



We: The Prisoner of Our Past

Flavianus Batan, Dosen STARKI

Have you ever wondered, as adults, why most of us have anxieties, separation issues, low self-esteem, and various personality issues? I have never seen any adults without any flaws in their personalities. No matter how good a person is, they must have some kind of mental wound if only we know more about them. Mild or severe, each one of us has personality issues. One of the mild personality issues examples is trust issues; difficulties in opening up or getting close to others, even if they long for deep and meaningful relationships. They may have difficulties in being vulnerable, and/or being physically intimate with others. These people tend to think that a healthy relationship is impossible to be achieved because people are mean and the world is cruel. On the other hand, examples of severe personality issues are antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), borderline personality disorder (BPD) histrionic personality disorder, and narcissistic personality disorder. Those personality issues might cause severe problems within one's relationship with others. Some of us keep failing to build healthy relationships because of our lack of trust, anxieties, etc. Some of us have met our soulmates but they end their relationship at some point because they

are too afraid to fall in love again. Some of us are despised by our colleagues because of our negative attitudes at work. The saddest thing is these issues cannot fix themselves and will be affecting one's life forever if not healed. So, what are the causes of these issues? Can one break free from the cycle once and for all?

Many experts believe that the root of most of our existing personalities is contributed to our childhood experiences. We have been through a lot ever since we were little. Some experts believe that even since a baby was in the womb, personal issues may have already existed. For example, when a pregnant mother doesn't want her baby, the baby can already feel it. Then, when the baby is born, various mental issues such as anxiety, lack of self-esteem, or trust issues, may be brought with him. Therefore, when we were little, we are like clays that are free to be shaped into anything. Traumas might have sculpted our personality into something unwanted and undesired. For example, a person whose parents got divorced at a young age might think that a happy ending does not exist and that real love is not coming their way. No matter how good people are to them, they will always leave at some point. Another example is when



someone was physically abused by their parents during childhood. They might think that they won't ever do it to anyone else, but they have tendencies to be the next abuser or bully in some other way when they grow old. According to NTCSN, these abused children do not even seem to care anymore if they are hit; they have lost the normal fight or flight reactions built-in to protect us, humans, from danger. These children may also fail to react to another hazard. They may stop trying to develop friendships or succeed at school or plan for their future. They might seem to be heartless and cold-hearted because they are too get used to being abused. In their future relations with others, they might have difficulties maintaining their cool. Some anger issues may occur in a long run. Some of us who were educated by the baby boomer generation are probably familiar with physical abuse within the family. We normalized their education method by thinking that they do not know what they were doing. Sadly, most of them actually did. Thus, should we blame our parents for being unable to educate us with love and compassion? As adults, we are responsible for our well-being. If blaming them could make us feel better, then, where is our part to make ourselves better? It is going to be a never-ending cycle of blaming others for our incapability to heal ourselves, to work on ourselves. Therefore, physically abused survivors have a lot of homework to do before they can engage in a healthy committed relationship with someone.

The next lack of affection during our childhood might also be a factor in various personality issues in our adulthood. Let us say that an individual's achievements have never been celebrated by their parents. Later in their adulthood,

they might have a lack of sensibility. They may find it difficult to appreciate others or even just to give compliments to others. If in our childhood we were often neglected by our caregivers, we may be crazy about acknowledgments from others, which might seem as if we are too proud or arrogant to other people. Those behaviors might be irritating in the eyes of our colleagues, friends, and even partners. Lack of affection during one's childhood might also lead one to be a narcissist. It is a mental health condition in which someone has a very high sense of their importance. They seek a lot of attention and desire people to admire them. People with this mental issue may lack the ability to care about the feelings of others. Of course, most narcissists do not even know if they are doing the wrong thing. In the long run, narcissists would find difficulties in maintaining a healthy relationship with others. People are going to only use them for their own needs by exploiting (feeding) their ego or leaving them alone.

So, what can we do to break the cycle of our past trauma? Cassoobhoy (2020) states that to heal, one should maintain connections with their loved ones such as friends and family. If others have had similar experiences, talk to them. They may be having some of the mutual feelings that you are having. Open the lines of communication as soon as possible after your traumatic event to people you trust. It's an essential part of your recovery. Therefore, you will be able to channel your overwhelming thoughts and feelings to others instead of putting all the burden on yourself. It always feels better to carry something together. Unfortunately, not everyone with trauma wants to open up with someone else. It takes courage to open



up and be vulnerable to others. Therefore, if one doesn't have anyone whom they can trust, they can seek professional help. According to Rauch (2016), therapists, or psychotherapists, are licensed mental health professionals who specialize in helping their clients to develop better cognitive and emotional skills, reduce symptoms of mental illness, and deal with various life challenges to improve their lives. They are meant to be an authentic and genuine person who listens yet not being judgmental of those who need their help. Alas, besides the economic reasons, not many people in Indonesia are aware of mental health issues. Only a few people start seeking professional help to work on their issues. Most of them choose to live with it or inherit their mental health issues to their children.

Exercise is one way to turn negative energy into something positive. Get out and move your body. Experts say it's one of the most effective ways to handle the side effect of a traumatic experience. Running, gentle stretching, and even walking are all good for your body. If you want to challenge yourself you can start to set some goals. However, do not force things. If you're exhausted, get some rest and start again the next day.

Last but not least is to feed your soul. Just like our body needs nutrients to keep functioning, our soul needs spiritual food, too. The faith that tomorrow may be a better day is required in the process of healing. That faith can be found in books, bibles, or simply in nature. There is a lot of motivational literature that we can read to develop ourselves, to heal our mental wounds. Most religions promise their followers that tomorrow will be a better day, and in the end, everything will be all right. Hope is powerful enough to make people change for the better. By going into nature, we can escape the overwhelming world that is full of human and their complexity. It takes time to be able to be comfortable with yourself. It takes time to love yourself. It takes time to feel better.

In the end, the healing process is never easy and it might not be as fun as it sounds, 'healing'. It might be up and down, back and forth, and not always linear. Therefore, we have to be able to accept the truth that healing is a long process that we have to face for the rest of our lives. Remember, "we are the product of our past, but we don't have to be prisoners of it." – Rick Warren./GN/

References

- Cassoobhoy, A. (2020). Self-Care and Recovery After Trauma. Retrieved from <https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/ss/slideshow-emotional-trauma-self-care>
- Rauch, J. (2016). What Is a Therapist (Psychotherapist)? The Complete Definition. Retrieved from <https://www.talkspace.com/blog/therapist-psychotherapist-complete-definition/>
-