inflict harm on others, including innocent people (Buckels, Jones, and Paulhus, 2013), while avoiding situations that could put them at risk (Buckels, 2018).

Sadists are known for directing their aggression toward others without any prior warning (Thomas & Egan, 2022). They display both proactive and reactive aggression to derive pleasure from their actions (Chester, DeWall & Enjaian, 2019). Additionally, sadists demonstrate more unprovoked aggression than individuals with other dark personality traits (Reidy, Zeichner & Seibert, 2011).

It has been observed that everyone has the potential for sadism, which is the tendency to derive pleasure from the pain of others. This characteristic is believed to be inherited from our hunter-gatherer ancestors (Buckles, 2012). Studies show that an individual may exhibit sadistic behavior if they are provoked, experience rejection from society, or feel existentially threatened (Buckles, 2018; Pfattheicher, 2021).

Buckles (2012) highlighted that our bodies strive for a psycho-physiological equilibrium, which can be disrupted during stressful situations. Engaging in pleasurable activities helps maintain this balance. Similarly, Pfattheicher (2021) found that boredom, which often co-occurs with negative emotions such as sadness, loneliness, worry, and anger, motivates people to seek out pleasurable activities. As a result, some individuals may become sadistic, inflicting pain on others for their own enjoyment.

Some individuals can become "addicted" to the

pleasure they gain from causing harm, which leads to significant problems for those around them. These individuals are referred to as "true sadists" and are particularly problematic. Factors such as feelings of guilt, fear of punishment, and empathy for others play a crucial role in controlling or inhibiting sadistic impulses. However, true sadists lack control over these factors (Buckles, 2012) and they "frequently" inflict pain on others for their pleasure (Buckles, 2018).

According to Buckels (2012), everyday sadism is defined as a subclinical trait characterized by the motive to inflict pain on others solely for pleasure (intrinsic motivation). Buckels rejects the notion of instrumental sadism, which refers to individuals displaying sadistic tendencies to dominate others or for other practical motives. In contrast, Góis et al. (2020) established a connection between extrinsic motivation and sadism, in workplace context, highlighting how individuals with sadistic tendencies utilize their power for personal gain. This observation aligns with the findings of Chabrol, van Leeuwen, and Rodgers (2011) as well as O'Meara, Davies, and Hammond (2011); everyday sadists are motivated by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors to inflict pain on others. Adding to this, Foulkes (2019, p. 2) states that, "*while an individual might claim that their motivation is to gain power over someone, this could also stem from the enjoyment they find in wielding that power—suggesting that the ultimate motivation could still be pleasure.*" This explains, sadists are not only motivated to direct pain on others to satisfy their intrinsic motives but also to satisfy their extrinsic motives, such as, power, control or dominance.

Every sadists primarily use emotional violence rather than physical violence to inflict harm on their victims. Interestingly, they often display positive emotions during acts of violence, while typically showing negative emotions in response to positive experiences (Bulut, 2017). Buckles (2018)

highlighted that in any violent or problematic situation, they do not take responsibility for their actions but instead shift the blame onto their counterpart. Furthermore, everyday sadists blame the victims, who have already experienced misfortune, for their losses or any negative occurrences in their lives (Sassenrath et al., 2024).

Sadists derive pleasure from others' suffering, either directly or indirectly. In indirect sadism, they simply observe and find satisfaction in others' pain without taking any action. In direct sadism, however, they actively inflict verbal or physical harm to experience pleasure (Lobbestael, Slaoui, & Gollwitzer, 2023). Individuals who score high in direct physical sadism tend to display passive-aggressive behaviors towards their victims, which is a more subtle form of physical harm. Moreover, this behavior affects the victim psychologically and emotionally (Emer & Poepsel, 2021).

It is evident that everyday sadists engage in verbal sadistic behaviors such as aggressive humor, sarcasm (Torres-Marin, Navarro-Carrillo, & Carretero-Dios, 2022), gossip (Russell & King, 2017), pranks (Burris & Leitch, 2017), trolling (Buckels et al., 2019), and mocking (Pfattheicher, 2021) to humiliate others in the workplace. These individuals employ these tactics to target their victims without obtaining prior consent. Researchers suggest that these antagonism may stem from "katagelasticism," a tendency to derive pleasure from others' discomfort (Torres-Marin, Navarro-Carrillo, & Carretero-Dios, 2022). At times, such actions serve as a "compensatory response" to insults they have received. Pranks, in particular, are often used as a means of expressing "retaliatory aggression," providing them with a sense of satisfaction (Burris & Leitch, 2017). This aligns with Buckels's (2018) findings; sadists exhibit "misplaced aggression" resulting from previous insults or misbehavior directed at them by others. Verbal sadism appears to be more harming and alarming as compared to any other form of

everyday sadism, as it can have long lasting impact on the victim (Góis, et al. 2020). It is also observed that, trolling, a form of verbal sadism, can severely impact victims' psycho-social dynamics (Pfattheicher, 2021).

Individuals with this aversive trait avoid engaging in prosocial actions, opting to accumulate wealth instead of assisting those in need. When they do offer help, it's not out of altruism but rather a desire for public recognition (Bonfá-Araujo, Simpson, & Schermer, 2023). The lack of prosocial behaviors and empathy significantly contributes to bystander passivity (Saravia Lalinde, Longpré & de Roos, 2023).

Some studies provide evidence of prosocial sadism. Individuals exhibiting this behaviour use their aggression as a form of punishment, humiliation, or other types of harm towards the perpetrator to gain peer appreciation. This behavior not only yields them pleasure but also enhances their social status. Such prosocial aggression is referred to as "socially-sanctioned aggression" (Russell, 2019). A prosocial sadist does not engage in overtly harmful behavior but deliberately chooses not to help someone in need, even when they could easily assist and resolve the situation (Emer & Poepsel, 2021).

A prosocial sadists seek prestige, while an everyday sadists pursue dominance (Russell, 2019). Erickson and Sagarin (2021) found that everyday sadists can be more malice than prosocial or sexual sadists. They do not require consent to cause pain; in fact, they take greater pleasure when consent is not given.

In the workplace, sadistic leaders with extensive managerial experience can inflict significantly more harm than individuals with other dark traits. They engage in various forms of forgery and unethical practices that may benefit them personally but ultimately detract from the

organization's well-being. Unlike other dark traits, sadistic leaders are not impulsive; instead, they take considerable time to strategize and creatively execute their malicious intentions against others. Also, individuals with higher academic degrees tend to exhibit more sadistic behavior compared to those with less education. This trend may stem from the toxic work environment often found in universities, which can lead highly educated individuals to develop sadistic tendencies (Góis et al., 2020). Ultimately, organizations where sadists work have to face the consequences of their toxic behavior

These characteristics highlight the extent of malice that a sadist can exhibit. According to Wang et al. (2022), everyday sadists are identified as a primary cause of various forms of uncivil behavior in the workplace. Additionally, Min et al. (2019) have shown that everyday sadists rank as the most significant among aversive traits that promote workplace incivility. Their inherent sadistic tendencies play a substantial role in fostering interpersonal deviance. They deliberately cut off all support to watch others struggle (Góis et al., 2020).

In this paper, we authors (PMT and AB), are moving forward in this research with a theoretical definition of an "everyday sadist" which is: Everyday sadists are individuals who lose their ability to feel guilt and empathy, often as a result of an intrinsic or extrinsic void created by a past incident or experience. They inflict pain on others frequently to fill this void and consistently try to rationalize or justify their actions (Buckles, 2012; Buckles, 2018; Buckles, Jones, and Paulhus, 2013; Foulkes, 2019; Góis et al., 2020).

In this study, we also attempt to establish this theoretical definition by drawing inferences from the characters of the Indian epic Ramayana.

### *Employee silence*

Employee silence is a phenomenon where

individuals refrain from speaking up after negative experiences in the workplace or hesitate to express their concerns, weighing the potential risks and anticipating adverse consequences in the future (Chou & Chang, 2020; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003; Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin, 2003).

Researchers have identified several reasons why employees may choose silence. Some may display acquiescent silence or ineffectual silence, believing that speaking up will not lead to meaningful change within the organization. Others may engage in quiescent silence or defensive silence, fearing personal consequences if they voice their concerns. Some employees may also practice active silence to protect others, avoiding speaking out to prevent creating trouble for their colleagues, which is referred to as prosocial silence or relational silence. Another reason for silence, driven by self-interest, is opportunistic silence or deviant silence, where employees intentionally withhold information from colleagues or supervisors for personal gain. Lastly, a lack of communication skills or confidence may lead to diffident silence, where employees struggle to express themselves, (Brinsfield, 2013; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003; Knoll & Van Dick, 2013).

Bari, Ghaffar, and Ahmad (2020) established a relationship between employee silence and knowledge-hiding behavior, highlighting how a breach of the psychological contract can act as a mediating factor between the two.

Knowledge-hiding behavior identified as a counterproductive work behavior, occurs when individuals intentionally withhold complete or partial information when asked to share (Connelly et al., 2012). Those who hide knowledge exhibit three distinct types of behavior: first, evasive hiding, where individuals promise to provide relevant and accurate information but, when the time comes to deliver, they intentionally withhold or provide false information. Second, acting dumb involves individuals pretending to be unaware of or uninformed about the requested information, often

misleading the seeker through their behavior. Third, there is rationalization, where the hider attempts to justify their behavior by informing the seeker in advance about their intention to withhold information. Among these behaviors, rationalization is viewed as less or not deceptive, while evasive hiding and acting dumb can contribute to a culture of silence within an organization (Bari, Ghaffar, & Ahmad, 2020).

Knowledge hiding behavior and deviant/opportunistic silence are seen as similar constructs, where individuals intentionally withhold knowledge due to selfish motives. (Brinsfield, 2013; Knoll & Van Dick, 2013).

In our empirical research, we adopted the constructivist grounded theory approach, an extension of grounded theory that emerged from the paradigm shift. This methodology aims to develop new theories rather than test hypotheses. However, the role of literature review in grounded theory research has been a longstanding subject of debate among qualitative researchers. Glaser argued against conducting a literature review in the early stages of research, suggesting it could bias or contaminate the study. Conversely, Strauss and Corbin supported engaging with the literature at any stage of the research process. Kathy Charmaz, who introduced the constructivist grounded theory approach, emphasized that reviewing literature not only aids in shaping initial ideas but also facilitates the discovery of novel findings (Ramalho, et al. 2015)

Guided by Kathy Charmaz's approach, we undertook a systematic review of existing literature. Our investigation involved searching research databases such as Scopus, PubMed, and ScienceDirect over the period of June 6th to 8th, 2024. We utilized keywords like "everyday sadism

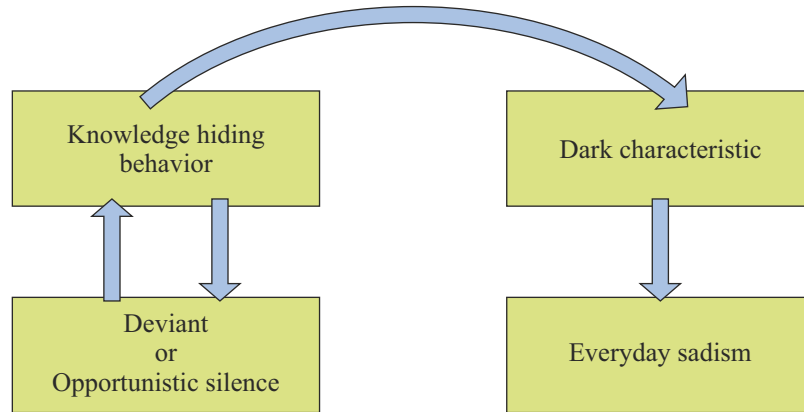
and employee silence," "Dark Tetrad and employee silence," "deviant silence and everyday sadism" and "opportunistic silence and everyday sadism" in our comprehensive search but did not find any relevant articles that bridge the gap between everyday sadism and employee silence. However, Karim (2022) has emphasized the concept of opportunistic silence (deviant silence), related to knowledge hiding behaviors exhibited by individuals with dark personality traits, known as the Dark Triad, which includes narcissism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism.

### **Present research and conceptual framework**

In this research, we aim to establish the theoretical definition proposed by the authors (PMT and AB) of everyday sadism by exploring the story of Kaikeyi from Valmiki's Ramayana, the Indian epic. Kaikeyi's character undergoes a transformation, losing empathy and a sense of guilt, and turning into a sadist after experiencing a painful event. She frequently inflicts pain on others, driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and even rationalizes her unjust actions. To analyze the changes in her personality before and after the incident, we refer to Debroy's (2017) work on the Valmiki Ramayana

We also aim to empirically establish a link between deviant/opportunistic silence and everyday sadism (Figure 1). While existing literature discusses knowledge hiding, opportunistic silence, and the Dark Triad, there is currently no research exploring the relationship between everyday sadism and knowledge hiding or opportunistic silence. Keeping these themes and their respective backgrounds in mind, we have developed a conceptual framework, which can serve as a possible direction towards addressing this research gap.





**Figure 1: Conceptual framework**

### Research Design and Methodology

There is currently no literature or theory that establishes relationship between employee silence and everyday sadism. This gap strengthen our intention to use Grounded Theory approach to develop a new theory.

Kathy Charmaz developed constructivist grounded theory to introduce a qualitative methodology suited for the 21st century (Glaser, 2007). This approach is a widely recognized “emergent method” that facilitates the discovery of new themes, ideas, and knowledge by examining participants' subjectivity and relativism (Charmaz,

2008; Glaser, 2007).

It is believed that good qualitative research stems from the researchers' extraordinary talent; however, Charmaz (2015) argues that this view is not factual. Instead, she emphasizes that high-quality qualitative research results from a robust qualitative methodology. Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers ensure the robustness of their research by establishing CCRT, i.e., credibility (internal validity), confirmability, reflexivity, and transferability (external validity) (Malterud, 2001). *Figure 2.* illustrates the steps we took to ensure robustness in our research design.

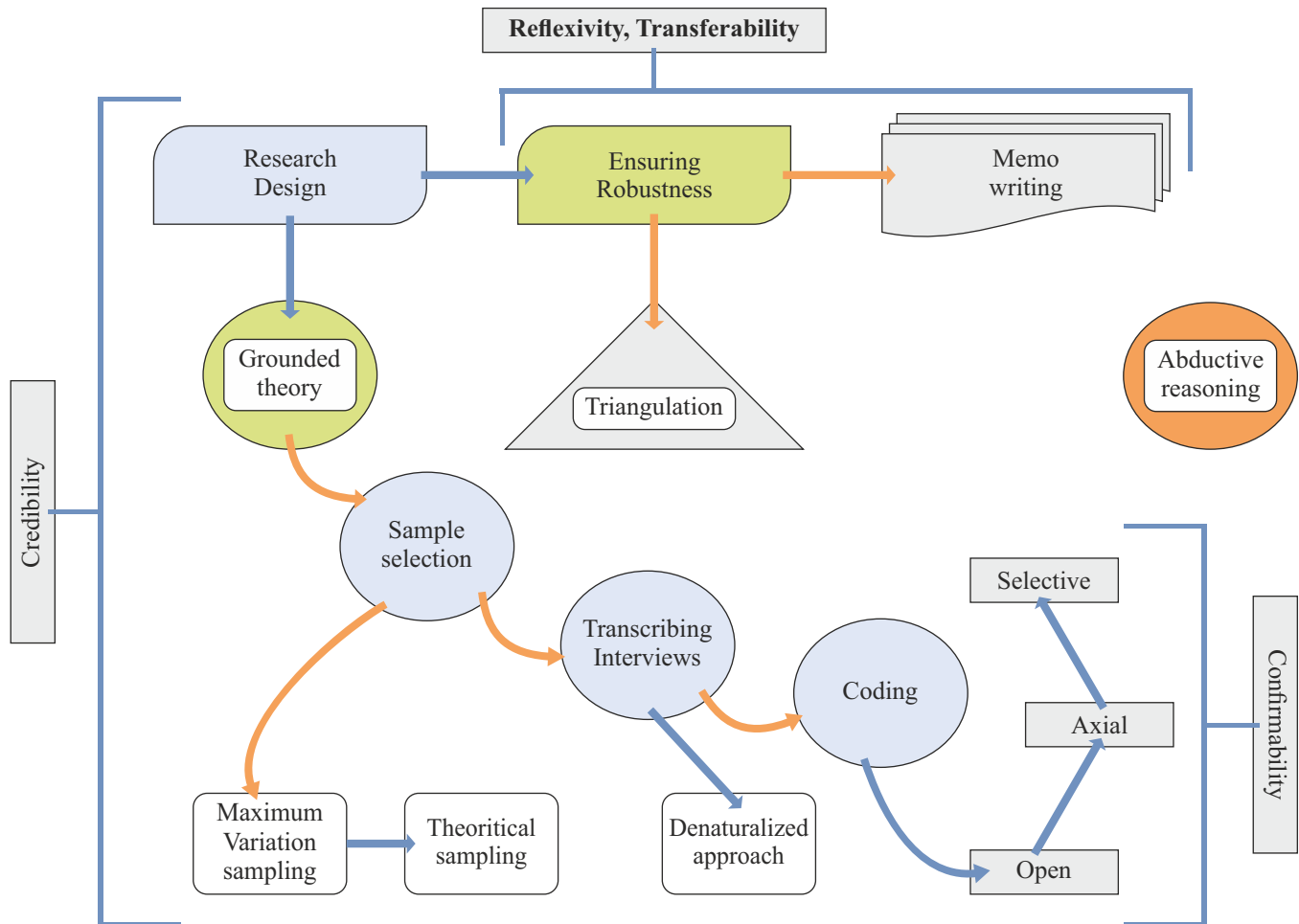


Figure 2. Steps taken to ensure robustness in our research

In grounded theory, all types of data—whether primary or secondary—are considered acceptable for research purposes (Glaser, 2007). For our study, we focused on primary data, which comprised 20 interviews with 11 males and 9 females employed in the service sector. These “semi - structured” interviews took place between June 8 and July 7, 2024, involving participants aged 25 to 30. While we reached saturation after the 16th interview, we conducted an additional four interviews based on Charmaz's (2008) recommendation to ensure we achieved theoretical saturation.

We selected our sample using “maximum variation purposive sampling”, a non-probability method that allows for the examination of diverse perspectives and identifying common themes

among them. This approach enabled us to assess different domains within the service sector that were extreme in nature, thereby broadening our understanding of everyday sadism in the workplace. The insights gained from these samples informed our direction for theoretical sampling, a core component of grounded theory (Cutcliffe, 2000; Rai & Thapa, 2015; Salinger, Plonka & Prechelt, 2008).

In our thematic analysis, we employed theoretical coding, a fundamental component of grounded theory (Salinger, Plonka & Prechelt, 2008), which encompasses open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. During the open coding phase, we extracted “first-order codes” from the interviews. As part of this process, we incorporated both verbal

and object elements into our open codes, following Salinger, Plonka & Prechelt's (2008) recommendation, as this approach provides deeper insights during the axial coding phase.

Next, in axial coding, we identified "categories" from the first-order codes. Finally, in the selective coding phase, we synthesized all derived codes into a "core category." Throughout all three stages, we engaged in constant comparison, which is the most critical aspect of grounded theory. This process involves continuously comparing codes and categories to identify similarities and differences, thereby allowing us to derive core categories and themes (Salinger, Plonka & Prechelt, 2008; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019).

The interviews were conducted in English, which is not India's first language; therefore, we implemented a "Denaturalized approach" for transcribing the interviews. As suggested by Nascimento & Steinbruch (2019), this approach is preferable when interviews are conducted in a language that is not the interviewees' first language, helping to mitigate potential "subjectivity errors" by the transcriber.

To enhance the robustness of this empirical study, we employed a triangulation method that included both data triangulation and investigator triangulation. For data triangulation, we incorporated both primary and secondary data, with the secondary data serving to establish a foundation of "logical competency" for the primary data. During the investigator triangulation phase, both authors, PMT and AB, actively participated in examining the generated codes and categories to strengthen the findings. Following the recommendations of Charmaz (2008), we engaged in memo writing to maintain reflexivity throughout the coding process and during the investigator triangulation.

We have also incorporated abductive reasoning in

our research, following the recommendations of Charmaz (2008). This approach aids in drawing inferences from empirical findings through an "intuitive interpretation." Walton (2014) provides a comprehensive explanation of how abductive reasoning is a scientific method applicable in the field of research. Furthermore, Lipscomb (2012) asserts that any inferences derived from abductive reasoning can be substantiated with "logical competency," thus making those inferences acceptable.

## Result and Discussion

### *Outlining the characteristics of an everyday sadist in the Indian epic Ramayana*

The Ramayana is the story of King Rama, who is known as Maryada Purushottam, a person who follows dharma and has attained control over his senses. He was loved by everyone, yet was banished from Ayodhya, his kingdom, by his stepmother Kaikeyi, who was influenced by the evil Manthara. Kaikeyee, the most beloved queen of Dasharatha among his 350 wives, who loved everyone and was loved by everyone. Her transformation in personality is evident in Valmiki's Ramayana (comprises of 7 kands, books and 500 sargas, chapters), where Manthara, her maid, created both intrinsic and extrinsic voids within her, turning her into an everyday sadist.

Manthara, the evil minded servant, who wanted to create unrest between Kaikeyee and Rama, spoke to Kaikeyee, "*O foolish one! Arise. You confront a great fear and are going to be submerged in a flood of calamity. Why are you sleeping? Why don't you yourself realize what is going to happen? You pride yourself as someone who is fortunate, but harm is going to be caused to your fortune. Fortune is fickle, like the flow of a river during the summer.*" Kaikeyee heard these angry and harsh words spoken by Kubja, whose thoughts were evil...Manthara spoke words that enhanced her unhappiness. She sought

*to create dissension between the miserable one and Raghava...However, in the garb of a husband, he is your enemy*" (Debroy, 2017, 2.7)

Manthra, the servant, deepened Kiakeyee's unhappiness with her malicious thoughts. She not only fostered an external sense of emptiness by emphasizing the misfortune that would come when Rama become king—implying that her son Bharat and his lineage would have to serve Rama for the lifetime—but also created an internal void by poisoning her mind against her husband, portraying him as her enemy who did not want her son to be king.

This experience transformed Kaikeyi's personality. Previously, she did not *"see any difference between Rama and Bharata"* (Debroy, 2017, 2.7). However, now she wishes for Rama's downfall and misery. Furthermore, *"she desired to say what was disagreeable. She readied herself to make her husband suffer"* (Debroy, 2017, 2.10). Kaikeyi commanded her husband to send Rama to the Dandaka forest for fourteen years and declared that Bharata should be crowned as the new king of Ayodhya.

After her personality changed, she appeared to be *"without fear and was causing fear instead"* (Debroy, 2017, 2.11). Her behavior, which inflicted pain on others, did not end easily; she repeatedly harmed Rama and Dashratha, verbally. For instance, when Rama went to talk to his father, Dashrath, to understand the reason for his sadness and lack of appetite, Kaikeyee blamed Rama. She said, *"O Rama! Until you leave for the forest and depart from this city, your father will not bathe or eat anything"* (Debroy, 2017, 2.16). Additionally, when Rama was about to leave for Dandaka Forest, he requested to wear tattered rags instead of royal clothing. Everyone was unhappy that their beloved Rama have to wear such rags. In response, Kaikeyee herself brought tattered rags for Raghava. Despite the assembly's disapproval, she

remained unashamed and said, *"Wear these"* (Debroy, 2017, 2.33). She also, undermines her husband by depicting his lineage negatively (Debroy, 2017, 2.32).

It is evident that past incidents or experiences can change anyone. Kaikeyi, who was once empathetic, turned wicked after a particular incident. Her selfish motives drove her to inflict pain on others (Debroy, 2017, 2.34). Her behavior demoralized everyone around her. She hurt her co-wives, Kaushalya and Sumitra, who were like sisters, by separating them from their child. She disappointed her subjects, who used to revere her like a goddess. She also saddened her husband, Dasharath, who loved her more than any of his other wives. Everyone felt ashamed of her, *"but she did not perceive this"* (Debroy, 2017, 2.32). She even justified her evil deeds, telling Dasharath, *"It is in your lineage that Sagara cast away his eldest son, known as Asamanja. He (Rama) should also leave in that way"* (Debroy, 2017, 2.32).

Thus, we establish our theoretical definition through Kaikeyi, a character from the Indian epic Ramayana. Kaikeyi becomes a sadist after enduring significant pain, leading to a loss of empathy for others. She shows no shame in her repeated actions of inflicting pain on those around her. Her behavior is motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Furthermore, she rationalizes and justifies her actions without experiencing any guilt and often blames the victims for their circumstances.

#### *Factors responsible for exhibiting deviant or opportunistic silence*

Qualitative research embraces subjectivity and relativism, focusing on vivid experiences and perspectives to understand the various realities that exist. In our study, we aimed to gather both empirical experiences and observed experiences from our participants, which they encountered in their respective workplaces. We conducted



interviews to explore whether any of our participants had witnessed colleagues or supervisors intentionally withholding knowledge, driven by deviant motives. We also sought to understand their thoughts on the possible reasons behind such behavior. Through our interviews, we successfully captured rich experiences and realities. For instance, a senior male marketing associate shared: *“People hide their work. People try to impress their manager so that, so that, you know, one day they will be, you know, be in good books of their manager so that, they will give promotion...They are deliberately doing it. And even if you are asking for some file, they will be like, yeah, I'm giving you, I'm giving you, but delaying it. Until that point where your boss will be furious that you are not working. And when you will say that, so because of that person, because of that file, which was belonging to that person, he was giving me, I wasn't able to perform or I wasn't able to finish the work. Manager will not listen to this. He will be like, I have given you a task. You have to complete it. You have to finish it. And this is what deliberately people will do to make sure that they will be in the good books of their manager for the next promotion, for the next hike, for the bonuses, for the name and fame”.*

Hiders engage in evasive hiding behavior for impression management purposes. They withhold knowledge or information from the seeker, revealing it only at the last moment. This tactic prevents the seeker from completing their work on time, leading to potential reprimands from supervisors. By creating the impression that they have fulfilled their responsibilities while casting doubt on the seeker's performance, hiders can gain favor with management. Evasive hiding not only provides tangible rewards such as bonuses, salary

increases but also psychological benefits for hiders, such as recognition.

Similarly, a male journalist recounted his experience within a newsroom, where he observed that some of his seniors intentionally withheld information regarding the contributors of various tasks from their supervisor, aiming to claim sole credit for the work accomplished. He shares: *“I did all those work, but when we went to boss, they said we have done this work and they took all the credit. And I think this thing happen in all the organizations. Every junior employee face these things. Juniors works hard, but his senior takes all his credit”*

Knowledge hiding behavior do exist in health care sector aswell, a male doctor shares: *“I think it is very much common. I think almost in all departments, this is a going on. People tend to hide the information and knowledge because they want to keep it to themselves and grow...I think two main points. One is like jealousy. Another one is to take credit for themselves to show that only we have that knowledge or only we are doing work and only we are capable of doing some projects or something like that.”*

It's interesting how some individuals choose to withhold knowledge in order to prolong their relevance. They intentionally keep information hidden to maintain their unique position, ensuring that others are dependent on them and can only turn to them when needed. This hiding will ensure their organizational growth.

From these findings it is evident that hiders hide knowledge to prioritize self over others (figure 3).

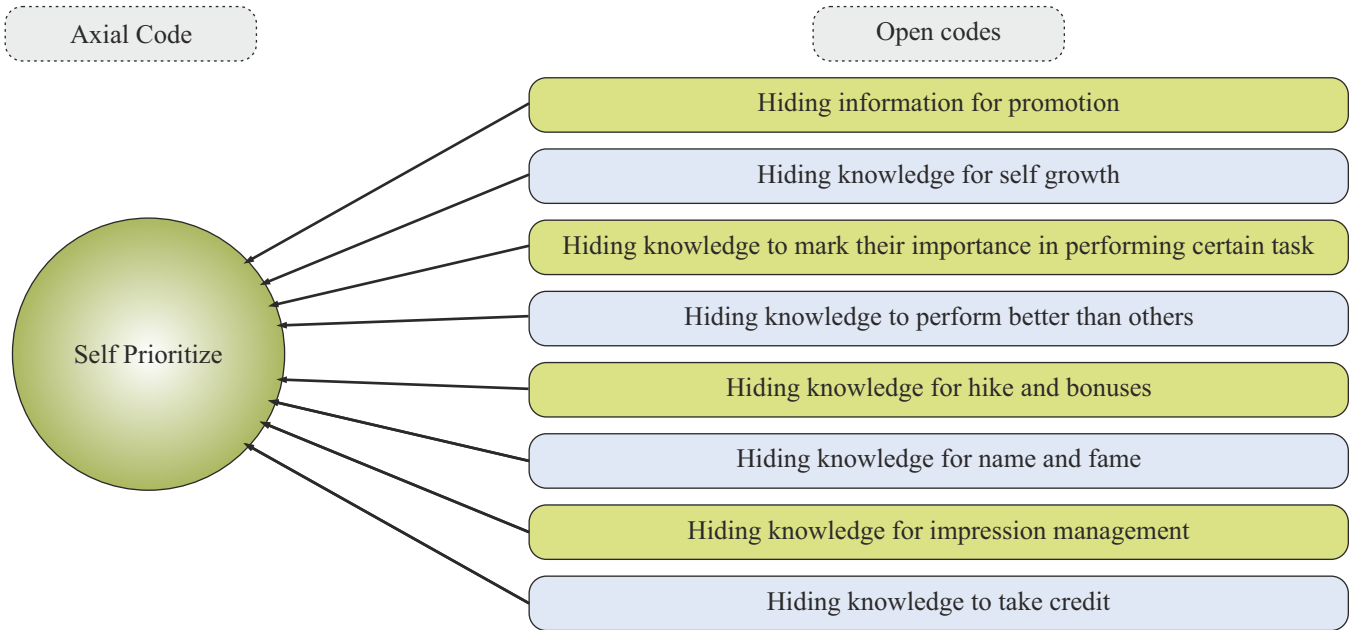


Figure 3. Open and Axial codes: Self prioritize

Factors such as jealousy, envy, and competition often drive individuals to engage in hiding behavior. They may intentionally withhold knowledge from others, fearing that if the seeker gains insight from that information, they could become a strong contender for desirable positions. This insecurity may lead individuals to conceal knowledge or information (figure 4). This can be illustrated by the following insights from interviews, which reveal that individuals hide information primarily out of insecurity:

*“You can say that it can be colleague rivalry. You can say that it was maybe because of, if he would have given a nice presentation, then he would have been a very firm competition to that particular person. If that meeting would have gone very well, then he would have been appreciated throughout the department and which would have been maybe a kind of envious thing for that person. So envy was the main reason. I think this happen in most of the organizations nowadays, facing with this particular problem where the senior positions is vacant for over a few people. And there was a lot of competition out there.”*

CA associate, male

*“It hasn't really happened with me, but with my colleagues. I mean, it could be appreciation from a passenger, which passenger happened to inform the lead by leaving, but it was never really mentioned or it was never really communicated to the crew who was in the craft”.*

Cabin Crew, female

*“I have observed many a times there is some piece of information which the other person sometimes doesn't share out of insecurity. Maybe I can, you know, use that thing to perform better. Or maybe in general, if that piece of information is given to me, then maybe I'll sound in front of others that, you know, okay, I know this thing. So maybe out of jealousy, out of insecurity, or maybe out of rivalry, professional rivalry, professional competition, just to make me look dumb in front of others”*

Radio jockey, Female

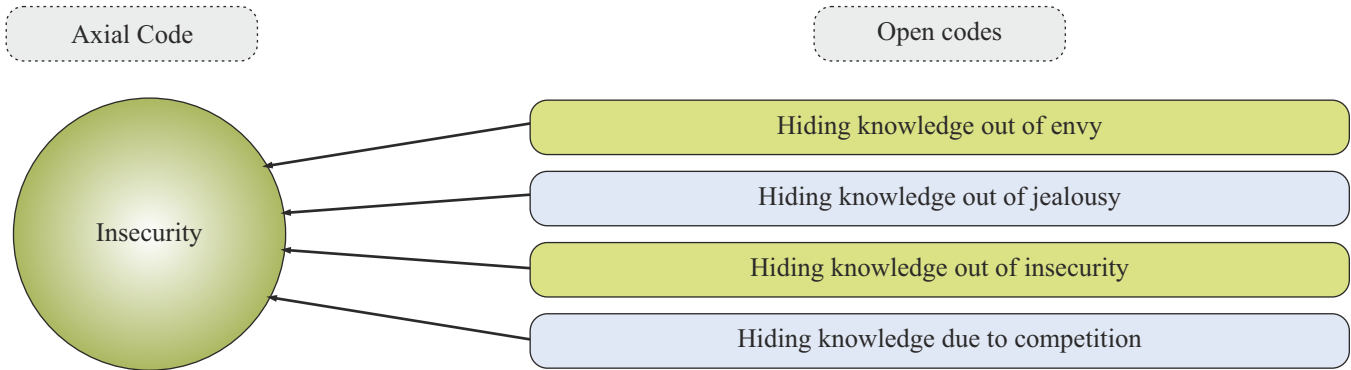


Figure 4. Open code and Axial code: Insecurity

**Relation between everyday sadism and deviant/opportunistic silence/knowledge hiding**

In our empirical findings, we identified two key factors contributing to the phenomenon of opportunistic silence, or deviant silence—defined as the intentional concealment of knowledge or information for personal gain: namely, "self-priority" and "insecurity."

Bonfá-Araujo, Simpson and Schermer (2023) established a connection between everyday sadism and self-priority. Their research reveals that individuals exhibiting traits of everyday sadism often prioritize their own needs above those of others. Such individuals typically avoid prosocial behaviors, focusing instead on accumulating wealth for personal benefit. Correspondingly, Góis, et al. (2020) highlighted that sadists engage in unethical auditing practices, such as concealing accurate audit reports to produce false or misleading outcomes, and exploit their positions to make opportunistic decisions for personal advantage. Everyday sadists often seek to dominate and harm others in various ways, driven by a desire to enhance their self-image or manage impressions (Bulut, 2017). Some individuals also display "instrumental sadism," wherein they inflict pain not for pleasure, but to attain specific desires like control, power, or money (ČEKIĆ, 2024; Chabrol, van Leeuwen, and Rodgers, 2011;

O'Meara, Davies, and Hammond, 2011).

Everyday sadists often struggle with insecurity. To cope with this insecurity, they attempt to dominate others, display instrumental aggression and deliberately foster a hostile environment. They tend to target weaker individuals, avoiding harm to those who stand powerfully against them (Buckels, 2012; Buckels, 2018; Bulut, 2017). Similarly, Góis et al. (2020) highlighted that sadists target lower-ranking employees at the workplace rather than their supervisors.

It can be inferred that individuals who demonstrate everyday sadistic tendencies often engage in what is referred to as deviant silence or opportunistic silence. This behavior seems to stem from a deep-seated sense of insecurity and reflects a prioritization of their own needs and desires over those of others (figure 5). Such silence is not merely a passive behavior; rather, it serves as a strategic choice that allows these individuals to maintain a sense of control or superiority in social interactions, suggesting a complex interplay between their insecurities and their approach to interpersonal dynamics (figure 5).

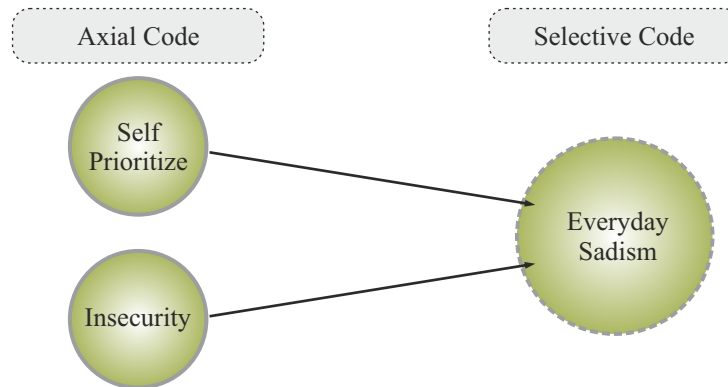


Figure 5. Axial and Selective code: Everyday Sadism

### Limitation and future research

In our empirical research, we employed an inductive method, Constructivist grounded theory, to establish a connection between employee silence and everyday sadism, laying the groundwork for future quantitative investigations. The study primarily focuses on a specific national context, namely India, and examines how this context affects the subjects' perceptions of deviant silence and everyday sadism. Additionally, our secondary findings revealed a lack of previously established work on everyday sadism and employee silence. However, there is some existing limited research on employees in the context of the dark triad. Numerous other avenues for future research exist, such as exploring how everyday sadism relates to quiescent silence (silence stemming from fear) and how it can contribute to diffident silence (silence arising from insecurity or self-doubt).

### Conclusion

Firstly, in this research, we could establish that, a painful incident or experience can turn anyone into a sadist. Transformed personality, stops them from empathizing others and they remain guilt-free from the unjust which they direct on others, driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Kaikeyee, who was well received by the society before the incident, but after the incident her personality changed and exhibited the characteristics of an

everyday sadist, who thrives on others' pain just to fill the void which is developed due to pain.

However, we based this conclusion on only one character, which can be considered a limitation of the study. Nonetheless, this finding can serve as a foundation for future research.

Secondly, Our empirical findings indicate that deviant silence arises from the presence of everyday sadism in workplace interactions. This phenomenon can be largely attributed to two governing factors: pervasive feelings of insecurity among individuals and a self-prioritizing nature that often leads to self-serving behaviors. This research represents a significant initial step towards integrating green Human Resource Management (HRM) practices, emphasizing the importance of fostering a healthy and communicative organizational culture.

The insights gained from this study are crucial for both employers and employees, as they shed light on the underlying causes of communication barriers within organizations. Understanding the motivations behind why individuals may choose to withhold information or remain silent, sometimes with the intent to undermine others or the organization itself, can help address and mitigate these issues.

While this research is primarily grounded in the



Indian context, it is important to acknowledge that perspectives on deviant silence may differ greatly from one country or region to another. This variation underscores the necessity for further exploration and research that builds upon the findings of this study, allowing us to develop a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon in diverse cultural and organizational settings. Thus, this research serves as a stepping stone for future inquiries into the complex dynamics of workplace communication and its implications for organizational wellbeing.

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