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Traumatic Abuse in Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Traumatic Abuse in Stephen Chbosky’s *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*” has been submitted to the Central Department, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This study delves the profound theme of traumatic abuse as portrayed in Stephen Chbosky's novel, "The Perks of Being a Wallflower." The researcher explores how the protagonist, Charlie, grapples with the enduring effects of trauma on his perception, memory. The aim is to unravel the intricate layers of how Chbosky employs Charlie's perspective to illuminate the complex interplay between traumatic experiences and distortion of reality. Drawing upon Mardi Horowitz's trauma theory, the study investigates how Charlie's fragmented memories and altered perceptions mirror the enduring impacts of traumatic abuse. Charlie's struggle to articulate his experiences resonates with Horowitz's insights into the disorganized and often incomprehensible nature of trauma's effects on memory and cognition. Within the narrative, the protagonist's journey becomes a poignant exploration of how trauma intersect. The study unveils how Charlie's struggle to express his experiences mirrors the broader challenge of conveying trauma through language. Just as the novel questions the limitations of words, so does the researcher analyze how the theoretical insights of Horowitz provide frameworks for understanding the complexity of trauma's impact on an individual's psyche.

Key words: adolescence, trauma, deception, abuse, PTSD

This study analyzes Stephen Chbosky's novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* from the lens of traumatic abuse. Through the novel its writer Stephen Chbosky tries to convey the message of PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Literature is influenced by circumstances of the character's self. It is equally influenced by his environment, beliefs and prejudices which the novelist prevails through the character Charlie. Charlie is an intelligent, thoughtful and logical person

who observes the truth. Charlie's struggles with mental health that can be viewed in the context of the rise of health awareness and the de-stigmatization of mental illness in the 1990s. Similarly, the exploration of sexuality and the depiction of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) characters in the novel can be seen in the context of the growing acceptance of homosexuality and the fight for LGBT rights during this time. Charlie's experiences of abuse and bullying contribute to his trauma. Trauma survivors might recall certain aspects of an event vividly while other details remain hazy or inaccessible. In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Charlie's letters often reflect this fragmentation as he struggles to convey the entirety of his traumatic experiences. The disjointed narrative mirrors the way traumatic memories are stored in non-linear and fragmented patterns. Sharing one's experiences, whether through therapy or creative outlets, can facilitate the processing of emotions. In the novel, Charlie's act of writing letters can be seen as a form of therapeutic expression, allowing him to confront and make sense of his traumatic past.

Discussing the process involved in the resolution or integration of trauma through defense mechanisms, M.J. Horowitz and N. Milner claim:

The individual employs defense mechanisms as a means of coping. However, the completion tendency, which drives the need for resolution, keeps the traumatic information active in memory. This dynamic creates intrusive symptoms like flashbacks, dreams, or intrusive thoughts. The individual oscillates between defense mechanisms and the completion tendency, gradually working towards integration. Difficulties in achieving integration result in the partial processing of trauma information, leading to the persistence of symptoms. (Horowitz and Milner 363)

Horowitz and Milner's theory discusses how trauma survivors can reexperience

aspects of the traumatic event through memories, dreams, or flashbacks. In the novel, Charlie's letters serve as a form of reexperiencing symptoms. As he recounts his past, he undergoes emotional and psychological responses that mimic his original experiences, reflecting Horowitz's concept. The theorist discusses how trauma survivors might develop coping mechanisms to deal with the emotional distress triggered by traumatic memories. These mechanisms can sometimes involve avoidance or numbing. In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Charlie's avoidance of directly confronting his traumatic experiences is reflected in his metaphorical language and hints in the letters. He uses these coping strategies to shield himself from the overwhelming emotional impact.

The novel hints at instances of sexual abuse that he endured in his childhood, which are only revealed gradually. These experiences leave lasting emotional scars on Charlie and contribute to his struggle with intimacy and trust. The impact of trauma is evident in his social anxiety, low self-esteem, and difficulty forming connections with his peers. Additionally, Charlie's isolation and feelings of being an outsider contribute to his traumatic experiences. He faces alienation and struggles to find his place within the social dynamics of high school. This sense of detachment and not fitting in exacerbates his feelings of loneliness and contributes to his overall psychological distress. In this context, Bessel Van der Kolk writes:

Complex trauma exposure results in a loss of core capacities for self-regulation and interpersonal relatedness. Children exposed to complex trauma often experience lifelong problems that place them at risk for additional trauma exposure and cumulative impairment such as, psychiatric and addictive disorders; chronic medical illness; legal, vocational, and family problems.

(401)

Chbosky portrays Charlie's trauma with sensitivity and authenticity. The exploration of trauma in the novel highlights the complex interplay between personal experiences, memory, and perception. It underscores the long-lasting effects of trauma on an individual's well-being, emphasizing the importance of understanding, empathy, and support in the healing process. As Cathy Caruth believes trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (Caruth 4).

In the novel, Charlie's experiences of trauma are depicted in a fragmented manner, with memories and emotions resurfacing intermittently throughout the story. Caruth suggests that trauma often resurfaces as flashbacks or repetitive images, breaking through the individual's conscious awareness. Similarly, Charlie's traumatic memories and emotions resurface gradually, triggered by certain events or stimuli. This fragmented recall of traumatic events reflects Caruth's concept of the "return of the repressed," where the traumatic past intrudes into the present.

In the novel, the protagonist Charlie engages in introspection, sifting through his past with a focus on traumatic experiences. His letters serve as a means of narrating his story, but their lack of a clear destination mirrors the disoriented nature of trauma. Within these letters, Charlie's struggles with mental distress come to light, although the specific condition remains unnamed. His life is marked by intense suffering, yet the root cause of his pain remains elusive and ambiguous. Chbosky employs these elements to challenge the idea of easy generalizations about human experiences and emotions. The narrative structure adopts a non-linear approach,

reflecting the fragmented and non-sequential way in which trauma is often remembered and processed.

The study dramatizes the logic of traumatic abuse and of principles about human condition. Charlie, a character of the novel, travels over his long course of life to find out the truth. He recalls and examines the time and events in his life such sex, separation, re-meeting, job and makes his own history but without any proofs. He finds no fixity and true general principles behind the human conditions. Such issues in the novel examine the problem of human conditions and raises the issue of trauma. How trauma is grappled? How PTSD and human conditions fail to speak the character's truth? These are some of the questions, this research tries to solve.

The intricate and perplexing nature of human experiences, the elusive grasp of certainty, and the ever-shifting quality of memories are evident within Charlie's narration of his traumatic experiences. As Charlie shares his personal events, his recollections are marked by numerous fractures and gaps, reflecting the fragmented nature of traumatic memories. These fractures become particularly pronounced when examining his trauma, as traumatic events often lead to disjointed recollections that challenge a coherent narrative.

Amid Charlie's narrative, one observes a tapestry of inconsistencies and uncertainties. His intellectual prowess becomes a double-edged sword, as he wields it to manipulate the truth of traumatic abuse. This manipulation is evident in his misrepresentation of events, where he bends the truth to serve his narrative. This process highlights the unreliability of Charlie's account, emphasizing how trauma's impact on memory can distort the authenticity of his recollections.

Haleigh Altman, a critic, argues that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* portrays the post-traumatic scenario through an unrealistic lens. She suggests that the novel

delves into the unstable mental conditions of its characters. Altman specifically focuses on Chbosky's exploration of mental health within the novel. It is in this context that she presents her concept and analysis of how Chbosky discusses mental health and its impact on the characters in the story:

The film and the novel are both great in their own rights. Both offer a fresh take on a coming of age story, one that if keeps viewers anxious to know and see more, whether that is because of excitement or morbid curiosity. The film is beautiful in so many ways with a great cast and visually exciting scenes. It is clear that as a director, Chbosky wanted viewers to be locked into the film. However, he failed to strongly hold onto the themes of mental health while widening the scope of the film. (8,9)

Altman's analysis provides a crucial lens through which to understand the profound impact of traumatic experiences on the mental well-being of individuals, a theme that resonates deeply within Chbosky's novel. Altman delves into the concept of fractured mental health, a notion vividly depicted in the pages of this narrative. Through Altman's perspective, the post-traumatic disorder resulting from trauma emerges as a defining factor in Charlie's mental state.

As Altman's insights echo throughout the novel, it becomes apparent that the trauma Charlie has endured has had a profound fracturing effect on his psychological and emotional equilibrium. Chbosky meticulously crafts Charlie's character to mirror the intricate aftermath of trauma, where the mental landscape is marred by fragmentation, discord, and emotional turbulence. Charlie's struggles to navigate his own thoughts and emotions are indicative of the disintegration Altman highlights in his discussions on post-traumatic disorder.

Furthermore, Altman's analysis serves as a lens to comprehend the

multifaceted nature of Charlie's psychological journey. The fractures within his mental health encompass not only his personal experiences but also resonate with the broader societal impact of trauma, which Altman's work addresses. The fracturing of Charlie's mental condition mirrors the intricate fissures in the broader social fabric, where the repercussions of traumatic experiences extend beyond the individual.

Altman's exploration of fractured mental health and post-traumatic disorder provides a theoretical foundation that enriches the reading of Chbosky's novel. By aligning Altman's insights with Charlie's experiences, a deeper comprehension of the character's struggles, as well as the broader societal implications, is unveiled. The fractures that Altman identifies become the very threads that Chbosky weaves into the narrative, crafting a poignant portrayal of the lasting impact of trauma on the human psyche.

Critic Timothy P. Kelly examines the novel *The Perks of being Wallflower* from the perspective of mental issues. According to her, Chbosky shows the psychological condition of American adults in twentieth century. Kelly writes:

Charlie is the protagonist who most directly deals with mental health issues. That is not to say that the other protagonists do not have mental health problems, they clearly do, but rather that Charlie's experiences are the ones that expressly grapples with them the most. . .and Charlie's anxiety and uncertainty when faced with such issues only amplifies that point. (35)

In these lines, Kelly, the protagonist of the novel is suffering from mental illness. According to her, all the characters are suffering from mental problem. The most negative impact has occurred in the lives of Charlie. Due to the traumatic past, Charlie is facing anxiety and depression. The social condition of character is heading towards the negative consequences.

Emily Cappel has looked into the very title of this novel. She is determined to demystify the conscious choice of title for this science fiction. Her view is expressed in the following excerpt:

Chbosky mentioned that he was not interested in the possibility of escaping and rebuilding lives. He was after exactly what he wrote, an exploration of a life doomed to disintegrate. There is something endearing about the title of this novel. It sounds like the ultimate request of someone who is deeply in love, which when not granted, would render the person incapable of going on.

(15)

The novel portrays a bleak vision of life, which is characterized by a sense of hopelessness and provokes fear. This vision is particularly evident in the concept of clones who are depicted as living with minimal hope for survival. The title of the novel itself conveys a sense of helplessness, as it implies being a mere observer or outsider in life. The limited options available to the clones further emphasize their sub-human existence, creating a stark contrast between human and sub-human lives. The reasons behind the categorization of lives into different tiers are not explicitly stated, but it can be speculated that a lingering anthropomorphic pride contributes to the negative outlook portrayed in the narrative. This pride may have fueled the belief in the inherent superiority of human life, leading to a perception of clones as lesser beings. The resulting negative vision reflects a sense of despair and fatalism, where individuals are trapped within a predetermined and oppressive system.

Arianna Vailas examines the triangular relationship between dystopia, the present, and the future in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. According to Vailas, dystopian novels, including Chbosky's work, hold the present accountable through their distorted depictions of a possible future. In the novel, the protagonist, referred to

as “The Boy,” navigates their life within a confined community that mirrors our own world in eerie similarity. The key difference lies in the prominence of human cloning, a subject that scientists and ethicists in the real world are currently debating. Vailas suggests that this dystopian setting allows for a new historical perspective, challenging conventional notions of history and prompting a reevaluation of the present by presenting an alternate future scenario. By intertwining elements of dystopia, the present, and the future, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* offers a unique lens through which to view and redefine history.

Dystopian novels incriminate the present in their distorted representations of an imminent future. Chbosky’s novel recounts the story of The Boy, reflecting upon their prescribed life within a confined community. Her experiences take place in a world that is uncannily akin to our own, the only major difference being that human cloning is at the forefront of modern medicine, an issue over which scientists and ethicists of this world are still debating. (23)

The question of ethics is inherently involved in the nurturing of mechanical hounds’ to securing and enhancing the lives of the people. This novel has raised several questions like whether is it ethically admissible to mechanical hounds’ as sub-human beings or not and whether is it anti-humanistic to compel clones to donate their organs to those suffers from incurable diseases. Along with these questions, the notion of humanism comes to be intermingled. Hence, the voice raised by Chbosky is unwrapping the scientific uplifting technological advancement.

Although all these critics have raised different issues in this novel, and then arrived at several findings and conclusions, none of them notice the issue of the traumatic abuse. Therefore, the researcher makes a thorough analysis of the novel. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by applying the methodology of PTSD, trauma

theory from the view point of how do the character uses coping mechanisms for trauma.

Charlie's fear of death is palpable in his letters. He often expresses existential concerns and thoughts about mortality. He grapples with the impermanence of life, reflecting on the deaths of loved ones and the uncertainty of the afterlife. This fear is deeply tied to his past traumas and the emotional weight they carry. His contemplation of life's fleeting nature is intertwined with his struggles to find meaning and purpose in a world that often feels chaotic and unpredictable. Charlie's sense of alienation is a central aspect of his character. He is introspective and observant, often feeling like an outsider or a "wallflower" in social situations. His traumatic experiences contribute to this sense of detachment from others. He struggles with forming connections and understanding social dynamics, which intensifies his feelings of alienation. This feeling is further exacerbated by his own perception of not fitting in, which makes it difficult for him to fully engage with his peers and the world around him.

The concept of alienation and fear of death began with the foundation of human civilization. Theorizing the fear of death and alienation in human beings, Amin Daraee and others, in their research work, explain that:

The fear of death is so great that a significant part of life's energy is spent denying death. As Freud has said, the primary human community and the bits of social life are formed because of fear of death. The early humans because of fear of separation and of what lies in the dark, gathered together and they got close together. We keep the community alive so that we can live our eternal life. Fear of death includes obvious or implicit horror elements, whose amount varies and it is devoted to real experience in a different. (1)

Both the fear of death and alienation contribute to Charlie's complex emotional landscape. They contribute to his mental health struggles and his journey of self-discovery throughout the novel. As Charlie's narrative unfolds, these themes intertwine with his experiences, influencing his relationships, decisions, and personal growth.

Traumatic abuse lens is an interpretive approach that seeks to understand literary texts in relation to the trauma-laden context they emerge from. This theoretical framework endeavors to redefine the dynamic between texts and the traumatic experiences that shape them, aiming to illuminate the intricate interplay between trauma and literary expression. Central to this theory is the exploration of how the "spirit of trauma" within a specific historical and societal milieu influences the creation and interpretation of the text. The lens of traumatic abuse asserts that multiple factors converge to shape the textual landscape, with its meaning shifting depending on the traumatic context from which it arises. Rather than seeking a singular and definitive interpretation, this approach highlights the necessity of comprehensively studying the contextual elements that respond to the production of the text. By adopting the traumatic abuse lens, the pursuit of a fixed and ultimate meaning gives way to a nuanced exploration of the multidimensional repercussions of trauma within the text.

At its core, the traumatic abuse lens endeavors to analyze literary creations through the prism of the trauma they embody. This entails examining the text within the broader sociohistorical and political frameworks of traumatic experiences. Instead of viewing the text as an isolated entity, this approach positions it within the context of trauma, uncovering layers of meaning that resonate with the traumatic undercurrents that shape the narrative. The lens of traumatic abuse offers an

alternative perspective on literary works, one that prioritizes an understanding of their origins within traumatic contexts. By embracing this lens, scholars and readers alike gain insight into the intricate connections between trauma and literary expression, unveiling the complex layers of meaning that emerge from the fusion of traumatic experiences and creative articulation.

Conceptual framework for the effects of traumatic experiences addresses what makes an experience traumatic, what psychological responses are expected following such events, and why symptoms persist after the traumatic experience is over. Three elements are considered necessary for an event to be traumatizing: The event must be experienced as extremely negative, uncontrollable, and sudden. The initial core responses to trauma include reexperiencing and avoidance symptoms that occur across four modes of experience. (Carlson & Dalenberg, pp 2,3)

Within Charlie's narrative, the framework's three crucial elements for an event to be deemed traumatizing align remarkably well. His experiences are profoundly negative, encapsulating a series of distressing events that shape his perception of the world around him. These events are often beyond his control, leaving him powerless in the face of adversity. The suddenness with which these experiences unfold further amplifies their traumatic impact on his psyche.

Charlie's responses to trauma mirror the initial core reactions outlined by the framework. His reexperiencing of past events is palpable throughout the novel. Flashbacks, memories, and emotional triggers abound in his letters, showcasing the enduring nature of trauma's imprint. Additionally, his avoidance strategies are evident in his introspection, his hesitance to confront certain memories, and his struggles to engage fully with the present. These avoidance symptoms underscore his efforts to

shield himself from the overwhelming emotions tied to his traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, the concept of trauma modes resonates with Charlie's multidimensional exploration. As he navigates his personal journey, he experiences trauma not only on a cognitive level but also emotionally, behaviorally, and interpersonally. This alignment with the four modes of experience underscores the comprehensive impact of trauma on Charlie's life, echoing the framework's insights.

Foucault deals with the discursive formation of power, knowledge and truth. For him to generate the text either literary or non-literary 'discourse' is responsible. He talks about, how several discourses are responsible to produce and exchange the knowledge and truth in the society. The 'discourse' consists of the power, knowledge and truth. It refers the set of ideas, proposition or the statement about some subject or areas. The power, knowledge and truth are three basic elements of discourse. These elements have direct relationship to generate the truth of the time. For instance, people in the position of power generate the knowledge about something and that knowledge becomes truth. When the position of the power changed firstly it changed the knowledge and then changed the truth. For Foucault, power is the main elements of discourse to produce the meaning from the text. Depending on the power relation of the context text provides and produces its meaning. He further states:

Power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action. Again, we have at our disposal another assertion to the effect that power is not primarily the maintenance and reproduction of economic relation but is above all the relation of force. Power is essentially that which represses. Power represses nature, the instincts, a class, and individuals. Though one finds this definition of power as repression endlessly repeated in present day that is discourse. (89,90)

Foucault's theory explores how language, knowledge, and power intersect to shape our understanding of reality and construct societal norms. This theory offers insights into how Charlie's traumatic experiences are both influenced by and influence the discourses surrounding trauma, abuse, and mental health.

Charlie's traumatic abuse, as depicted in the novel, becomes entwined with the discourses that surround these experiences. Foucault's concept of "discourse" refers to systems of thought, language, and power that produce and circulate knowledge. In the context of Charlie's trauma, various discourses intersect, including those related to mental health, abuse, and personal identity. These discourses shape how Charlie perceives his experiences, how he articulates them in his letters, and how he seeks to comprehend and communicate the impact of trauma.

Foucault's notion of power is particularly relevant when examining Charlie's response to traumatic abuse. Trauma can often lead to a sense of powerlessness and voicelessness. In Charlie's case, his letters become an avenue through which he exercises agency and reclaims his voice. The act of sharing his experiences and feelings is a way of asserting power over the trauma that once dominated him. This act of narration aligns with Foucault's idea of discourses being both a site of power and a potential site of resistance.

Stephen Chbosky through *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* textualizes the history of Charlie, the fifteen-year-old narrator who has just entered his freshman year of high school when the book begins. Charlie is the eponymous wallflower. At first, Charlie is a wallflower because he has not friends and does not try to connect with people. At dances, he is literally a wallflower because he stands off to the side instead of joining in. Throughout the novel he is quiet and withdrawn, but he is also extremely observant and thoughtful, always paying close attention to everything

going on around him, even if he is only a silent witness. In fact, Charlie is a fictitious character through whom Stephen Chbosky presents story of both fact and fiction in this novel in which characters themselves are the reference of another. Chbosky presents Charlie as a representative of himself who sees the 20th century American landscape quite nearly and represents the fragmented incidents within a single threat as if it is a real and truthful incident.

Chbosky through this novel shows the American landscape that have radically being changed with the rise of new ethos and pathos of social transformation. Charlie writes his letter to an anonymous person about the past event. “Dear Friend, I feel very ashamed. I went to the high school football game the other day and I don’t know exactly why” (18). Chbosky historicizes the personal events through which he presents an incident happened once upon a time.

The act of attending the high school football game might appear innocuous on the surface, yet its implications run deep. The undercurrents of shame that Charlie grapples with reflect a complex interplay between his experiences and the broader shifts within society. Traumatic abuse, with its enduring impact, can shape how one navigates the seemingly mundane aspects of life. Charlie’s shame isn’t just a solitary emotion; it’s a manifestation of the ways in which trauma colors his perception of events. The anonymity of the recipient of Charlie’s letters becomes symbolic of his own struggle to address his trauma. The letter becomes a medium through which he confronts his emotions, seeks understanding, and gradually peels back the layers of his experiences. This process mirrors the journey of many trauma survivors, as they wrestle with the shame, confusion, and fragmented memories that often accompany their stories. The football game, a quintessential American event, is reimagined as a backdrop for Charlie’s internal conflict. The quote encapsulates the tension between

his desire for normalcy and the overwhelming emotions tied to traumatic abuse. The absence of a clear reason for his actions reflects the enigmatic nature of trauma's influence, how it can subconsciously guide our choices even when we can't fully articulate the reasons.

Ultimately, Chbosky's narrative serves as a microcosm of the broader societal transformations occurring during that period. Through Charlie's experiences, we glimpse the profound impact of trauma on individual lives, shaping their interactions with the changing world around them. The quote becomes a poignant testament to how traumatic abuse can infiltrate the seemingly mundane, leaving an indelible mark on both personal narratives and the broader social fabric.

First of all, Bill gave me a C on me *To Kill a Mockingbird* essay because he said that I run my sentences together. I am trying now to practice not to do that. He also said that I should use the vocabulary words that I learn in class like "corpulent" and "jaundice." I would use them here, but I really don't think they are appropriate in this format. (14)

In Charlie's contemplative reflection, the seemingly ordinary encounter with Bill's feedback on his essay takes on a deeper layer of meaning when viewed through the lens of his traumatic past. As he recounts Bill's remarks, an intricate connection emerges between his struggles to express himself and the enduring impact of the traumatic abuse he has endured. Bill's critique about "running sentences together" becomes a symbolic reflection of the fragmented and disjointed nature of Charlie's own experiences. Just as his sentences jumble without structure, so too do his memories and emotions, often intertwined in a disorienting way. This mirrors the challenge he faces in navigating and articulating the complexities of his trauma—a daunting task marked by internal turbulence.

Bill's suggestion to use advanced vocabulary words carries a weight beyond the classroom context. Charlie's hesitation to incorporate these words reflects his larger struggle to communicate the unspeakable pain of his traumatic abuse. Just as certain words remain unvoiced in his writing, so too does the traumatic abuse remain a deeply buried secret, creating an emotional barrier that inhibits his ability to fully express his feelings.

The act of practicing and refining his writing style resonates beyond the realm of academia. It becomes a metaphor for his journey of healing from the abuse. Much like his endeavor to structure sentences, Charlie strives to bring order to the emotional chaos that stems from his traumatic experiences. The desire for coherence in his writing mirrors his quest to find clarity and understanding in the turmoil of his emotions. The use of *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the classroom setting also serves to underscore the impossibility of objectively and transparently representing the past while highlighting the significance of history itself.

The central aim of this novel is to dramatize the traumatic history. Charlie the protagonist of the novel travels over his long course of life to find the meaning of life. He examines the time and events such as separation, physical relationship, family relationship, his education but without any proofs. Charlie finds no historical fixity and true general principles in the life of human beings. There are no fixed rules and regulations; rather they are man-made things. As his aunt life's secrecy could not be foregrounded, real history and factual things could not be foregrounded.

As the primary objective of this novel is to portray the process of construction from PTSD. The protagonist, Charlie, embarks on a journey to find out the meaning of life. Throughout his exploration, he reflects upon experiences such as separation, physical and family relationships and education but without any proofs. Charlie

discovers that the life of human beings has no fixed certainty or universal principles. Instead, they are constructs of human creation on the basis of power politics. Additionally, the secrecy surrounding his aunt's life prevents the revelation of traumatic history, indicating that real history and truth are not always easily discernible. Charlie tries his best to find out the main cause of Aunt Helen's family breakdown, he says, "my Aunt Helen started crying very hard. That's when my dad slapped me" (5-6). Some of the hidden realities are not foregrounded. In the same way historical narratives also maintained secrecy and fail to prevail the real truth as his aunt's past is restricted to be foregrounded.

Within the intricate layers of Charlie's narrative, his relentless quest to unearth the root cause of Aunt Helen's family breakdown holds a mirror to the hidden realities that trauma can shroud. As he recounts the emotional moment when Aunt Helen's tears flowed and his father's hand struck him, the resonance of these hidden truths becomes palpable. Just as the trauma he experienced at the hands of his aunt is veiled, narratives too can cloak their own concealed truths beneath a veneer of secrecy.

In a parallel vein, narratives often hold back concealed truths—silenced accounts that remain hidden beneath layers of societal norms and sanctioned perspectives. Just as Aunt Helen's past remains restricted and shadowed due to the impact of trauma, personal accounts also frequently fail to convey the complete truth. Trauma's ability to obscure and manipulate narratives, whether personal or interpersonal, reveals the profound impact it has on shaping how stories are told and understood. The lingering effects of trauma can distort memories, fragment experiences, and create gaps in narratives, leading to an incomplete and often distorted understanding of events.

Charlie's journey to uncover Aunt Helen's past resonates with the broader

endeavor to reveal obscured truths, whether personal or historical. The hidden realities that emerge within his narrative reflect the intricate layers of trauma's influence on memory and perception. The interplay between the revealed and concealed aspects mirrors the complexity of grappling with the truth amid the shadows of trauma. In essence, Charlie's relentless pursuit of understanding mirrors the universal quest for clarity in the face of hidden realities. Just as he peels back layers of his aunt's history, society grapples with the task of uncovering concealed narratives in both personal and historical contexts. Through this connection, Charlie's narrative serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges and complexities of addressing traumatic experiences and hidden truths.

Chbosky through this novel wants to deliberate the changing scenario of the American society. *The Perks of being a Wallflower* projects the downfall of American social norms and values. When the American society was shifting from tradition to modernity it somehow loses its socio-cultural norms and values. People started to deviate from the culturally constructed norms. The illusive relationship between Helen and Charlie can be taken as the social deviation. A 15-year old high school student Charlie badly suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and an ultimately depression following the sexual abuse he suffered from his Aunt Helen, who also dies in a car crash when he was younger. It is early twentieth century American society where human beings' feelings and social ties get changed with the rise of post-modern ethos and pathos which Chbosky tries to show through this novel.

As American people guides by post-modern thinking, they started to adopt whatever they like. The relationship between Aunt Helen and Charlie should be pious and pure. Charlie is Helen's elder's son with whom she keeps sexual relationship. Charlie accepts their relationship as:

It's funny, too, because boys and girls normally weren't best friends around my school. But Michael and Susan were. Kind of like my Aunt Helen and me. I'm sorry. "My Aunt Helen and I." That's one thing I learned this week. That and more consistent punctuation. I keep quiet most of the time, and only one kid named Sean really seemed to notice me. (7)

Above lines depict that, during Charlie's school days, girls and boys were just started to turn their relationship as boyfriend and girlfriend. There were not much more relationships in school. Kids were started to adopt post-modern way of lives. Charlie mentions in his letter that Michael and Susan were the first couple who have fallen in love. So as the relationship between Aunt Helen and Charlie has happened. Aunt Helen's husband was absent there and she is dwelling with Charlie family. Charlie is totally unknown about the fact, but Aunt Helen could not stop her in terms of erotic desire and she forcefully makes sexual relationship with him. This shows the changing scenario of American society.

The assigned social roles have been questioned, which can be taken as the social deviance. American society is quite patriarchal social norms and values where women have to play their subservient role. They were compelled to accustom with the roles assigned by patriarchal hypocrisy. It is evident that patriarchal assignments are perpetuated in order to preserve patriarchal status quo. For last many years, male members of the white community and they have settled down the roles and regulations for male and female in a quite different manner. Women have been assigned sub-servant and submissive roles whereas male as a superior and cosmic energy, but in the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* historicizes the changing scenario of American society. American women have started to put question against such roles designed with behalf of power and politics. The post-modernist believes

history is the story of winners like Foucault, they question the official history as power construct. The power holders write the historical events in their way, according to their interests and to fulfill their political benefits; perpetuating their supremacy over marginal group. So, history is in favor of them who are in power. Defying this trend of social reality, Chbosky opens the possibilities of multiple histories. Drawing Charlie's family history parallel to 20th century American society, he exposes the breaking down of American male centric ideology upon women and children and rise of their freedom in terms of their personal as well as social affairs. Charlie remembers:

When Susan at the guidance counselor meeting about Michael, she said that Michael once told her that she was the prettiest girl in the whole world, braces and all. Then, he asked her to "go with him," which was a big deal at any school. They call it "going out" in high school. And they kissed and talked about movies, and she missed him terribly because he was her best friend. (7)

Chbosky interprets the American face through the novel that how American dream of being a leading super power in the world in terms of socio-economic phenomena is being decayed and new possibilities of freedom in the lives of children and women have been emerged. America teaches the lesson of right and wrong but with the rise of 20th century, school children are not ready to accept its code of conducts.

Aunt Helen is ready to abandon her drunkard husband who always indulges in gambling and starts to company with sister's family. Her swift from her husband to this family can be taken her freedom stance. Chbosky reveals the American society how it has been slowly and gradually changing. Aunt Helen could not remain with the person where her physical as well as bodily needs are not fulfilled. While remaining with sister's family, she sees the possibility of fulfilling her erotic desires. As she has

left to believe the social norms and values that could not provide her future aspirations settled down by the then socio-political conventions. She lets to remain with her husband and joins her sister's house. She slowly and gradually attracts Charlie, a school child. She gives books to him to read in spite of his father's refusal.

Charlie on the one hand says, "My Aunt Helen was my favorite person in the whole world. She was my mom's sister. She got straight A's when she was a teenager and she used to give me books to read . . .the books were a little too old for me, but I liked them . . .and let me read" (5). In these lines, Chbosky uses the lines that give double meaning as Linda Hutcheon indicates as parody. As insisted by Hutcheon, Chbosky ironically uses such language which presents contradictory and double coded, since it works within the very systems it attempts to subvert. Parody, in Hutcheon's and other critic's work on postmodernism, is intimately connected to notions of intertextuality. Charlie wants his own Aunt Helen in the whole world. She is just like straight 'A' during her teenage and now she is a bit older than him, but Charlie is reading her as a book without any restriction as both of them are guided by post-modernist ethos.

Sigmund Freud has explained that "Since we haven't gone through the experience of death and since death doesn't exist in our unconscious, we can't actually fear death itself" (25). He first introduced the concept of Thanatophobia that is opposed by self-destructive death instinct. Though the aim of every life is death, Freud explored death anxiety in many subjects – which can lead to deep psychological effects. Freud adds, "We may fear something else, such as abandonment, castration, unresolved conflicts otherwise fear of death may be the outcome of a sense of guilt" (25). Explaining Freud, Lois Tyson also opines that death is a frightening issue to cope with. She states that "My intense fear of losing my life

makes living so painful and frightening that my only escape is death” (23). Fear of death is really a frightening experience, and it makes living painful. People try to escape death by twisting its talks and trying to make life easy. Just as death remains an abstract concept in the unconscious, so too does the trauma Charlie experienced manifest as a shadowy, elusive force that permeates his emotions and memories. His struggle to make sense of his past abuse aligns with Freud’s notion that we fear not the event itself, but the unknown aspects it represents.

The opposition between Thanatophobia and the self-destructive death instinct finds its echo in Charlie’s narrative. His internal conflict, as he battles with the emotional aftermath of his abuse, mirrors the tension between a desire to confront and heal from the trauma and the self-destructive tendencies that emerge as a result. Freud’s exploration of death anxiety and its deep psychological effects resonates as we witness Charlie’s attempts to reconcile the pain he carries within.

Freud’s assertion that the fear of death may be a manifestation of unresolved conflicts, abandonment, or guilt strikes a chord with Charlie’s narrative. His trauma is not just about the abuse itself; it encompasses the intricate web of emotions tied to abandonment, guilt, and the unresolved aspects of his past. Charlie’s struggle to articulate these emotions mirrors the challenges posed by death anxiety—complicated, multi-layered, and deeply internalized.

Lois Tyson’s perspective on fear of death as an escape from the painful struggles of life resonates with Charlie’s journey. His coping mechanisms, like his introspective letters and attempts to connect with others, can be seen as avenues for navigating the fear and pain he carries. The novel becomes a testament to how the fear of confronting traumatic experiences can drive individuals to find ways to make life more bearable, even if it means seeking refuge from the overwhelming emotions

within. In essence, Freud's exploration of death anxiety and its psychological effects intersects with Charlie's narrative, offering a lens through which to view his internal turmoil. The fear of death, metaphorically speaking, mirrors the fear of confronting traumatic abuse—the struggle to confront the unknown, the unresolved, and the pain. Through this connection, the novel becomes an exploration of how individuals like Charlie grapple with the complexities of trauma, fear, and the quest for understanding and healing.

In order to exhibit the then society, Chbosky began writing this novel in 1994, he finished writing and published the book in 1999. Charlie writes his letters to his anonymous friend from 1991 to 1992. In those letters, shows American adolescent perspective, studying the environment in which he and his companions grow up. Charlie experiences not only the social changes of adolescence but also the lifestyle phases that come with being a high school student. His friends express their individuality through the music they listen to, and they introduce him to the genres that they enjoy on FM radio and cassette. They feel offended when one of their favorite artists is insulted. In the novel, the characters feel insulted when one of their favorite artists is insulted because their music holds significant personal meaning to them. When someone criticizes or belittles the artist or the genre of music that resonates with them, it feels like an attack on their identity and their individuality. Music plays a crucial role in shaping their experiences and serves as a form of self-expression. Therefore, any negative comments or insults directed towards the artists or the music they love can be perceived as a direct affront to their personal tastes and preferences. It undermines their sense of belonging and can evoke strong emotional reactions, leading to feelings of offense or hurt.

One night Charlie listens to a heated debate among several of his friends over

the media's portrayal. Mass media in twentieth century has been playing an important role in order to create truth. As Mitchel Foucault questions ultimate truth rather, it is a political grand narrative played on behalf of power. In the text, friends debate regarding the music whether "Beatles" or "Rocky Horror" (104) is superior "and it started this big discussion" (104). Charlie believes that superior or inferior battle "probably already did with our parents and grandparents. It was probably happening with us right now" (105). The way of creating truth has been existed since last many years. Chbosky through Charlie, his moth speaker portrays how traumatic abuse haunts him:

So, I said I thought the magazine was trying to make him a hero, but then later somebody might dig up something to make him seem like less than a person. And I didn't know why because to me he is just a guy who writes songs that lot of people like, and I thought that was enough for everyone involved. Maybe I'm wrong, but everyone at the table starting talking about it. Sam blamed television. Patrick blamed government. Craig blamed the "corporate media." (105)

This complex contemplation showcases the recurrent and distressing thoughts that are symptomatic of PTSD. The trauma he carries reverberates in his inability to perceive situations without the filter of his past experiences.

The passage becomes a microcosm of Charlie's trauma-triggered hyperarousal—the heightened sensitivity to potential threats or negative outcomes. His hesitance to accept the hero narrative, the fear that something might later tarnish the image, reflects how trauma can distort one's sense of safety and stability. This heightened state of vigilance, rooted in trauma, echoes the hallmark symptoms of PTSD.

As the conversation at the table unfolds, Charlie's peers attribute blame to various external factors. This mirrors the psychological phenomenon of externalizing internal turmoil. Charlie's mind is grappling with his own trauma, but in the context of this discussion, he projects his distress onto the world around him. This self-distancing is a common coping mechanism seen in individuals dealing with trauma.

In conclusion, Stephen Chbosky's novel, "*The Perks of Being a Wallflower*," offers a poignant exploration of the profound effects of traumatic abuse on an individual's perception of truth and reality. Through the eyes of the adolescent narrator, Charlie, the novel skillfully reveals the intricate layers of how trauma can reshape personal experiences, leading to a profound transformation in how one perceives oneself and interacts with the world.

The analysis undertaken in this study has delved deep into the complexities of trauma's impact on memory, perception, and coping mechanisms, particularly within the context of Charlie's personal struggles. By examining Charlie's journey, the novel sheds light on the ways in which traumatic experiences can fragment one's understanding of reality and distort the connection between past and present.

Throughout the narrative, Chbosky skillfully employs Charlie's perspective to expose the fractures in personal historical truths. Trauma, as experienced by Charlie, splinters his memories and perceptions, blurring the line between reality and fact. The study has unveiled how this mirrors the disjointed and often unreliable nature of traumatic recollections, challenging the stability of truths. The theoretical lens of Mardi Horowitz's trauma theory adds a new layer of understanding, revealing how Charlie's fragmented memories and altered perceptions are common markers of post-traumatic stress.

Key to the novel is the exploration of trauma's grip on memory and

perception. Through Charlie's lens, Chbosky vividly illustrates the lasting impact of trauma on shaping one's understanding of personal events. His internal struggles echo the theorist's insights, highlighting how traumatic abuse can refract memories and distort the narrative of the past. Chbosky's narrative craft aligns seamlessly with Horowitz's theory, showcasing how trauma taints Charlie's perceptions and fuels his struggles with memory and emotions.

Furthermore, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* eloquently probes the fragility of language in representing traumatic experiences. Charlie's difficulty in comprehending and utilizing vocabulary words parallels the challenge of expressing traumatic memories. His struggle to find the right words mirrors the broader difficulty in articulating trauma's impact on personal history. Just as traumatic experiences defy easy description, the novel questions the limits of language in capturing the nuances of the past.

This exploration seen through the prism of Charlie's traumatic experiences, invites readers to engage with a new perspective. The novel becomes a vehicle to question the construction of truths when viewed through the lens of trauma. By redefining traumatic past, Chbosky's work underscores the necessity of recognizing individual voices and perspectives in shaping a more accurate and inclusive narrative. In essence, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* emerges as a powerful exploration of the intersection of trauma, and memory, inviting readers to rethink the very foundations of character's understanding.

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