

Content with the  
mediocre: the  
underside of  
acceptance in  
Chbosky's novel



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The novel *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, written by Stephen Chbosky, portrays a series of characters that strive for acceptance and understanding from others. Yet, for the most part, they are constantly ridiculed or treated like the second option. The quote “ we accept the love we think we deserve”(Chbosky 24) is an explanation as to why people can always have something better, but choose to conform with what they receive primarily because of the way they view themselves, among other factors.

Someone with low self-esteem will remain with someone who treats them unfairly because they believe that's the treatment they earned. On the other hand, someone who values themselves won't settle for less. The characters Charlie, Sam, and Patrick portray this idea perfectly due to the constant abuse they receive throughout the novel. First and foremost, Charlie's oppression is most evident through his interactions with his family and friends. He is constantly trying to make other's lives better, or at least, easier to handle. Yet, what he doesn't realize is the harm he causes himself. In the novel, Charlie's sister says “ “ I hate you,” My sister said it different than she said it to my dad. She meant it with me. She really did. “ I love you,” was all I could say in return”(Chbosky 26). This interaction between the characters is a general representation of the relationships that Charlie has with other characters. He will try to help and make others happy, but his actions eventually backfire, leaving him with troubling consequences and broken relationships that he tries to fix.

Another problem of his is that he puts himself in situations that are inconvenient, or even heartbreaking, for him if it means that someone else will be happy. An example of this is when Charlie writes “ I am really in love

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with Sam, and it hurts very much”(Chbosky 47). He loves Sam, but is willing to let her be happy with someone else because he’s content with just having her close. It can be said that this is his hamartia, because Charlie will always put others before himself. Furthermore, Sam’s character is involved in a relationship in which her boyfriend loves the superficial aspect of her, not what lies underneath. Craig, her boyfriend, is with her solely for the fear of being alone, not because he actually loves her. He sees her through a perspective that makes her attractive towards him, and doesn’t see the beautiful person she is all by herself. Charlie once commented on their relationship, stating “ I just think it’s bad when a boy looks at a girl and thinks that the way he sees the girl is better than the girl actually is. And I think it’s bad when the most honest way a boy can look at a girl is through a camera”(Chbosky 48-49). Sam is more invested in the relationship because it seems that she thinks better about herself because of the fact that an older boy loves her, thus being worthy of love. So she accepts his love as it is, despite knowing that his love does not reach the real her.

Ultimately, Patrick’s secret relationship with Brad is also troubling due to the fact that the love he has is seen as unacceptable and forbidden. Although knowing that getting caught would have dire consequences for both of them, he continued to see Brad despite knowing that this was hurting him. Brad had a reputation to keep, going after the girls and being a jock in general. Patrick was more open and free about his sexuality, but had to be burdened with not being able to express his love in public. Charlie participated in an experiment that clearly showed this relationship. He said “...what the scientists found out was that the rat or mouse would put up with a lot more

voltage for the pleasure. Even more than for the food” (Chbosky 50). Patrick is, evidently, the rodent, who is willing to be kept hidden and ridiculed if only it means that his love is reciprocated by Brad.

All things considered, it's apparent that the famous quote “ we accept the love we think we deserve” explains how people will deal with situations in which they are aware of how much hurt they receive because they don't want to see what they truly deserve. The Charlie's character shows this because he accepts verbal abuse and will put others before his happiness and wellbeing, while Sam and Patrick's abusive relationships are based on them putting up with undeserved circumstances because they want to feel loved and seek approval. This is even more tragic because they are teenagers-kids who need guidance and reassurance but are receiving none. They need to come to terms with the fact that they deserve much more than they're receiving, and need to find something better to be truly happy.