

**CHILDHOOD TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE AND ITS
CONTRIBUTION TO PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT IN
STEPHEN CHBOSKY THE PERKS OF BEING A
WALLFLOWER NOVEL: A BEHAVIORISTS PERSPECTIVE**



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in the English Department Faculty of Teacher Training and Education**

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus untuk mengetahui lebih jauh tentang trauma masa kecil dan kontribusinya terhadap perkembangan kepribadian yang dihadapi Charlie sebagai tokoh utama dalam *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* karya Stephen Chbosky. Teori yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan psikologis dengan fokus utama pada perilaku B.F Skinner. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah deskriptif kualitatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode pengumpulan data dengan menggunakan teknik observasi dan dokumen. Penelitian ini menggunakan dua buah data, yaitu data primer dan data sekunder. Novel *The Perks of Being Wallflower* sebagai data primer, buku, website, jurnal, review jurnal, dan referensi virtual lainnya yang terkait dengan fokus yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini digunakan sebagai data sekunder. Penelitian ini bertujuan antara lain untuk menyebutkan dan mengungkap trauma masa kecil yang dialami Charlie terhadap perkembangan kepribadiannya sebagai tokoh utama dalam novel ini. Selain itu, penulis juga ingin mengungkapkan atau menyampaikan bagaimana pengalaman buruk dari masa lalu sebagai seorang anak dapat menjadi hal yang buruk di masa depan.

Kata kunci : trauma masa kecil, kepribadian, perilaku, B.F Skinner

Abstract

This study focuses on finding out more about the childhood trauma and its contribution on personality development that Charlie faced as the main character in Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The theory used in this research is a psychological approach with the main focus on the behavior of B.F Skinner. This type of research used in this research is descriptive qualitative. This study uses data collection methods using observation and document techniques. This study uses two pieces of data, namely primary data and secondary data. The novel *The Perks of Being Wallflower* as primary data, books, websites, journals, journal reviews, and other virtual references related to the focus used in this study were used as secondary data. This study aims, among other things, to mention and reveal what childhood trauma Charlie experienced on his personality development as the main character in this novel. In addition, the author also wants to express or convey how bad experiences from the past as a child can be a bad thing in the future.

Keywords: childhood trauma, personality, behavior, B.F Skinner

1. INTRODUCTION

Research on the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* has been defined by Austriani and Resnitriwati (2016), and Ayubrata (2016) explored the impact of a traumatic childhood event on the main character's personality and conduct in Stephen Chbosky's novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Both investigations used a library research method with a descriptive data analysis presentation. Austriani and Resnitriwati (2016) adopt a psychological approach to go deeper into the presented issue, referencing the American Psychiatrist Association's guiding notion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Meanwhile, Ayubrata (2016) identified and interpreted the data analysis using characterization, psychoanalytic theory, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder theory. Austriani and Resnitriwati (2016) concluded that the character suffers from PTSD, prompted by a traumatic childhood event. This affects the character's behavior and personality into becoming antisocial and self-destructive. Moreover, Ayubrata (2016) discovered through the analysis in the study that the character named Charlie was determined through the characterization and the traumatic event he experienced in the past, which led him to behave destructively. The disorder influences this behavior that he suffered from as the result of trauma repression under the term PTSD. This is concluded by six symptoms found in Charlie that indicate PTSD. The result of both studies affirmed that traumatic events in the childhood stage influence the individual's personality and behavior even as they grow into an adult. The strength of the previously mentioned studies is the issue of traumatic experience that the character represented is analysed and described based on its relation to the disorder that the character suffers as the result of the damage caused by the specific trauma. This established the point in which childhood trauma affects individuals in various aspects of life and is reflected through their psychological state and behavior.

Furthermore, Nasri (2014) and Mayangsari and Asmarani (2017) investigated how childhood trauma affects adult personality and deviant conduct. Nasri (2014) examines the character's personality and behavior influences using qualitative research and a behaviorist method. Mayangsari and Asmarani (2017), on the other

hand, employed the library research method and psychoanalytic theory to analyze further and interpret the data. According to Nasri (2014), childhood trauma has an impact on an individual's personality development because it forms the root of their growth. Furthermore, Mayangsari and Asmarani (2017) discussed how childhood trauma and environment influence personality abnormalities, such as trust issues and criminal activity. Nasri (2014) stated that, despite having experienced a traumatic childhood, an individual could nevertheless display a healthy personality and conduct because of their development. However, Mayangsari and Asmarani (2017) went on to say that a past traumatic incident in childhood influences an individual's deviant or destructive conduct and personality.

The other studies by Hapsari (2016), Rodan (2018), Adriani, et al.(2012), and Cesar (2018) used the psychological approach and the guiding theory of psychoanalysis to determine the traumatic experiences of the character in literary work. Library research and qualitative method are applied to present the data analysis of the studies. The studies investigate how traumatic childhood experiences shape an individual's personality and conduct, leading to diseases like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to the study, individuals who have experienced childhood trauma have a lack of concentration, anxiety, lack of confidence, and criminal tendencies. Another result by Rodan (2018) also includes how the individuals' behavior was becoming quieter and more antisocial for the burden of childhood trauma they bear. The strength of the studies lay in how each of the discussions includes the relation between trauma and the result in term of personality and behavior of the individuals affected by the trauma they experienced.

Moreover, the studies by Permatasari and Rosyidi (2020), Anwar (2013), Susanti (2017), and Fidianto (2018) still employed psychoanalysis with the method of library research and qualitative in presenting the analysis. The studies discovered how childhood trauma includes various forms such as physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, affecting the victim by the trauma that was continuously influencing their growth as individuals through behavior and personality. Permatasari and Rosyidi

(2020) discovered that the character's self-concept results from borderline personality disorder, which is influenced by the past traumatic events experienced by the character. Meanwhile, Fidianto (2018) and Anwar (2013) studies also highlighted the defence mechanism of the character that influences the individuals in adulthood through their personality and behavior. This includes the characters' attempt to overcome the result of past traumatic events that still haunt them. The discussion of defence mechanisms from the traumatic experiences and how the personality is formed through the process strengthened and enriched the analysis.

The study by Hartanto (2019), Liskamalia (2012), and Lubis (2017) used the psychoanalytic theory with qualitative and library research methods. The three studies approach the issue by determining the character's id, ego, and super ego to further interpret and discuss the traumatic event in the form of abuse that happened in childhood. The studies discovered that the abuse that happens to an individual affects both their childhood and adulthood. The abuse is in the form of physical, emotional, and neglect. These aspects influence the process of personality development and behaviour that often lead to negative impacts such as anxiety, depression, PTSD, and so forth. Lastly, Kinanti and Daulay (2020) study uses the psychosocial approach and descriptive analysis to investigate how abuse that happened to a child represented by the character affects personality and behavior development. The stages of psychosocial development are employed to determine the characters' story with the traumatic experience of abuse. The study discovered eight psychosocial stages in which the character ended up being distant from people. This behavior is influenced by the abuse the character experienced. However, this study does not further discuss the traits of the character, which is the result of the process of personality development as the victim of abuse.

This study differs from the others in that it discusses the character's personality development and the reasons behind it and the impact of childhood trauma as shown by the character. This research primarily focuses on the signs of childhood trauma displayed by Charlie in Stephen Chbosky's novel *The Perks of*

Being a Wallflower. From the standpoint of the behaviorist approach, this study focused on the relationship between childhood trauma and personality development. In this study, B. F. Skinner's theory of human behavior is employed as the basis of analysis.

2. METHOD

The theory used in this research is a psychological approach focusing on the behavior of B.F. Skinner. The study of a literary work is to clarify the meaning of the literary work. The object of this study is material object and formal object. The material object here is about the book itself, the background of the novel author, etc. And standard object in here is the focus of this article, indicators, and implications about this research. The descriptive qualitative research method was used in this study. The data for this study was gathered using observation and documenting procedures. To collect the data, the researcher employed the documentation method to writing this research. The data was taken from the novel itself and some added information on the internet, journal, website, etc. This study uses two pieces of data, namely primary data and secondary data. The novel *The Perks of Being Wallflower* as primary data, books, websites, journals, journal reviews, and other virtual references related to the focus used in this study were used as secondary data. The data analysis method used in this research is qualitative research.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Finding

3.1.1 Indicators of Childhood Trauma

Childhood trauma was an event experienced by a child that severely impacted the child to carry over until the child became an adult. The incident that causes trauma to arise was usually an unpleasant event that causes the child to stress and remember it in the long term, causing trauma to the event experienced. After the researcher read the novel, the researcher found out that there were indicators of childhood trauma in this novel.

a. Repeated Memories

The memory of a repeated event is one of the indicators of trauma. And in this case, Charlie experienced several things that made him reminisce about events in his past. According to the story, Charlie experienced recurring memories of when he kissed Sam. It happened when Charlie and his friends had a Christmas party. At that time, there was an incident where they did a gift exchange activity, and while doing that, Sam invited Charlie to go to his room. After arriving at his room, Charlie was surprised by the gift given by Sam. It was a typewriter. Charlie was pleased to receive the gift. Then they began to talk intimately by sitting on Sam's bed. At that time, it turned out that Sam talked about his terrible childhood. Sam told him that a friend of her father's kissed her, and it made her feel bad when she remembered it.

"I'd like to know if the first person you kiss is in love with you.Okay?"

"All right," she said, crying even more. And I was, too, since I can't help but cry when I hear anything like that, for reasons I don't understand.

"I simply want to double-check.Okay?"

"Okay."

She kissed me after that. I couldn't tell my pals about it since it was the kind of kiss I could never tell them about. It was the kind of kiss that reminded me that I'd never been happier in my life. (1999:70)

At that moment, all Sam wanted to give Charlie was a first kiss from the person who loved him, even though they were just friends. After kissing Sam, Charlie realized he had never been happy. And he felt sad when he kissed Sam. He should be glad to be able to kiss the person he adores. However, Charlie felt something was wrong with him. From the above, it can be said that Charlie experienced repeated memories which eventually triggered the indicators of the childhood trauma experienced by him through Sam's kiss.

b. Hallucinations

In addition to experiencing memory repetition, Charlie also experienced hallucinations. One of them is when Charlie comes home after meeting Sam

and Charlie at school. Charlie experienced hallucinations while driving his car home.

"I got into my father's car and drove away." And, despite the fact that the station was switched off, all I could hear on the radio were these songs. As I pulled into the driveway, I believe I forgot to switch off the car. I simply sat in front of the television on the couch in the family room. Then I could see what was on TV, but it wasn't really on." (1999:139)

From the quote above, it can be evidence that Charlie experienced a hallucination. He heard the radio is on but there was no radio on. He felt like he was watching a show on the TV when the TV was off, not on mode. The hallucinations experienced by Charlie were one of the indicators of trauma shared by Charlie because of his past events when he was a child.

c. Disliking Childhood Memories

A person who has experienced past trauma or childhood trauma tends not to want to remember the memories he has participated in the past, especially if it was a bad memory. Charlie also experienced this; he did not like it when he asked to remember memories he had. But this happened to him when Charlie finished celebrating his farewell party with his high school seniors, who were about to graduate. At that time, Charlie was not happy at all; he felt terrible because his friends would leave him, to went where they live now and move to go to college that was out of town or some other place. And it was made worse after Charlie also learned that Sam also would move to another place and would leave him to study abroad in 2 weeks. Because it bothered him so much, when Charlie finally decided to talk to his psychiatrist, he felt all his friends would leave him because they were busy with their college matters or their stuff.

"So, the only person I'd have to talk to about it would be my psychiatrist, which I'm not keen on the idea of right now because he keeps asking me difficult questions from when I was younger." I'm simply lucky that I have a lot of homework to use as an excuse and don't have a lot of time to think about it." (1999: 159)

In the evidence of the quote above, it can be seen how Charlie avoids to remembering his past. He hates being asked to remember his past. He also shared that doing his school homework helped him forget his memories for a moment. This was evidence of Charlie's trauma indicators.

d. Having Trouble in Concentrating

A person who has experienced trauma has some trauma indicators, one of which was difficulty concentrating on something that was being done. In Charlie's case, he felt that way after taking Sam to school. He prefers to go back home and go to his room instead of hanging out with his friends as he usually did before. He felt something wrong with himself after having sexual relations with Sam at that time. When Charlie got home, he chose to go in and then locked himself in his room because he felt terrible and not in the mood then Charlie decided to write a letter.

"I have no idea what's wrong with me. It's as though the only thing I can think of to keep myself from falling apart is to keep writing gibberish."
(1999:190)

In the quote above, it can be seen where Charlie said that he had difficulty controlling his concentration. Charlie found it hard to concentrate when he wrote a letter because that was what he was referring to as a mysterious letter. From this evidence, it can be concluded that Charlie has difficulty concentrating, which is an indicator of the trauma experienced by Charlie.

e. Having blackouts

A person who has a trauma will faint if triggered by a severe trauma. This might happen because of depersonalization or derealisation. Depersonalization is a psychological disorder in which a person feels cut off from his body. He has the impression that he is watching himself from the outside. Derealisation is when a person believes that an event is not taking place as it appears. This universe seemed to him to be a dream. Both are signs that someone has been through a traumatic experience. And it happened to

Charlie; he experienced it after he went to Sam's house and took her who was going out of town to continue her studies. After that, Charlie went home feeling so bad. Then he chose to stay alone until his parents found him, sat on the sofa all naked, and decided to take him to the hospital to get his treatment.

“For the preceding two months, I've been in the hospital. I had only been released the day before yesterday. According to the doctor, my mother and father saw me on the couch in my family room. I was naked, and all I did was stare at the TV, which was not even turned on. They said if I didn't speak or snap out of it, I wouldn't. My father smacked me to wake me up despite the fact that, as I already stated, he never hits. That, however, did not pan out.” (1999:194)

From the quote above, Charlie did not remember anything that happened to him after he came home to take Sam home. All he knew when he woke up was that he was in the hospital. And the doctor then told him that he had fainted. He was also depersonalized because he could not feel his whole body. He even feels detached from his body, thus indicating that the effects of his traumatic event are getting worse.

3.1.2 The Implication of Childhood Trauma on Personality Development

When someone experiences an event that deeply impacts bad memories, it can create a prolonged trauma. And the trauma can have implications that can disrupt the daily life of someone who has a trauma. The implications of that trauma have a profound effect on a person. Trauma can cause a person to experience personality changes. When someone experiences trauma, that person will feel tormented by emotions and memories and will experience anxiety about something that reminds him of the event that traumatized him. In Charlie's case, the researcher found several implications of the trauma experienced by Charlie because of the past trauma he experienced.

a. Trust Issue

A trust issue is a condition in which a person feels someone has lost trust in others. There was a time when Charlie became a person who had a sense of

trust issue with others, Charlie became a person who found it difficult for him to trust others easily. Charlie is easily worried about whether the person he is sharing this story with is the right person and can be trusted to understand the situation he is going through or even someone who cannot be trusted and does not want to understand his position. He needs to know whether trustworthy people exist or not. This particularity is found in the novel as quoted below.

"All I want and need is to know that someone out there listens and understands others and doesn't attempt to sleep with individuals even if they have the ability to do so." I require confirmation that these individuals exist." (1999:9)

The quote above is proof of how Charlie became anxious about trusting others. This was one of the implications for Charlie. The impact of the trauma suffered by Charlie is significant enough that he finds it challenging to give trust to others.

b. Be Alone or Avoiding Others

In addition to feeling that he has a trust issue with others, the implications of the trauma experienced by Charlie also cause him to like to be alone and avoid meeting other people. He became someone who did not want to meet anyone else. Charlie feels uncomfortable when it comes to meeting and dealing with other people. Charlie even avoided his best friend, Patrick, and chose to be alone.

"To tell you the truth, I've just been avoiding everything." (1999:135)

"They claimed I went over a week without speaking or acknowledging anyone." (1999:198)

The quote above proves how Charlie doesn't want to meet other people because of the trauma he has. The impact of his childhood trauma had a significant effect on Charlie into adulthood.

c. Difficult to Socialize

Charlie became a thinker; he became afraid of dealing with other people. He does not know how to establish social communication with other people; it is evident in this quote.

“For the most part, I was alone, and the only one of the youngsters, Sean, appeared to notice me. He waited for me after gym class and threatened me with a "swirlie," which is when someone dips your head in the toilet and flushes your hair to make it spin around. I informed him that he looked to be in a foul temper. Then he got angry and started beating me, and all I had done was follow my brother's directions.” (1999:13)

“So that's what I'm doing till I make a friend here. I had hoped that the young man who told the truth would become one of my friends, but I feel he was merely doing the right thing by revealing the truth.” (199:14)

From the quote above, it can be proven how Charlie experienced the implications of trauma which made him a difficult person to make friends or build socialization with the environment. He only saw a way that worked with other people, but it didn't work for him.

3.1.3 The Reason Stephen Chbosky Specifically Address Trauma

The reason why Stephen Chbosky specifically addresses the trauma in this novel can be said because the background behind the reason he wrote this novel is because of a life experience that he experienced himself; he said this in an interview he did in ‘Alexandra Dersch sits down with Stephen Chbosky.’

“I was a little messed up when I was younger, and I was going through a pretty difficult time with a bad breakup. And I needed to find something that could give me hope in my current situation. Then there was Charlie, a fictional character who represented my hope. Because I'm sure, you've questioned - at least once in your life – why so many decent individuals you know, or some friends you know, have been mistreated. Know what I'm talking about? I was astounded, too, and Charlie was my answer, assisting me in determining how to avoid it from happening again.” (2012)

According to Stephen Chbosky, he incorporates ideas from his personal experiences. It took him five years to write this novel during a difficult period in his life. A complex or difficult period in his life was when Stephen Chbosky experienced an unpleasant separation. The undesirable separation made him wonder, 'why do good people allow themselves to be mistreated.' Until he got the answer to that question himself by writing this novel.

From the experience of experiencing an unpleasant separation, Stephen Chbosky finally explicitly dealt with trauma in this novel because even Charlie's character that he wrote in this novel is a representative of himself, where Charlie's situation is like what happened to him. At the same time, the other characters in the novel are also people who used to exist in the difficult period of Stephen Chbosky's life and throughout his life.

3.2 Discussion

After reading and analysing the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the researcher uses B.F Skinner's theory with a behavioural perspective. The answers to 3 research questions can be answered, the first is what indicators of trauma experienced by Charlie, then the second is the implications of the trauma faced by Charlie, and the last is why Stephen Chbosky as the author of this novel, specifically raises the theme about trauma in this novel. And the answers to these research questions have been answered in the findings above.

This study supports research conducted by Fenita Austriani and Christina Resnitriwati (2016) the title of the research is *Traumatic Experience Resulted from Sexual Abuse in Stephen Chbosky's The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Fenita Austriani and Christina Resnitriwati (2016). What is different from the research conducted by the researcher with Fenita Austriani & Christina Resnitriwati is the approach and theory used in the preparation of the research. The method and theory used by the researcher in this study is B.F. Skinner's personality, where the influence

of a person's personality changes can occur due to behavior reinforcements or behavior selection. While the approach and theory used in Fenita Austriani and Christina Resnitriwati's (2016) research is a psychological approach, and the theory used is The American Psychiatric Association's (APA) hypothesis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (APA). According to the American Psychological Association, exposure to stressor, re-experiencing of a traumatic event, avoidance, arousal, and length are the five symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The results of the research analysis conducted by Fenita Austriani (2016) is that the study proved that Charlie experienced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and the personality changes experienced by Charlie were caused by the post-traumatic stress disorder he experienced when he was a child. At the same time, the results of the research conducted by the researcher are how this research proves that the childhood trauma experienced by Charlie affects the personality changes experienced by Charlie. This shows how these two studies support each other, where the results of this study show how the trauma that Charlie had experienced in the past affected Charlie's personality changes. The theory used makes these two studies mutually supportive and has almost the same results, how Charlie's personality changes due to past trauma that has been experienced by him when he was a child.

4. CLOSING

Three conclusions can be drawn from the study based on the data analysis results in this chapter. First, there are several indicators of childhood trauma in the novel, which are Charlie has memories that repeat, Charlie hallucinate, Charlie avoids remembering his childhood memories, Charlie has trouble on concentrating, and Charlie is having blackouts. In many cases of trauma, having repeated memories is one indicator that influences a person's experience of trauma in the past. Then experiencing hallucinations, happens because someone who has trauma experiences prolonged stress due to unpleasant experiences in the past as a child. Avoiding remembering memories as a child is usually done by someone who has a childhood trauma or a bad experience when someone was a kid, this is done so that the memory

of the trauma that has happened before is not repeated. It is difficult to concentrate; people who have trauma tend to find it challenging to concentrate on it because they feel their brain has been thinking a lot of things, and makes them so hard to focus on one thing only. Experiencing blackout can be an indicator of trauma because someone faints because of too many things he thinks in his head, and just because of one thing that triggers it to happen, to excessive overthinking that causes them to be weak and faint.

The second is the implications of trauma in this novel; the implications of childhood trauma experienced by Charlie is where Charlie becomes someone who does not easily trust others, he becomes someone who likes to be alone or avoids meeting other people, and he gets difficult to socialize. He becomes someone who does not easily trust other people or someone who has trust problems so that he does not know who to talk to about his issues, because he does not trust people. The implication of trauma in which he likes to be alone or avoids other people is when he does not want to see anyone, including his own best friend, who has been close to him for a long time. The implication of trauma is that he is difficult to socialize with other people and find new friends he is challenging to start. He tried methods like other people did that worked, but they did not work for him.

The third is why Stephen Chbosky addressed trauma in this novel; this happened because the inspiration for writing this novel was obtained from his own life experiences. He had experienced what Charlie felt, how it felt to be abandoned by a loved one in a wrong way, to cause a bad feeling. How it felt to be left and broke. Make Stephen Chbosky question his self-worth, whether he deserves to be gone, and whether he deserves not to be loved. That finally made Stephen Chbosky write this book and built Charlie's character. The people involved in the lives of the characters in this novel are also a depiction of the people who used to help Stephen Chbosky in his difficult time.

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