



**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL CONDITION ON
THE PERSONALITY OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN
R. J. PALACIO'S *WONDER***

A FINAL PROJECT

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement
For S-1 Degree in Literature
In English Department, Faculty of Humanities
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PRONOUNCEMENT

I state truly that this project is compiled by me without taking the results from other research in any university, in S-1, S-2, and S-3 degree and in diploma. In addition, I ascertain that I do not take the material from other publications or someone's work except for the references mentioned in the bibliography.

Semarang, August 2017

Elfida Aulia Rahmayanti

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“Sometimes, it is better to be kind than to be right.”

(Anonymous)

“Beauty is not in the face; beauty is a light in the heart.”

(Kahlil Gibran)

“Be soft. Do not let the world make you hard. Do not let pain make you hate.
Do not let the bitterness steal your sweetness.”

(Anonymous)

This project I dedicated to my beloved father

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I admit that this final project is far from perfection. Thus, I will be glad to receive any constructive criticism and recommendations to make this final project better.

Finally, I expect that this final project will be useful to the reader who wishes to learn something about the influence of society on personality of a character.

Semarang, August 2017

Elfida Aulia Rahmayanti

TABLE OF CONTENT

TITLE.....	i
PRONOUNCEMENT	ii
MOTTOAND DEDICATION	iii
APPROVAL	iv
VALIDATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	vi
TABLE OF CONTENT	viii
ABSTRACT	ix
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background of The Study.....	1
1.2 Research Problem.....	2
1.3 Purpose of the Study.....	2
1.4 Method of the Study.....	3
CHAPTER 2 BIOGRAPHY AND SUMMARY	3
2.1 R.J. Palacio Biography	3
2.2 Summary.....	4
CHAPTER 3 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK.....	4
3.1 Intrinsic Element.....	5
3.1.1 Characters.....	6
3.1.2 Setting.....	6
3.2 Extrinsic Element.....	7
3.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism.....	7
CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS.....	10
4.1 The Personality of August Pullman before He Enters Society Circle.....	10
4.2 The Relation between August Pullman and His Society	12
4.3 The Influence of Society toward August’s Personality.....	14
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION.....	19
References.....	20

ABSTRACT

Social influence is one of the main discussions about the discrimination in life of a ten-year-old boy who from suffered facial abnormality named August Pullman in novel *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio. The aim of this study is to analyze the personality development of August Pullman against discrimination in his society. This study uses method of library research. The writer uses intrinsic approaches, such as character and setting in completing this study. Besides, the writer uses Cooley Horton's symbolic interactionism theory. The writer found out that social life greatly influences the personality development of the main character. August's personality development influenced by his parents, his friends at school and his best friend named Jack. At first, August was an unconfident, unhappy, and isolated boy and he successfully turned out to be a confident and kind-hearted boy. August developed his personality based on his experienced he got from other people in his society. He improved himself to be a better boy.

Keywords: *Social influence, discrimination, personality development, psychological aspect.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In social interaction, people try to find out information from others. The information is probably about race, age, gender, and physical appearance. For some people, the information is used as the basic reference of interaction. People or group may interact with other people based on the information they received. After receiving the information, people decide how to act to other people or group. However, it depends on how individual is influenced by psychology and sociology aspect.

The writer believes that physical appearance is a key in social interaction. Generally, physical appearance takes a big role in interaction. For example, people who have good physical appearance can easily gain positive responses from others. The positive responses are shown by sympathy and praise, so it is easy for them to make a friend and socialize with others. In opposite, people who have bad physical appearance may be difficult to make a friend and socialize with the society. Moreover, they may be discriminated by their society because of their physical appearance. Discrimination from society makes people changed. They try to adapt based on current condition in order to survive. They change not only their appearances but also their psychological aspects such as attitude, behavior and mindset.

The writer chose *Wonder* novel by R.J. Palacio as the object of the research. *Wonder* is a novel about a boy with abnormal face named August Pullman as the main character. August, who is suffered from some complicated health, is discriminated by his society because of his physical appearance. People always notice at him wherever he is and it makes him uncomfortable. Moreover, he is homeschooled and his mother is the one teacher he has. It is interesting to find out how August Pullman finally can accept himself in his life after his depression for being an abnormal boy and discriminated by the society. How society influences August Pullman is an interesting topic to analyze.

1.2 Research Problem

Related to the background of the study above, the writer had identified some problems below:

1. How does the personality of August Pullman before he enter society circle?
2. How is the relation between August Pullman and his society?
3. How does society influence August Pullman's personality?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the research problems above, the objectives of the study are:

1. To describe the personality of August Pullman before he enters society circle.
2. To describe the relation between August Pullman and his society.

3. To describe how society influences August Pullman's personality.

1.4 Method of the Study

The writer uses textual method in analyzing this research. According Botan and Kreps, textual analysis is a research method used to describe the content, structure, and function of the messages contained in texts (Botan and Kreps, 1999: 213). Based on the definition, the writer applies a textual method that only focuses on the information contained within the text or book as the object of discussion.

In addition, the approach method of this study is sociological approach, which focused on the social aspect of the story in the novel. According to Wellek and Warren "...literature and society are put more narrowly and externally. Questions are asked about the relations of literature to a given social situation, an economic, social and political system" (Wellek and Warren, 1976: 94). The quotation asserts that this approach is useabl to reveal problem in the society in literary works.

2. Author and Her Work

2.1 R. J. Palacio's Biography

Raquel Jaramillo Palacio was born on July 13, 1963 in New York City. In 1990, she worked as a designer of book jackets and covers for any genres of books. She designed book covers for several authors for twenty years including Sue Grafton, Salama Rushdie and many more. Then, she continued her carrier as photo illustrator

for young people and her interest in children's literature brought to be an editorial designer. She worked as director of children's book at Workman in 2006 and in the next year, she decided to write her first novel.

Palacio loves book so much especially children literature. *Wonder* is her first novel and also her first #1 New York Times Bestselling Novel in 2012. She was inspired by a real-life story of her when she wrote *Wonder*. One day, one of her sons, who aged three years, noticed poorly at the girl with abnormal face. From that moment, she got inspired and began to write *Wonder*. *Wonder* is the first series of her children literature. Another series of *Wonder* are *365 Days of Wonder {Mr. Browne's Book of Precepts}*, *The Julian Chapter: A Wonder Story*, *Pluto: A Wonder Story*, and many more. In addition, Palacio is one of *Star Wars* fans. She published a retelling of *Star Wars: A New Hope* in partnership with Disney-Lucas film in April 2015.

Source: "Biography of R.J. Palacio. 1999-2017. <<http://rjpalacio.com/author.html>.> (September 26, 2017)

2. 2 Synopsis of the Story

Wonder is a novel telling us about children life. The main character is August Pullman. He was a ten year old boy with abnormal face. Because of his abnormality, he suffered healthy complication as well. He got countless surgeries and therapies for his health in a year, and he hated his recovery so much. He blamed himself for getting an abnormal face and health complication. He thought that because of his

abnormality, people and his society always mocked and discriminated him. His external conflicts began when his mother forced him to join regular school. In this new environment, he met new people including the headmaster and staff of the school. It was the first time he got new friends named Jack, Julian and Charlotte.

They seemed nice to August. In the early period of school, August thought that going to school was good. Most of friends made distance to him, but Jack stayed close to him during classes. Nevertheless, Jack was kind of fake friend and he pretended to be kind to August because of the headmaster asked for it. Therefore, he got a new friend for lunch named Summer. August struggled to adapt in his new school without having a good friend. In fifth grade, it became the worst phase in August's life. He bullied by some children from another school. Therefore, some of his classmates stood up for him and it made a new bond among them. They became friends and realized how smart and funny August was. From that moment, in the end of fifth grade, August got surprised from school because he was brave enough for being a part of social system.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Intrinsic Element

The basic step to analyze a literary work is by examining its structure or called intrinsic element. Here are some intrinsic elements discussed in this research:

3.1.1 Character

Character is a person described in literary work and sometimes it reflects a person in real life. Character can be divided into two; static and dynamic character. According to Morner and Rausch, static character is consistent characteristic and little change in the story. Meanwhile, dynamic character is a character who presents more faces portrayed and generous details (Morner and Rausch, 1991: 23). Personality change is usually influenced by other character in the whole story.

3.1.2 Setting

Setting can be said as description of physical environment including just time and place. It is used not only to provide the background of the story but also to give some influences to the character's personality. Mayor declared three major factors of setting which support the story; setting of place, setting of time and setting of social environment. Setting of place can be identified as a place where the story happens. The place can be portrayed as a room, a street, a building or a forest and a beach. Then, setting of social environment shows the surrounding condition of the main characters. It usually contains what kind of society that lives around the character, which consists of social tradition, public culture, religious aspect, or morality.

3.2 Extrinsic Approach

3.2.1 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theory proposed by Charles Horton Cooley and Mead in the beginning of twentieth century. The theory discuss about social behavior and interaction. Therefore, this theory focuses at how people interact with other people and create meaning based on their interpretation. Symbolic interactionism believes on the symbolic meaning that people develop their self in interaction process. From these interactions, people change the way they behave and act. On the other words, people act based on symbolic meaning they receive in any given situations.

For example, almost teenagers are well informed about the disadvantages of smoking and many medicals prove the danger of cigarette. However, they keep smoking. It happens because in teenager's life there is a trend that claims smoking is cool, safe them harm and give positives image to their friends. Because of that trend, the symbolic meaning of smoking is well accepted and followed by them, although the fact about the disadvantages of smoking is ignored. From interactions or communications, people not only change their behavior but also their mindset as well. People spend to think about what will they do next and adjust their behavior depending on situations. They act based on how they interpret a word, symbol or situation. Exactly, it is influenced by social environment and culture.

Charles Horton Cooley stated that an individual and society are a set of idea. He explained that society exist as a set of ideas among its members. The two nations concept, the looking-glass-self and society and individual as a set of ideas, are the most well-known concepts of his work (Cooley, 1902: 179-185).

3.2.1.1 Society and individual

Cooley defined individual and society as two sides of a coin. It means that between individual and society cannot be apart because there is no society without individual and there is no individual apart from society:

A separated individual is an abstraction unknown to experience, and so likewise is society wen regarded as something apart from individuals. The real thing is Human Life, which may be considered either in an individual aspect or in a social, that is to say a general, aspect; but is always, as a matter of fact, both individual and general. In other word, “society” and “individuals” do not denote separable phenomena, but are simply collective and distributive aspects of the same things...(Cooley, 1902: 27-36).

For Cooley, individual and society come together. Both of them interact through communication or, in other words, every individuality includes of social order. Personality is developed extent social life and the communication between individuals. Individual always interact each other in everywhere they live. From the interaction, our mindset is shaped by other people thought. While, our mindset about other people thought is connected with emotion or sensibility called self-feeling.

3.2.1.2 The looking glass self-concept

The looking glass self-concept claimed that we describe ourselves based on other people's perspective. Parley stated, "we come to develop a self image on the basis of the message we get from others, as we understand them (Parley, 1992: 71)". For example, if your friend or people around you tell a message that you are very big and fat, you will think that you are fat as well. It is because you use other people perspective as a mirror about how you look like in the society. Cooley explained the looking glass self-concept as bellow:

In a very large and interesting class of cases the social reference takes the form of a somewhat definite imagination of how one's self-that is any ideas appropriates-appears in particular mind and the kind of self-feeling one has is determines by the attitude toward this attributed to that other mind. A social self of this short might called the reflected or looking-glass self:

"each to each a looking-glass
Reflect the other that dot pass."

As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according as they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be, so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manner, aims, deeds, characters, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it (Cooley, 1902: 183-184).

From that explanation, it can be concluded that people develop a complex set of ideas based on the message they receive from others. Besides, the idea of looking glass self can be broken down into:

1. We imagine how people see us from our appearance,
2. We imagine their judgments about appearance,

3. We develop some feeling, such as pride or motivation, as a result of our imagination based other's judgments.

In addition, our self-image is shaped by how people see us from our appearance and how their judgments about us. Self-image influences individual's self-feeling. Cooley explained that the self-feeling is developed by individual's experiences (Cooley. 1902: 170-171). Self-feeling can be modified depending on the difference of thought which is obtained from experiences.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Personality of August Pullman before He Enters Social Circle.

4.1.1 Character Analysis

Mostly, *Wonder* is a novel which tells about August's story, however many other characters take roles in giving perspective on him. August, a ten year old boy, never imagines for having abnormal face and being an infant in his life. August has an extra-large forehead. His eyes are much lower than it should be. His mouth always hangs open and his ears are underdeveloped and cauliflower-shaped. Therefore, the characters of August Pullman can be described as below:

4.1.1.1 Low self esteem

August's wishes that he can have a normal life with his physical appearances. He wants to go to school, have friends and socialize with society as other kids did.

August explained: “What I wanted was to go to school, but only if I could be like every other kid going to school. Have lots of friends and hang out after school and stuff like that” (Palacio, 2012: 4). He dreams that he has a normal face so no one ever notices at all and he can walk down the street without people seeing him and then doing looking-away thing. From other characters’ perspective, he is ugly, strange and creepy. These perspectives makes him shy about meeting new people. When he interacts with new people, August prefers to mumble and avoid eyes contact. He feels unconfident and thinks that he should keep the distance from his society.

4.1.1.2 Isolated person

As result of his low self-esteem, August isolates himself from his society. He knows that people always notice him and are even afraid to meet him. He interprets these messages as sign that people dislike him. Therefore, he prefers to protect and isolated himself by growing his bang. August stated: “One of the reasons I grew my hair long last year was that I like how my bangs cover my eyes: it helps me block out the things I don’t want to see” (Palacio, 2012: 7). By growing his bangs, he can camouflage his ugly face so people will not stare or whisper at him. A few years before the bangs, August wears an astronaut helm when he wants to do outdoor activities. Moreover, August prefers to keep himself at home to run off from people attention.

4.1.1.3 Unhappy person

August feels unhappy since he realizes that people always notice at his unusual appearance. He is homeschooled as his mother suggested. His mother teaches himself but he feels uncomfortable with it because he wants to have many friends. August stated, “What I wanted was to go to school, but only if I could be like every other kid going to school. Have lots of friends and hang out after school and stuff like that” (Palacio, 2012: 11). He is also depressed because he has abnormal face but his friends have not. These conditions make August for becoming an unhappy person and being isolated in home.

4.1.2 Setting Analysis

August and his family live in a town in New York City in Upper Manhattan neighborhood called North River Height. Besides, August school, Beecher Prep, is located near his home. He uses to go to school by walking. From August’s social environment, August grows up in a city where most of the citizens are educated and upper class family, for example Julian’s family. However, surprisingly, these kids do not care and have no tolerant of differences. It indicates that most of urban people have high level of individuality.

4.2 The Relation between August Pullman and His Society

August Pullman is a boy with an abnormal face and he suffers from some complicated health. He has an ugly face and different physical appearances. This

condition makes him for having some conflicts with his society. The society which is related with August's personality are August's parents, best-friend and other friends at school. Here are the explanations:

4.2.1 August's family

August's parents force him to enter a regular school. It means that he will meet many people. His mother argues that August will learn a lot of thing more than she teaches. She assumes that regular school is the right place for August to build his social relationship. This condition can be seen in the dialogue above:

"Don't you think you're ready for school, Auggie?" Mom said.

"No," I said.

"I don't, either," said Dad.

"Then that's it, case closed," I said, shrugging, and I sat in her lap like I was a baby.

"I just think you need to learn more than I can teach you," Mom said. "I mean, come on, Auggie, you know how bad I am at fractions!"

"What school?" I said. I already felt like crying (Palacio, 2012: 13).

August's parents send a message to him that August should go to school, since he never has a good relationship with his society. They want August developing himself to be a brave boy. Other messages August's parents want to give are that August can meet new people, makes a friend, makes a deal with society and learn more. As parents, August's mother and father want to give all the best in August life. They realize that forcing August to study in regular school is not a good idea. Moreover, August opposes to enter school. August parents gently build their arguments and tell some funny stories until August end up admitting. August said "I

smiled even though I didn't want to let them see me smile" (Palacio, 2012: 15). His parents use humor and some motivated words to help him get into a better mind when he scares or hurts. It seems to work well. His parents promise that they are on his team and will make it clear. They argue that August do not to be worry because there are school staffs and good friends that will help him.

At a moment when August gets bullying from his friends, he swears that he will never return to school. However, his sister named Via gives him some advices to turn him around. Via reminds August of his desire to be an ordinary boy by saying: "Now, unless you want to be treated like a baby the rest of your life, or like a kid with special needs, you just have to suck it up and go" (Palacio, 2012: 34). Via is kind of protective sister of him but she maybe not quite as protective as his mom and dad. Via delivers harsh-yet-good message to August. Via's statement boost August out of his self-pity so he needs to continue his school to grow.

According to his family, August will face new people and environment by going to school. From his family messages delivered to him, August decides to enter the school and tries to enjoy his new environment. He understands that his family wants the best for him so that he can improve himself.

4.2.2 August's best friend: Jack

Jack treats August in a good way. Jack helps him in a class especially in learning process. August explains,

“I hung out with Jack in homeroom, English, history, computer, music, and science, which were all the classes we had together. The teachers assigned seats in every class, and I ended up sitting next to Jack in every single class, so I figured either the teachers were told to put me and Jack together, or it was a totally incredible coincidence” (Palacio, 2012: 52) .

Jack also helps to August from naughty-friends who bullying him. Jack always motivates that August is strong and does not need to be treated like an infant. Jack gives message to August that he can confront this situation and he does not need to be afraid. Thus, August should be a confident boy.

4.2.3 August’s friends at school

Although August gets bullying by some students, there are several students stood for him. They are Summer and Charlotte. Summer is the most reliable friend August has and no matter how cruel other kids at him, Summer is always there to calm August with her kindness and maturity. The maturity of Summer can be seen into dialogue above,

The Summer Table

"Hey, is this seat taken?"

I looked up, and a girl I never saw before was standing across from my table with a lunch tray full of food.

"Uh, no," I said.

She put her lunch tray on the table, plopped her backpack on the floor, and sat down across from me. She started to eat the mac and cheese on her plate.

"Ugh," she said after the swallowing the first bite. "I should have brought a sandwich like you did."

"Yeah," I said, nodding.

"My name is Summer, by the way. What's yours?"

"August."

"Cool," she said.

"Summer!" Another girl came over to the table carrying a tray. "Why are you sitting here? Come back to the table."

"It was too crowded," Summer answered her. "Come sit here. There's more room."

The other girl looked confused for a second.

Summer thinks that it does not matter to have a sit with August at lunch while no one will. She did not think of her consequences that her friends would stay away from her because she only cared about August's feeling. Another August's friend was Charlotte. Charlotte was one of his first friends, but they did not have good enough friendship. However, at the end, she tried to remain August to be careful with Julian and friends.

His friendship with Summer and Charlotte save August from isolation. He has someone to talk, laugh and play with especially at lunch. Summer and Charlotte give August strength to tolerate the weirdness he gets from other kids at school. Moreover, August learn about kindness from them.

4.3 The Influence of Society toward August's Personality

. August's personality is influenced by society through the conflicts he has experiences with his society. This fact is appropriated with Cooley's theory of individual and society, which is said that personality develops from extent social life and communication between individual and society. After being depressed by discrimination done by his society, August tries to show them that he is really

growing. It is a prove that personality is shaped by social condition around them.

Here are August's personality development:

4.3.1 Confident person

After all of his experienced in facing the discrimination of society, he learns a lot. He successfully improves himself for becoming a confident boy. August's personality development are helped by the role of his parents. August's parents decide to send him to school. It is not easy to persuade August that school is the place he should visit. His mother says that teacher in school will give him more lessons in fun way. He also will get new experiences about friendship and society. However, August's mother states that there are always good friend who will help him. Moreover, August proves his mother statements. His school gives him an award as the greatest student. Before he enters to school, he is really a silly boy, even, he prefers to wore a mask in order to run off from people attention.

“All I knew for sure is that we were all laughing and squeezing in tight against each other, and no one seemed to care if it was my face that was next to theirs or not. In fact, and I don't mean to brag here, but it kind of felt like everyone wanted to get close to me” (Palacio, 2006: 213).

In the beginning of the story, it declares that August feel comfort and be more confident by wearing a mask because no one notice and stare at him anymore. Also, from his friends' behavior, who are Jack, Summer and Charlotte's behavior, August learns that he is able to be a friend and to have a friend. A thing that August noted is he should have a big heart to have a friend. At the same time, it improves August'

confident. As result, at the end, he successfully develops himself to be confident with his appearances and stays confident without mask.

4.3.2 Kind-hearted person

August gets an award as ‘the greatest whose strength carries up the most hearts by the attraction of his own’ that given by Mr. Tushman. At least, he is able to prove that even he has an abnormal face but he has an awesome heart. Mr. Tushman said; “Without further ado, 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?” (Palacio, 2006:211). At first, August feels that he does not need to be kind to other since no one do kind thing to him. He claims that all people around him are cruel except his family.

August successfully develops himself into a better person by entering social place called regular school. In school, he learns a lot of thing such as about learning process, making deal with a problem, and socializing with friends. He convinces himself that people have their own characteristic or behavior. Although there are people who hate or scare of him, there must be people who love and care about him. He also learns that people do not need to be handsome or beautiful to be loved by others, they just need to be kind. Therefore, everyone will love you back.

5. Conclusion

The theory of symbolic interactionism believes that human behavior is a part of social structure and part of a product of how individuals interpret that social structure. August as the main character uses other people as a mirror to see himself from other people's perspective. August is a low esteem and unhappy boy, moreover he isolates himself by staying in home because of his abnormality. The society who influence August's personality are parents, best friend and other friends at school. However, at the end, he successfully develops himself for becoming a better, confident and kindhearted boy. Those personalities are a continuing process from the thought differentiation of his experiences. Thus, the social condition takes a big role in the development of August Pullman's personality.

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