

## THE POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH OF VIOLET MARKEY AFTER EXPERIENCING POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER IN *ALL THE BRIGHT PLACES* NOVEL

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### Abstract

*Traumatic events that pose a threat to one's life can cause PTSD. Positive changes that a person experiences after going through trauma are referred to as PTG. Violet Markey, as the main character in All the Bright Places Novel, experienced post-traumatic stress disorder. This study aims to analyze the five domains of post-traumatic growth that were achieved after successfully going through PTSD symptoms. This study applies post-traumatic stress disorder theory by Gleen R. Schiraldi and Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun's post-traumatic growth theory. This study analyzed data including dialogues, sentences, and phrases regarding Violet's PTSD and PTG using qualitative research methods. The process of collecting data involves multiple steps, such as reading the novel, identifying, classifying, and reducing the data. The findings of this study portrayed that the symptoms of PTSD in Violet Markey are re-experiencing, arousal, and avoidance. Furthermore, Violet experienced personal strength, relating to other, new possibilities, appreciation of life, and spiritual change as a result of post-traumatic growth. It can be concluded that Violet can achieve post-traumatic growth after dealing with the symptoms of PTSD.*

**Keywords:** Post-traumatic stress disorder, PTG, All the Bright Places

### INTRODUCTION

Literature is a work created to express the emotions felt by the author by using beautiful word choices to attract the reader's attention. Literature is the type of writing that most consistently and provocatively addresses the deepest aspects of experience, cognition, and emotion (Bennett & Royle, 2016). Through literary works, the author conveys his imagination inspired by everyday events. Mario Klarer (2004) examined that author portrays life to readers based on his or her objectives, perceptions, ideologies, and value judgments. Some literary works represent the inner struggles or psychological problems that character's face. For

example, someone who is traumatized, anxious, or suffers from another mental illness. Furthermore, literary works can be used to examine and understand numerous aspects of human psychology; meanwhile, psychology provides a theoretical framework for examining and expanding these elements in literary stories.

According to Gosken Aras (2015), literature and psychology are inextricably linked because, both examine humans, their behaviors, and perceptions of the world. Moreover, the problem that often mentioned in literary works is psychological trauma. According to Nada Pop-Jordanova as cited in (Gottfredson & Becker, 2023) Psychological trauma is defined as an individual's experience of a negative incident or enduring condition that overwhelms his or her immediate ability to absorb emotional experiences. Psychological trauma can evoke a wide range of responses and reactions to the trauma they face. Some people may struggle with PTSD, while others are able to thrive through PTG. While trauma can be terrible, there is potential for beneficial growth in the aftermath.

Some people who experience negative effects due to traumatic events have the possibility of experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder. As described by Gleen R. Schiraldi (2009) post-traumatic stress disorder is caused by being exposed to a very stressful situation, such as war, rape, or abuse. The traumatic experiences that generate post-traumatic stress disorder are usually so extraordinary or terrible that they would distress almost anyone. PTSD sufferers tend to isolate themselves, avoid places that trigger trauma, and feel anxious when trying to remember traumatic events that have occurred. The primary aspect of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the emergence of distinctive symptoms resulting from exposure to one or more stressful events (American Psychiatric Association, 2022).

Post-traumatic stress disorder is defined by an overwhelming reaction to a significant stressor, such as heightened anxiety, avoidance of trauma related stimuli, and signs of elevated arousal (Davison et al., 2012). In addition, people who have experienced a traumatic event often struggle to adapt to their new environment. Individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder may have persistent erroneous cognitions about the beginnings of the traumatic experience, which lead them to blame themselves or others (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). According to Schiraldi (2009), the symptoms of PTSD divided into three category such as re-experiencing event, arousal, and avoidance. The symptoms that each person experiences when suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder vary depending on how severe the trauma they experienced.

Traumatic events can bring positive changes for sufferers who are able to overcome post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Life after trauma provides a large deal of information regarding self-reliance, affecting not just self-evaluations in tough situations but also a person's approach of overcoming the difficulties they experience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). This positive change is known as post-traumatic growth. This is characterized by changes in behavior, thinking, and personality towards the better. Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun (2018) emphasized post-traumatic growth refers to beneficial psychological

transformations that occur as the effect of coping with traumatic or extremely difficult life conditions. These transformations happen in response to the challenge of maintaining what people previously believed to be relevant about their lives. According to Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, there are five domains that can support the achievement of post-traumatic growth including personal strength, relating to others, new possibilities, appreciation of life, and spiritual and existential change.

From the theory above, this study focuses on identifying the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder experienced by Violet Markey and how she achieves her post-traumatic growth. Violet as the main character in the novel *All the Bright Places*, has a traumatic experience after an accident that caused her sister to not be saved. After that incident, Violet experienced the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder such as refusing to drive a car again, avoiding places and all activities that trigger trauma. Violet's life has changed since that incident. In the middle of the story, Violet meets Finch, who indirectly supports Violet so that she succeeds in achieving post-traumatic growth.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used qualitative research approach, which will focused on the structure and meaning of the text. Qualitative research provide a comprehensive understanding of human actions, experiences, perspectives, intentions, and motives by conducting observations and interpreting data to determine how individuals behave and what they feel (Ahmad et al., 2019). By using this research method, it can be easier to understand the data conveyed in the form of words, phrases, sentences, and quotations based on the object. In organizing data, there are steps used in this study including reading *All the Bright Places* novel carefully to obtain broad information and recognize characters, themes, plots, and conflicts that lead to psychological trauma, especially PTSD and PTG. After reading the novel, the data will be identified related to symptoms of PTSD and domains of PTG experienced by the character. The next step is to classify all the data that has been identified according to the three symptoms of PTSD, which include re-experiencing, arousal, and avoidance, and the five domains of PTG, such as personal strength, relating to others, new possibilities, appreciation of life, and spiritual change experienced by Violet which can be proven through monologues, dialogues, and narratives. The last step in this process is eliminating data that is inappropriate with PTSD and PTG.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study found the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder towards Violet Markey after experiencing an accident that killed her sister. After successfully fighting post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, she can achieve five domains that influence the achievement of post-traumatic growth. The results are presented in the form of monologue and dialogue from the *All the Bright Places* Novel.

## A. The symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder

The traumatic incident had to encompass both actual and threatened death, severe injury, and a threat to the bodily integrity of oneself or others (Vieweg et al., 2006). Traumatic sensations infiltrate the subjective interpretations, behavioral patterns, and cognitive patterns of survivors who are unable of digesting them on their own as time passes (Chen, 2023). Based on the post-traumatic stress disorder theory in Glenn R. Schiraldi's book, a person will experience three PTSD symptoms, including re-experiencing, arousal, and avoidance after experiencing a traumatic event in the past.

### *Re-experiencing symptoms*

Schiraldi (2009) explained that re-experiencing of event is fear of the stressful memories that continually enter into one's awareness, which causes feelings of fear, sadness, or guilt, which typically arise as thoughts, images, or perceptions. Based on the definition above, Violet's re-experiencing symptoms are reflected in the following quote:

**"It is the face of a sad, lonely girl something bad has happened to. I wonder if my face will ever look the same again, or if I'll always see it in my reflection—Finch, Eleanor, loss, heartache, guilt, death"** (All the Bright Places 312).

In the quote above, Violet felt lonely and sad after Finch's death. Violet felt sad when she recalled the accident she had with her sister and also when she found out that Finch disappeared and was found dead. Violet's re-experiencing symptoms are shown when she is always haunted by guilt, heartache, and the loss of her loved ones. Violet's guilt occurred because she was the one who advised Eleanor to go through the slippery, snowy road so that the accident could not be avoided, while Violet's guilt towards Finch occurred because she felt she could not help Finch deal with his problems so that in the end Finch was found dead. Violet often replayed those moments in her mind, wishing she could turn back time and make different choices. The weight of her remorse felt unbearable, as if it were a shadow that followed her everywhere, reminding her of the consequences of her decisions and the lives forever altered by them.

Nightmares are a common form of re-experiencing the trauma. Schiraldi (2009) explained that nightmares might be repeats of the traumatic incident, or they may symbolically reflect the trauma with themes of danger, saving self or others, being encased or followed by monsters, or dying. Based on the definition above Violet's nightmare can be seen on the quote below:

**"That night, I have the same nightmare I've been having for months—the one where someone comes at me from behind and tries to strangle me. I**

feel the hands on my throat, pressing tighter and tighter, but I can't see who's doing it" (All the Bright Places 109).

The traumatic event that Violet experienced in the past caused her to experience one form of re-experiencing symptoms, namely having nightmares. Since her sister's death, she often has nightmares. Every nightmare that Violet experiences has the same plot. In her dream she feels that someone wants to harm her. In her previous dream, Violet dreamed that her father tried to torture her. Violet's nightmares occur when she always blames herself after her sister's death. Excessive guilt makes the bad memories always come back and results in nightmares. These haunting visions leave her feeling trapped in a cycle of regret, preventing her from finding peace.

### ***Arousal symptoms***

As described by Schiraldi (Schiraldi, 2009), post-traumatic stress disorder can be defined by excessive general bodily arousal complying with exposure to internal or external stressors. Arousal signs include difficulty concentrating or remembering, which might occur while one is still striving for control of intrusive memories (9). As show in the monologue below:

In the days Before, I would have written something—a short story or a blog post or just random thoughts. **"But now I open a new document and stare at the screen. I write a couple words, erase them. Write, erase. I was the writer not Eleanor, but there is something about the act of writing that makes me feel as if I'm cheating on her"** (All the Bright Places 110).

The quote explained that before the traumatic event happened to her, she never had trouble writing, but after the accident Violet had difficulty writing short stories or blogs. Violet experienced arousal symptoms when she tries to control her intrusive memory about her sister death, which caused her to have difficulty concentrating when she wanted to write something.

Furthermore, an overwhelming trauma has made the nervous system more sensitive. Signs of a sensitized nervous system include tightness in the chest or stomach, light-headedness, and sweating. These could happen all the time or in response to a trigger (Schiraldi, 2009). Another proof of the arousal symptoms experienced by Violet Markey in *All the Bright Places* novel can be seen in the monologue below:

"Suddenly I'm having one of those moments that you have after losing someone—**when you feel as if you've been kicked in the stomach and all your breath is gone, and you might never get it back"** (All the Bright Places 334).

Based on the monologue above, the trauma that Violet experienced made her feel difficulty breathing, and her stomach felt like it was kicked. The condition that Violet experienced was the same as some people who were feeling lost. Their nervous system

responded excessively to the memory of the trauma, which had a bad impact on their body condition just like Violet experienced.

### ***Avoidance symptoms***

PTSD sufferer strives to avoid all things that remind them of the trauma. They may refuse to talk about it. They may suppress thoughts, images, or emotions associated with the incident. They may avoid activities, locations, individuals, or memories that trigger flashback (Schiraldi, 2009). Additionally, another dialogue below proves the avoidance symptoms experienced by Violet Markey:

“Let’s talk about the writing. Let’s talk about the website.”

She means EleanorandViolet.com. Eleanor and I started it after we moved to Indiana. **“But I haven’t touched the site since Eleanor died, because what would be the point? It was a site about sisters. Besides, in that instant we went plowing through the guardrail, my words died too.”**

**“I don’t want to talk about the website.”** (All the Bright Places 27).

This conversation shows when Violet refused to discuss with Mrs. Kresney as her school counsellor about the website created by Violet and Eleanor. Since Eleanor passed away, EleanorandViolet.com has been neglected. Violet experienced avoidance symptoms when Violet tried to refuse talk with Mrs. Kresney about the website so that she would not remember the trauma she had experienced.

Moreover, the dialogue below proves the avoidance symptoms experienced by the main character, Violet Markey:

**“I don’t cheer anymore. I quit student council. I suck at orchestra. I don’t have any friends or a boyfriend, because it’s not like the rest of the world stops, you know?” My voice is getting louder, and I can’t seem to do anything about it.** “Everyone goes on with their lives, and maybe I can’t keep up. **Maybe I don’t want to. The one thing I’m good at I can’t do anymore.** I didn’t even want to work on this project, but it’s kind of the only thing I have going on” (All the Bright Places 176).

Violet experiences avoidance symptoms that can be seen when Violet avoids all activities carried out with Eleanor. When Eleanor was still alive, Violet and her sister participated in various extracurricular at school. They often spent time together. However, that habit began to change after Eleanor's death. Eleanor's death made Violet very depressed; she always tried to avoid everything related to the incident by not continuing the cheerleading, orchestral

extracurriculars, and resigning from the student council. By avoiding everything related to trauma, Violet hopes that her efforts can help her to continue her life without Eleanor's shadow.

Violet exhibited three symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, including re-experiencing the event, arousal, and avoidance. Violet had these symptoms resulting from a car accident. Violet felt sadness and guilt when she remembered Finch and Eleanor's deaths. An overwhelming trauma has made her nervous system more sensitive. Violet avoids discussing and engaging in activities related to trauma. As time goes by, Violet's PTSD symptoms begin to diminish. Violet begins to show positive changes, commonly called PTG. There are several things that underlie the achievement of Violet's PTG, one of which is that Finch had a big impact on Violet's positive changes.

## **B. Post Traumatic Growth**

Post-traumatic growth is described as an individual's subjective experience of positive psychological transformation as an effect of their difficulties with trauma (Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). As described by Ricard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, there are five domains that influence the achievement of post-traumatic growth, including personal strength, relating to others, new possibilities, appreciation of life, and spiritual and existential change.

### ***Personal Strength***

Personal strength begins with an improved feeling of self-reliance, strength, and confidence, and an understanding of self as a survivor or victor rather than "victim." (Tedeschi et al., 2018). Violet's personal strength reflected through the monologue below:

**"I drive faster than I normally do, and I remember the way without looking at the map."** I am scarily, eerily calm, as if someone else is doing the driving. I keep the music off. This is how focused I am on getting there (All the Bright Places 307).

From the monologue above, Violet becomes more confident that she is able to drive a car to save Finch, who is reported missing. When experiencing PTSD, Violet refused to drive a car because she was afraid that the accident would happen again, but after getting to know Finch, the fear disappeared. The evidence that Violet has achieved post-traumatic growth when Violet decided to look for Finch's whereabouts by driving a car. This decision marks a significant turning point in her journey, symbolizing her newfound strength and resilience.

Another proof that Violet experienced personal strength can be seen when Finch invites Violet to go to a place that is often used by some people to write their wishes and requests on a wall. Violet writes down some hopes that she wants to do before she dies. Violet wants to stop being afraid and overthinking, start driving, writing, and doing all activities without fear. With a strong desire from Violet, it can help her achieve post-traumatic growth. This is reflected in Violet as quoted below:

***Before I die*** ... it says on what looks like a giant chalkboard. **“For a long time, I just stand there reading, and then I write: Stop being afraid. Stop thinking too much. Fill the holes left behind. Drive again, write, and breathe”** (All the Bright Places 130).

### ***Relating to others***

According to Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun (2018), post-traumatic growth emphasizes the results of positive changes in connections, attitudes or behaviors in relationships can be transformed in positive ways such as more willing to express emotions and receive encouragement from others”. It can be proven by the quote below:

Then another message appears: **“I got your rules for wandering and I have an addition: We don’t travel in bad weather. We walk, jog, or ride bikes. No driving. We don’t go far from Bartlett.”** (All the Bright Places 36).

As seen in the quote above, Violet accepts Finch to be her partner in the geography assignment. At first, Violet tried to negotiate with Mr. Black whether she could get a replacement assignment other than visiting beautiful places in Indiana. However, her efforts were in vain. Violet had to continue doing the assignment. In the past, Violet decided to limit her interactions with people since her sister's death. Some of her friends were also reluctant to approach her. Because Finch understood the trauma experienced by Violet, Finch tried to help Violet. Finch always gets rejected by Violet. To convince Violet, Finch starts to visit Violet and invites her to go to the park with the hope that she will feel comfortable being around Finch. After several meetings, Finch tries to convince Violet that everything will be okay, and Finch would comply with all the requirements that she wanted so that she could continue doing this assignment without being overshadowed by the fear of traveling far from home. After seeing Finch's efforts, Violet began to try to open up and began to feel comfortable exchanging stories with Finch and finally accepted Finch's invitation to be a partner in the geography assignment. Based on the explanation above, Violet shows positive changes after trauma by accepting help from others.

Relating to others involves developing more closer and meaningful relationships with other people. The experience of a higher feeling of compassion, especially towards individuals who currently face the same distressed fate (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Violet's relating to other can be seen when Violet worried about Finch's condition. At her lowest phase, Violet once stood on the bell tower with a blank mind. Luckily, Finch saved Violet and helped her down from the bell tower. Remembering the incident, Violet shows post-traumatic growth when she wants to help Finch, who is in trouble, and Violet feels that it is her turn to save the person who helped her before. Violet's relating to other can be seen through the monologue below:



"On the first day of school after Christmas break, I climbed up on the bell tower ledge. That's where I met Finch. He was up there too, but he was the one who talked me down, because once I realized where I was, I was scared and I couldn't move. I might have fallen off if he wasn't there. But I didn't fall off, and that's thanks to him. **Well, now he's up on that ledge. Not literally, I say to my dad before he can jump for the phone. And we need to help him.**" (All the Bright Places 282).

### ***New possibilities***

New possibilities are frequently shown in the individual's identification of new possibilities for their life through creating new interests, activities, or habits, or building a new career (Tedeschi et al., 2018). Violet's new possibilities were shown when Violet had a consultation session with Mrs. Kresney. Seeing Violet's condition starting to improve from before, Mrs. Kresney asked several questions regarding Violet's condition. After going through PTSD symptoms, Violet decides to do everything she previously avoided. She started to write actively again and was brave enough to drive a car again. Violet decided to create a new web magazine that has interesting themes. Each step she took not only helped her heal but also reignited her passion for storytelling. It can be seen in the quote from the novel below:

"I'm fine. Let's talk about you. I want to know how you're feeling."

**"I'm good actually. Better than I've been in a long time."**

**"Really?" She's surprised.**

**"Yes. I've even started writing again. And riding in a car."** (All the Bright Places 196)

Another proof of new possibilities can be seen in the narrative below:

When she comes to a stop, I can't tell if she's going to throw up or climb out and slap me. **Instead, she shouts, "Again!" And she's off once more in a blur of blue metal and long hair and long legs and arms** (All the Bright Places 186).

Since meeting Finch, Violet often tries various new things, one of which is riding a roller coaster. Violet has never ridden a roller coaster before. Violet experienced post-traumatic growth, which can be seen when Violet managed to overcome her past fears and dared to try new activities. This newfound courage not only brought excitement to her life but also deepened her bond with Finch, who encouraged her every step of the way.

### ***Appreciation of life***

As stated by Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun (2018), Appreciation of life involves a deeper appreciation for everything that existence has to offer, whether little things previously taken for granted or a deeper appreciation for everything that people still have in

their lives. Based on the definition above Violet's appreciation of live can be seen on the quote below:

**"I can feel the worries fading away. I'm relaxed and happy—happier than I've been in a while. I am in the moment. I am here"** (All the Bright Places 278).

As seen in the narrative above, Finch's presence had a big impact on Violet. She felt all the fear she had felt since the accident was gone. She felt happier and didn't feel anxious about anything. Violet showed that by appreciating the little things in her life, she would feel much happier. When she manages to overcome her PTSD symptoms, Violet feels a surge of joy that she never imagined before.

The traumatic events that Violet has experienced make her realize that everything that has happened cannot be changed and avoided. At first, Violet never expressed to her parents what she felt after the accident. Violet always tried to look fine in front of her parents. But one day Violet tried to tell her parents honestly what she really felt and the guilt due to Eleanor's death. After hearing the statement, Violet's parents tried to hug and calm Violet that everything that had happened was not her fault and everything would be fine. After Finch's death, she tries not to blame herself for everything that has happened. Violet tries to appreciate everything that she still has, such as her parents and other friends. It can be proven by the quote below:

When they try to interrupt me, I talk louder. "We can't go backward. **We can't change anything that happened. I can't bring her back or bring Finch back. I can't change the fact that I sneaked around to see him when I told you it was over"** (All the Bright Places 331).

### ***Spiritual Exchange***

Spiritual and existential growth is another process through which some individuals experience beneficial transformation in their struggles with stress and grief (Tedeschi ad Calhoun 6). This is reflected in Violet as quoted below:

Taylor Prayer Chapel was created as a sanctuary for weary travellers to stop and rest along their way. **"It was built in memoriam to those who have lost their lives in auto accidents, and as a place of healing"**

I read and reread them until I know the words by heart, and then I fold up the papers and slide them back into the envelope. **"I don't need to worry that Finch and I never filmed our wanderings.** It's okay that we didn't collect souvenirs or that we never had time to pull it all together in a way that made

sense to anyone else but us. The thing I realize is that it's not what you take, it's what you leave" (All the Bright Places 342).

The quote explains that Violet decides to stop worrying about Finch after reading the letter in the Bible that Finch wrote to her. After Finch died, Violet visited the last place on their list to visit while working on their geography assignment. Their final destination was a church that was used as a place for healing and in memory of the victims in a car accident. The implied meaning of choosing Taylor Prayer Chapel as the final destination of their journey because Finch wants Violet not to linger with guilt over her sister's death. Which indirectly leads Violet to get closer to spiritual things. When she arrived at the church, it turned out that there was a letter that Finch had prepared. The letter contained heartfelt words of encouragement and hope and urging Violet to embrace life without guilt to consume her. As she read through Finch's thoughtful notes, she felt a surge of emotions, realizing that his support would always be with her, guiding her toward healing and acceptance. Violet experienced a spiritual and existential change when she realized that after reading the Bible and Finch's letter, there was nothing to worry about if someone had left her.

## CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the traumatic event experienced by Violet Markey caused her experience three symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Violet is always haunted by guilt and heartache after losing her loved ones. The accident made it difficult for her to concentrate to write a blog. Violet also refused to discuss anything related to her trauma. The symptoms of PTSD greatly changed Violet's psychological condition; from being known as an active student, she changed to being gloomy and limiting her interactions with other people. However, Violet begins to show various positive changes called post-traumatic growth. She showed all the positive changes after getting support from various people and changing her view that there is no point in regretting what has happened and learning that avoiding trauma is part of her journey to achieve PTG. She feels better focusing on development towards a better direction in the future. This new mindset has allowed her to embrace challenges and view setbacks as opportunities for growth. With each step forward, Violet builds resilience and strengthens her belief in her own potential. Post-traumatic growth experienced by Violet includes feeling more confident to drive a car again, accepting help from others, trying new things, appreciating her life, and experiencing spiritual and existential change.

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