

EMOTIONAL ABUSE IN ROALD DAHL'S MATILDA

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Abstract: This research aims to reveal emotional abuse and its impact on Roald Dahl's Matilda. This study used qualitative research because the writer collected the data in the form of words, definitions, quotations, statements, or dialogue, which can provide support for this research. In other words, the writer analyzed the data according to the topic and then narratively presented the result. The data sources are divided into two categories: the primary data source is the novel, and the secondary data are journals, articles, e-books, and other sources that are related to the study. In analyzing the data, the writer used a psychological approach to present the emotional abuse and its impact. The results show that the emotional abuse that Matilda experienced was caused by her parents, who criticized her, did not support her, and even manipulated her. So Matilda chooses to read books because reading provides Matilda with a sense of empowerment and freedom. She recognizes that education and learning provide her with a path to empowerment. She finds solace and adventure in books to escape from her difficult situation.

Keywords: *Dahl, Matilda, Emotional Abuse, Impact, Psychological Approach*

INTRODUCTION

Emotional abuse involves exerting emotional control over someone through actions such as criticism, degradation, shaming, blaming, or other forms of influence. While prevalent in dating and marriage relationships, mental or emotional abuse can manifest in any type of relationship, extending to friendships, family connections, and professional interactions (Gordon, 2022); (Wuntu & Moge, 2022).

Emotional abuse constitutes a type of interpersonal violence encompassing non-physical harm inflicted through both nonverbal and verbal means. Deliberate and manipulative emotional abuse frequently coincides with other forms of abuse, though it can also occur independently. Its impact is most pronounced on individuals with limited power and resources (Stark, 2015).

Generally, emotional abuse has the potential to impact one's self-esteem and lead to a questioning of one's perceptions and reality. Individuals subjected to emotional abuse may find themselves too wounded to sustain the relationship, yet they also harbor a fear of ending it. This cycle tends to persist until its eventual conclusion (Wuntu, 2020); (Wowor et al., 2021); (Suoth et al., 2023).

The indication of child abuse is assuming the other individual puts unreasonable demands on you. Instances of this include: setting nonsensical expectations, anticipating that you should set everything to the side and address their issues, requesting you hang out, being disappointed, regardless of how diligently you attempt or the amount you give, reprimanding you for not finishing responsibilities as indicated by all accounts, anticipating that you should impart their insights (i.e., you are not allowed to have an alternate assessment), requesting that you name accurate dates and times while examining things that agitated you (and when you can't do this, they might excuse the occasion as though it won't ever work out) (Gordon, 2022).

The novel *Matilda* portrays emotional abuse affecting both children and adults. Matilda's parents consistently neglect her, with her father going as far as accusing her of lying and cheating, and yelling at her. It's noteworthy that throughout the book, instances of abuse predominantly originate from the adult characters.

Matilda questions our concept of family as a commodity that is good, loving, and safe. The families we hear about Matilda for the majority of the book are simply horrible, with Matilda's parents emotionally abusing her. Matilda's family members do not praise her intelligence or encourage her to further her studies. Matilda wouldn't have been so motivated to pursue education on her own terms if she hadn't had comparable bad parents.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research employs descriptive qualitative methods. To be analyzed in this study is emotional abuse. Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* is a topic of study.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), in Aspers & Corte (2009), qualitative research has a multimethod focus and takes an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers explore events in their

natural surroundings to comprehend and interpret them based on the meanings ascribed by individuals. The deliberate use and collection of numerous empirical resources, such as case studies, personal experiences, introspective data, interviews, observations, historical records, interactive elements, and visual texts, constitute qualitative research. These items describe both ordinary and stressful occasions, as well as meanings in people's lives (Aspers & Corte, 2019); (Alydrus et al., 2021).

Based on the explanation above, the research for the study was descriptive. The analysis data takes the form of words, definitions, quotations, statements, or dialogue, providing support for this research. Put differently, the author will scrutinize the data in alignment with the topic and subsequently present the results in a narrative form.

Data Collection

There are two types of data sources: the main source of data and the secondary sources of data. The main source of data is Roald Dahl's novel, *Matilda*, while the secondary sources data come from other materials pertinent to the analysis. The techniques of data gathering are based on sources from journals, articles, e-books, and any other sources that are related to the study.

Data Analysis

In data analysis, the writer employs a psychological approach to elucidate emotional abuse and its repercussions. This psychological approach aligns with the literary criticism approach, which emphasizes the psychological aspects present in literary works (Atar Semi, 2013); (Liando et al., 2021); (Takamuntu et al., 2022).

The attention given to these psychological facets in literature criticism and research is a result of an increased awareness among both authors and critics. In the contemporary era, societal development is gauged not only by material progress but also by spiritual and psychological dimensions. Many authors utilize this theory in literature by extracting relevant and authentic components for their exploration of individual characteristics and personality.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory (1923) provides a comprehensive framework for comprehending human behavior and the mind. A prominent feature of psychoanalytic theory is its focus on exploring unconscious thoughts and feelings to fathom and address mental health conditions. Freud's psychoanalytic theory of the

personality, rooted in the unconscious mind (1925), posits that a significant portion of our thoughts, emotions, and memories resides in the unconscious mind, influencing our conduct and experiences subconsciously.

Applying a psychological approach, the writer delves into the emotional abuse and its impact on Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. Regarding emotional abuse and its repercussions, the analysis encompasses symptoms such as criticism and gaslighting. Frequent or excessive criticism can induce feelings of inferiority and inner conflict, reflecting dysfunctional relationship dynamics (Klein, 1946). While Freud did not explicitly address gaslighting, psychoanalytic theory can shed light on how the manipulation and distortion of information can shape an individual's self-perception and reality (Stern, 2015); (Lampus et al., 2022).

Concerning the impact, it encompasses feelings of isolation, loneliness, escapism, positive feedback, and transformation. According to Anna Freud (1967), psychological conditions, including feelings of isolation and loneliness, may manifest as a consequence of emotional abuse, indicating dysfunction in an individual's psychological defense mechanisms. Escapism is understood as an individual's effort to evade or distance themselves from distressing realities, including experiences of emotional violence (Winnicott, 1971). Positive feedback can occur when individuals receive reinforcement or support for actions or behaviors that aid in coping with stress or emotional abuse (Klein, 1952). Transformation in psychoanalysis denotes a shift or alteration in the way an individual processes a traumatic experience, a response to emotional abuse, in line with (Freud, 1920); (Rorintulus et al., 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Of this chapter, the author wants to discuss the emotional abuse and impact of Roald Dahl's *Matilda*. The writer applies the theory offered in chapter three to solve the research question from the previous chapter.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic framework, especially his emphasis on the unconscious mind, provides insights into how repressed thoughts and feelings may contribute to the perpetuation of emotional abuse. (Freud, 1923). In Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, the writer found that the main character, Matilda, is subjected to emotional abuse that appears to be criticizing and gaslighting.

Criticizing from Parents

Freud (1905), stated that criticism that is too harsh or consistent towards children can cause psychosexual conflict and is related to the stage of psychosexual development.

In Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, the pervasive criticism from Matilda's parents serves as a poignant representation of the damaging effects of parental neglect and emotional abuse, highlighting the protagonist's resilience and determination to forge her own path despite the constant negativity she faces.

The novel *Matilda* portrays a pattern of parental criticism by Matilda's parents, Mr. And Mrs. Wormwood. This form of emotional abuse involves repeatedly undermining Matilda's self-worth through belittlement and derogatory comments. The critical behavior of her parents not only erodes Matilda's confidence but also highlights the significance of seeking positive validation from external sources.

"Dad, can you buy me a book?" she said.

"A book?" he said "Why do you want a burning book?"

"Go read, Dad."

"What's wrong with the television? We have a lovely television with a 12-inch screen, and now you're asking for a book! You're being naughty, my daughter!"

(Dahl's 11- 12)

From quotations above, the writer found the criticizing is directed at Matilda's request for a book. Matilda expresses her desire for a book, but her father's response is highly critical and dismissive. He belittles her request by implying that it's unnecessary and questions why she would want a book when they have a television. He also accuses her of being spoiled for even asking for a book to read. This interaction illustrates his harsh and critical attitude towards Matilda's interests and desires.

Gaslighting from Parents

Dr. Robin Stern, in her book "The Gaslight Effect," primarily focuses on gaslighting behaviors and their impact on relationships, without explicitly tying them to a specific psychological theory. For example, a parent consistently dismisses a child's emotions, telling them they're overly sensitive and imagining things when expressing feelings of distress. (Robin, 2007)

In Roald Dahl's *Matilda*, the portrayal of gaslighting by Matilda's parents underscores the insidious manipulation of authority figures, showcasing how parental

figures can employ psychological tactics to undermine their child's confidence, self-worth, and understanding of reality.

Gaslighting, a form of psychological manipulation, is prominently depicted in *Matilda* through the interactions between Matilda and her parents, the Wormwoods. Gaslighting involves distorting the truth and manipulating an individual's perception of reality to maintain control and power. Within the novel, Matilda's parents consistently employ gaslighting tactics to belittle her intelligence and isolate her emotionally.

"Every car that passes through my hands undergoes the treatment," declared the father. "I ensure they all have their mileage reduced to under ten thousand before putting them up for sale. And believe me, I came up with that idea all by myself," he added with pride. "It's made me a fortune."

Matilda, who had been attentive, remarked, "But Daddy, that's even more dishonest than the sawdust. It's disgraceful. You're deceiving people who trust you."

"If you don't approve, then don't eat the food in this house," replied the father. "It's bought with the profits."

"It's ill-gotten gains," Matilda retorted. "I despise it."

Two red spots appeared on the father's cheeks. "Who do you think you are," he shouted, "The Archbishop of Canterbury or something, preaching to me about honesty? You're just an ignorant little squirt who hasn't the foggiest idea what you're talking about!"

"Quite right, Harry," the mother concurred. And addressing Matilda, she added, "You've got a nerve talking to your father like that. Now keep your nasty mouth shut so we can all watch this programme in peace." (Dahl's 23)

From the quotations above, the writer found the gaslighting in Mr. Wormwood's unethical actions and Matilda's strong moral stance. Mr. Wormwood proudly admits to manipulating the mileage of cars he sells to deceive buyers. Matilda listens

attentively and expresses her disapproval, stating that this deception is even worse than the sawdust trick as it involves cheating people who trust him. She points out the dishonesty and the breach of trust. In response, Mr. Wormwood tries to justify his actions by linking his profits to their lifestyle. Matilda, however, denounces the money earned from such dishonest practices as "dirty money" and expresses her hatred for it. Mr. Wormwood's angry response reflects his defensiveness and his attempt to belittle Matilda's opinion by calling her ignorant. Matilda's mother joins in by agreeing with the father's response and invalidating Matilda's perspective. This reinforces the notion that Matilda's concerns are not valid and that she should stay quiet

The Impact of Emotional Abuse

The concept of defense mechanisms, as elucidated by Anna Freud (1936), offers an understanding of how individuals may employ psychological strategies to cope with the emotional impact of abuse.

Emotional abuse has a significant impact on the main character, Matilda Wormwood. Matilda's experiences with emotional abuse shape her personality, her relationships, and her journey of empowerment. While about the impact, it included feelings of isolation and loneliness, escapism, positive feedback, and transformation.

Feeling Loneliness and isolation

In psychoanalytic theory, feelings of isolation and loneliness can be understood through concepts such as object relations and attachment. According to theorists like Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott, early relational experiences shape an individual's capacity for emotional connection.

Matilda's parents are emotionally neglectful, leaving her feeling isolated and alone within her own family. Her love for reading and learning further separates her from her parents. This loneliness reinforces her feelings of being different and unaccepted.

On most weekday afternoons, Matilda found herself alone at home. Her older brother, five years her senior, attended school. Meanwhile, her father went to work, and her mother visited a bingo hall eight miles away. (Dahl's 12)

From the quotation above, the writer found that Matilda's parents rarely pay attention to her, as they are more interested in watching television and pursuing their own

interests. This ongoing neglect contributes to Matilda's feelings of isolation and emotional abandonment.

Escapism and Empowerment Through Knowledge

In psychoanalytic theory, the concepts of escapism and empowerment through knowledge can be understood through various lenses, including defense mechanisms and the development of the self. In Freud and Erikson, exploring aspects of pleasure, development, and the formation of identity within psychoanalytic theory, for example engaging in extensive reading and acquiring knowledge might serve as a form of intellectual escapism, providing an individual with a sense of empowerment and control, potentially reflecting a compensatory mechanism for unresolved early experiences.

"The novels transported her to different realms, acquainting her with remarkable characters leading adventurous lives. She sailed on vintage ships with Joseph Conrad, explored Africa with Ernest Hemingway, and ventured into India with Rudyard Kipling. Despite being in her modest room in an English town, she virtually journeyed across the globe." (Dahl's 20-21)

From the quotation above, the writer found that books have the power to transport Matilda to different worlds and introduce her to fascinating characters and adventures. They emphasize how reading is an act of imagination and escapism, allowing Matilda to experience exciting lives and far-off places from the comfort of her own room.

Positive Feedback and Empowerment

In psychoanalytic theory, positive feedback and empowerment can be viewed through the lens of ego development, self-esteem, and the fulfillment of basic needs. In Erikson and Kohut, consistent positive feedback during childhood, fostering a strong sense of self and mastery, aligns with psychoanalytic theories emphasizing the importance of healthy ego development, contributing to an individual's overall empowerment.

Matilda's interactions with her teacher, Miss Honey, provide a stark contrast to her experiences at home. Miss Honey's kindness and recognition of Matilda's intelligence and potential gradually empower her to challenge her negative self-perception.

Matilda's friendship with Miss Honey becomes a source of emotional support and empowerment. Miss Honey's understanding and kindness counteract the emotional abuse Matilda faces, allowing her to develop a positive and nurturing relationship that helps her.

"Could any of you go through the entire sentence?" inquired Miss Honey, anticipating the anticipated "yes" from Matilda.

"Yes," confirmed Matilda.

"Please proceed," urged Miss Honey.

Matilda effortlessly read the sentence without any hint of hesitation.

"That is truly impressive," complimented Miss Honey, delivering the understatement of her life. (Dahl's 66-67)

From the quotation above, the writer found that when Matilda reads the sentence fluently and without hesitation, Miss Honey is genuinely impressed. Her statement that it's "That is truly impressive" is an understatement, as she recognizes Matilda's exceptional reading talent. This moment represents a connection between teacher and student, with Miss Honey acknowledging and appreciating Matilda's unique abilities.

Miss Honey's initial action involved approaching several teachers responsible for the senior class and borrowing a range of textbooks covering subjects such as mathematics, geometry, French, English Literature, and others, before locating Matilda and summoning her into the classroom.

"There's no use," she remarked, "in you sitting idly during the class while I teach the rest of the form the two-times table and basic spelling. Therefore, in each lesson, I'll provide you with one of these textbooks to study. At the lesson's end, you can approach me with any questions you may have, and I'll do my best to assist you. How does that sound?"

"Thank you, Miss Honey," Matilda expressed. "That sounds good."

"I believe," Miss Honey stated, "that we'll be able to have you moved to a higher form later on, but for now, the Headmistress wants you to remain where you are."

"Very well, Miss Honey," Matilda agreed. "Thank you so much for obtaining those books for me." (Dahl's 76)

From the quotation above, the writer found that Miss Honey acknowledges that Matilda is far more advanced than her classmates. Miss Honey expresses confidence

that Matilda will eventually be moved to a higher grade level, indicating that Matilda's advanced abilities will not go unnoticed or unutilized in the long term. Matilda responds with gratitude, thanking Miss Honey for providing her with the advanced study materials. Matilda appreciates the effort made by Miss Honey to support her education.

Transformation

In psychoanalytic theory, by Freud and Jung, foundational figures in psychoanalytic theory, discussing the processes of remembering, repetition, and the collective aspects of transformation in the psyche.

Transformation can be understood as a process of change and development within an individual's psyche, often influenced by experiences, conflicts, and the integration of various aspects of the self. This concept is embedded in key psychoanalytic ideas such as psychic growth, defense mechanisms, and the resolution of inner conflicts.

Matilda stands up against the abuse, both emotional and intellectual, that she experiences from her parents. While she possesses extraordinary intelligence and abilities, Matilda faces a challenging home environment where her parents belittle her and neglect her educational needs. Ultimately transforming her life and the lives of those around her. It also underscores the impact of her love for reading on her perspective and values.

Most youngsters in Matilda's situation might have succumbed to tears. This was not done by her. She sat there, attentive but quite still. She appeared to understand the futility of crying or sulking. When you are assaulted, the only logical thing to do is to counterattack, as Napoleon once stated. Matilda's brilliant intellect was already working on another acceptable chastisement for her toxic parent. The strategy she was forming in her head, however, was contingent on whether or not Fred's parrot could talk as well as Fred claimed. (Dahl's 36)

From the quotation above, the writer found that Matilda's composed demeanor reflects her resilience and inner strength. She understands that crying or sulking won't change her circumstances or improve her situation. She refuses to give in to negative emotions. She believes in countering attacks rather than simply reacting emotionally. This approach aligns with her belief that she can find clever ways to address her problems and challenge those who mistreat her.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes obtained after analyzing Roald Dahl's *Matilda* unveil the profound consequences of emotional abuse on a child's growth. Obtained after analyzing Roald Dahl's *Matilda* unveil the profound consequences of emotional abuse on a child's growth. Nevertheless, it also underscores the resilience and fortitude of the human spirit, as *Matilda* discovers means to confront adversity, pursue knowledge, and resist abuse, ultimately forging a brighter future for herself and those around her.

Overall, the writer aims to reveal the emotional abuse and its impact on *Matilda*'s character development. This influence is evident in her resilience, nurturing relationships, and the potential for characters to overcome their traumatic experiences, leading to empowerment. *Matilda*'s story serves as a testament to the strength individuals can find within themselves to overcome the effects of emotional abuse and create their path toward positive growth and self-discovery.

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