

## REVEALING CHARLIE GORDON'S TRAUMA IN DANIEL KEYES'S *FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON*

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### Abstract

Trauma is a common psychological problem of human being. Meanwhile, intelligence is a human gift as a 'tool' to give 'intellectual responses' in life. Bloom mentioned that our very complex brains and powerful memories distinguish us as the most intelligent, and yet as we will see, it is this very intelligence that leaves us vulnerable to the effects of trauma (Bloom, 1999, pp.2-3). This thesis focuses on Charlie Gordon in Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*. The purpose of this thesis is to reveal Charlie Gordon's trauma in *Flowers for Algernon*.

This thesis includes the analysis about Charlie's trauma depicted in the novel, and the reasons why the trauma happens on Charlie in the novel. The writer applies library reseach method using theory of trauma and its symptoms by Judith Herman, concept of *mental retardation* by WHO, and concept of *gifted* by Sword and Silverman. In the data analysis, there are two steps which are applied: First, analyzing how the trauma depicted by using theory of trauma symptoms and theory of intelligence. The theory of trauma symptoms is applied in Charlie's two conditions: mentally retarded man and intelligent man. Then, for knowing the role of Charlie's intelligence in affecting his trauma, theory of intelligence which include *mental retardation* and *genius/gifted* are applied. And second, analyzing the reasons why the trauma happens on Charlie using theory of trauma.

The result of this thesis shows that Charlie Gordon as retarded man, although has the trauma, does not get much effects on him. Meanwhile, the intelligent Charlie feels the effects of the trauma worse. Although individual with retarded condition is more sensitive to stress which can lead to trauma, the effect it has is less serious than individual with enough intelligence. Furthermore, the role of Charlie's intelligence in influencing his trauma to either worsen the trauma or make it better and the reasons why the trauma happens to him are revealed.

Keywords: trauma, traumatic experience, symptoms of trauma, intelligence, mental retardation, genius/gifted.

### Abstrak

Trauma merupakan masalah psikologi yang sudah tidak asing. Sementara itu, inteligensi merupakan berkah yang dimiliki setiap individu sebagai alat untuk memberikan respon intelektual dalam hidup. Bloom menyatakan bahwa otak kita yang sangat kompleks dan ingatan yang kuat membuat kita menjadi yang terpintar, akan tetapi dapat juga kita lihat, inteligensi inilah yang membuat kita lemah terhadap efek trauma (Bloom, 1999, pp.2-3). Skripsi ini terfokus pada Charlie Gordon dalam novel Daniel Keyes *Flowers for Algernon*. Tujuan skripsi ini ialah mengungkap trauma Charlie Gordon dalam novel *Flowers for Algernon*.

Skripsi ini menyertakan analisa tentang trauma Charlie yang digambarkan dalam novel, dan penyebab-penyebab mengapa trauma terjadi pada Charlie dalam novel. Studi in mengaplikasikan *Library Research Method*, menggunakan teori trauma dan gejala trauma oleh Judith Herman, konsep *mental retardasi* oleh WHO, dan konsep *gifted* oleh Sword dan Silverman. Pada analisis data, terdapat dua langkah yang diaplikasikan: Pertama ialah menganalisis bagaimana trauma tersebut digambarkan menggunakan teori gejala trauma dan teori inteligensi. Pengaplikasian teori gejala trauma ini diaplikasikan pada dua kondisi Charlie: sebagai orang yang berkebelakangan mental dan sebagai orang yang pintar. Kemudian, untuk mengetahui peran inteligensi Charlie dalam mempengaruhi traumanya, teori inteligensi yang mencakup *mental retardasi* dan *genius/gifted* juga diaplikasikan. Langkah kedua ialah menganalisis penyebab mengapa trauma tersebut terjadi pada Charlie menggunakan teori trauma.

Hasil skripsi ini menunjukan bahwa ketika Charlie menjadi seorang berketerbelakangan mental, walaupun ia mempunyai trauma, ia tidak merasakan efek yang berat pada dirinya. Sementara itu, Charlie sebagai seorang yang pintar merasakan efek trauma lebih parah. Walaupun individu dengan keterbelakangan mental lebih sensitif terhadap stress yang dapat mengarah pada trauma, efek yang didapat tidak seserius individu dengan inteligensi yang cukup. Lebih jauh, peran inteligensi Charlie dalam mempengaruhi traumanya menjadi parah atau menjadi lebih baik dan penyebab mengapa trauma tersebut terjadi padanya juga terungkap.

Keywords: trauma, pengalaman traumatik, gejala-gejala trauma, inteligensi, mental retardasi, *genius/gifted*.

## INTRODUCTION

The word "trauma" is not something new neither in psychology nor in literature. The word trauma itself is very common in psychology. It is one of psychological problems which always gets special attention among psychologists. It gives bad impact, for example: a person cannot live normal in daily life. The trauma survivors fear that the traumatic event might repeat again, or fear that the danger might come at any moment, or maybe feel in deep regret, or endured the horrible flashbacks or even nightmare. It makes a traumatized person neither live in the past nor in the present because there will always be something as a reminder.

Psychological trauma is an affiliation of the powerless. When experiencing traumatic event, the victim becomes helpless because of the overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disaster. When the force is that of other human being, we speak of atrocities (Herman, 1997, p.33). There are many things in life that can cause trauma and have bad impact to the person who has it which can be from bad experiences, such as: abusive experience, seeing somebody's death, and many other things that cause a person to feel helpless or to feel in danger. Moreover, trauma does not only come from other human being but also that of nature, such as: earthquake, flood, etc.

A traumatized person experiences trauma symptoms. According to Judith Herman (Herman, 1997, p.35), there are three symptoms, those are: hyper arousal, intrusion, and constriction.. Most of traumatized person will experience these symptoms. In this case, those people who have enough intelligence. Otherwise, those who do not have it might not be able to experience these three symptoms fully.

Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind (Terr, 1990, p.8). This is where human intelligence might take the role in influencing the trauma. Trauma actually is all about what is in the mind. Because human has mind that provides intellectual response, and it makes the response to trauma even worse.

In terms of intelligence, there are people who have high intelligence (*gifted*) and low intelligence (*mentally retarded*). These two kinds of people have different ways in facing every day life. It also makes them having different responds to what had happened to them including the responds to trauma.

According to Margaret Charlton and friends, people with developmental disability [mentally retarded] are more likely to be exposed to trauma and make developmental delays more likely (Charlton, Kliethermes, and Taverne, 2004, p.5). Whereas, according to Sandra L. Bloom, our intelligence also is the one that leave us vulnerable to the effects of trauma (Bloom, 1999, p.2). Being human being and is gifted with feelings and intellectual response has it advantages and disadvantages. Our intelligence helps us to process and to understand information. Unfortunately, sometimes the way we process information is too much. On the other

hand, being not able to response intellectually also is not a good thing. It would give foreign feelings and stress without understanding why.

Trauma is not something new in literature. There are many literary works that also use this psychological problem as a theme. Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon* is one of them. This study would like to reveal Charlie Gordon's trauma in Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*. In the story, Charlie's responses to trauma when he was mentally retarded and when he was an intelligent man are very different. It would be interesting to analyse Charlie's trauma which is related and is influenced by his intelligence in *Flowers for Algernon*.

*Flowers for Algernon* is Daniel Keyes's first successful novel and his most famous novel. It gets two awards: Hugo Award in 1959 and Nebula Award in 1966. It also gets many praises from several publishings. Daniel Keyes himself is one of the great American authors who was majored in Psychology and American Literature (Keyes. H, 2010, p.1).

Mr. Keyes is "fascinated by the complexities of the human mind" (Ohio Reading Road Trip, 2004, p.1). That's why he used almost the same theme in all of his novels. Keyes mostly describes the complexity of human mind, what human mind can do, and many possible impacts it could cause. He can describe the complexity of human mind to a well and easy reading novel. Most of his novels tell a story about human tragedy or trauma that shows how the character becomes a "new or different" person than before (Keyes. H, 2010, p.1)..

## RESEARCH METHOD

The thesis is regarded as a descriptive-qualitative study and uses library research. The descriptive method of this study can be elaborated as the following:

### 1. Data

This study uses novel of Daniel Keyes, entitled *Flowers for Algernon* which published by Harvest Books in 2005 as the main data of this thesis. The data are in the form of quotations focusing on the main character (Charlie Gordon)'s dialogue, minds, and behavior that reflects on his trauma.

### 2. Data Collection

The method of collecting data, which is used in this thesis, is library method (Library Research) as an approach to analyse this study. The kind of Library Research here is intensive or closely reading to search quotations or phrases and to analyse literary element both intrinsic and extrinsic. The references are taken from library and contributing ideas from the internet that support the idea of this study.

### 3. Data Analysis

Some steps of how the data is analysed will be described as follows:

- a. Classification based on the statements of the problem. This classification is used to avoid the broad discussion. There are two classifications in this study. First, is Charlie's trauma depicted in *Flowers for Algernon*. Second, is why the trauma happens on Charlie in *Flowers for Algernon*.

- b. Describing Trauma. Quotations divided into the same as the two classifications that had been mentioned: first, how trauma depicted on Charlie Gordon and second, why the trauma happens on Charlie Gordon.
- c. Revealing Charlie Gordon's trauma in Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*. The first analysis, how Charlie's trauma is depicted will be analysed using theory of trauma symptoms and theory of intelligence. And the second analysis, why the trauma happens on Charlie will be analysed using theory of trauma.

## ANALYSIS

### Charlie Gordon's Trauma Depicted in *Flowers for Algernon*

#### Charlie's Trauma as Mentally Retarded Man

##### 1. Hyper-Arousal

Hyper-arousal is when the human system of self-preservation is going into permanent alert, as if danger might return at any moment. Criteria of hyper-arousal include: *startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocations, and sleeps poorly* (Herman, 1997, p.35). This first symptom appears dominantly than other symptoms in Charlie as mentally retarded man.

I dint know what he [Burt] was gonna do and I was *holding on tite to the chair...* but he kept telling me to rilax and that gets me skared because it always means its gonna hert. (Keyes, 2004, p.2).

The quotation above shows Charlie's nervous reaction sitting on a chair with Burt asked him to relax. He reacts irritably that *he was holding on tight to the chair*. Somehow, Charlie feels nervous and it becomes worse when Burt asked him to relax. He feels unease and slightly afraid.

Sadly, at the time, Charlie's lack of intelligence unable him to process his feeling further. He just accepts the unease feeling. However, eventhough he is not able to response intellectually in regards to his retarded condition, his body still response on its own unique way to the repetition of the traumatic event. Just as mentioned, the body of trauma survivor has an extreme startle response to unexpected stimuli, as well as an intense reaction to specific stilmuli associated with the traumatic event (Herman, 1997, p.36).

... He [Dr. Burt] patted my head and then 2 other men waring wite masks too came and *straped my arms and legs down so I coudnt move them and that maid me very skared and my stomach feeled tite like I was gone to make all over but I dint only wet a littel and I was gone to cry but they put a rubber thing on my face for me to breeth in and it smelld funny.* (Keyes, 2004, p.14).

The quotation above shows Charlie's other hyper-arousal as retarded man. During the preparation for the brain surgery, Charlie was scared. He was even more scared and had extreme unease feeling lying on the bed with doctors around him. His body reacts irritably even though all the people in the surgery room will not do anything that harm him.

The trauma survivor has intense reaction to spesific stimuli associated with the traumatic event (Herman, 1997, p.36). When being strapped down, Charlie's reaction was intense. His uncomfortable reaction worsen when his legs and arms were strapped on the bed. *then 2 other men waring wite masks too came and straped my arms and legs down so I coudnt move them and that maid me very skared.* His stomach feels tight that he wants to vomit and cry and accidentally pee in his pants, *I was gone to make all over but I dint only wet a littel and I was gone to cry.*

In regards to his retardation, Charlie only knew what he felt. He felt scared and he did not like it. He does not think further on the reason why he could feel that way. People with mild mental retardation tend to have short attention spans (Watson, 2014, p.1), that unable Charlie to think further and just focus on what is happening to him for the time being. Again, he just accepts the feeling and neither was able to do something about it nor had any idea about it.

In this hyper-arousal symptom, Charlie as a mentally retarded man does not have difficulty to sleep. Charlie is able to sleep well during the night.

##### 2. Intrusion

This second symptom of trauma is about a "repeating memory of the traumatic event". Herman includes two criteria of intrusion, those are: *flashbacks* during waking states and as *traumatic nightmares* during sleep (Herman, 1997, p.37).

This second symptom of trauma is not visible in Charlie Gordon's behavior as retarded man because it relates to Charlie's disability in remembering well.

His name is Burt. I fergot his last name because *I dont remembir good.* (Keyes, 2004, p.2).

*I don't remember* so good what Burt said but I remember he wantid me to say what was in the ink. (Keyes, 2004, p.2).

Dr. Strauss asked me how come you went to the Beekman school all by yourself Charlie. How did you find out about it. *I said I don't remembir.* (Keyes, 2004, p.4).

Mild mentally retarded people have memory difficulties, delays in speech development, and delay in language development (Watson, 2014, p.1). Thus unable Charlie to recall his memories well and even speak about it. It can be seen in some quotations as mentioned above.

As we know, Charlie has disability in remembering with short and long term memory because of his retarded condition. He has difficulty in remembering what had happened to him in the past and in current event. In result, Charlie does not experience this second symptom of trauma because his current intelligence does not support him in experiencing *flashbacks* and *nightmares*.

### 3. Constriction

In Charlie's retarded condition, he does not experience this symptom because of his lack of intelligence. Dissociation is commonly called as *multiple personality disorder* and observing from outside the body is commonly called as *depersonalization*, need enough intelligence to be able to experience them.

Dissociation is a psychological process whereby parts of a person's experience are kept out of conscious awareness (Wastell, 2005, p.152). The cause of dissociation are the feeling of helpless and numb. The relate person who feels that way does not able to bear the pain anymore and then dissociates. He creates new character/characters to bear the pain, to avoid some experiences, and accidentally share the intelligence.

In the other hand, depersonalization is marked by the separate mental feelings or body, as if a person becomes an observer outside her body (Nevid, Rathus, and Greene, 2005, p.210). the depersonalization also needs enough intelligence to be able to remember and picture situations. A person who depersonalized tend to create his own imagination in picturing himself and positioning himself as the one who watch the event instead of as the victim/ the player.

### Charlie's Trauma as an Intelligent Man

#### 1. Hyper-Arousal

In regards to Charlie's terrible body reaction on being strapped down in his retarded condition, this hyper-arousal symptom appears worse on him in his intelligent condition. Charlie's body not only reacts badly on being strapped down, but also reacts badly in seeing someone held knife and being close to women. Fortunately, due to his intelligence, he is able to analyze his issues and overcome his reaction.

"We're ready to take off, sir. May I help you fasten your seat belt?"

"Do I have to? I don't like to be strapped down."

"Until we're airborne."

"I'd rather not, unless it's necessary. I've got this fear of being strapped in. It'll probably make me sick."

"It's regulations, sir. Here, let me help you."

"No! I'll do it myself."

"No... that one goes through here."

"Wait, uh....Okay." (Keyes, 2004, p.134).

Quotation as mentioned above is Charlie's hyper-arousal with seat-belt. His effort to overcome his reaction can be seen. He manage to hold his over reaction to a minimum. In this condition, Charlie still does not like being strapped with seat-belt or belt. Threat [danger] initially arouses the sympathetic nervous system, causing the person in danger to feel an adrenalin rush and go into state of alert (Herman, 1997, p.34). In his intelligent condition, Charlie still feels the threat from the seatbelt. It is the same response when he still retarded but this time with more of his intellectual response. He tried to protect himself by asking the stewardess "*Do I have to? I don't like to be strapped down.*" He also tried to being reasonable, as mention in quotation below.

Ridiculous. There's nothing to be afraid of. Seat belt isn't too tight-doesn't hurt. Why should putting on the damned seat belt be so terrifying? That, and the vibrations of the plane taking off. Anxiety all out of proportion to the situation... (Keyes, 2004, p.134).

With his intelligence, Charlie starts to reason that he should not be afraid of it. He thinks that it is ridiculous to be afraid of something that does not has capability to harm him.

so it must be something... what?... flying up into and through dark clouds... fasten your seat belts... strapped down... straining forward... odor of sweaty leather... vibrations and a roaring sound in my ears. Through the window-in the clouds-I see Charlie. Age is difficult to tell, about five years old. Before Norma... (Keyes, 2004, p.134)

Charlie tries to think analytically and tries to remember the cause of his fear which put him on a flashback that makes him understand. *Gifted* have great analytical thinking and is very insightful (Silverman, 1993, pp.51-78). Thus helps Charlie to overcome his over-reaction to seatbelt by thinking analytically.

I forgot all about it [the seat-belt]. I'll just leave it on until we land. *It doesn't seem to bother me anymore.* (Keyes, 2004, p.144)

Henceforth, below is Charlie's hyper-arousal with someone holding knife.

She [Alice] toyed with her knife making circular depressions in a pat of butter and the movement hypnotized me. (Keyes, 2004, p.79).

Charlie accidentally sees Alice toys with her knife and it hypnotized him. Whenever he sees someone holding a knife, it makes him uncomfortable, although

the person does not have bad intention with that knife. At first, Charlie does not understand why he responds that way. Then he understands after memory of his childhood with his mother comes to him.

Then after understanding the cause of his fear through the flashback, being strapped down with seat-belt does not bother him anymore. *It doesn't seem to bother me any more. Gifted people are highly perceptive* (Sword, 2014, p.1). Thus helps Charlie in quick understanding of the situation.

Another Charlie's hyper arousal is when his relationship with Alice becomes physically close and Charlie could not bear it.

She [Alice] was standing close to me, waiting for me to kiss her. I put my arm around her, but it happened again. *If I didn't get away quickly, I would pass out.* (Keyes, 2004, pp.101-102).

Despite Charlie's feeling for Alice, he still does not able to get near her physically. The quotation above shows Charlie's body unpleasant reaction while Alice offers him comfort in his hard time. Although Charlie wants to welcome her comfort, somehow his body refuses it.

If someone is exposed to danger repeatedly, their bodies become unusually sensitive so that even minor threats can trigger off this sequence of physical, emotional, and cognitive responses (Bloom, 1999, p.3). This time, Charlie's body reacts with the need to pass out if he does not pull away from Alice immediately. Alice's comfort triggered it. *If I didn't get away quickly, I would pass out.*

At the moment Charlie's body response to Alice as a threat. Charlie cannot avoid his physical and emotional response even though he wants to. He can do nothing to control his reaction because just like Bloom says, it is a biological, built-in response, a protective device that only goes wrong if we are exposed to too much danger and too little protection in childhood or as adults (Bloom, 1999, p.3).

Yet, due to his intelligence, Charlie tries to reason rationally. He tries to reason that Alice will not harm him. *Gifted people have great intellectual characteristics such as: exceptional reasoning ability, analytical thinking, also has the need for precision/logic* (Silverman, 1993, pp.51-78). Thus, Charlie tries to analyse the situation, reason with himself, and thinks logically while enduring the unpleasant feeling and tries not to be panic.

Maybe the fear and nausea was no longer a sea to drown in. but only a pool of water reflecting the past alongside the now. ... If I could reach Alice in time-without thinking about it, before it overwhelmed me-maybe the panic wouldn't happen. If only I could make my mind a blank. I managed to choke

out: "You.. you do it! Hold me!" (Keyes, 2004, pp.112-113).

Regarding the quotation above, with his intelligence, Charlie thinks that if he tries not to feel the panic, then maybe everything will be fine. Or if just Alice is the one who held him, then maybe everything will be fine.

And before I knew what she was doing, she was kissing me, holding me closer than anyone had ever held me before. ...,it started: the buzzing, the chill, and the nausea. I turned away from her. (Keyes, 2004, pp.112-113).

However, in the end, Charlie's body responds to the stimuli of the traumatic event get the best of him. He neither able to avoid the unease feeling to come nor fight it. Charlie's attempt to endure the unpleasant feelings broke because his body response is more dominant. The longer Alice offers him the comfort, the feelings worsen. Charlie feels not only the panic, but also the buzzing, the chill, and the nausea. It explains again more about Bloom's theory that the trauma survivor cannot control that body response because it is a biological, built-in response, a protective device that only goes wrong if we are exposed to too much danger (Bloom, 1999, p.3).

Charlie has been exposed to this kind of danger (being abused physically, emotionally, and neglectly) repeatedly in his childhood. It was his mother who often gave him this kind of treatment. It makes Charlie has unease feeling of being close to women and seeing someone with knife in hand. Unlike his success to get rid of his trauma of being strapped down by thinking rationally, it is not easy to get rid of the rest of his trauma.

## 2. Intrusion

This second symptom appears in Charlie as an intelligent man. As an intelligent man, his intelligence provides him with good memory which according to (Sword, 2014, p.1), *Gifted people have a good long-term memory. Thus, his ability in recalling memories, especially the long-term memory one helps Charlie to understand more about his childhood.*

This second symptom of trauma is about "repeating memory of the traumatic event". Herman include two criteria of intrusion, those are: as *flashbacks* during waking states and as *traumatic nightmares* during sleep (Herman, 1997, p.37). As an intelligent man, Charlie starts to have *nightmares* and *flashbacks*.

His first nightmare was triggered by Miss Kinnian while she was reading his report in school.

The dream was about Miss Kinnian reading my progress reports. ...when Miss Kinnian reads the report she gets angry and tears the pages up because they've got dirty words in them. ...Prof. Nemur and Dr Strauss ...they

give me a beating for writing dirty things in the progress report. ...I pick up the torn pages but they turn into lace valentines with blood all over them. (Keyes, 2004, p.50).

That night Charlie dreamed of Miss Kinnian reading his report. Miss Kinnian, Prof. Nermur, and Dr. Stauss get angry on him and torn the report because it has dirty words in it. When Charlie looked into his torn report, it turned into a valentine card with blood.

After having the *nightmare*, Charlie woke up the next morning. He wondered why he had that kind of dream. It is then followed by the *flashback* which related to his dream.

... writing... big pencil on a red valentine... a little gold heart... a locket... a chain... all covered with blood... The chain is from a locket... spinning around ...flashing the sunlight into my eyes. And I like to watch it spin... watch the chain... all bunched up and twisting and spinning... and a little girl is watching me. Her name is Miss Kin - I mean Harriet. "Harriet... Harriet... we all love Harriet."  
And then there's nothing. It's blank again (Keyes, 2004, pp.50-51).

This flashback is about his childhood crush, Harriet, who he gave a valentine card to with dirty words in it. The dirty words was written by Charlie's friends who intentionally did it to have a prank on him. When his flashback started to bring Harriet face clearer, it beomes blank. However, after Charlie started to remember again, the flashback continue.

...  
She's a little girl with dimples and long curls and her name is Harriet. We all love Harriet. It's Valentines Day.  
...  
I remember...I remember what happened at P.S. 13 and why they had to change my school and send me to P.S. 222. It was because of Harriet. (Keyes, 2004, pp.50-51).

Apparently the flashback is about one of the pranks that Charlie's childhood friends did to him. He wanted to give the most beautiful girl in school, Harriet, a valentine card because all love Harriet, so he loved her too. But he couldn't write so he asked his friends to do it. His friends wrote dirty words in it and Charlie did not aware of it. Harriet cried and the teacher expelled Charlie out of school. At that time, in his retarded condition, Charlie was confused and did not know what he had done wrong. Now he understands all.

Judith Herman says, small or seemingly insignificant reminders can evoke memories, which often

return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event (Herman, 1997, p.37). *Nightmares* and *Flashbacks* are always have something that trigger those to appear. The nightmare and flashback above are triggered by Miss Kinnian while she was reading and helping him write his report the day before.

The next nightmare and flashback come again to Charlie after seeing Alice toyed with a knife in their dinner date the day before. Below is the nightmare.

I'm running down a long corridor, half blinded by the swirls of dust. ... I'm afraid because I'm hiding something in my pocket. I don't know what it is or where I got it, but I know they want to take it away from me and that frightens me. ...girl with her arms outstretched to me - ... She takes me into her arms, kisses and caresses me, and I want to hold her tightly but I'm afraid: The more she touches me, the more frightened I become because I know I must never touch a girl.

...  
But when I look up I see a bloody knife in her hands.  
I try to scream as I run, but no sound comes out of my throat, and my pockets are empty. (Keyes, 2004, p.83).

In his nightmare he was running from a girl with a bloody knife in hand who want to take something from him. In his dream, he hide 'that something' in his pocket. After he wakes up, it is then followed by the *flashback*. It relates to his unease feeling with a knife. In reality it was Charlie's mother who chased him with kitchen knife when he was a child because he was caught peeppep on his sister, Norma. As mentioned in the flashback below.

a woman bathing... a girl... Norma taking a bath... I am watching through the keyhole... she gets out of the tub... I see that her body is different from mine. Something is missing.

...  
Running down the hallway ..somebody chasing me... a big flashing kitchen knife and I'm scared and crying but no voice comes out ... "Mama, Charlie is peeking at me through the keyhole ..."  
Why is she different? What happened to her? Blood... bleeding... a dark cubbyhole... (Keyes, 2004, p.84).

From this flashback, Charlie understands the cause of his unease feeling of knife. It was because his mother ever chased him with kitchen knife for peeping on his sister while she was taking a bath.

There in the clothes hamper he finds Norma's underwear with dried blood. What had she done wrong? He was terrified. Whoever had

done it might come looking for him...  
(Keyes, 2004, p.85).

At that time Charlie does not understand what he had done wrong that his mother was so angry about. His mother was so angry that she brought a kitchen knife and run after him. He was just terrified that his sister was different when he saw her body. And he was even more terrified when he found his sister's underwear with dried blood. He thought whatever it was that take 'it' (penis) from her sister might come after him too. Apparently, his mother thought otherwise and believed that Charlie had forbidden desire toward his sister.

Another *flashback* comes to Charlie, it is triggered by his effort to confront his fear of women. The flashback is about her mother beat him with a belt for looking at his sister in the 'wrong way'.

... Charlie's mother, screaming at him, holding a leather belt in her hand, and his father trying to hold her back.  
"Enough, Rose! You'll kill him! Leave him alone!" Matt  
His mother straining forward to lash at him, ... he writhes and twists away...  
"Look at him!" Rose screams. "He can't learn to read and write, but he knows enough to look at a girl that way. I'll beat that filth out of his mind."  
"He can't help it if he gets an erection. It's normal. He didn't do anything." Matt (Keyes, 2004, p.112).

Since then, Charlie never dare watching woman in 'that way'. He never dare to touch women either. The *flashback* above. It explains more about Charlie's reaction to women and his unease and nervous reaction whenever he get close to Alice.

"He's got no business to think that way about girls. A friend of his sister's comes to the house and he starts thinking like that! I'll teach him so he never forgets. Do you hear? If you ever touch a girl, I'll put you away in a cage, like an animal, for the rest of your life. Do you hear me?... " Rose (Keyes, 2004, p.112).

Because of his mother, he does not able to get close to woman especially now with the one he loves because his mother will cage him or do something with his penis. The fear from his mother treat still exists. *I'll put you away in a cage, like an animal, for the rest of your life. Do you hear me?*

Charlie's other *flashback* also reveals the cause of his trauma of belt.

I've been afraid before. Afraid of being strapped for not giving in to Norma, ... And I

was afraid of the school teacher, Mrs Libby, who tied my hands so I wouldn't fidget with things on my desk. (Keyes, 2004, p.110).

Apparently it was not only his mother and doctors who like to strap him down, but also his school teacher. Moreover, the worse experience that Charlie has was when his mother brought him to doctors to make him 'normal'. Below is the *flashback* of Charlie's experience with the last doctor.

... he [the doctor] lifts him gently onto the leather-padded table and straps him down securely with heavy webbed straps. The table smells ...sweat, and leather.

"Maaaa!"

"She's outside. Don't worry, Charlie. This won't hurt a bit."

"Want Ma!" Charlie is confused at being restrained this way. He has no sense of what is being done to him, but there have been other doctors who were not so gentle after his parents left the room. (Keyes, 2004, p.138).

Little Charlie from the flashback does not like being in the that state. Being alone with stranger and cannot see his mother scared him. He always scared that the doctor will be cruel to him.

...

"Make me smart."

"That's right. At least you know what you're here for ..."

Guarino[the doctor] snaps on the switch that sets the huge machine humming, ... He cringes and shivers, straining against the straps that hold him fast to the table.

He starts to scream, but Guarino quickly pushes a wad of cloth into his mouth. ...  
(Keyes, 2004, pp.138-140).

In this flashback, the cause of Charlie's unease feeling whenever being strapped down with belt can be seen clearly. His mother used belt to hit him. He also experienced being tied with belt for several times by 'doctors' in his childhood.

He tries to scream again, but all that comes out is a muffled choking that makes him want to throw up. He feels the wetness and the stickiness around his legs, and the odor tells him that his mother will punish him with the spanking and the corner for making in his pants. He could not control it. Whenever he feels trapped and panic sets in, he loses control and dirties himself. ...  
(Keyes, 2004, p.140).

### 3. Constriction

As an intelligent man, Charlie experiences this third symptom. Unlike retarded Charlie who does not experience this symptom because of his lack of intelligence, *Genius* Charlie is able to experience this third symptom. According to (Sword, 2014, p.1), *Gifted* people have a vivid and rich imagination. It provides Charlie the ability to experience this symptom.

Charlie experiences one of the criteria of this symptom that is *observing outside the body*. Furthermore, this "*observing from outside the body*" is also can be called as *depersonalization*. Depersonalization is a repetition of experience or persistence of depersonalization, which marked by the separate mental feelings or body, as if a person become an observer outside her body (Nevid, Rathus, and Greene, 2005, p.210).

In addition, it is already mentioned before in intrusion symptom that Charlie often gets *flashbacks*. However, whenever it becomes too much for him, it is not *flashback* anymore, it changes perspective. He often sees the old Charlie: little Charlie or retarded Charlie who is the one who involve in the traumatic event instead of himself, the real Charlie. He observes the scene/memory as the outer person. Herman notes that these third symptom is modification of 'one of nature's small mercies, a protection against unbearable pain' (Herman, 1997, p.43).

*I see Charlie*, standing in the center of the kitchen, playing with his spinner, ... He holds the string up in one hand turns the rings so they wind and unwind in bright spinning flashes. He spends long hours watching his spinner. ... *I see him* standing there fascinated as the string untwists and sets the rings spinning... (Keyes, 2004, p.72).

From the quotation above, the depersonalization can be seen in the words *I see Charlie* and *I see him*. Charlie, as the one who recalls the memory, instead of feeling it himself, he makes himself as the outer person. As (Nevid, Rathus, and Greene, 2005, p.210) notes that depersonalization is marked by the separate mental feelings or body, as if a person become an observer outside her body.

Below is another Charlie's depersonalization. It is about Charlie's memory of his mother teaching him how to read and spell.

*I stood up and closed my eyes and saw Charlie, myself* -... , learning to read, saying the words over and over with my mother sitting beside him, beside me...

...  
"No! You're not trying. Do it again!"  
"Leave the boy alone. You've got him terrified." Matt  
"He's got to learn. He's too lazy to concentrate." Rose ...

"He's slower than the other children. Give him time." Matt

"He's normal. There's nothing wrong with him. Just lazy. I'll beat it into him until he learns." Rose ... (Keyes, 2004, p.289)

Two of Charlie's memories of his childhood above shows that instead of picturing himself as himself, he observe the memory as other person. This way, Charlie does not has to feel the pain from the memory, because he is the observer.

The next depersonalization is Charlie's memory of his parent's argued about him being sent away.

*Seeing Charlie huddled beneath the covers I wish I could give him comfort, explain to him that he has done nothing wrong, ...* There on the bed, Charlie did not understand what they were saying, but now it hurts. If I could reach out into the past of my memories, I would make her see how much she was hurting me. (Keyes, 2004, p.171).

He remembers a little Charlie, himself, was so afraid that he hide beneath the cover. This time, the depersonalization is clearer. Charlie saw little Charlie, himself. He wanted to comfort the little Charlie and if just he could tell his mother that she had hurt him so much at that time, he would do it. What Charlie feels about the little Charlie who he sees is a reflection of what he feels towards himself.

The depersonalization is not only happen in Charlie's *flashback*, but also happen in his present time. the depersonalization below happen when Charlie tried to fight his unease feeling of being close to Alice.

... I pulled her [Alice] toward me. Then it happened. It started as a hollow buzzing in my ears... an electric saw... far away. Then the cold: arms and legs prickly, and finger numbing. Suddenly, I had the feeling I was being watched. (Keyes, 2004, p.100).

The quotation above happened when Charlie and Alice were on their date in the park. Lying on the grass together with Alice triggers this depersonalization in him. It starts with the feeling of being watched.

*A sharp switch in perception. I saw, from some point* in the darkness behind a tree, the two of us lying in each other's arms.

....  
...it was on my mind that the boy had been crouching there in the darkness, and *for one second I had caught a glimpse of what he was seeing-the two of us lying in each other's arms.* (Keyes, 2004, p.101).

Then he sees himself in other place watching him and Alice, as if he is in two different place at the same time. Then his perspective changed suddenly. He becomes the observer who watch himself and Alice lying on the grass. This event that had happened to Charlie is just as (Herman, 1997, p.43) says about depersonalization that the person may feel as though the event is not happening to her, as though she is *observing from outside her body*.

Another depersonalization happened when Charlie intended to test his limit of his trauma being close to women. He tested it through Fay.

*... I saw the two of us, as if I were a third person standing in the doorway. I was watching a man and woman in each other's arms. But seeing myself that way, from a distance, left me unresponsive. There was no panic, it was true, but there was also no excitement-no desire.* (Keyes, 2004, p.192).

While he was trying hard in testing his limit, his perspective changed suddenly and he becomes an observer. It actually shows that he is not ready being close intimately to woman yet. It is ended with Charlie watching himself with Fay making love. *I saw the two of us, as if I were a third person standing in the doorway.* Being an observer, he neither feel the panic nor the desire. *There was no panic, it was true, but there was also no excitement-no desire.*

For one moment I had the cold feeling he was watching. Over the arm of the couch, I caught a glimpse of his face staring back at me through the dark beyond the window-where just a few minutes earlier I had been crouching. *A switch in perception, and I was out on the fire escape again, watching a man and a woman inside, making love on the couch.* (Keyes, 2004, p.209).

It still shows that Charlie is not yet able to get rid of his trauma of woman. As the observer, he sees himself from different point of view, *A switch in perception, and I was out on the fire escape again, watching a man and a woman inside, making love on the couch.*

*Then, with a violent effort of the will, I was back on the couch with her, aware of her body and my own urgency and potency, and I saw the face against the window, hungrily watching.* (Keyes, 2004, p.209).

However, due to his intelligence, learning from the first experience, Charlie does not give up to fight it. *Gifted* people are thrives on challenge (Sword, 2014, p.1). Charlie's trives on challenge can be seen from *then*,

*with a violent effort of the will, I was back on the couch with her,...* This time, he success.

The quotation above shows Charlie's willing to fight his trauma and success to make love with Fay in the end, as himself. However, Charlie knows that the other Charlie is still looking. He still has the depersonalization in him yet due to his *gifted*, he is able to response well then before.

### Reasons Why The Trauma Happens on Charlie Gordon in *Flowers for Algernon*

Charlie experienced many bad experiences in his childhood. In his retarded condition, his mother considered him as a 'sick child' and believed that one day her son would be 'healed'. Trauma can come from two different sources. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disaster. When the force is that of other human being, we speak of atrocities (Herman, 1997, p.33). In this case, the cause of Charlie's trauma is from atrocities. It is from other human being (Charlie's mother). Charlie's mother tend to abused him emotionally, physically, and neglectly because she was in denial and ashamed of her son's dissability.

*Mom use to tell me all about him [God] and the things he done to make the world. She said I shoud always love god and prey to him. I dont remembir how to prey to him but I think mom use to make me prey to him a lot when I was a kid that he shoud make me get better and not be sick. I dont rimember how I was sick. I think it was about me not being smart.* (Keyes, 2004, p.19)

It shows that Charlie's mother's shame in having him as a son. In result, she always ordered him to pray to God to heal him from his retarded condition. *I think mom use to make me prey to him a lot when I was a kid that he shoud make me get better and not be sick.*

His experience with his mother affects him until his adulthood. He always tells everybody that he wants to be smart and says that his mom always wanted him to be so.

*Prof Nemur said but why did you want to lern to reed and spell in the frist place. I tolld him because all my life I wantid to be smart and not dumb and my mom always tolld me to try and lern...* (Keyes, 2004, p.6)

Quotation above shows Charlie's answer when he was asked by Prof. Nermur why he always wanted to be smart. Charlie aswer it with *all my life I wantid to be smart and not dumb and my mom always tolld me to try and lern...*

But of course it is difficult to Charlie regarding his retarded condition. It is because he has an IQ of 68, and is belong to Mild Mental Retardation. The main difficulties in mild mentally retarded people are usually

seen in academic school work, many have particular problems in reading and writing (WHO Geneva, 1996, pp.2-4). Thus, no matter how hard Charlie study, his slow development will unable him to keep new information in his brain for long. But his mother was so persistent in making him smart that she always forced him to read and learn.

"You're fooling yourself, Rose [Charlie's mother]. It's not fair to us or to him. Pretending he's normal. Driving him as if he were an animal that could learn to do tricks. Why don't you leave him alone?" Matt [Charlie's father].

....

"*Because I want him to be like everyone else!*" Rose (Keyes, 2004, pp.73-74)

People with mild mental retardation is also lack the understanding of verbal and non verbal clues (Watson, 2014, p.1). It makes him difficult to understand new things even with great effort. In the quotation above, Charlie's father tried to remind his wife to not pretend that Charlie was normal. But, Rose still so persistent in making him smart and normal like everyone else. *Because I want him to be like everyone else.*

Moreover, the bad part that Rose did to Charlie was the abuse which lead him to have his trauma. Trauma is an affiliation of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force (Herman, 1997, p.33). His mother tended to abuse him whenever he could not do what she wanted. The little Charlie who was powerless of his mother's dominant tended to accept all. Rose abused Charlie (physically, emotionally, and neglectly) whenever he did not able to do what she said or wanted.

The next quotation below shows his mother physically abuse him by spanking him because he was afraid to go to the bathroom alone.

"You're a big boy now. You can go by yourself. Now march right into that bathroom and pull your pants down the way I taught you. I warn you if you make in your pants you'll get spanked. ..." Rose. he sobs and covers his face with his hands as he dirties himself.... *she will spank him. She comes toward him, screaming that he is a bad boy, ...* (Keyes, 2004, p.75) \*physically

Psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or series of blows assaults the person from outside (Terr, 1990, p.8). The sudden, unexpected, and overwhelming blows that his mother gave him lead to his powerless state that made him has the trauma.

The quotation below shows Charlie's mother hit him with belt when she thought Charlie had desire for his sister.

"Enough, Rose! You'll kill him! Leave him alone!" Matt.

His mother straining forward to lash at him [Charlie], just out of reach now so that the belt swishes past his shoulder as he writhes and twists away from it on the floor. (Keyes, 2004, p.112)

\*physically

As mentioned before, trauma is an affiliation of powerless (Herman, 1997, p.33). At the moment, Charlie was powerless because in regard to his retarded condition he neither wanted to fight back nor know how. He fears his mother who abused him heartlessly. She was supposed to provide him comfort.

The next quotations shows Charlie's mother abused him emotionally.

The look of disgust on his mother's face sets him trembling. For a short while he had forgotten how bad he is, how he makes his parents suffer. He doesn't know how, but it frightens him when she says he makes her suffer, and when she cries and screams at him, he turns his face to the wall and moans softly to himself (Keyes, 2004, p.142).

\*emotionally

The developing brain in people with developmental disability is sensitive to stress (Perry, 2001, p.5). Knowing that he made her mother suffer frightened him. It was even more frightening to know that her mother hate him. Although in regards to his retardation he did not know how he had done that. *He doesn't know how, but it frightens him.*

All of Charlie's childhood also had been spent with Rose and Matt fight with each other. It affects him greatly.

He has learned to sleep through quarrels. They are an everyday occurrence in his house... (Keyes, 2004, pp.184-185)

Frightened by their quarreling, Charlie whimpers. The sound of anger in their voices is painful to him. ...he pulls away and runs to the corner of the kitchen, behind the door and stands with his forehead pressed against the tile wall, trembling and moaning. (Keyes, 2004, p.143). \*emotionally

Somehow, knowing his parents had a fight is painful to Charlie. It stresses him out. Whenever he felt that way, which often he did not know why he felt that way. He gone to the wall and moaning to himself. It also can be seen that the quarrel of his parent affects him greatly.

Moreover, below is a quotation that shows Charlie being abused neglectly.

...They [Charlie's mother and father] pay no attention to him. *They have forgotten that he has to be cleaned and changed* (Keyes, 2004, p.143). \*neglectly

His parents always had a fight because of him. One time, they were busy fighting with each other and forget him. That time Charlie had pee in his pants and too afraid to move. And his parents forgot that he had to be cleaned and changed. They neglected him. *They have forgotten that he has to be cleaned and changed.*

There was another bad experience that had happened to Charlie. This quotation shows the experience of little retarded Charlie with one of the doctors.

"Want Ma!" Charlie is confused at being restrained this way. He has no sense of what is being done to him, but there have been other doctors who were not so gentle after his parents left the room. (Keyes, 2004, p.138).

It was when her mother was very keen in making him smart by bringing him to doctors. She brought him to doctors who fibbed that he had an opportunity to be smart and 'normal'. Little Charlie was afraid of the doctor because he often met a bad doctor who cruel to him after his parents left the room *there have been other doctors who were not so gentle after his parents left the room.*

However, after doing many unsuccessful efforts in making Charlie normal, Rose then realised that it was no use. She then asked Matt to sent Charlie away.

"He's got to be sent away. I don't want him in the house any more with her [Charlie's sister]..." Rose  
"...Think of what it will be like for her [Charlie's sister] to have a brother like that. I was wrong all these years, trying to believe he [Charlie] would grow up like other children. I admit it now. Better for him to be put away." Rose (Keyes, 2004, pp.169-170)

She asked Matt to sent Charlie away from home to Warren House State [a home for retarded people] in order for Charlie to not give bad influence to his 'normal' younger sister who was just born. *Think of what it will be like for her [Charlie's sister] to have a brother like that.*

Little did Rose know, Matt gave Charlie to his brother. Charlie lived with uncle Herman for a while until his uncle's death. Then Charlie lived with his uncle's bestfriend, Mr. Donner, and works in Donner's Bakery until his adulthood.

In regards to his retarded condition, he lives happy without his memories of his childhood. People with mild mental retardation have memory difficulty (Watson, 2014, p.1). Thus, unable Charlie to remember clearly on

what had happened to him before. He can't remember short and long-term memory well.

Then come to the time when he was being asked as an object to an experimental surgery by Prof. Nermur and Dr. Burt. Charlie was very happy and willing to do that because he always wants to be smart. And when the surgery success in increasing his intelligence, everything becomes different.

Other things is at nite its suppose to make me have dreams and remember things that happened a long time ago when I was a very little kid. Its scary. (Keyes, 2005, p.25).

Why does a memory like that from childhood remain with me so strongly, and why does it frighten me now?... (Keyes, 2004, p.85)

...memories that began as ripples now wash over me in high-breaking waves. (Keyes, 2004, p.145).

Charlie's psychological trauma appears worse because his intelligence provides him with good memory and intellectual responses. Just as explained in the first analysis that the trauma become worse in Charlie's intelligent condition. Charlie in his retarded condition does not aware he had the trauma, while intelligent Charlie aware of the trauma. Later, intelligent Charlie also realises that his trauma of being strapped down, seeing someone holding knife, being close to women are all from his mother's abusive habit in his childhood.

## CONCLUSION

There are two conclusions that can be drawn regarding to Analysis that has been conducted. First, the depictory of Charlie Gordon's trauma is depicted clearly through his trauma symptoms which influenced by his intelligence. Charlie's trauma as retarded man and as an intelligent man depicted differently in *Flowers for Algernon*. In his retarded condition, Charlie does not aware of his trauma, yet his body aware of it. That's why in his retarded condition, his trauma are depicted only in hyper-arousal symptom. His body always reponses to the repetition of the traumatic event which according to Sandra Bloom, it is a human being 'natural' response.

On the other hand, it is very different when he got his intelligence. In his intelligent condition, he awares of his trauma. He experiences the symptoms worse than the retarded Charlie that his trauma are depicted fully in hyper-arousal, intrusion, and constriction symptoms. It is supporting Bloom's theory that our very complex brains and powerful memories distinguish us as the most intelligent, and yet as we will see, it is this very intelligence that leaves us vulnerable to the effects of trauma.

Logically, retarded people have disability in thinking further. It is unable them to experience the trauma symptoms which relate in using intelligence

(thinking and remembering). Meanwhile, intelligent people think more and is able to analyse more which in result, can lead to worsen the trauma or otherwise make it better. That's why the trauma symptoms experienced by Intelligent Charlie is worse than Retarded Charlie.

From the story, it can be seen that the trauma affected retarded Charlie only in hyper arousal symptom. Then, the trauma becomes worse when he first got his intelligence. Yet, he can make it better in time by learning to use his intelligence in a better way. It also gets better when his intelligence reached in *gifted* level which gave him more exceptional intellectual ability in rational thinking and solving all his problems. Having the 'problem solving skill' help him in facing all of his fear. Finally, although his trauma cannot be heal completely, after reconciling with his mother and sister who are the main cause of his trauma, tries to think rationally and logically to all of his problems, being a good problem solver himself, using his intelligence to control his emotion and the way he thinks, Charlie is able to live life better than before.

Second, Charlie's trauma appeared from his helpless and powerless states which are caused by his mother's abusive behavior in his childhood. It is supporting Judith Herman's theory that trauma is an affiliation of the powerless, and Lenore Terr's theory that trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or series of blows assaults the person from the outside. What Charlie's mother had done to him affects him greatly that he always reacts to the repetition of it until his adulthood.

To summarize it all, trauma appear from a powerless state where neither fight nor resistance was possible. It happens to Chalie with his abusive mother that it affects him until his adulthood. Moreover, through this novel, it can be concluded that human intelligence takes important role in exposing to trauma just like in Naomi Breslau's research. Although people with retarded condition are more sensitive to stress which can lead to trauma, the effect it has is less serious than people with enough intelligence. It can be seen from the depictory of Charlie's trauma as retarded man and intelligent man. People with enough intelligence can make their trauma worse by over-thinking it but then, they also have chances to make it better by seeking ways to solve it. The reason Charlie get his trauma is from his mother abusive behavior in his childhood which his intelligence provide him the ability to aware of it and feels the effects worse. In the end, trauma actually is all about what is in the mind.

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