

# The Detrimental Experiences And Deterioration Of Mental Health Of Patrick In The Perks Of Being A Wallflower By Stephen Chbosky

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## Abstract

This study investigates the detrimental and the traumatic experiences of the character Patrick in Stephen Chbosky's novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The main data source is the novel and supporting data sources include previous research, websites, books, and other sources. The novel touches upon sensitive topics such as suicide, depression, and rape, although throughout the novel the topic of homosexuality and the stereotypes associated with it and the as its' effects on mental health has been depicted as well. Queer representation and the negative experiences that are associated with it are dealt with in the novel. Thus the writer analysed the mental issues dealt with by the people of this community through Patrick.

**Keywords:** *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, detrimental experiences, mental health, Queer representation

## INTRODUCTION

This study examines the theme of traumatic experience in Stephen Chbosky's 1999 novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. It is a story about a young teenage Charlie and his group of friends Sam and Patrick. The novel starts with Charlie writing to his pen pal as he prepares for the first day of his freshman year. An extremely shy and introverted individual, it is difficult for Charlie to make friends but he soon becomes friends with a senior named Patrick. Patrick, an outcast, flamboyant, funny and hilarious, he is someone who is openly gay and feminine. Although he is comfortable in his skin and openly accepting of himself and his sexuality is not a problem for his friends but he is not fully free from the bullying he faces at school. Charlie is not the only character experiencing traumatic experiences in the novel, Patrick also deals with his own negative relational images. These traumatic and detrimental experiences associated with the queer community are handled in a way that makes the audience understand the mental health conditions of the community. These experiences hinder the daily activity of an individual and they have to look for different coping mechanisms. The emergence of public awareness of queer community's lives and issues, has been there just from the past two decades. The shift in the attitude of people towards the queer community brought build the knowledge regarding the mental of this community.

The marginalisation of this community can be traced from the beginning of the era, which lead a drastic impact on the mental health of the members of this community. The rate of suicides and other mental illness such as depression and anxiety were common in them.

According to Gibson When the national healthcare objectives were rearranged in 1979, suicide among young people was recognised as a public health issue of national relevance. According to the Surgeon General's report, healthy adults, the suicide rate among people aged 15 to 24 should drop from 12.4 per 100,000 in 1978 to 11 per 100,000 by the year 1990.

He further continued The same risk factors for suicide behaviour that affect other youth apply to gay youth. These include identity struggles, failing in school, social isolation, breakups with lovers, and family issues. When the young person has a gay or lesbian orientation, these elements, however, become more significant. 53 percent of gay men and 33 percent of lesbians surveyed by Jay and Young thought their homosexuality played a role in their suicide attempts. (Gibson 1989)

For the last few decades mental health is being a concern and it's representation of people suffering from mental illness in popular culture has greatly increased, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is one of those novels that portrays the mental health of teenagers and the negative side and impact of that on the mental health of queer community. Patrick and his experiences throughout the storyline, show real-life situations and struggles that teenagers goes through. His relationship with Brad, a homosexual quarterback who is not ready to come out has an impact on Patrick's mental health. Furthermore Brad and his identity crisis and his relationship with his family is real life to people who belong to this community and are not ready to come out and this leaves a negative impact on their mental health.

"Self acceptance may be especially critical for young gay males who tend to have homosexual experiences and are aware of their orientation at a somewhat earlier age than lesbians (1,15). Conflicts with others may be more salient for young gay males "identified"as homosexuals." (Gibson 1989)

## Method

Qualitative method of analysis is used by the writer in the research. The qualitative technique is a way to look into and understand the significance that an organisation gives to a social or human issue. The core issue dealt with in this research is the analysis of the character Patrick and his experiences and relationships throughout the novel. The main data source of this study is the novel by Stephen Chbosky *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, a coming-of-age epistolary novel, which was first published on February 1, 1999, by Pocket Books. It consists of 256 (first edition paperback), 224 (regular edition paperback). Throughout the research the writer collected the data by through reading of the novel and summarising it after reading and taking notes and then classifying the data. The secondary data are books, journals and related websites to this research. There are some steps for collecting the data, such as: reading the whole *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* novel for understanding the story; reading thoroughly the parts related to Patrick and his relations, with his friends, family, his reputation at school and his coping mechanism. Thus the techniques used in the research are data display, data reduction and the conclusion of this study.

## Discussion

I am queer. I have a lot of really wonderful friends who are of very different sexes and genders. I am very much in love with no one in particular. I've been trying to figure out relationships . . . I don't know if it is responsible for kids my age to be aggressively pursuing monogamous binds, because I don't think we're ready for them. The romanticism within our culture dictates that that's what you are supposed to be looking for. Then [when] we find what we think is love— even if it is love— we do not yet have the tools. I do feel that it is possible at this age to be unintentionally hurtful, just by being irresponsible . . . I am just trying to make sure my lack of responsibility no longer hurts people. . . . Getting socially outcast can be the best and most informative thing that could ever happen to you because you have to learn who you are separate from the pack.

— Ezra Miller

The traditional concept of gender identity in recent years has witnessed some major changes and is supplanted by ideas of gender fluidity and inclusion of different genders which resulted in the increase in queer studies that aim to broaden our understanding of them. However in terms of queer community and their experiences, little amount of literature exists. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky being one of the novels that addresses queer identity. This literature was used set out to an empowering and powerful word for the people of this community. The hate speech and the negativity that was associated with them was tackled with the literature that was used to put them in more of a humane spectrum. This hate speech and inhumane treatment had an unimaginable impact on the mental health of the people belonging to the queer community. Despite of the social change in the acceptance of the community over the last few years, the mental health received a major hit.

We start by recognising a contradiction or tension that permeates the public conversation about LGBT adolescents and mental health. In terms of public acceptance of LGBT persons and concerns, there have been significant social developments. On the other hand, there has been unprecedented worry for the mental health of LGBT kids. Why are LGBT youth's mental health problems vital if things are so much "better"? (8)

In the book *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, one of the characters, Patrick, reflects the painful experiences and mental health problems of a young adolescent who is a member of the LGBT community. His life experiences, interpersonal interactions, mental health, and coping mechanisms are all presented in an interesting way. Most people go through different experiences in their lives, some might be good, some might be bad. All the experiences are memorised, where couple of them might be easy to forget, but few may leave a daunting memory. The memories that are hard to forget and are not good makes trauma of an individual. According to Heidarzadeh in his journal article *The Significant Role of Trauma in Literature and Psychoanalysis*, trauma, sometimes known as traumatise, is the term used to describe a stressful encounter that involves just one event or experience, as well as the feelings and emotions that go along with it. Trauma from psychoanalysis also has negative long-term implications. In actuality, awful memories and earlier tragedies have an impact on the characters' minds. Confusion and uncertainty are the root causes of trauma, and common psychological trauma triggers include sexual assault, workplace discrimination, police brutality, bullying, domestic abuse, and particularly childhood experiences. These incidents can occasionally have a negative effect on a person for the rest of their lives.(5)

The novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, represents queer community, and the two characters Patrick and Brad, their relationship and the mental issues of theirs are somewhat actual representation of what people go through being homosexuals, the isolation, the bullying, the fear of taking about their preferences openly and the stereotypical marginalisation.

Patrick is a joyful, vivacious, and free-spirited individual. He is the one with the charisma to die for and who is a devoted buddy. Patrick first introduces himself to Charlie, the main character, at a football game. Patrick is the lone senior who is at ease with himself, is openly gay, and identifies as female. Patrick is described as being feminine, outwardly gay, and popular among his contemporaries. He can be flamboyant, but he has a great sense of self-awareness. In the local version of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, he was at ease playing the transsexual character of Frank 'N Furter. (2)

Patrick might be open about his orientation but his relationship with Brad, a high school jock, makes him struggle the most and takes a toll on his mental health. Not only the relationship he has with Brad but the his life choices and his way of expression makes him prone to bullying, as his choices and preferences made him stand out from the rest of the crowd. Being different is never easy, standing out from the crowd, having different opinions and thoughts, even different references and a different gender identity. All these things impact the mental health of an individual. When we consider change and acceptance, it is never easy. With change comes hardships and other traumatic experiences which slow and surely hinder the mental health of an individual. The topic of homosexuality was under a complicated debate during the 1960s and early 1970s, classifying homosexuality as a mental disorder. A queer-affirming stance, which favoured declassifying homosexuality, was in opposition to a conservative viewpoint, which supported maintaining the classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder.(1) Furthermore the classification between the mental disorders and Homosexuality was clear in a debate where Marmor (1) stated whether some or many gays can be proven to be neurotically disturbed is not the fundamental question... It would be surprised if many gays did not have poor self-image and some level of discontent with their stigmatised status in a society like ours where they are consistently regarded with contempt or derision, let alone outright hostility. However, attributing such neuroticism, when it occurs, to fundamental elements of homosexuality itself is obviously unjustified and wrong. Self image and the confidence of an individual is shattered and they starts to develop mental health issue. Recent research on LGBTQ populations' mental health suggests that members of the LGBTQ community experience a greater number of mental health issues than their straight counterparts, including substance use disorders, affective disorders, and suicidal ideation.(4).

Researchers claim that members of stigmatised minority groups can develop mental health problems as a result of the stressful social environment created by stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, which is why there is a higher prevalence of disorders among LGB people.(8)

Patrick was comfortable in his own skin but he was not free from the derogatory comments of the society. He wanted to be with a Brad, a high school jock, one of the best players on the football team. Brad was homosexual but he was not ready to come out. He was a privileged male and had a sense of masculinity that refrained him

from coming out. He was afraid of his father and him finding out about his sexuality that when Charlie saw Brad and Patrick together, he started to freak out. Brad had his own struggles and bad experiences that hindered his journey throughout the novel. He belonged to a religious family, the stress and fear of him getting disowned had an impact on his mental health and that is why he choose to be with the person he loved the most, Patrick in a hidden manner which in turn gave him anxiety and needed excuses to be with him time. It not only impacted the mental condition of Brad but was tampering with the emotions of Patrick. Brad and Patrick both were going through stress in their lives. The term "stress" has recently been used to refer to events or situations outside of a person's control that push them past their breaking point and may result in physical or mental illness.(5).

Stressors are now understood to be the situations and events that bring about change and necessitate a person's adaptation to the new reality. According to research, the causes of stress include traumatic experiences, stressful life events, chronic stress, role tensions, daily problems, and even nonevents. (5).

Patrick was the one on whom the stress was taking a toll on a different level. He was openly gay and not used to hide what he wanted and desired but his love for Brad was so strong that he started to hide the thing he was most comfortable in. He started to excuse the behaviour of Brad and used to hang out with him despite it being painful for him emotionally. He struggled with alcohol and drugs to cope up with the struggles of being queer and unwanted by his romantic partner. This made him prone to depression. Patrick and Brad when caught by his dad, things didn't go well with them after that. Brad was in-the-closet and his friends and family did not approve of homosexuals. Everything went downhill for Patrick when Brad was him ignoring Patrick at school and when something unimaginable happened at the cafeteria

"I was sitting alone in the cafeteria, eating Salisbury steak, when I saw Patrick walk up to Brad, who was sitting with his football buddies, and I saw Brad ignore him like he did at the locker. And I saw Patrick get really upset, but Brad still ignored him. Then, I saw Patrick say something, and he looked pretty angry as he turned to walk away. Brad sat still for a second, then he turned around. And then I heard it. It was just loud enough for a few tables to hear. The thing that Brad yelled at Patrick. "Faggot!" Brad's football buddies start laughing. A few tables got quiet as Patrick turned around. He was mad as hell. I'm not kidding. He stormed up to Brad's table and said, "What did you call me?" God, he was mad. I'd never seen Patrick like that before. Brad sat quiet for a second, but his buddies kept egging him on by pushing his shoulders. Brad looked up at Patrick and said softer and meaner than the last time, "I called you a faggot." Brad's buddies started laughing even harder. That is, until Patrick threw the first punch. It's kind of eerie when a whole room gets quiet at once, and then the real noise starts." (Chbosky,1999)

This was the final hit for Patrick, a fun loving guy who was okay with himself was after all not free from the bigotry. In an article Gay Best Friend: Patrick (Ezra Miller) in "The Perks of Being a Wallflower" (2012), Patrick has been referenced to "gay best friend" and someone who "experienced joy and love, rather than being defined by the trauma heaped upon him by others." Yet Patrick was someone who "allowed himself to be minimised by Brad and to be his secret. Yet, he's never allowed Brad to be one of his aggressors."

Although he was minimised by Brad and ridiculed and called names but he was not weak. He fought back but couldn't keep up with the thing that happened to him later on and started to feel depressed and eventual feel into substance abuse. He started to go on drives with Charlie and talk. Patrick started to look different, he did not change and shower and used to unexpectedly pick Charlie up.

"He was wearing the same clothes he wore the night before. He hadn't showered or anything. I don't even think he went to bed. He was just wide awake on coffee and cigarettes and Mini Thins, which are these small pills you can buy at Quick Marts or Truck Stops. They keep you awake! They're not illegal either, but they make you thirsty." (Chbosky, 1999)

In What I Learned About Gay Love: The Perks of Being a Wallflower, Andrew Evans explains the universal void a typical teenage like Patrick goes through, he also explains that the need for a romantic connection and intimacy still exists, and since romance is so uncommon, LGBT teens turn to using hookup apps, using drugs and alcohol as a diversion, or engaging in other risky behaviours to at least satiate their desires. Simply put, it's the simplest thing to do. (6)

When Patrick couldn't be with Brad anymore, he started to take pills and drug alcohol. He started to drink and do random things. Patrick was so broken and wanted to escape that he even kissed Charlie and soon after that started to cry. "And he moved his face to mine. And he kissed me. A real kiss" "Then, he started crying. Then, he started talking about Brad."

Patrick was messed up because he was different, because he didn't had the same preferences as others. This cause him agony and pain and this is what teenagers of this community go through. Mental health of LGBTQ community has been a topic of concern from the past few decade and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* was able to highlight the concern and the aftermath of the agony via Patrick. Patrick was not a weak character but true to what happens someone in these situations. These experiences made him do all kind of things and the pain was unbearable. He was able to come out of it and wanted to pursue music but not everyone is capable enough. This novel was able to highlight the experiences and derogation of the mental health of Patrick after his breakup with Brad. His every day encounter with people who used to demean him for his sexual orientation. And finally his collapse where he fell into sustainability and alcohol.

Nathain in his article states that the harsh LGBT stereotypes that are frequently seen in movies are represented in these characters' relationships. A character who is reluctant to come out as gay is an example of the relationship's pervasive hegemonic masculinity. Patrick embodies the feminine gay stereotype, which is frequently used to depict gay males. The fact that this literature is intended for high school pupils between the ages of 13 and 19 makes its consumption challenging. Teenagers are still growing and maturing, so if a person is gay, he or she might fear that coming out will make their parents detest them and possibly even beat them. Or they must be under the influence in order to be with their significant other because they despise themselves for being who they are. The relevance of my study is that it has an impact on readers by making them fear coming out as gay in front of others and themselves. Additionally, it still serves as a prime example of homophobic bullying, particularly directed at teenagers and young adults. The unstable condition of our society's dominant hegemonic masculinity persists, which makes gay people and the community as a whole the "other" and makes them feel less valuable than heterosexual people.

## Conclusion

Based on the study, the novel was studied and analysed for the representation of the community and their mental health.

The representation of queer community and their experiences were quite evident in the novel. Patrick was a friendly, loving and fun person who had no insecurities about himself and his preference. He was okay with what he liked but the hostile environment and the people around him made him fall. Even his own lover couldn't be with him and started to make fun of him. His mental health has been traced and the agony of his was highlighted in this paper. The bigotry, derogatory remarks and non acceptance of the family members have been dealt with and highlighted in the paper.

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