

Research Article

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The Absence of Mother's Love Experienced by the Main Female Character in Jacqueline Wilson's *The Story of Tracy Beaker*

Bernadia Puspa Damayanti^a, Ratna Asmarani^b

^aEnglish Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, 50274, Indonesia

^bEnglish Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University, 50274, Indonesia

bernadiapuspaaa@gmail.com

ratnaasmarani@lecturer.undip.ac.id

Abstract

This thesis article discusses Jacqueline Wilson's *The Story of Tracy Beaker* about Tracy Beaker, a ten years old girl living in a children's home waiting for her mother to pick her up. The purpose of this study is to discover the causes and impacts of the absence of the mother's love for the main character, Tracy Beaker. The writer uses psychological methods and close reading methods with characters, conflict, and setting theories for the intrinsic elements and John Bowlby's attachment theory for the extrinsic elements. The result of the research indicates that the main character, Tracy Beaker, has increased aggression, delinquency, and affectionless psychopathy because she is abandoned by her biological mother.

Keywords: Jacqueline Wilson; love; attachment.

1. Introduction

In everyone's life, a mother is a figure who has the greatest influence on their children. The only person who can provide their children with every comfort is a mother. It has become a mother's duty to develop and uphold her child's character. A mother's love represents the strength that enables a child to get through any challenges. A mother protects their kids from all misfortune and provides them with all the comfort they can. In addition to spoiling them, mothers' love for their children also involves teaching them moral and cultural values. A child character reveals his level of upbringing, which is entirely dependent on the lessons his mother has taught him. A child's personality and behavior can be influenced by his attachment to his/her mother, which can also define how he presents in relationships. To feel secure, safe, and loved and to be able to form positive personalities and behaviors, a child needs attachment from his/her mother.

The absence of mother's love can be seen in Jacqueline Wilson's *The Story of Tracy Beaker* [1]. Tracy Beaker is a ten years old girl living in a children's home away from her biological mother. She has trouble with anyone so she moves swiftly between two foster families and the children's home. She becomes naughty and has behavior issues due to abandonment from her mother. In this thesis article, the author is particularly interested in examining the underlying causes of the absence of mother's love and how it impacts the novel's main female character by using the theory of attachment from John Bowlby. Bowlby believed that the earliest bonds formed by children with their caregivers have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life [2, p.232]. He suggested that attachment also serves to keep the infant close to the mother, thus improving the child's chances of survival. Bowlby argued that the relationship between kids and their mothers is somehow different altogether from other relationships [3]. Essentially, Bowlby suggested that the nature of "monotropy" (attachment conceptualized as being a vital and close bond with just one attachment figure, usually with the mother) meant that a failure to initiate, or a breakdown of, the maternal attachment would lead to serious negative consequences, possibly including affectionless psychopathy. Affectionless psychopathy is an inability to show affection or concern for others. Such individuals act on impulse with little regard for the consequences of their actions, for example, showing no guilt for antisocial behaviour. Bowlby originally believed the effects to be permanent and irreversible, which are in the form of delinquency, reduced intelligence, increased aggression, depression, and affectionless psychopathy (1951: 47-62) [4]. The author mainly focuses on examining the negative effects that are experienced by the main female character, which are increased aggression, delinquency, and affectionless psychopathy

2. Research Methods

In order to try and do the analysis, a technique of analysis is required to develop, find, and check the correctness of the analysis. To collect the data, the writer uses library research by collecting and sorting the data sources from the library and the internet from websites related to this thesis. George stated that library research is used to find factual information and/or the opinions of specialists on necessary elements like ways and theories (2008: 6) [5].

To analyze the causes and impacts of the novel, the writer uses a psychological approach. From a psychological perspective, psychological approaches try to elaborate on the actions and ideas of characters in literary works. This approach analyzes the motives behind human behavior that can be seen through the character. The writer tries to recognize the character's ideas and emotions through the lines from the novel (Guerin *et al.*, 1979: 122) [6].

3. Results

In the novel entitled *The Story of Tracy Beaker*, the focus of analysis is on the psychological condition of the main female character relating to the impacts of the absence of mother's love during her growing-up years.

3.1. Tracy Beaker's Character and Characterization

Due to her specific situation, Tracy Beaker, the main female character, has unique characteristics as can be seen in the analysis below.

3.1.1. Tracy Beaker as a naughty girl

Tracy is described as a naughty ten-year-old girl. It can be seen in Elaine's (one of the social workers) description in the newspaper stating that: "Tracy is a lively, healthy, and chatty ten-year-old who has been in foster care for a number of years, consequently she has a few behavior problems and needs firm, loving handling in a long term foster home" [1, p. 51]. Her behavior problems are known by her surroundings, so that it makes her image unfriendly. She moves from one foster family to another one because of her behavior issues. She always waits for her mother, which makes her unable to get along well with her foster family. Due to this, it can be concluded that it is hard for Tracy to find the perfect family due to her stubbornness to wait for her mother.

3.1.2 Tracy Beaker as a temperamental girl

Tracy is implicitly described as a temperamental girl based on her actions toward her mom's boyfriend. She has no control over her emotions, so she hits and hates her mom's boyfriend until she ends up in a children's home. It can be seen from her emotional words, "she got this Monster Gorilla boyfriend and I hated him and he hated me back and beat me up and so I had to be taken away to a children's home" [1, p. 8]. Tracy's nickname for her mother's cruel boyfriend is "Monster Gorilla Boyfriend". Tracy's separation from her mother due to her bad relationship with her mom's boyfriend makes her angry and it develops into her personality which becomes temperamental.

3.2 Conflicts

The conflicts experienced by Tracy cover internal conflict and external conflict as will be discussed below.

3.2.1 Tracy Beaker's Internal Conflict with her belief

The conflict is in the form of a battle between her beliefs and reality. Tracy strongly believes in her mom's love and care, and someday she will pick her up to live together. She focuses on her mother's presence since she does not have a father figure in her life before. It can be seen that in the novel there is no story about her biological father at all from the beginning to the end of the story. She often mentions missing her mom so much and wanting her mom so badly. However, Tracy's mother never comes or visits Tracy in the children's home at all. It is reflected in Tracy's mind that "She hasn't ever come before" [1, p. 114]. It is strengthened by Justine's (one of the children in the foster home) mocking statement "she's never coming for you. She hasn't been near you since you were little" [1, p. 116]. It can be concluded that Tracy's mom abandoned her; she does not love her even

though Tracy loves her so much. However, Tracy's mom leaves good memories to her that make Tracy want her mom's presence even more.

3.2.2 Tracy Beaker's External Conflict with Her Mother's Boyfriend

At first, Tracy and her biological mother have a normal life full of love and care. After years of being a single parent, her mother starts to date another man, and her mother's boyfriend moves into Tracy's house. The conflict appears when she gets jealous of her mother's boyfriend and hates him. Tracy expresses her feelings and gets beaten by her mother's boyfriend, and her mom decides to move Tracy to a children's home [1, p. 8]. Tracy, who thinks that she is the only one that her mother loves, cannot accept the other person in her life because it could affect her mother's love towards her. Tracy hates her mother's boyfriend since she assumes that her mother will love him more than her.

3.2.3 Tracy Beaker's External Conflict with Aunty Peggy's Family

Aunty Peggy's family is Tracy's first foster family. Tracy often mentions her biological mother to Aunty Peggy. Tracy confesses that she misses her biological mother and imagines that her mom will come for her someday, but Aunty Peggy does not like that and gives violent correction to Tracy. It can be seen when Tracy tells the social worker about Auntie Peggy's coarse words to her, "Oh, Tracy, you naughty girl, you're telling fairy tales again." Then she'd give me a smack [1, p.18]. Besides that, Tracy also shows to the social workers the bruises on her body while saying, "And her smacks really hurt too, right on the back of your leg where it stings the most" [1, p.18]. Tracy's report to the social worker breaks the connection between Tracy and Auntie Peggy, and then Tracy moves into the children's home again.

3.3 *Setting*

The settings that will be discussed are the setting of place, setting of time, and setting of the social environment.

3.3.1 Setting of Place

The setting of place that will be discussed is the children's home where Tracy is abandoned by her mother.

3.3.1.1 Children's Home

In the story, the writer finds the essential place that affects Tracy's personality development; that is, the children's home. This is an important place where Tracy Beaker spends her days. The children's home is also representative of her psychological state, which is developed in that place. The children's home symbolizes Tracy Beaker's loveless condition, in which she does not get her mother's love because her mother leaves her there and never picks her up. It can be seen when Tracy says, "I was in a children's home for a while" [1, p.3]. In that children's home, she feels an absence of motherly love because she is separated from her biological mother and has to live with people that do not care about

her very much. The children's home contributes to her improper development in emotions, behavior, and social skills.

3.3.2 Setting of Time

The focus of the setting of time is on the crucial years in Tracy's life that she has to spend at the children's home.

3.3.2.1 Tracy at the Age of Five

The time when Tracy is abandoned by her mother is very crucial to her psychological development. Abandoned at the age of five, Tracy is desperate to meet her mother again. She often has a delusion about contacting her mother. It can be seen from Tracy's behavior at kindergarten school while staying at a children's home: "I always used to take this toy telephone in the playhouse at school and pretend I was phoning my mom ... but I was only about five then and sometimes they got to be quite real" [1, p.9]. Tracy always misses her mother. Tracy believes that her mother will someday come for her, so she always searches for her mother and wonders when she will visit her. She does not play with other kids while in the playhouse; otherwise, she just does activities that will satisfy her feelings by living in her delusion about her lovely mother.

3.3.2.2 Tracy at the Age of Ten

Tracy's age can be seen in her diary book, stating that "I am 10 years and 2 months old" [1, p.1]. It describes how much time she is separated from her biological mother and how much she misses her mother. She cannot deal with the reality that her mom never looks after her and she must face her life without the mother figure that she wants the most.

3.3.3 Setting of Social Environment

3.3.3.1 The Foster Family

Tracy moves from one foster family to another in a short time. The first foster family is Auntie Peggy and Uncle Sid. Tracy often gets bad treatment from Auntie Peggy, and even forces Tracy to do things rudely. It can be seen through Tracy's saying that "She used to make this slimy stew that looked like throw-up and we were supposed to eat it all up, every single bit. Yuck" [1, p.7]. Auntie Peggy cannot provide Tracy with the warm touch and love that Tracy needs the most. Instead of forcing Tracy to eat what she does not like, Auntie Peggy should hear Tracy's opinion first, then talk nicely to Tracy and persuade Tracy with nice words to eat the food that she cooks.

The second foster family is Julie and Ted. At first, Tracy can get along with her second foster family because Julie and Ted do not have any children except her, so she gets full love and attention from them. After a while, Julie is pregnant, and they are waiting for the new member of the family. After some consideration, Julie and Ted decide to move Tracy into the children's home again because they get some information that Tracy cannot get along with other kids, especially younger ones, while in her former foster family. It can be seen in Elaine's words: "You shut the baby up in the cupboard—" [1, p.39]. Tracy is violent toward Steve (Auntie Peggy's kid) while she is in Auntie Peggy's house. She does not know

how to calm Steve when he is crying, so she puts the baby in the cupboard and closes the door instead of calming him in a loving way. Julie and Ted are afraid that Tracy will act the same way when they have their own child in the future.

3.3.3.2 Children's Home and the Social Worker

Tracy has lived in a children's home for years. All of the kids in the children's home, including Tracy, depend on the social worker there because the social worker has the responsibility of taking care of all of the kids in the children's home. Because of that, the social worker cannot give full love and attention to Tracy since they have many kids to take care of. Tracy once asks Elaine to foster her, but Elaine says, "I'm sure it would be a lot of fun, Tracy, but I'm sorry it's just not going to happen" [1, p.20]. Social workers do not give her all the emotional security she needs to feel comfortable so that she can stop searching for her biological mother. That is why Tracy is always looking for her mother's presence so that she can leave an environment that is not welcoming and loving to her.

4. Discussion

The authors analyzed the causes of the absence of mother's love as well as the impact of the absence of love experienced by the main female character in Jacqueline Wilson's novel entitled *The Story of Tracy Beaker* based on the findings that are written in the results above.

4.1 Causes of Absence of Love Experienced by Tracy Beaker

The focus of the analysis is on the main triggers that cause Tracy's absence of love.

4.1.1 Tracy Beaker's Mother Leaving her in Children's Home

In *The Story of Tracy Beaker* by Jacqueline Wilson, Tracy Beaker does not get the chance to be with her biological mother and feel the warmth of her mother's love. Starting from her early years, her mother leaves her in a children's home because Tracy's mother at that time meets a new boyfriend and her boyfriend does not get along with Tracy. He becomes violent towards Tracy, so Tracy's mother has to send Tracy to a children's home at the age of five. Since then, the mother has not visited her even once [1, p. 14-15]. Tracy has a strong desire that her mother will come for her someday and they will live together happily. It can be seen when Tracy says, "Mom always tell me to give her a big smile even when she's saying goodbye to me" [1, p. 56]. She has a positive thought that her mom still loves her very much, so she is always waiting for her to come to the children's home.

4.1.2 Aunty Peggy's Violent Treatment of Tracy Beaker

Tracy does not experience her mother's love and attachment, even though those are the things that she needs the most. When she needs her mother's love, she gets a foster mother named Aunty Peggy, who cannot give her the love that she needs. Moreover, Auntie Peggy treats her violently by smacking her [1, p. 26]. In other words, Auntie Peggy cannot serve as a loving substitute mother for Tracy. As mentioned above, it can be

concluded that she does not have mother's love and security since her early years. Moreover, she gets bad treatment from her foster mother, which makes her miss and wants her mother more and more.

4.2 The Impacts of the Absence of Love Experienced by Tracy Beaker

The absence of mother's love in Tracy's life inevitably leads to certain impacts that affect Tracy's socialization ability.

4.2.1 Increased Aggression

In the story, Tracy has increased aggression. She cannot control her emotions and anger, and it makes her have trouble with people in children's homes, not only with the other kids there, but also with the social worker and her ex-foster family. When she misses her biological mom, she often bickers or fights with anyone, so she ends up getting punishment from Auntie Peggy. It can be seen in her confession: "I've been locked up heaps of times. Once they locked me up all day long. That was at the first home, when I wouldn't settle down because I wanted my mom so much" [1, p. 17]. Tracy feels frustrated due to missing her mother so much, she cannot express her emotions well, so other people will assume that she is a difficult kid. She does not feel secure and gets warm love from her foster mother, which should be a replacement for her mother's figure. It makes her emotions unstable, which results in increased aggression in Tracy's behavior.

Tracy's aggression can also be seen in her relationship with Justine. She often has trouble with Justine because she cannot hold her anger towards Justine who always has words about Tracy's mother. It can be seen in Tracy's diary book, "I'll think long and carefully for a suitably horrible revenge. I really hate that Justine" [1, p. 25]. The social workers in the children's home cannot control Tracy's aggressive behaviour. They cannot give full attention to her as there are many kids who are also as difficult as her. She needs extra love and affirmation in order to develop her personality to be a good one, but she does not get those support. A mother's love is so important for the emotional development of a kid, especially younger kids. Love and attachment can shape a kid to become a person with stable emotions that will be accepted by society. It can be concluded that a kid extremely needs a mother's love and attachment in order to teach the kid how to follow the rules of society, correct him/her if something is wrong in a loving way, and give her/him the security feeling needed to become confident and respect each other.

4.2.2 Delinquency

Tracy has some behavior problems, including delinquency. She often commits delinquency toward other kids, not only in the foster home but also in the children's home. Initially, she does not get along with a younger foster child named Steve in the first foster family [1, p. 39]. Tracy exhibits this behavior because she has no mother figure that gives her a good example of how to deal with others properly. Even her foster mother, named Auntie Peggy, gives an example of violence by smacking her instead of telling her to stop her delusion about her biological mother.

Tracy's conflicting relationship with Justine also shows her delinquency. Although the social worker tries to separate them, they continue to fight. This leads them to be locked in the quiet room as a punishment for what they have done. Justine always brings up the issue of Tracy's biological mother, who abandoned her in the children's home without even once visiting her. Triggered by Justine's provocation, Tracy cannot control her anger, so she commits delinquency toward Justine. "So I hit her." And I kept on hitting her. And I don't care. I've made her nose bleed again. She's hurt me a bit too, but I don't care" [1, p. 117]. Tracy dislikes it when others disparage her biological mother because, in her opinion, her mother is a lovely woman who adores her. Even when her mother says goodbye to her, Tracy still loves and adores her very much. The separation cannot change Tracy's attitude toward her mother or her desire to be attached to her mother. That is why whenever someone says bad words towards her mother, Tracy cannot control her delinquent behavior. It can be concluded that missing a loving mother figure in someone's life, especially a kid, could affect their development. It can lead to serious negative consequences in the form of delinquency.

4.2.3 Affectionless Psychopathy

Tracy does not have any friends and does not try to make friends in children's homes since she thinks that her mom will come and pick her up, so she believes that it is not necessary to make relationships with anybody. It can be seen in her confession that "there's not much point, because my mom is probably coming to get me soon and then I'll be living with her, so I won't need any friends here" [1, p. 45]. She also pushes away other kids who want to be friends with her. She cannot accept Peter Ingham as her friend by saying "it does not make us friend, dumbo" [1, p. 24]. A child who does not get love and attachment from his or her mother, like Tracy, can suffer from affectionless psychopathy. They have trouble making friends because they cannot show affection or care for others. A child who has no mother figure or mother's love cannot show affection or care to others because no one has taught her. She also cannot feel affection from her surroundings so she cannot give back that kind of feeling to others. Because Tracy often gets bad treatment from Auntie Peggy, she becomes affectionless and keeps away from people. She thinks that no one will like her and she will get a bad response instead of a warm response whenever she approaches others. Thus, Tracy tends to avoid having close relationships with other people because she does not want to feel thrown away. Tracy's affectionless psychopathy is getting worse and worse.

Tracy is also unable to find happiness with other people. She does not care about her surroundings since she still believes that her biological mother will pick her up soon. She does not even try to play around with other kids in the children's home. It can be seen that whenever other kids play together, she does not want to join them. "Except me." I mean, I didn't want to join in a dopey game like that" [1, p. 63]. It can be concluded that kids raised without loving mother figures to develop their good personalities can have a barrier in their social relationships with others. Tracy, who always searches for her mother's warm love and care, ignores everybody except her mother. She shows affectionless psychopathy

because she does not get "monotropy", a loving bond with a mother figure, as mentioned in John Bowlby's theory of attachment [2, p.137-157]. It is proof of how important motherly love is for a kid to develop good social skills.

5. Conclusions

From the analysis based on the research problems, there are causes and impacts of the absence of mother's love shown by Tracy Beaker. The causes of absence of mother's love performed by the main female character are caused by abandonment by Tracy's biological mother and she often gets violent treatment from her former foster mother and her surroundings. Tracy is separated from her biological mother because she has a bad relationship with her mother's boyfriend so she has to live in a children's home and she gets violent treatment from her substitute mother named Auntie Peggy. As a result, Tracy Beaker has increased aggression, delinquency, and affectionless psychopathy due to missing her mother figure in her life and her belief in her biological mother's love and care for her. In this article, it is clear that the main female character that are Tracy Beaker show behavior and personality problems because she has no mother figure in her life that is loving and welcoming her. Meanwhile, she gets violence and bad treatment from her foster mother and her surroundings. They cannot give the support that Tracy is supposed to get in order to change Tracy's problematic behavior and personality into a good one

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