

THE TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES AS THE HINDRANCE OF CHARLIE'S PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT IN STEPHEN CHBOSKY'S THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER, A PSYCHOSOCIAL ANALYSIS.

By:

Tria Nur Arista

arista.tria@yahoo.co.id

First Consultant : Drs. Sugi Iswalono, M.A

Second Consultant : Niken Anggraeni, SS,.M.A

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Abstract:

This research aims to identify how traumatic experiences become the hindrance for the main character of The Perks of Being a Wallflower to handle the fifth stage of psychosocial development, and to explain the impact of this failure to his personality in the sixth stage. To answer the objectives, this research employs the psychosocial theory by Erikson. The research used a qualitative research with content analysis method. The main source of the data was a novel entitled The Perks of Being a Wallflower. The research analysis was conducted through five steps: reading and re-reading, classifying and categorizing, interpreting and scrutinizing the meaning of the data, and checking the trustworthiness by triangulation. The results show two important points. Firstly, a psychosocial crisis occurs in the main character's life based on Erikson's psychosocial development theory i.e. Identity vs. Role Confusion. In this stage, the result shows that the main character experiences traumatic experiences, which make him suffer from three major problems of identity confusion in his adolescence period: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, and negative identity. Secondly, the failure brings impact on his personality in adulthood stage: intimacy crisis and isolation. It can be seen through his inability to make an intimate relationship with others, which makes him feel lonely and suffer from depression.

Keywords: traumatic experience, psychosocial development, Erikson, personality development, *The Perks of being a Wallflower*

BACKGROUND

Human personality development does not innately achieved by individuals when they were born. It requires the process of development through the life-span. The

consistency of human personality will grow to be an identity. Every human being must achieve a sense of identity, no matter a good or a bad one. Based on James (in Erikson,

1968: 19), self-identity is when individuals intensely felt their life and known who they really are. The process of gaining self-identity occurs through the lifespan, so that the experience in the childhood will significantly contribute to the personality in adulthood stage. The environment around individuals gives significance influence toward them in achieving the self-identity. A good environment will guide individuals to achieve the proper development. On the other hand, a conflicting situation of environment will lead individuals to gain the unhealthy personality development. In fact, traumatic experience can be considered as a conflicting situation since it strongly influences human psychological development.

Traumatic experience can disturb the whole person's personality and characterization, and it will happen for a long-term. Therefore, the social condition around individuals and the experience in the past they once witness is very influential for their personality development. The human personality development that is

influenced by the environment around them is in accordance with Erikson's psychosocial theory. Erikson believes that human personality development is highly influenced by the social and historical factor. Individuals who cannot deal with the traumatic event they once had in the past will have difficulty in dealing with the problem in the future.

From the description above, it is desirable to discuss about the effects of the traumatic experience toward individuals' psychosocial development. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is a novel that brings the issue about the traumatic experience and the effects toward the psychosocial development of the character. Charlie is the main character in the novel, and it is indicated that he fails to pass the crisis in the fifth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development. The traumatic experience in his childhood becomes the hindrance for him to solve the problem in the stage of Identity vs. Role confusion. As the consequence, he also fails to deal with the crisis in the following stage.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative research with content analysis method. The main source of this research was a novel entitled *The Perks of being a Wallflower*. The data were in the form of expressions used to convey the psychosocial development of the main character in the fifth and sixth stage proposed in Erikson's theory. The research analysis was conducted through five steps: reading and re-reading, classifying and categorizing, interpreting and scrutinizing the meaning of the data, checking the measure of worthiness by triangulation, and making conclusions based on the results of the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Charlie's Failure in the Fifth Stage

There are some problems that occur during this stage; which are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, and negative identity.

1. Identity Diffusion

Erikson (1968: 171) mentions that identity diffusion is always

accompanied by acute upset, the inability to concentrate, the excessive self-awareness, and the inability to make a decision. All of the disruptions usually occur to adolescents who live in an insufficient family or an environment that does not give them positive influences for their psychological development. As the consequence, individuals will lose their social play in the environment around them. It is as what happens to Charlie, who suffers from identity diffusion. Charlie's identity diffusion is followed by numerous inappropriate behaviors that become the hindrance for him to achieve the sense of identity. His failure leads him to have the inability to concentrate and the difficulty in making a decision. In addition, he is also haunted by acute upset and excessive self-awareness.

2. Identity Foreclosure

Identity foreclosure is when individuals define themselves too early before trying many other choices or opinions. Usually, they base their self-images on recognition by others who have authority around

them (Erikson, 1968: 158). Charlie's identity foreclosure is indicated by the excessive involvement of parents and friends, interruption of self-potential, and the premature establishment of sense of self. Charlie's parents have a big deal for him in making every choices of his life. the excessive involvement of his parents interrupt him to explore more his potential. As consequence, he prematurely accepts himself as a boy who is freak and has nothing to be proud.

3. Negative Identity

According to Erikson (1968: 172), negative identity is a choice of a person as a denial toward the rules of family or certain society, which is expressed in a scornful and snobbish behavior. It is also known as the loss of a sense of identity of individuals since they perform the opposite things of the roles in society or even their own desire.

In this research, Charlie is suspected as a boy who performs the choice of negative identity, which is indicated by an undesirable choice of an action to gain an acceptable identity, and a denial action toward

the rule in a family. Charlie shows actions that are totally different from the expectation of his family toward him. In addition, he also performs different behaviors that have been adjusted to his new environment as he becomes a freshman, which leads him to the choice of negative identity. It can be seen through his behavior that he begins to drink brandy, consume drugs, and smoking cigarettes.

B. Charlie's failure affects his personality in the sixth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development.

Charlie is suffering from identity confusion indicated from the identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, and negative identity. He has not established his sense of identity yet, which affects his personality at this stage. As the consequence, he feels difficult in dealing with the more complicated conflicts arising in this phase.

1. Intimacy

The intimate individual is characterized by having close friendships characterized by depth

and openness of communication, as well as an exclusive, committed partner relationship. Individuals who do not yet achieve the sense of identity will hardly build an intimate relationship with the opposite sex. It is as what Feist (2008: 259) says that “People who are unsure of their identity may either be shy away from psychosocial intimacy or desperately seek intimacy through meaningless sexual encounters”. Therefore, there are two possibilities for individuals who fail in this stage, whether they exile from the society or even push themselves to engage with a worthless relationship. Individuals who cannot cope with their trauma in the past will be unable to take their responsibility as young adults in this stage. In this case, Charlie’s efforts to achieve the basic strength in this stage are seen from his participation in groups and his encouragement in a worthless relationship. Since he fails to gain the sense of identity, he has difficulty to build an intimate relationship with others. He even involves himself in a relationship that he does not put his heart into.

2. Isolation

According to Jess Freist (2008: 259), isolation is the negative disposition of intimacy stage. Individuals who are indicated to suffer from isolation are those who are unable to accept the adult responsibilities, such as having an intimate relationship and having a good carrier. As a result, they will suffer emotional isolation, loneliness and depression (Cherry, 2013: par. 11). Based on the previous study findings, Charlie fails to handle the three problems occurring in his psychosocial moratorium, those are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, and negative identity. Charlie’s failure in the previous stage certainly influences his performance at this stage, which makes him feel difficult in building an intimate relationship and assimilate with the society. As the consequence, Charlie often feels lonely and draws himself out from the crowd. The problems that indicate Charlie’s failure at this stage are the feeling of loneliness, alienation, and depression.

CONCLUSION

The results show that Charlie fails to handle the crisis in the fifth stage of Erikson's theory known as Identity vs. Role Confusion. He has difficulties to deal with problems related to the self-identity and personality that influence his way in giving responds to the social phenomenon around. As a result, he suffers from identity crisis that covers three conflicting problems; those are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, and negative identity.

Charlie's failure to get a balanced outcome in the fifth stage gives impact toward his personality in the following stage. Charlie suffers from intimacy crisis since he cannot achieve the task of this stage to build an intimate relationship with others. Charlie has tried to socialize with more people, but he fails to build an intimate relationship with others whether as a friend or a love partner. As the consequence, he is lack of self-affection from his surroundings and trapped in a worthless relationship with his girl. The second impact is isolation, which can be seen from the feeling of loneliness, alienation, and

depression. Charlie's inability to make an intimate relationship with others makes him feel lonely; and it even drives him to the depression.

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