

# SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN R.J PALACIO'S WONDER NOVEL: A DECONSTRUCTION ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper discussed about the characters' survival in terms of social exclusion which aimed to deconstruct the binary opposition between the main character and minor character and reveal the deconstructed meaning "unique side" of the main character which are awakened by his social interaction. Also, to analyze on how social exclusion occur and relate to the main character survival in Wonder novel by R. J Palacio. This research is based on Derrida's Theory about Deconstruction. The data were collected by reading the entire text of the story, identifying binary oppositions, reversing the hierarchy, and finding another meaning concealed in the text. The results of the study show that there are binary oppositions in the story; perfect – imperfect, self-acceptance – mortification, friendship – friendless which all relate to main character flaws and power to conquer the social casualties by his weaknesses. This means that R.J. Palacio's Wonder is successful in portraying that the Wonder has multi interpretations in the storyline. The character has changed from being diffidence to confidence and every person in movie gives him a meaning to complete himself. From the analysis of deconstruction theory, the character has changed from being diffidence to confidence along with the storyline and can be concluded that being Wonder has multi – interpretations along the storyline.

## Keywords:

Social Exclusion, Deconstruction, Character, Self-acceptance

Article Received: 18 October 2020, Revised: 3 November 2020, Accepted: 24 December 2020

## Introduction

Marginalization is a pattern of imbalance in the possession of economic, social and educational resources by a group of individuals (Alcock, 1993). Marginalisation is a problem that impacts negatively upon individual in the society. Marginalization happens when someone called as "different" in surrounding in terms of behavior and physical appearance. The gap created by marginalization will affect marginalized people for being excluded in majority environment. The concepts of social exclusion and marginalisation appear to be interchangeable (Hansen, 2012). This paper will discuss about social exclusion as marginalization that appears in Wonder by R.J Palacio. August Pullman, as the main character in the novel have experienced where he got unpleasant treatment because of his different face so he got a social exclusion from his friends. Social exclusion is a philosophical principle, a prism through which people look at reality rather than reality itself (de Haan, 2001:28). Social

exclusion matters because it denies people's right to not be equal in their society. One of the ways to survive or overcome from social exclusion is a moral support that comes from another individual. This paper contributes in finding the binary opposition in the story on how moral support can influence the main character conquers the social exclusion by moral support that comes from his surroundings. Moral support, helps encourage a person. Moral support creates a sense of hope returns and helps people to overcome from their problems.

## Methodology

To interpret this study, descriptive methodology is used. The aim of descriptive research is to identify a phenomenon and its features (Nassaji, 2015). The data were collected by reading the entire text of the story, identifying binary oppositions, reversing the hierarchy, and finding another meaning concealed in the text.



This paper applies the Derrida's Theory about Deconstruction in analyzing this research. Derrida (1978) states that deconstruction refers to the theories of the story's question; asserts that the argument seeks its meaning.

### Finding and Discussion

Palacio uses a first-person perspective in the Wonder novel.

The results of the research show that there are binary oppositions in the story;

Mortification	Self- acceptance
Imperfect	Perfect
Friendless	Friendship

These binary oppositions are all relate to main character flaws and power to conquer the marginalization and social exclusion by his weaknesses. Some minor characters are also support the main character to be able to have self-acceptance by moral Support.

### Imperfect

Someone will categorized as imperfect if they are not same with their surrounding in terms of physical appearance, and behavior. This striking difference makes August Pullman, as the main character has portrayed as a kid who doesn't have a self-acceptance since he doesn't have a perfect face like others. *"If I found a magic lamp and I could have one wish, I would have wish that I had a normal face that no one ever noticed at all. Here's what I think: the only reason I'm not an ordinary person is that no one else sees me that way. My name is August, by the way. I won't describe what I look like. Whatever you're thinking, it's probably worse."*

In this excerpt, August acknowledge himself as an inferior, imperfect, and not a normal kid. He said he will not describe what he looks like, but he actually describes what he looks like at the same time. And why does he make himself look so small when at the same time he is the one who

makes himself small because won't open up, he won't have friend, and he won't to go to a public school and choose homeschooling as his education. The fact that he is afraid of being normal, because he is actually afraid of what people are thinking about him, whereas, in the other side, he is loved by many, and he doesn't always realize that because he still thinks that he is not ordinary. The reason why he still thinks that he is not an ordinary person because he is being excluded by his friends. They; Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte were introduced by Mr. Tushman, the principal as a starting point to August to socialize with new people. But, the events at his new school makes August aware of other kids' views.

### Mortification

Imperfections that August Pullman have leads to insecurity; lack of confidence meanwhile a human being should not feel the inferiority and have to embrace security (Vornanen, et. al, 2012). The story tells about August's inferiority and insecurity reveal from people's reaction about him. He gets pressure in convincing people that he is normal. His low self-esteem exists because he is not normal from others. It can be seen from the way of his friends had called him. *"Rat boy. Freak. Monster. Freddy Krueger. E.T. Gross-out. Lizard face. Mutant. I know the names they call me. I've been in enough playgrounds to know kids can be mean"*

At this point, August is always portrayed as deformed, helpless and weird. It is very likely August's character seems to be insecure about his deformity, because other characters' perceptions meanwhile some of his friends also see him as a normal kid. This perception leads August has power to conquer his low self-esteem

### Friendship

Friendship is human-to-human interaction in the society. Friendship matters to enhance the



people's emotional resilience and help people to feel connected through sharing thoughts with other in order to survive with certain condition and that's why friendship is important. A good friendship can be characterized if people have a good attitude, and accept other people just the way they are and it will create a mutual trust develop as the best thing that can be hoped from our friends if they become "like family". The problem is, August is hard to find a true friendship. It happens with August where he is not sure with his friendship. August had friends in his new school. They; Jack Will, Julian, and Charlotte were introduced by Mr. Tushman, the principal as a starting point to August to socialize with new people. But, the events at his new school makes August aware of other kids' views. *"Jack Will looked at me and put out his hand. When I shook it, he kind of half smiled and said: "Hey," and looked down really fast. "Hey," said Julian, and did the same exact thing as Jack Will: took my hand, forced a smile, looked down fast. Charlotte, she didn't shake my hand but gave me a quick little wave and smiled."* According to the excerpt, the three kids' reactions can be one example of other people's impressions of August at first. Although the excerpt does not explicitly show that August's weird, it goes into detail in telling the kids' expressions. It can be said that August's friends don't really have a mutual trust develop in having friendship with August in their first meeting.

### Friendless

Because it is said that having friendship is matters, in some scenarios, having friend will not as smooth as it should be. Friend is not always kind to people and it will make life worst. Friendless happens when people are not able to appreciate just the way we are and giving insult for other people's imperfection. It harms the psychological through insecurities and lack of self-acceptance. August finally becomes friends with those kids and it turns out to sadness, because finally he

knew that one of them talked behind him in Halloween and accidentally heard someone mocked him like others. It was beyond his expectation to have a nice friends in school. *"i think he looks like an orc" "if I looked like that," said the Julian voice, kind of laughing, "I swear to God, I'd put a hood over my face."*

he heard the mean things that saying about him. He didn't care about what the other boys had said, he expected that, but he was hurt that one of the boys was his "best friend" Jack Will. *"Then why do you hang out with him so much?" asked Darth Sidious "the thing is: he always follows me around. What am I supposed to do?" "just ditch him," said Julian.* The excerpt proves that his confidence turns out him to be a friendless where some of his friends are insulting him just because of his physical appearance.

Based on the statement, August is such a form of being the social exclusion from majority. R.J Palacio finally portrayed August as the meaning of wonder, where he has a power to conquer the social exclusion by his weaknesses from moral support and friendships that turns out to formed his self- acceptance

### Moral

### Support

Moral support is an act of caring, and acceptance showed by people who appreciate other people just the way they are. Moral support is necessary to build self-esteem. In the story, August Pullman gets a moral support from his surrounding, such as; family, and some of his friends as his mutual trust develop. Family matters for August because family knows about the August in terms of a sense of intimacy and sense of connection. In the other hand, friend support is also matters for August to conquer social exclusion that given society because of his imperfection. It encourages him to have self-esteem so he is able to survive from social exclusion that August get from society.



Mom: "you don't have to go to school if you don't want, sweetie."

Auggie: "I want to"

Mom: "Auggie..."

Auggie: "really Mom, I want to." And I wasn't lying.

According to the excerpt, the August's reaction about school proved that he started to build a self-confidence to come out to the society with his imperfection.

When he is in the new school, August starts a friendship with Summer when had lunch. She took a seat besides August, "My name is Summer, by the way. What's yours?"

"but if someone doesn't have a summer name and wants to sit with us, we'll still let them if they're nice, okay?"

The excerpt proves that there is a "filter" in August's friendship through Summer's support as a friend to avoid mock from others.

"Some kids have actually come out and asked me why I hang out with 'the freak' so much. These are kids that don't even know him well. If they knew him, they wouldn't call him that. 'because he's a nice kid!' I always answer. 'and don't call him that.' 'you're a saint, Summer,' Ximena Chin said to me the other day. 'I couldn't do what you're doing.'"

"it's not big deal," I answered her truthfully.

"Did Mr.Tushman ask you to be friend with him?" Charlotte Cody asked.

"No. I'm friends with him because I want to be friends with him," I answered.

Summer is such a good friend for August where she doesn't see August as the one who needs specialties. Support from Summer matters as connection for August to share the emotional lives, struggles, thoughts, and to encourage August to be himself despite of his imperfection.

### Self-Acceptance

In the story, August Pullman finally found his self-acceptance through moral support that comes

from his family, and his friends and formed his self-esteem.

"I know academically it's been a great year for you. You're one of our top students. Congrats on the High Honor Roll" – Mr.Tushman

"he is the greatest," he finally continued, "whose strength carries up the most hearts by the attraction of his own. Without further do, this year I am very proud to award the Henry Ward Beecher medal to the student whose quiet strength has carried up the most hearts. So will August Pullman please come up here to receive this award?"

The excerpt proves that August, in his imperfection, August is successfully conquering his weaknesses by being kind and have a good academic in the school.

No, that's not true. I know why. It's like people you see sometimes, and you can't imagine what it would be like to be that person, whether it's somebody in wheelchair or somebody who can't talk. Only, I know that I'm that person to other people, maybe to every single person in that whole auditorium.

The excerpt shows that August is understand that no matter the physical appearance hit them with being imperfect, and friendless, because he succeeded to conquer his weaknesses, people start to love him well.

"thank you, Auggie," she answered softly.

"for what?"

"for everything you've given us. For coming into our lives. For being you"

"you really are a wonder, Auggie. You are a wonder."

This excerpt shows that the meaning of Wonder, where imperfection can be handled if August being himself and accept just the way he is.

### Conclusions

R.J. Palacio is successful in portraying that the binary opposition in Wonder has formed August, as the main character to have self-esteem through moral support. The social exclusion received is



very influential in shaping August Pullman's personality. The process of forming self-acceptance began when August Pullman went to a regular school. Although at the beginning Auggie refused to go to school, he finally agreed with his parents' plans. The new school has a bad social environment where discrimination to minority such as being called by inappropriate names that makes him feel the inferiority. The character has shifted from being diffidence to confidence. From the analysis of deconstruction theory, the character has changed from being diffidence to confidence to appreciate his imperfection along with the storyline by moral support and friendship that given to go through. The bad things he received him made him strong and finally he accepts his condition. Therefore, through this research it is proven that R.J. Palacio is succeed in portraying the "Wonder" meaning where physical appearance was not everything, acceptance will exist in the right time. Social exclusion does not always make a person surrender, but social exclusion can shape self-acceptance, and family support contributes greatly in the struggle to find the meaning of "Wonder".

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