

**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on the Main Character in “First Love” by
Gwendoline Riley**

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze a psychiatric disorder experienced by the main character and several other supporting characters in a novel entitled “First Love” (2017) by Gwendoline Riley. As a guide in this study, the author uses the psychoanalytic theory initiated by Sigmund Freud about human personality in his book ‘A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis’ (1916). This study uses qualitative research methods to analyze the elements in literary works, which are then described with supporting theories. The step taken by the writer to identify the psychological problems of the characters is to describe the symptoms that arise, such as thinking about flashbacks of traumatic experiences, excessive fear, and physical attacks, which are then observed in how the characters struggle through them. The results of this study indicate that past trauma that is not appropriately handled by the characters causes a mental illness called PTSD. This study also provides an overview of how the characters use their defenses when symptoms of psychiatric disorders appear. Through sentence analysis and dialogue between characters in the novel “First Love” (2017), which is used as the object of this study, they provide an overview of what the mental illness PTSD is like and the defenses used to fight against this mental illness.

Keywords: *Post-traumatic stress disorder, Sigmund Freud, Novel analysis, Psychoanalysis of novel’s character, and Symptoms of PTSD.*

A. Introduction

This study delves into the intricate phenomenon of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as portrayed in the lives of the characters within the novel "First Love" (2017) by Gwendoline Riley. Through a careful analysis of the narrative, the author seeks to uncover the profound impact of trauma, particularly stemming from violence within the household, on both the child and wife characters. The pervasive nature of trauma

within the storyline serves as the impetus for this study, which aims to shed light on the nuanced manifestations of PTSD within the novel's main characters.

The choice of "First Love" as the object of study offers a rich tapestry for exploring the complexities of PTSD. Set against the backdrop of domestic discord and emotional turmoil, the novel provides a poignant portrayal of individuals grappling with the aftermath of traumatic experiences. By focusing on this specific work of literature, the study aims to unravel the intricate layers of trauma and its enduring effects on the psyche. Violence within the household emerges as a central theme within the novel, serving as a catalyst for the characters' experiences of trauma and subsequent development of PTSD. The author meticulously examines the various instances of domestic violence depicted within the narrative, highlighting the devastating repercussions on both the child and wife characters. Through their respective narratives, the study seeks to elucidate the profound impact of trauma on the psychological well-being of individuals, as evidenced by the manifestation of PTSD symptoms.

Trauma, characterized by its profound and lasting effects on individuals, emerges as the primary underlying cause of PTSD within the novel. The study delves into the psychological ramifications of trauma, exploring how it permeates the lives of the characters and shapes their perceptions of themselves and the world around them. Through a nuanced analysis of the characters' experiences, the study endeavors to illuminate the intricate interplay between trauma, memory, and identity within the context of PTSD.

The title of the study, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on the Main Characters in 'First Love' by Gwendoline Riley," succinctly encapsulates its central focus and thematic exploration. By centering the analysis on the main characters of the novel, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the manifestations of PTSD within the context of their lived experiences. Through a close reading of their narratives, the study aims to uncover the multifaceted nature of PTSD and its profound impact on individual lives. Moreover, the study adopts a multidisciplinary approach, drawing insights from psychology, literature, and trauma studies to enrich its analysis of PTSD within the novel. By integrating perspectives from diverse disciplines, the study aims to offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon, shedding light on its psychological, social, and cultural dimensions.

In conclusion, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder on the Main Characters in 'First Love' by Gwendoline Riley" offers a compelling exploration of the enduring effects of trauma and PTSD within the lives of the novel's characters. Through a careful analysis of their narratives, the study seeks to unravel the complex interplay between trauma, memory, and identity, highlighting the profound impact of traumatic experiences on individual psyches. By shedding light on this often-overlooked aspect of the human condition, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of trauma and its lasting repercussions on individual lives.

B. Method

This study used a qualitative approach by collecting and analyzing data collected from literary novels. All data collected is in the form of sentence fragments analyzed to describe the explanation of the theory chosen for the study. Meleong (2015), describes Qualitatively discussing starting from research planning to present the results to the public by using open interviews to examine and understand attitudes and views as well as the use of documents. Subhan (2019) quotes that qualitative approach focuses on the meaning of data interpreted from individuals and groups. From the experts' explanations above, the author concludes that qualitative data is presented in the form of words containing meaning or descriptive information with data collection techniques through interviews, observations and analyzing supporting documents for research.

The author used Gwendoline Riley's Novel entitled "First Love" (2017) for this study. This literary work has won many awards at prestigious events, such as being shortlisted for the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, shortlisted for the Gordon Burn Prize, shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize and other awards already mentioned. On the other hand, the author uses Sigmund Freud's theory book "A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis". This study also used three journals from other studies and another reference from books or the internet to support the study. Data were analyzed in the focus of sentences and dialogues refer to psychoanalysis with PTSD as an object study. Collecting research data is one of the processes of writing this study. For this study, the Author has several ways to collect data as writing material. Gwendoline Riley read the first thing the Author did in the novel "First Love" (2017) to the end with the aim of the Author being able to transparently examine the topics that could be discussed. After the first reading, the Author re-reads the novel while underlining the sentences and dialogues that represent the symptoms and the character's defense techniques in dealing with PTSD. Proceed to make a draft that contains a list of quotations that have been collected, which are then classified according to the topic of discussion. As a reinforcement of the analysis, the Author also collects statements from Freud's theory in his book "A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis", which relate to object data. There are several steps that the Author uses to process data from the novel "First Love" (2017) by Gwendoline Riley, which has been collected and classified. Before writing dozens of paragraphs, the Author first creates a writing framework consisting of the main points of the Author's arguments which are reinforced by Freud's theory in his book "A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis" (1916) as well as proof of arguments originating from data collections. In writing the analysis, the Author also received statements based on journal articles as strengthening references. Thus the writing of the analysis becomes more accurate.

C. Findings and Discussion

PTSD Described By The Main Character In The Novel “First Love”

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines PTSD as a traumatic event experienced by a person that often causes impaired self-integrity and helplessness. The disturbance caused by bad experiences in the past has a bad impact on every sufferer. The sufferer is forever haunted by fear and panic. In the novel by Gwendoline Riley with the title “First Love” (2017), the character Neve, the main character, is suspected of having PTSD. The picture of this mental illness is seen when she whispers to herself when she hears compliments from her friends that her life is fun.

...when I went back upstairs, and I felt baffled, frightened, by what my old life had been (Riley, 2017, pg. 25).

Feeling not confident enough and even tending to be afraid is one of the markers that someone has PTSD. In the case of Neve in the novel “First Love” (2017), the main character feels very scared when her life begins to be talked about by other people. The mental illness that this character feels is a depiction of guilt or shame over her horrific experience (Jie, 2011).

PTSD Symptoms Are Reflected In The Main Character

The narration that Riley wrote in her novel, “First Love” (2017), tells the story of Neve remembering her past when she was six. This character reveals that anger arises when remembering the moment when her father died.

Something in me balked, thinking of that, but it was no good, I felt that rank and creaky old outrage, getting to its feet again at the back of the room, ready to pour out whatever was still pooling in its cup. (Riley, 2017, pg. 31-32).

Neve's father is a temperamental character that causes trauma to the entire family. Neve's character evokes angry emotions on the day of her own father's funeral, not without reason. This response is shown because memories suddenly reappear.

The Denial Behavior Of The Main Character

The main character in the novel “First Love” (2017), Neve, also described that she often uses this defensive coping to show everyone that she is okay. However, this defensive coping made him more soluble in the trauma that occurred.

This ghastly other self kept breaking the surface of my real, frightened self, insisting scornfully that things would be fine, (Riley, 2017, pg. 53).

Portrayed The Character’s Struggle With PTSD

In the novel written by Gwendoline Riley with the title “First Love” (2017), several characters can describe the causes of trauma that can appear. Young Neve's character lives with three members of her family, they are her father, mother, and brother. Her father, who had a bad temper, often abused her, her mother, and her brothers. The violence she experienced was in the form of

physical and verbal violence, but she often witnessed her father sexually assaulting her brother.

'Oh, well, I'm not allowed an opinion, you see, not having been to art school,' she said. 'My opinion's worthless, apparently, so...but I think they're all crap, yes. Absolute crap, so...'

'Have you told him that?'

'Oh, he doesn't listen to what I say!' (Riley, 2017, pg. 17).

The key to happiness in a family is communication. Riley's first image in this novel is the part where Neve and her mother talk. Her mother recounts her life with Neve's father, Rodger, before giving birth to her. Rodger has painting skills but does not allow his wife to give any opinion about it. The character does not realize that this pattern shows the phase of violence by not giving freedom of opinion in the household.

Characters Defense Against With PTSD

In the novel "First Love" (2017) by Gwendoline Riley, the types of violence often described as the cause of PTSD for some characters are emotional and physical violence. Emotional violence is a form of verbal violence by giving harsh words, innuendo, threats, insults, and bullying. This violence creates a sense of fear, insecurity, and helplessness and experiences significant trauma.

'I have no plans to spend my life with a shrew. Just so you know that. A fishwife shrew with a face like a fucking arsehole that's had...green acid shoved up it.' (Riley, 2017, pg. 7).

Using a back-and-forth plot, Riley describes the story starting when Neve has just moved into her new apartment. This violent image is depicted through the mind of Neve, who has flashbacks of her domestic life with Edwin. In the flashback, there is a scene of a fight between the two which triggers Edwin to insult Neve with insulting sentences. An image that Neve is a rotten fish.

'You can always just get out if you find me so contemptible,' he went on, feet apart, fists clenched, glaring at me over on the settee. (Riley, 2017, pg. 7).

Defense Mechanism Conducted By The Characters

A woman who decides to stay in an unhealthy relationship is their best defense coping strategy. This maladaptive condition affects the decision-making process and distorts existing perceptions and reality. This has adverse effects such as anxiety, stress, and cognitive bias. Without realizing it, various coping defense mechanisms appear to aim to avoid or help overcome PTSD disorders. The reflection in the novel "First Love" (2017) depicts Neve's character, which is made into a woman who persists in an unhealthy relationship.

He was aggressive, not bright, none of which makes for a person you want to engage with if you can help it. Instead—I did it myself when I was older—you smiled, tried to meet him halfway, just as you might encourage a baby, and give all your warm attention to a baby, to get it to behave. He was like a baby. (Riley, 2017, pg. 33).

D. Conclusion

The results of a study conducted on the literary work written by Gwendoline Riley entitled "First Love" (2017) revealed that the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder are reflected in a character named Neve as well as several other supporting characters. PTSD is described as a psychiatric disorder characterized by changes in character behavior when faced with similar traumatic conditions or the perpetrators who caused the trauma themselves. The image is in the form of intense fear accompanied by extreme panic in the characters. In addition, the character's body responds to the panic by issuing symptoms of headaches, nausea, or chest pressure. Based on what the characters experience, it can be concluded that the characters use defensive techniques such as avoidance, arousal, and many others. For Neve to survive in the traumatic circumstances of her household, Neve had to close her eyes and perform avoidance defense techniques. Without Neve realizing it, this actually made her PTSD mental illness worse. This study describes one form of PTSD experienced by the main character in the novel "First Love" (2017) by Gwendoline Riley. The symptoms shown by the characters in this novel can be developed and further classified with PTSD. With this, the author hopes that analyzing this novel can be more varied in classifying the depiction of PTSD reflected in the characters of literary works. The method needed is to read the narrative object and supporting theory carefully, leading to the discovery of an even more interesting study. This study can also be used as a reference for research and further knowledge about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

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