

Unseen Scars, Unspoken Words: The Perks of Addressing Mental Health in Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

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Abstract

In the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, the theme of mental health takes center stage, offering a poignant and sensitive exploration of the challenges faced by adolescents struggling with emotional turmoil. The protagonist, Charlie, grapples with past traumas, depression and social anxiety, which profoundly impacts his daily life and relationships. Through Charlie's candid and introspective narrative, the novel delves into the complexities of mental health, portraying the importance of seeking help and forming supportive connections. This study uses qualitative methodology, employing close textual analysis to examine the mental health challenges faced by the protagonist Charlie, as well as other characters such as Patrick's suppressed pain and Brad's fear of accepting his identity. The study aims to identify the underlying themes and psychological aspects associated with mental health that are depicted in the novel through an analysis of key passages and character interactions including subtle nuances and implicit meanings by conducting a thorough analysis of the text from a psychoanalytic perspective. Through Chbosky's novel, this research offers a compassionate and authentic depiction of mental health, highlighting the importance of understanding, empathy and personal growth in navigating the challenges of adolescence.

Keywords: Anxiety, mental health, adolescents, emotional turmoil, support, personal growth

1. Introduction

A wallflower is an individual who passively observes the lives of others and simply exist on the sidelines. They find it difficult to participate in group activities as they tend to seclude themselves rather than engage with a larger audience. Stephen Chbosky focuses on the narrative of the introverted individual, Charlie Kelmeckis in his novel, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Charlie, an unreliable narrator, serves as the narrative voice, recounting his experiences as a victim of sexual abuse. The protagonist's experience of abuse significantly impacts his behavior, thereby influencing his relationships with others around him.

Charlie narrates his teenage experiences in the form of letters to an unknown person whom he addresses as a "friend". Charlie is regarded as a wallflower, as he does not mingle with other students at school, nor does he have any friends. He finds a special connection with his English teacher, Mr. Bill Anderson. Besides Aunt Helen, Bill is one of the few adults who make Charlie feel special and inspires Charlie to believe in his academic prowess. Charlie knows that it is odd to be spending time with his teacher rather than hanging out with students his age. He attempts to socialize and ends up attending the school football game where he befriends Patrick and his stepsister, Sam. Charlie develops an enormous crush on Sam and confesses to her as time progresses.

At the beginning of the novel, Chbosky introduces the readers to Charlie, a lonely teenage boy grappling with two major traumatic deaths of his loved ones: his only friend who had committed suicide, and his aunt Helen who died in a car crash back when he was seven years old. As a kid, Charlie has been a victim of sexual abuse as he recalls instances when his aunt Helen used to touch him inappropriately when his siblings were sleeping. Charlie seems to not understand what has happened to him as he talks with great joy at the mention of his aunt. He writes in his letters that his aunt was his favorite person in the world. Though he used to feel uncomfortable, he never questioned Aunt Helen's intentions and was happy to be her little secret. The death of his friend and Aunt Helen prevents Charlie from living a normal teenage life, as it messes up his head and makes it difficult for him to socialize.

There has been an increasing recognition of the significance of understanding and addressing mental health concerns, specifically among adolescents, in recent years. Literature frequently serves as a platform for delving into intricate themes, providing valuable insights into the real-life experiences of individuals struggling with emotional turmoil. Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is an example of a literary piece that extensively explores the complexities of mental health.

1.1. Research Questions

This study endeavors to examine the following research questions to shed light on the intricate depiction of mental health in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and its wider implications:

1. In what manner does Stephen Chbosky's novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* portray the psychological challenges faced by the central character, Charlie?
2. What coping mechanisms do the characters use to deal with their mental health issues, and how effective are those strategies?
3. How does the novel highlight the importance of seeking help and forming supportive connections while addressing mental health issues?

2. Review of Literature

The research article titled "Charlie's Depression in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*" examines the portrayal of depression in the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, with a specific focus on the main character, Charlie. The author has employed psychoanalysis theory by Jacques Lacan to examine the factors influencing Charlie's depression and the influence of his environment on his mental well-being. The paper emphasizes the significance of social support in addressing mental health concerns, especially during adolescence. Kamilia (2021) states that, "For the subject like Charlie, trauma is something that cannot be symbolized. When the subject remembers something, it is nothing but a fantasy that is self-woven by the subject. This is where the repetitive motion is directly related to trauma".

Barbara Majcan in her thesis, "Stereotypes and Diversity: Gender Representation in the Novel and the Film *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*" examines the portrayal of gender roles and stereotypes in both the novel and film adaptation. She has explored the differences in gender representation between different mediums and analyzes the influence of audiovisual techniques, language and cultural codes on the construction of gender. She notes the difference in the portrayal of the protagonist in both mediums by stating, "The decision of almost not letting Charlie cry in the film at all characterizes Charlie significantly less feminine than he appears in the book. Thus, a central and powerful tool of challenging gender stereotypes has been lost in the film, destabilizing the position Charlie has in the novel" (Majcan, 2021). The thesis offers valuable insights into the complexities of gender portrayal in literature and film. It utilizes a four-category framework to analyze gender stereotypes and explores the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of diversity.

The language employed by female characters in a variety of contexts, including intensifiers, tag questions, lexical hedges and super polite form is examined in the article, "Women's Language in the Movie Script of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*". "The woman character, Mary Elizabeth used well in her utterance. She used the hedges well to express that her statement cannot vouch for the accuracy" (Kurniaty et al., 2018, p.544) thereby focusing on the linguistic features and their functions in the dialogues delivered by the female characters in the film. These language components serve a variety of tasks in communication, such as highlighting feelings, expressing admiration, expressing uncertainty, seeking confirmation, stressing distance in relationships and maintaining politeness.

The research article entitled, "An Analysis of Charlie's Personalities In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by using Psychoanalytical Approach" offers insight into the correlation between Charlie's traits, including shyness, emotional attitude, honesty, caring demeanor and uncommunicative conduct are linked to specific events in his past. "He will start to cry if he feels that he does something bad. It is proof enough that his emotional personality had been influenced by his trauma which is the death of the people he loved in his childhood" (Khotimah et al., 2017, p.56). The article emphasizes how Charlie's environment had a big impact on his personality development. It implies that Charlie's character traits have been greatly influenced by his upbringing, family dynamics and cultural influences. For example, his compassionate character stems from the warmth and love of his family, and his Catholic background instills ideals of honesty and integrity in him.

Nugraheny (2016) in her thesis titled, "The Manifestations of Anxiety and Defense Mechanism of the Main Character of A Film Entitled *The Perks Of Being A Wallflower*" explores the examination of anxiety and defense mechanisms depicted by the protagonist in the movie *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. She employs Freudian psychoanalysis theory to examine how the character deals with anxiety by employing defense mechanisms. Through the examination of previous studies in literature and film, this research offers an insight into the character's psychological challenges. Nugraheny highlights the significance of anxiety on individuals and the subconscious role of defense mechanisms in coping with heightened anxiety.

Marie D ücker (2017) in her research article titled, "Form and Emotion in Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*" explores the emotions and form in Stephen Chbosky's novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The analysis focuses on the development of the main character, Charlie, as he goes through a transformative journey of personal growth and self-discovery, which is strongly influenced by his passion for writing. The narrative structure, specifically the epistolary form, is instrumental in depicting Charlie's growth and metamorphosis. Charlie's letter writing is a means of introspection, emotional equilibrium and reconciling with his past traumas. "The epistolary form serves as a crucial means of illustrating Charlie's personal growth and transformation from his point of view, which is only made possible through his continuous writing as well as reflecting on that writing and the effect it has had on him as a person" (Dücker, 2017, p.173). Charlie's exploration of his identity is greatly enhanced through the use of the epistolary form. This form allows him to shift from being a mere observer to actively engaging in his own life, resulting in emotional growth and self-awareness.

3. Methodology

The study uses qualitative methodology, specifically thematic analysis, to investigate the predominant themes found in the novel *The Perks*

of *Being a Wallflower*. Throughout the narrative, the prominent themes including trauma, abuse, healing, adolescence, gender and mental health are discussed. The focus of this study is centered on the characters' journeys, which shed light on their battle with mental health complexities such as social anxiety, depression and traumatic experiences. In this study, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* serves as the primary source and also offers a broader contextual background. In addition, it incorporates secondary sources comprising pertinent literature, books, and academic articles that examine many aspects of mental health and homophobia. The research methodology emphasizes the need to use literary analysis to get a more profound comprehension of mental health themes in the novel and to contribute to broader discussions about how mental health is portrayed in literature.

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the mental health challenges discussed in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, this study employs psychoanalytic approach rooted in the principles of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Applying Freud's theories on the unconscious mind, defense mechanisms and the relationship between conscious and unconscious processes, this approach aims to analyze the fundamental psychological dynamics that underlie the narrative.

4. Discussion and Analysis

According to the American Psychological Association,

"Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea" (2021).

Charlie's memories appear in the form of distorted images ending with his aunt asking him to keep it as a secret. This shows that Charlie selectively ignores the disturbing moments as a means of protecting himself. His inability to recall the incident can be viewed as a screen memory as he cannot put the pieces together to comprehend what has happened to him irrespective of being constantly reminded about it. When an event in Charlie's present causes the past to rip through the present, the trauma is re-lived. Charlie is appalled when Sam, his longtime crush, starts to touch his private area and he turns white as a sheet. He knows that he can trust Sam but his past traumatic experience haunts him from proceeding further. Later, while sleeping he dreams of Sam touching him exactly the way it had happened earlier, but he jolts awake when he sees his Aunt Helen's face instead of Sam's.

Charlie has not only been a victim of abuse but is portrayed as a magnet for situations of abuse. His first experience of sex was at the age of 10 at his brother's party. Two drunken teenagers start making out in Charlie's bedroom and Charlie notices that the girl is drunk. He notes that the girl starts to cry but the guy continues to undress her. The couple leave the room after Charlie's sister enters the room and questions Charlie as to why he didn't ask them to leave to which he replies that he was unsure what to do. Charlie seems to make a connection with the girl who was forced into oral sex. Both of them seem to have gotten involved in sexual situations with the people they had considered to be trustworthy. Charlie accidentally relates with the girl and gets triggered by the action taking place in front of him. His first reaction is to close his eyes and ears to prevent listening to the girl's screams and to avoid negative feelings which fail as he could still hear her screams.

The stories of abuse undergone by others also set Charlie off. When his best friend Sam shares her secret that her first kiss was with her dad's friend, she starts crying and Charlie is unable to console but begins to cry along with her. Sam has her own demons to fight which leads her to fall into wrongful relationships as a consequence in search of true love. She makes an effort to give Charlie a memorable experience since she recognizes the significance of first-time experiences and how they affect a person's behavior as she says, "I want to make sure that the first person you kiss loves you" (Chbosky, 1999, p.70).

In *Coping with Trauma: A Guide to Self-Understanding*, trauma is characterized as,

"It is the subjective experience of the objective events that constitutes the trauma...The more you believe you are endangered, the more traumatized you will be...Psychologically, the bottom line of trauma is overwhelming emotion and a feeling of utter helplessness. There may or may not be bodily injury, but psychological trauma is coupled with physiological upheaval that plays a leading role in the long-range effects" (Allen, 1999, p.14).

When Sam kisses Charlie, he tries to repress the abuse that had taken place in his childhood thereby convincing himself that he was not actually abused as a kid. "It might be possible that Charlie denies having kissed before in order to convince himself that he has not experienced similar situations, as to ignore the fact that he was sexually abused when he was an early child" (Vera, 2018, p.6). The kiss by Sam was meant to bring him joy but as he tries to suppress his emotions he starts crying to let go of the negative feelings that bring back his past experiences. He understands what true love feels like as he writes, "It was the kind of kiss that made me know that I was never so happy in my whole life" (Chbosky, 1999, p.70).

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis states that, "the essence of repression lies simply in turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (Freud, 1915, p.147). Boag (2006) states that the "dynamic view of mentality, where some mental contents are denied access to conscious thought, became a fundamental tenet of psychoanalysis" (p.74). A repressed memory, also known as a recovered memory, has been suppressed and is therefore inaccessible to the conscious mind and can be retrieved using therapeutic methods. "Repression of the memory of a distressing sexual experience which occurs in mature years is only possible for those in whom that experience can activate the memory-trace of trauma in childhood" (Freud, 1896, p.166).

Patients, including those who have endured childhood trauma or sexual abuse, repress memories of extremely traumatic situations as a form of coping mechanism. In the case of Charlie, he represses his memories related to Aunt Helen and the abuse that he had faced during his

childhood years as a means of coping mechanism. “The rejection of the idea from the conscious is, however, obstinately maintained, because it entails abstention from action, a motor fettering of the impulse” (Freud, 1915, p.157). Charlie’s repression occurs when his mind gets stuck on the unfortunate circumstances that he had experienced in his childhood with Aunt Helen.

Dissociation is defined as, “the lack of normal integration of thoughts, feelings and experiences into the stream of consciousness and memory” (Bernstein & Putnam, 1986, p. 727). Charlie bottles up the actual memory of the abuse to the extent that he goes into a trance when he tries recalling it. The intensity of the unfortunate incident increases to the point that he begins to black out. The numerous instances of unpleasant thoughts start to invade his mind which result in a mental breakdown with him sitting naked on the sofa, crying and murmuring loose sentences about how guilty he feels about everything.

“I’ve been in the hospital for the past two months. They just released me yesterday. The doctor told me that my mother and father found me sitting on the couch in the family room. I was completely naked, just watching the television, which wasn’t on. I wouldn’t speak or snap out of it, they said. My father even slapped me to wake me up, and like I told you, he never hits. So they brought me to the hospital where I stayed” (Chbosky, 1999, p.208).

Charlie finds it challenging to accept the fact that his aunt was his perpetrator and the memories linked with her were not always happy ones as he tends to state so in his letters. He constantly represses the inappropriate behavior of his aunt, but his trauma doesn’t cease. According to Bagley & King (1990), “the victim of child sexual abuse suffers from psychological trauma rather than physical trauma. Children who are experiencing repeated or multiple traumatic experiences tend to show post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms in adolescence. Since children are more vulnerable to attack because they are small, dependent, powerless and defenseless” (p.44).

When Charlie gets intimate with Sam, the girl with whom he has fallen in love, he is unable to process what is happening when Sam starts touching his private area when they are together. He freezes for a moment and starts crying which startles Sam as she immediately withdraws her hand and consoles Charlie. “This cry, however, according to Charlie, is a panicky type of crying that is brought back by memories of the past. Based on the description of his thoughts, these memories seem to force their way into his mind, allowing him no escape” (Akshara, 2023). Later he dreams of this exact incident but in his dreams, it was his aunt Helen who was touching him in the place of Sam. This implies that Charlie’s tragedy still haunts him in his nightmares despite his efforts to erase the painful memories from the past.

Sublimation refers to the psychological process by which individuals channel their potentially harmful or unacceptable urges into more constructive and socially acceptable motivations. This mechanism allows individuals to redirect their energy and desire toward activities or behaviors that are deemed appropriate by society. Through sublimation, individuals will be able to transform their instinctual drives or impulses into more productive and beneficial outlets, thereby avoiding the expression of their original urges in ways that may be detrimental or socially unacceptable. Charlie finds comfort and channels self-expression by composing letters addressed to an anonymous recipient. Writing provides Charlie with a valuable means of expressing his complex emotions, enabling him to communicate his thoughts, analyze his experiences, and delve into his inner world in a safe and constructive manner. “It serves as a coping technique for the purpose of surviving and facilitating emotional restoration” (Suganthy. S & V. Karunanithi, 2023, p.403). Through the act of channeling his emotions into his written work, Charlie effectively converts his feelings of anguish, confusion and longing into a form of artistic expression thereby sublimating his inner turmoil into a productive and meaningful activity.

According to Freud, the tripartite components of the mind, the id, ego and superego offer insight into the psyche and behavior of individuals. Wade et al. (2015) in their book *Invitation to Psychology* note that “the id which is present at birth, is the reservoir of unconscious psychological energies and the motives to avoid pain and obtain pleasure” (p.44). In Charlie’s case, the influence of the id can be seen in his reluctance to attempt to mingle with his schoolmates. Charlie’s id is manifested through his unfiltered emotional reactions and impulsive behavior, which are driven by his profound desire for acceptance and connection with others.

His id wants to pursue Sam with romantic gestures and try to win her heart. At a party, Charlie imagines dancing with Sam with her hands wrapped around his shoulder, hugging each other. But he realizes that the person hugging Sam was Craig, not him. This shows that his id wants him to do romantic things with Sam but his superego brings him back to reality. He is unable to act according to his raw instincts as he fears that he may lose Sam if he expresses his feelings for her. This shows that Charlie’s superego is more dominant than the id and ego. The superego,

“is the voice of conscience, representing morality and parental authority. The superego judges the activities of the id, handing out good feelings of pride and satisfaction when you do something well and handing out miserable feelings of guilt and shame when you break the rules. The superego is partly conscious but largely unconscious” (Wade et al., 2015, p.44).

4.1 Interconnected Components of Mental Health



Figure 1. A comprehensive illustration of the complex nature of mental health with interrelated elements

The relationship between mental health and physical health is intricate and reciprocal, indicating that both can have an impact on one another. Mental health problems, like chronic stress, anxiety, or depression, have the potential to trigger the body's stress response. Extended activation of the stress response can result in elevated levels of stress hormones, like cortisol, which can potentially contribute to various physical health issues, including cardiovascular problems, digestive disorders and an impaired immune system. It might have an impact on the onset or aggravation of long-term medical issues. For instance, chronic pain disorders can influence mental health and illnesses like depression have been connected to an increased risk of heart disease.

The ability to regulate emotions is greatly impacted by mental health. Good mental health frequently demonstrates efficient emotional regulation, which enables individuals to manage stress and keep their emotions in check. However, mental health issues like anxiety or depression can interfere with the control of emotions, which can affect behavior and mood. It has an impact on cognitive functions such as memory, attention and problem-solving. Optimal mental health is crucial for supporting cognitive abilities, as mental health disorders can have a negative impact on these functions.

Aldwin & Yancura (2004) in their article "Coping" mention the two major types of coping skills, problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Problem-based coping entails actively addressing and resolving the external stressor or challenge that causes distress. People who employ this coping style prioritize practical solutions, taking direct action and making changes to the situation in order to reduce stress. Emotion-based coping focuses on effectively managing the emotional response to stress, without necessarily altering the external circumstances. This coping style entails the regulation of emotions, seeking support and finding strategies to alleviate emotional distress.

4.2 Understanding How a Stressor Becomes Exposed

According to Marshall (2000), "Stress is a disparity between society's pressures to conform to extreme events with an individual's capability to adapt to those events. In other words, stress is the result of an individual's inability to adapt to extreme events. Those extreme events are usually known as stressors. Stressor is an extreme event that can cause excessive stress (i.e. threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence). As a result, when someone experiences those events, then he will be traumatized" (p.11). The stressor is referred to as the state of being exposed, or exposure, in this context. The following are some examples of how a stressor gets exposed.

1. Undergoing the traumatic incident firsthand.
2. Observing the unfolding of traumatic events as they happen to others.
3. Discovering that a close family member has been subjected to a traumatic event (Austriani, 2016, p.15).

4.2.1 Undergoing the Traumatic Incident Firsthand

In the case of Charlie, he has experienced sexual abuse from young age but is oblivious to it because he believes his Aunt Helen only loved him and would never harm him. "I don't really want to talk about the questions and the answers. But I kind of figured out that everything I dreamt about my Aunt Helen was true. And after a while, I realized that it happened every Saturday when we would watch television" (Chbosky, 1999, p.208-209). Charlie has been sexually assaulted. It becomes apparent when Charlie dreams of his aunt. He is having dreams about his aunt Helen, who raped him every Saturday on a couch. In light of the aforementioned quote, Charlie doesn't recall the incident, but he still dreams about it. Psychoanalytic theory posits that dreams, along with other psychological experiences, can be categorized into two distinct levels of content: manifest content and latent content. The manifest content is what a person remembers consciously and latent content conveys the hidden meaning behind the dream (Friedman & Schustack, 2016, p.47). Charlie was subjected to stress when his aunt Helen sexually assaulted him, according to the criterion. He is unable to adjust to early sexual behavior as a result. For Charlie, the latent content of his dreams reflects his unresolved trauma, repressed emotions and unconscious desires.

4.2.2 Observing the Unfolding of Traumatic Events as they Happen to Others

He observes a girl at a party who was forced to get intimate with her boyfriend irrespective of her cries to stop the act. This is an instance when Charlie gets to know that the girl is being abused and he is unable to stop the act. "The boy's hand went up the girl's shirt, and she

started protesting. The boy kept working up the girl's shirt, and as much as she said no, he kept working it" (Chbosky, 1999, p.30). Charlie is not able to even open his mouth as he is stuck in time. Witnessing the scene right in front of him transfers Charlie back to his past when he remembers his Aunt Helen touching him inappropriately. Charlie employs the strategy of denial as a means of safeguarding himself against those disturbing thoughts. According to Anna Freud, denial is a defense mechanism employed by individuals as a means of safeguarding themselves against uncomfortable thoughts, emotions or reality. This psychological approach involves the deliberate rejection or denial of certain aspects of reality, especially those that could be seen as endangering one's self-worth or mental health.

"The defensive measure to which the ego has recourse is aimed not against the instinctual life but directly at the external world which inflicts the frustration. Just as, in the neurotic conflict, perception of a prohibited instinctual stimulus is warded off by means of repression, so the infantile ego resorts to denial in order not to become aware of some painful impression from without" (Freud, 1936, p.89).

4.2.3 Discovering that a Close Family Member has been Subjected to a Traumatic Event

Later in the novel, it is said that Helen did those awful things to Charlie as she was trying to forget what had taken place in her own childhood. She has been a lone survivor of abuse and she uses Charlie to forget her painful memories. Charlie hears from his mother that his Aunt was never happy. He gets to know that Aunt Helen was molested by her father's friend when she was a child. "I'm talking about the bad thing that happened to Aunt Helen that they wouldn't tell me about when I was little...It is the one thing that makes me deeply sad. I will not say who. I will not say when I will just say that my aunt Helen was molested. I hate that word" (Chbosky, 1999, p.89-90).

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), which was originally published in 1980, compiles data on the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The DSM manual is used to diagnose mental disorders by psychiatrists and researchers. The American Psychiatric Association states:

"Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events, or set of circumstances. An individual may experience this as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and may affect mental, physical, social, and/or spiritual well-being" (Taylor-Desir, 2022).

A person with post-traumatic stress disorder will make deliberate attempts to avoid thinking about their awful experience. They may suppress their sentiments or thoughts regarding the incident. During his session with the psychiatrist, Charlie initially intends to discuss his extreme loneliness. Nevertheless, the psychiatrist's focus remains on probing into his childhood experiences, a line of inquiry that perplexes him. He finds it strange and uncomfortable that the psychiatrist is delving into his early years since he's always been reluctant to open up about his past.

"So, then the only person I would have to talk to would be my psychiatrist, and I don't like the idea of that right now because he keeps asking me questions about when I was younger, and they're starting to get weird. I'm just lucky that I have so much schoolwork and don't have a lot of time to think" (Chbosky, 1999, p.173).

This reluctance suggests a deliberate avoidance of thoughts and memories related to certain traumatic events. He goes on to explain that he uses his homework as a way to divert his attention away from these distressing memories. His resistance to the psychiatrist's questions and his deliberate efforts to evade thoughts of these traumatic events strongly indicate that he exhibits characteristics of avoidance behavior. Heidarizadeh (2015) claims that trauma is an occurrence that involves feelings and emotions in his journal article *The Significant Role of Trauma in Literature and Psychoanalysis*. It occasionally has detrimental effects on the victim.

"Past trauma and traumatic memories affect the mind of the characters. Confusion and insecurity cause trauma; typical causes of psychoanalysis trauma are sexual abuse, employment discrimination, police brutality, bullying, domestic violence, and particularly childhood experiences. Significantly, childhood trauma can lead to violent behavior" (p.788-789).

Fortunately for Charlie, he was surrounded by a healthy group of friends especially Sam and Patrick who have been understanding and helped bring about a change in Charlie's behavior. The support he received from his friends thwarted Charlie's attempts to understand what love truly means and how he was accepted by them irrespective of his flaws. He is able to fathom that his past experiences were not his fault and he no longer has to bear the weight of guilt. The comfort provided by his friends made Charlie understand that it is okay to not be okay, and with the right people he can become a better person.

4.3 Homophobia and Its Repercussions

It is not just Charlie who is going through mental health issues in the novel. Chbosky introduces Patrick who is an openly gay, flamboyant guy and is accepted in the school. He gets into a secret relationship with Brad, a popular jock and one of the best players on the football team. Brad is a closeted gay who hides his sexuality from the outside world in order to maintain his hegemonic masculinity. He comes from a religious family and is afraid of getting cast away by his family members. Internalized homophobia represents "the gay person's direction of negative social attitudes toward the self" (Meyer & Dean, 1998, p.161).

Brad is a victim of internalized homophobia and it is manifested in the way he looks at everything around him. "Individuals with higher levels of internalized homophobia experience lower self-esteem and more shame" (Rowen & Malcolm, 2002), "less comfort with socializing with other gay men" (Ross & Rosser, 1996), "and feel stigmatized in either their family or community" (Preston et al., 2007). He denies his sexual orientation and claims to be the stereotypical macho popular jock, acting tough on the outside thereby building an image that will not allow anyone to question his sexuality ultimately leading to "feelings of self-disgust and self-hatred" (The Rainbow Project,

2022).

Mason (2001) conducted a research study wherein it was found that people mask any overt signs of homosexuality in order to protect themselves from discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Anti-gay violence episodes have an impact on not just the victim but also all gay men since they imply that homosexuality is not acceptable. Due to the discrimination and hate crimes that gay men experience as a result of their sexual orientation, they refrain from making public displays of affection and prefer to stay closeted or secretly open to specific individuals.

Szymanski & Carr (2008) found that as a result of reduced self-esteem brought on by higher degrees of gender role conflict, gay men endured higher levels of psychological distress. The theory of human relatedness offers a possible explanation for how specific protective factors might lower the impact of internalized homophobia on the onset of depressive symptoms. (Hagerty et al., 1993). According to this theory, “there are four states of relatedness: (a) connectedness (b) disconnectedness (c) parallelism and (d) enmeshment. A man experiences connectedness when he is actively involved with the people, environments and objects that he encounters and this connectedness can enhance his well-being and comfort and reduce any anxiety” (Hagerty et al., 1993).

“In contrast, disconnectedness occurs when a man lacks this involvement, resulting in him experiencing less well-being and more discomfort and anxiety” (Hagerty et al., 1993). In Brad’s case, he tries his best not to associate much with everyone especially Patrick as he doesn’t want his sexuality to be known by everyone. He remains closeted and also manipulates Patrick to hide him. Brad’s hesitancy stems from concerns about how his peers, family, and the wider community might perceive him. Suppressing one’s true self due to the fear of negative reactions is a common experience for many individuals, such as Brad, who face the stigma associated with non-normative sexual orientations.

The sense of belonging is a potential protective factor that could prevent internalized homophobia from escalating into depression in gay men. Patrick is a part of a welcoming open-minded set of friends who do not judge him for his sexuality and accept him for who he is. But it is not the same in Brad’s case. He is surrounded by his fellow football teammates and is reluctant to come out to anyone. He doesn’t feel like he belongs with them and finds solace only when he is with Patrick. He uses humor and a nonchalant attitude as a means to mask away his pain. This coping mechanism is an expression of the societal pressure he faces and his effort to divert attention away from his own challenges. This is significant as to how a gay person thrives to find a sense of belonging which helps him from going into depression. Patrick confronts societal norms and conventions that may not correspond with his identity as a homosexual individual. The societal need to adhere to traditional norms heightens his suppressed anguish as he manages to live in a society where openly expressing his sexual orientation is challenging.

5. Conclusion

Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is an influential novel that, aside from engaging readers with its narrative of coming-of-age, also contributes eloquently to the ongoing discussion regarding mental health. Through Charlie's journey of introspection, Chbosky leads us through the maze-like passageways of teenage difficulties with anxiety, sadness and the lingering shadows of the past. It beautifully emphasizes how important it is to recognize one's mental health and how brave it is to reach out for support. Patrick's concealed suffering and Brad's reluctance in accepting his sexual orientation are also included, as they create a mosaic of human experiences and show how we frequently carry our own problems in silence.

Charlie, the protagonist of the novel, exhibits a plethora of psychological complexities that make him an intriguing subject for psychoanalytic investigation. The Freudian concepts of the id, ego, and superego serve as a theoretical framework for comprehending Charlie's internal conflicts and the subsequent external manifestations of these conflicts. His id, which symbolizes innate desires and instincts, becomes apparent through his unfiltered emotional reactions and impulsive behaviors, motivated by a deep yearning for social bonds and validation. Concurrently, his ego exhibits a persistent drive to reconcile these desires and the limitations of reality, all while negotiating the complexities of his personal relationships and his interactions with other people. Ultimately, Charlie experiences the influence of his superego, which represents the internalization of societal norms and moral values. This psychological construct exerts a significant amount of pressure on Charlie, compelling him to conform to external expectations. Consequently, Charlie often finds himself grappling with feelings of guilt and self-doubt as a result of this internal conflict.

As stated by Fonagy et al. (2012), psychoanalytical understanding “helps us to respond in humane ways when anxiety and stress threaten our ability to contemplate behavior in terms of underlying mental states” (p.19). By using the tenets of psychoanalysis, this study serves to enhance our comprehension of the complicated inner worlds of the characters in the novel, as well as shed light on the overarching themes pertaining to adolescence, the formation of identity and mental well-being depicted within the narrative. It highlights the continuing relevance of Freudian psychoanalysis within the realm of literary analysis, emphasizing its ability to provide insights into the intricate and multifaceted aspects of human experience. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Sigmund Freud's theory of repression provides valuable insights into the phenomenon of repressed memories and subconscious desires experienced by Charlie. These repressed memories and desires are believed to be expressed through various means, such as dreams and psychological distress, thereby shedding light on the complex workings of the human psyche. The dreams encountered by Charlie provide valuable insights into his subconscious mind, offering a glimpse into the intricate mechanisms of his psyche and revealing the underlying causes of his emotional turmoil.

The concept of sublimation within the psychoanalytic framework offers a valuable lens to comprehend the defense mechanisms employed by the characters in the novel. Through an examination of Charlie's use of journaling as a mechanism for self-expression and Patrick's

adoption of a flamboyant persona as a strategy for self-protection, the researcher is able to identify how these characters effectively redirect their unconscious desires and impulses into outlets that are deemed socially acceptable. Charlie's journey of self-discovery and personal progress is enhanced by channeling his inner issues into positive outlets, which showcases the transforming power of self-expression and resilience. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* serves as a reminder that beneath the facade of a "wallflower", there are powerful tales of resilience and vulnerability just waiting to be noticed. The narrative of Chbosky reaffirms the idea that, in the intricate fabric of adolescents, mental health is a thread that should not be disregarded but rather embraced with open minds and hearts.

The study's limitation is that its primary focus revolves around the psychoanalytic analysis of the character Charlie. However, it is worth noting that the experiences of female characters, namely Sam and Mary Elizabeth, have not been extensively explored. The novel's depiction of female experiences is enhanced by the inclusion of secondary female characters, such as Candace, Charlie's sister and Bill's girlfriend. The problems that Candace encounters in relation to her own demons serve as a parallel exploration of family relationships and personal growth, mirroring Charlie's journey. Likewise, the girlfriend of Bill assumes the role of a mentor to Charlie, providing him with direction and support as he confronts the various obstacles encountered during the period of puberty. These characters possess psychological complexities that could potentially offer valuable insights into the broader themes of the novel. Exploring the experiences, motives and psychological dynamics of characters such as Sam, Mary Elizabeth and other female characters by delving deeper into these aspects could provide valuable insights into gender representation, identity formation and interpersonal relationships, thereby opening up opportunities for further research.

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