



Neurodivergence and Trauma in Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*

Faeja Humaira Meem

Metropolitan University, Bangladesh

Abstract

Following exposure to traumatic events, an individual's brain may undergo structural changes in an effort to adapt. These alterations can be interpreted as manifestations of neurodivergence, which encompasses variations in cognitive processes and behavioral patterns that deviate from societal norms. Conversely, neurodivergent individuals may experience trauma in a neurotypical-oriented society. Recognizing the intersection between neurodivergence and trauma is imperative for accommodating diverse cognitive experiences. This qualitative research employs a psychoanalytic lens and the existentialist philosophy, using Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego, and exploring repression and the unconscious, to analyze the experiences of Tsukuru Tazaki, the titular character in Haruki Murakami's novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*, exploring the intersections of trauma and neurodivergence and their impact on his identity formation and relationships, revealing layers of consciousness, internal conflicts, and existential reflections. The findings suggest that the protagonist's trauma and neurodivergence significantly contribute to his experiences of alienation and existential crisis. This research underscores the necessity of understanding how neurodivergence and trauma coalesce to influence the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals, aiming to contribute to fostering a richer understanding of the human condition.

Keywords: alienation, existentialism, neurodiversity, psychoanalysis, trauma theory

1. Introduction

Something must be fundamentally wrong with me, Tsukuru often thought. Something must be blocking the normal flow of emotions, warping my personality. But Tsukuru couldn't tell whether this blockage came about when he was rejected by his four friends, or whether it was something innate, a structural issue unrelated to the trauma he'd gone through. (Murakami, 2014, p. 58)

Murakami's writings frequently depict characters struggling to figure out who they are and where they fit in the world. His characters are often isolated and disconnected from society, and they tend to experience loss and longing. Murakami's 2014 novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, hereafter *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*, is one such introspective and melancholic story in which Murakami shines a light on the deep-seated pain

and isolation that result from past traumas through the titular character Tsukuru's journey of self-discovery.

Judy Singer, a self-advocate and sociologist, is credited with coining the term "neurodiversity" in her 1998 honors thesis titled, "Odd People In: The Birth of Community Amongst People on the Autism Spectrum. A Personal Exploration of a New Social Movement Based on Neurological Diversity," to acknowledge and recognize that each person's brain develops uniquely (Fung, 2021). This gave rise to the term "neurodivergent," which is a non-medical umbrella term that describes differences in the human brain and cognition, such as differences in social skills, learning, attention, mood, and other mental functions, compared to those of the "neurotypical." The concept calls into question the belief that certain neurodevelopmental abnormalities are inherently pathological. Even though some neurodivergent people have medical conditions, others may not have one or have not been diagnosed yet. Autism spectrum disorder, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, down syndrome, social anxiety, and mental health conditions such as bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), avoidant personality disorder (AvPD), and others are common among people who identify as neurodivergent (Fung, 2021).

Many of the characters written by Murakami, a master of delving into the psyche of his characters, exhibit mental illnesses, which the author disguises with supernatural occurrences, and Tsukuru is no exception. His feelings of inadequacy and inability to form close personal relationships add to his feelings of alienation which is amplified due to the traumatic experience Tsukuru faced from the expulsion from his peer group. Murakami ultimately leaves it up to the readers to make sense of Tsukuru Tazaki's existence, as well as the larger world that surrounds him, and to walk the delicate line between what is and what isn't.

This research argues that Tsukuru's neurodivergence is both inherent and a result of traumatic experiences, leading to his profound sense of isolation and existential crisis. The research findings suggest that Murakami's portrayal of Tsukuru not only sheds light on the psychological complexities of neurodivergent individuals but also underscores the broader human struggle for identity and connection in the face of trauma and existential despair.

2. Method of Interpretation

The primary method of data collection involves a detailed textual analysis of Haruki Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*. This research focuses on the narrations and dialogues in Haruki Murakami's *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* (2014), through the lens of psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and existentialism.

2.1. Selection of Passages

For this research, specific passages were chosen based on their relevance to the topics of trauma and neurodivergence. Instances, where the titular character Tsukuru's behaviors, thoughts, dreams, or dialogues exhibit traits of trauma reactions or neurodivergence, have been identified and closely examined in this research to understand how Murakami portrays these traits in his character.

2.2. Coding Methods

The research delves into how Tsukuru's experiences of rejection and loss contribute to his sense of alienation from the world around him through a close reading of various instances and dialogues throughout the novel, which was coded to classify its various themes and patterns. The following standards were applied while coding passages:

1. Neurodivergence Indicators: Signs of innate neurodivergent characteristics, such as distinctive cognitive processes, social challenges, or obsessive thoughts.
2. Trauma Reactions: Tsukuru's reactions to traumatic events such as withdrawal, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts.
3. Existential Crisis: The sections where Tsukuru contemplates his identity, the purpose of his existence, and his place in the world.
4. Psychoanalytic Elements: References to the id, ego, superego, repression, and unconscious processes.

2.3. Application of Theoretical Frameworks

2.3.1. Psychoanalysis

Peter Barry (1995/2009) defines psychoanalysis as a type of therapy that tries to cure mental problems by studying the conscious and unconscious processes in the mind. This research aims to look at how Murakami deals with the issues of trauma and its relations with neurodivergence through his narratives and investigates the unconscious by focusing on the id, ego, and superego, which are the three aspects of the mind according to psychologist Sigmund Freud (Peter Barry, 1995/2009). In the decision-making process, these three elements of the mind mediate conflicts between impulses, morals, and reason. Mental illnesses develop when the id, ego, and superego are imbalanced (Freud, 1923).

2.3.2. Trauma Theory

Another important aspect of exploring the unconscious mind is examining what is repressed or shifted into the unconscious to protect the mind from dangerous memories and painful emotions. According to Sigmund Freud (2010), one way humans cope with traumatic experiences is to repress them or shift them from conscious to unconscious memory. These repressed memories, according to Freud's predecessor and colleague Carl Jung (1961/1989), might manifest in dreams as archetypes.

2.3.3. Existentialism

A further vital approach of this research is existentialism, a philosophical movement that addresses questions of existence, freedom, and the pursuit of meaning. The emphasis of existentialist philosophy, as expressed by thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, is on the struggle of the individual to find purpose in an absurd world (Flynn, 2006). This viewpoint helps to explain Tsukuru's existential crisis, his emptiness, and his search for meaning and identity.

2.3.4. Integrating Theories

Both psychoanalysis and trauma theory focus on the impact of past experiences on present behavior. The repression of traumatic memories is also central to understanding trauma responses. Existentialism's emphasis on individual isolation and the search for meaning dovetails with the experiences of neurodivergent individuals, who often feel disconnected from societal norms and expectations. Tsukuru's existential crisis is thus informed by his neurodivergence and trauma history. All three theories contribute to an understanding of identity formation.

3. Murakami and Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki

Murakami describes Tsukuru Tazaki's life and his quest for meaning in life in a third-person narrative. In the past, while he was still attending high school, Tsukuru had four best friends — two girls and two boys — who all had names that included a color. Murakami (2014) writes, "The two boys' last names were Akamatsu — which means 'red pine' — and Oumi — 'blue sea', the girls' family names were Shirane — 'white root' — and Kurono — 'black field.' Tazaki was the only last name that did not have a color in its meaning. From the very beginning this fact made him feel a little bit left out" (p. 6). Tsukuru is the only one in the group whose name does not have a color, his surname means "to build or create," which coincidentally coincides with his profession at a Tokyo train company. This estrangement serves as the foundation for the novel. After a while, when he had left his hometown for college, all of Tsukuru's closest friends ended their relationships with him without any explanation. They stopped returning his phone calls and declared they would never see or speak to him again. "It was a sudden, decisive declaration, with no room for compromise. They gave no explanation, not a word, for this harsh pronouncement. And Tsukuru didn't dare ask" (Murakami, 2014, p. 3).

The alienated 36-year-old Tsukuru is encouraged by his new romantic interest, Sara, to visit each of his old friends in order to seek the truth. He eventually discovers that the reason he was shunned from the group was that one of the female friends, Shiro, also known as Yuzu, claimed he raped her. At this stage of the narrative, reality and dreams collide. Tsukuru had a violent and erotic dream that involved the two girls, Yuzu and Eri, and a new college friend, Fumiaki Haida, around the time of the alleged rape. At first, it appears to be nothing but a dream, but given Haida's unexpected disappearance and Yuzu's rape allegations, he starts questioning whether he is responsible and worries something supernatural has occurred. Tsukuru then learns Yuzu was murdered in her apartment six years prior to the present plotline, further intensifying the mystery.

Tsukuru's existence takes on a psychedelic and slightly unsettling tone, owing primarily to his inner monologues, which range from the ordinary to the philosophical. Murakami (2014) adds to Tsukuru's reflections on former relationships, "[It was] like a silent hatchet had sliced the ties between them, ties through which warm blood still flowed, along with a quiet pulse" (p. 100). *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* (Murakami, 2014) contains many philosophical undertones, which take two forms. The first involves extensive dialogues between Tsukuru and Haida, a close friend at Tokyo University and a philosophy aficionado who, unlike Tsukuru, enjoys "deconstructing" things. Back at Tsukuru's apartment, Haida ponders the metaphysical question of being, contemplating the limits and bounds of free thought and existence, but is unable to respond when Tsukuru inquires about the worth of free choice (Murakami, 2014). This conversation, especially Haida's "respect for and exasperation with boundaries" (Murakami, 2014, p. 56), sets the foundation for the remainder of the novel. While Haida does not return following his abrupt departure, his comments color Tsukuru's conduct toward his four companions, leading to the second type of philosophy he investigates. The novel's second half delves deeply into Tsukuru's existence and driving goal. Murakami dwells on Tsukuru's physicality as he becomes more immersed in Yuzu's mystery. Tsukuru becomes a character devoid of belonging as he blurs the barriers between reality and the strange.

4. Identifying Neurodivergence in Tsukuru Tazaki

Tsukuru's sensitivity to noise, lack of interest in socializing, need for solitude, and ability to focus on one task for prolonged periods are all instances of neurodivergent qualities that are

innate to him. These characteristics are not the consequence of his traumatic experiences, rather, they are a part of who he is as a person:

The scale of the city was overwhelming, the diversity of life there extraordinary. There were too many choices of things to do, the way people talked struck him as odd, and the pace of life was too fast. He couldn't strike a good balance between himself and the world around him. (Murakami, 2014, p. 22)

Tsukuru is described as having a heightened sensitivity to sound, which are overwhelming and distracting for him. For example, he is unable to work in noisy environments and is frequently described as covering his ears in response to loud sounds. This sensitivity to sound is a common symptom of sensory processing disorder and is indicative of how sensory difficulties impact daily functioning and quality of life (Marco et al., 2011).

Tsukuru Tazaki's sensory processing of music is a key aspect of his neurodivergence, highlighting his unique and complex relationship with the world around him. Throughout the novel, Haruki Murakami explores how Tsukuru's sensory experiences impact his emotions and relationships with others. One example of Tsukuru's sensory processing of music is seen when he listens to Franz Liszt's "'Le mal du pays.' The quiet, melancholy music gradually gave shape to the undefined sadness enveloping his heart... ultimately revealing, slowly and silently, its shape" (Murakami, 2014, p. 197).

Tsukuru's emotional response to the music is visceral and profound, highlighting the depth of his sensory experience. The ways in which Tsukuru processes sensory information in relation to music and art are also closely linked to autism spectrum. These experiences are seen as a result of the difficulty in navigating a world that is often overwhelming and confusing for individuals with sensory processing disorders. The sensory difficulties also exacerbate feelings of frustration, anger, and hopelessness, leading to a vicious cycle of anxiety and depression (Marco et al., 2011).

Many individuals with neurodivergence struggle with serious mental health issues. Depression, a common condition in this population (Fung, 2021), is characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-esteem, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of fatigue, and poor concentration. Long-term or recurrent depression significantly affects a person's capacity to function at work or school or cope with day-to-day activities. Depression, at its worst, results in suicide (Mind, 2020), and Tsukuru's suicidal tendencies are seen from the beginning of the narrative:

From July of his sophomore year in college until the following January, all Tsukuru Tazaki could think about was dying... Taking his own life seemed the most natural solution, and even now he couldn't say why he hadn't taken this final step. (Murakami, 2014, p. 1)

Tsukuru's feeling of worthlessness is a common symptom of depression and is also the manifestation of his existentialist struggle for meaning and connection, as he indicates that, "[a]s far as this world was concerned, he would simply no longer exist—just as this world would no longer exist for him" (Murakami, 2014, p. 1). Tsukuru's depression can be classified as major depressive disorder, a type of depression characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, emptiness, and loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, among other symptoms (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), as seen below:

Like a person in a storm desperately grasping at a lamppost, he clung to this daily routine. He only spoke to people when necessary, and after school, he would return to his solitary apartment, sit on the floor, lean back against the wall, and ponder death and

the failures of his life. Before him lay a huge, dark abyss that ran straight through to the earth's core. (Murakami, 2014, p. 2)

One of the key themes of the novel is the stigma surrounding mental health in Japan. Tsukuru's struggles with his mental health are often dismissed or ignored by those around him, reflecting the societal stigma and lack of understanding that still exists around mental health in Japan. Despite the lack of understanding of mental health in Japan, research has shown that Japan had the highest rate of depression among developed countries, highlighting the need for more awareness and support for those struggling with mental health issues (Nakao & Takeuchi, 2006).

Tsukuru's tendency to withdraw from social interactions and his fear of getting close to others are symptoms consistent with avoidant personality disorder (AvPD), which is often comorbid with major depressive disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Tsukuru's sense of alienation and isolation is also an indication of his AvPD, which is characterized by a fear of rejection and a tendency to avoid social interactions, combined with Tsukuru's other neurodivergent traits, reinforces his feelings of disconnection from others and contributes to his sense of existential alienation, as evidenced by the narration below:

The pain he felt was, if anything, more intense, and weighed down on him even more greatly because of the physical distance. Alienation and loneliness became a cable that stretched hundreds of miles long, pulled to the breaking point by a gigantic winch. (Murakami, 2014, p. 3)

Tsukuru is portrayed as having feelings of social anxiety and fear of rejection, which are hallmarks of AvPD. Individuals with AvPD avoid work or social activities that require interaction with others and are extremely sensitive to disapproval and criticism. They constantly worry about rejection, as well as being ridiculed or shamed by others, they avoid relationships, friendships, and intimacy out of fear of rejection and feel lonely, isolated, and inferior to others. They are also reluctant to try new activities for fear of rejection (Mind, 2020). These traits are visible in Tsukuru throughout the novel:

...he had a constant, nagging fear that someday he would fall away from this intimate community, or be forced out and left on his own. Anxiety raised its head, like a jagged, ominous rock exposed by the receding tide, the fear that he would be separated from the group and end up entirely alone. (Murakami, 2014, p. 12)

Tsukuru tends towards self-blame and self-loathing and he is haunted by the belief that he is responsible for the events that led to his friends cutting him off and he internalizes their rejection. Tsukuru often describes himself as a faulty person and feels guilty for things that are not his fault. He also has a tendency to avoid dealing with his emotions and instead, suppress them. This repression of emotions is a coping mechanism that is a result of his traumatic experiences (Mind, 2020), and it is clear that Tsukuru is struggling to process and cope with the trauma he has experienced:

Though he lacked a striking personality, or any qualities that made him stand out, and despite always aiming for what was average, the middle of the road, there was (or seemed to be) something about him that wasn't exactly normal, something that set him apart. And this contradiction continued to perplex and confuse him, from his boyhood all the way to the present, when he was thirty-six years old. Sometimes the confusion was momentary and insubstantial, at other times deep and profound. (Murakami, 2014, p. 11)

The narration of the novel gives the impression that Tsukuru suffers from borderline personality disorder (BPD), and this is consistent with the description of BPD where

individuals who suffer from this condition are emotionally unstable (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). People with BPD lack a solid sense of who they are or what they want in life, with their views on these topics fluctuating greatly depending on who they're with, as depicted in *Tsukuru*:

Sometimes, when he looked at his face in the mirror, he detected an incurable boredom. He had no deep interest in the arts, no hobby or special skill. He was, if anything, a bit taciturn, he blushed easily, wasn't especially outgoing, and could never relax around people he'd just met. (Murakami, 2014, p. 10)

Having psychotic episodes, such as seeing or hearing things that other people don't, is another indication of BPD (Mind, 2020). After his friends in Nagoya abandoned him and he returned to Tokyo, he felt that his life had changed drastically. Everything in his life transforms from his perspective, causing him to have extended hallucinations:

That summer, after he returned to Tokyo from Nagoya, Tsukuru was transfixed by the odd sensation that, physically, he was being completely transformed. Colors he'd once seen appeared completely different, as if they'd been covered by a special filter. He heard sounds that he'd never heard before, and couldn't make out other noises that had always been familiar. When he moved, he felt clumsy and awkward, as if gravity were shifting around him... All around him, for as far as he could see, lay a rough land strewn with rocks, with not a drop of water, nor a blade of grass. Colorless, with no light to speak of. No sun, no moon or stars. No sense of direction, either. At a set time, a mysterious twilight and a bottomless darkness merely exchanged places. A remote border on the edges of consciousness. At the same time, it was a place of strange abundance. At twilight birds with razor-sharp beaks came to relentlessly scoop out his flesh. But as darkness covered the land, the birds would fly off somewhere, and that land would silently fill in the gaps in his flesh with something else, some other indeterminate material. (Murakami, 2014, p. 33)

Moreover, *Tsukuru Tazaki* is depicted with traits that suggest he has obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). He is portrayed as having repetitive and intrusive thoughts and behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), which is seen in his need for order and symmetry. He is shown to have a love for trains and train stations due to their orderliness and unchanging routine:

He loved to watch as the trains passed by the station, or slowed down as they pulled up to the platform... But he could never adequately explain to people why he was so attracted to the stations. Even if he could, he knew they would think he was one weird kid. And sometimes Tsukuru himself wondered if something wasn't exactly right with him. (Murakami, 2014, p. 11)

OCD is categorized into two main parts: obsessions and compulsions. Obsessions are unwanted thoughts, images, urges, worries, or doubts that emerge in one's mind on a regular basis and they cause severe anxiety. Compulsions are recurrent behaviors used to alleviate the uneasiness produced by an obsession (Mind 2023). These are evident in *Tsukuru's* narration:

No matter what, he had to make Sara his... If Sara chooses me, accepts me, he thought, I'm going to propose to her right away. And give her everything I'm capable of giving—every single thing. Before I get lost in a dark forest. Before the bad elves grab me. (Murakami, 2014, p. 298)

One of the most striking features of *Tsukuru's* neurodivergence is his difficulty in relating to others and understanding their emotions and motivations. This is evident in his interactions with his former friends, who seem to be driven by a sense of group identity and shared

experience that Tsukuru is unable to access. It is also evident in his struggles to form meaningful relationships with others, which are complicated by his sensory processing issues, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, and avoidant personality traits. At the same time, Tsukuru's neurodivergence also enables him to experience the world in a unique and profound way. His sensitivity to sensory stimuli and his deep emotional connections with music are a testament to the richness and depth of his inner world, highlighting the potential benefits of neurodivergent ways of being.

5. Under the Psychoanalytic Lens and the Trauma of Otherness

Edward W. Said's (1979) concept of otherness refers to the process of objectifying and dehumanizing those who are perceived as different. Throughout the novel, Tsukuru Tazaki is haunted by the trauma of otherness, a sense of alienation, and estrangement from others that stems from the rejection and abandonment by his group of friends, who were also part of his identity. The concept of otherness explores the relationship between the self and the other, or the outsider. Said (1979) argues that the concept of the other is used to define the self and that this process leads to stereotypes and prejudices. The experience of being cast out and ostracized created a sense of otherness within Tsukuru, causing him to repress his emotions and disconnect from his own identity.

Sigmund Freud's (1955/2010) theory of trauma posits that repressed memories and emotions manifest in physical symptoms and affect one's mental health. Similarly, Carl Jung's (1961/1989) theory of the shadow self suggests that one's unconscious thoughts and emotions influence one's behavior and perception of self. In the novel, Tsukuru's repression of his traumatic memories and feelings of otherness leads to physical symptoms such as insomnia and an inability to form meaningful relationships. Tsukuru's romantic interest, Sara, pursues him to confront his feelings of otherness by encouraging him to explore the suppressed memories and emotions that he has pushed away. In this way, Murakami seeks to eliminate the dividing line between "us" and "them" to empower the individual to discover his own identity.

Freud's approach to trauma theory was rooted in his belief that the mind was divided into three parts: the conscious mind, the preconscious mind, and the unconscious mind. Traumatic experiences were believed to be stored in the unconscious mind, where they could continue to exert an influence on the individual's behavior and emotions (Freud, 1955/2010). Tsukuru's traumatic experiences with his friends in high school left him with a deep sense of shame and a feeling of being unworthy of love and connection. These unresolved feelings continue to haunt him, manifesting as a sense of otherness that permeates his life.

Jung's approach to trauma theory was somewhat different from Freud's. While he also believed in the importance of the unconscious mind, he placed a greater emphasis on the collective unconscious – a shared storehouse of memories and symbols that all humans have access to. Jung (1961/1989) believed that the psyche was made up of three components: the personal unconscious, the collective unconscious, and the archetypes. The personal unconscious contains repressed memories and experiences from an individual's life, while the collective unconscious contains universal symbols and archetypes that are common to all human beings. According to Jung (1961/1989), traumatic experiences could become lodged in the collective unconscious, where they could affect not only the individual but also the wider culture. Jung believed that trauma arises when there is a split between an individual's conscious and unconscious selves. Tsukuru's trauma is a split between his conscious identity as a successful and accomplished engineer and his unconscious identity as a lonely and isolated individual. This split creates a sense of inner conflict and a feeling of being disconnected from oneself. Tsukuru's experience of otherness, particularly his feeling of being a "colorless"

individual, can be understood through Jung's concept of the shadow archetype. "The more he thought about the boundary between the conscious and the unconscious, the less certain he became of his own identity" (Murakami, 2014, p. 87).

Throughout the novel, Tsukuru has recurring dreams about a train station, a symbol of his trauma and his desire to escape it. Tsukuru's dreams reveal his repressed thoughts and emotions. Freud (1955/2010) suggests that dreams are a manifestation of unconscious desires, fears, and anxieties, and that they serve as a means of processing and integrating traumatic experiences. Tsukuru's recurring dreams are a way of processing the traumatic events of his past and as a manifestation of his unresolved feelings of abandonment and loss. The vividness of his dreams and their recurring nature suggest that they are serving as a means of re-experiencing and processing his traumatic experiences, as well as a means of dealing with his anxiety and fears. Tsukuru's autism is also reflected in his vivid and recurring dreams, as individuals with autism are often known to have vivid and imaginative dreams that reflect their unique perspectives and experiences (Pindar, 2019). Tsukuru's vivid and recurring dreams also serve as a means of compensating for his difficulties with social interaction and communication, as they provide an outlet for his imagination and creativity. Jung's (1961/1989) archetypes are evident, particularly in the character of Haida, who represents the shadow archetype and embodies Tsukuru's repressed desires and emotions, as depicted in his erotic dream (Murakami, 2014). From a Jungian perspective, Tsukuru's depression is a manifestation of his shadow, the unconscious aspect of his personality that contains his negative qualities and repressed desires. Jung (1961/1989) believed that people who are unacquainted with their shadow become burdened by feelings of anxiety and depression. In Tsukuru's case, his depression is a manifestation of his shadow, which is composed of his repressed feelings of anger and frustration, as well as his fear of abandonment. By exploring his shadow and coming to terms with his repressed feelings, Tsukuru can begin to heal from his depression and move towards a more fulfilling life.

Freud's (1961) trauma theory suggests that traumatic experiences from the past have a lasting impact on an individual's psyche, leading to the manifestation of symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and dissociation, which are clear symptoms of Tsukuru's neurodivergence. Freud (1961) introduced the concept of the death instinct, which he argued was a fundamental part of human psychology. The death instinct represents the desire for self-destruction and the return to a state of non-existence, which Freud believed was an innate part of the human psyche. Trauma, according to Freud (1961), triggers the death instinct and leads to a disconnection from reality. The death instinct, thus, is a manifestation of Tsukuru's desire to escape his trauma and return to a state of non-existence. Tsukuru's dissociation and sense of alienation from others is a result of his repressed memories and experiences from his past.

Tsukuru's experience of traumatic events, including the rejection by his group of friends and the loss of his first love, led to the development of PTSD symptoms, such as intrusive thoughts, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviors. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that occurs in individuals who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event. PTSD has a significant impact on an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Crenshaw & Mayfield, 2020). According to Freud's trauma theory, traumatic events lead to the formation of unconscious memories that resurface in the form of intrusive thoughts and nightmares. Tsukuru's recurring dreams of being trapped in a dark room with no exit are a manifestation of these repressed memories. Additionally, Carl Jung's (1961/1989) dream theory suggests that dreams serve as a means of communication between the conscious and unconscious mind. Tsukuru's dreams are his unconscious mind's attempt to process and integrate his traumatic experiences.

As a part of his psychoanalytic theory of personality, Freud (1923) developed the concepts of id, ego, and superego. According to Freud (1923), the id represents our most primitive and instinctual drives and desires, such as hunger and sexuality, and operates on the pleasure principle. The ego, on the other hand, represents the rational aspect of our psyche that mediates between the demands of the id and the realities of the external world. Finally, the superego represents our moral and ethical standards and operates on the principle of perfectionism. In the context of trauma theory, the id is the part of the psyche that is most vulnerable to traumatic experiences. Traumatic events trigger intense emotional responses, such as fear, anger, or helplessness, that are rooted in the id's instinctual drives and desires. The ego, meanwhile, struggles to cope with the overwhelming emotional impact of trauma and resorts to various defense mechanisms, such as denial or dissociation. Finally, the superego plays a role in shaping how individuals process and cope with trauma by influencing their sense of morality and ethics (Freud, 1923).

Tsukuru's id represents his primitive and instinctual drives, which include his desire for love and connection. However, his id is often repressed by his superego, which represents his moral and ethical standards and societal norms. This repression of his id causes Tsukuru to struggle with forming meaningful connections with others, as he is constantly battling with his desire for intimacy and his fear of rejection. Tsukuru's ego, which mediates between his id and superego, is also impacted by his experiences of trauma and otherness. His ego is responsible for maintaining his sense of identity and reality, but his experiences have left him feeling disconnected from himself and his surroundings. This creates a sense of existential crisis, as Tsukuru struggles to find meaning and purpose in his life. In Tsukuru's case, his superego is likely very strong, as he is deeply concerned with the opinions of others and strives to be accepted by society. His desire to fit in and be like others could be seen as an internalized sense of what is "normal" and "acceptable" behavior, which is influenced by his cultural upbringing and societal expectations. However, his traumatic experience with his friends rejecting him without explanation has led to a disruption in his superego functioning, as he struggles with feelings of unworthiness and self-doubt. This is seen in his constant questioning of his actions and decisions, as well as his lack of confidence in forming new relationships. His superego is not functioning healthily, as it is contributing to his feelings of isolation and disconnection from others.

Furthermore, Tsukuru's experiences are also linked to the concept of the autism spectrum. Individuals on the autism spectrum have difficulty with social communication and interaction due to their more primitive or instinctual nature, which is often attributed to the id (Brenner, 2020). They also struggle with emotional regulation and rely on defense mechanisms, such as stimming or avoidance, as a way of coping with overwhelming sensory experiences, which is an expression of the ego (Brenner, 2020). This is seen in his difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships, as well as his preference for routine and his intense focus on certain interests.

This experience of feeling different and disconnected from others leads to feelings of otherness and alienation, which are common themes in existentialist philosophy, which explores the experience of the individual as an isolated and unique entity, separate from the rest of the world (Flynn, 2006). Trauma disrupts an individual's sense of self and creates feelings of disconnection and alienation. This disruption leads to a search for meaning and a deeper understanding of the self, which are also key themes in existentialism. Individuals on the autism spectrum face unique challenges in this regard due to their difficulties with social communication and interaction. However, some individuals with autism are known to develop a keen sense of purpose and passion in areas of interest that give their lives a sense of meaning and direction (Pindar, 2019). This is seen as an expression of the superego, as they strive to

meet their own moral and ethical standards in pursuit of their goals (Brenner, 2020). Existentialists also argue that death is the ultimate reality of life and that it forces individuals to confront the meaninglessness of existence (Flynn, 2006). In the novel, Tsukuru is depicted as being haunted by the death of a close friend, which serves as a reminder of the ultimate reality of life. This reminder forces Tsukuru to confront the meaninglessness of his existence and to search for meaning in his life.

6. Discussion of Findings

This research provides a unique and nuanced perspective on the intersections of neurodivergence and trauma in the context of Murakami's novel, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* (2014). The analysis of Tsukuru's neurodivergent traits sheds light on the challenges faced by individuals with neurodivergent conditions and how trauma exacerbates these difficulties. By employing psychoanalysis, trauma theory, and existentialism as primary analytical frameworks, this research explores the root causes of Tsukuru's neurodivergence and how his experiences have shaped his worldview.

7. Conclusion

As Tsukuru describes himself, "... always seen myself as an empty person, lacking color and identity. Maybe that was my role in the group. To be empty" (Murakami, 2014, p. 137), his neurodivergence manifests itself in his feelings of isolation and disconnection from the world around him. Tsukuru's struggles with depression, feelings of isolation and alienation, and difficulties in understanding the motivations and emotions of others are experiences that many individuals share.

Future research could involve comparative studies between *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* and other works by Murakami or different authors, to explore how themes of neurodivergence and trauma are addressed across various narratives and cultural contexts. Specific research questions might include: How do different authors depict the intersection of trauma and neurodivergence? What role does cultural context play in the portrayal of neurodivergent characters?

This research is limited by its reliance on interpretive frameworks, the focus on a single character and novel, and the lack of empirical validation and lived experiences of neurodivergence and trauma. Future studies could broaden the scope by incorporating diverse theoretical perspectives, comparing multiple texts, and integrating empirical data and personal narratives.

Interdisciplinary approaches may also be utilized by combining literature, psychology, and neuroscience to explore the connections between neurodivergence, trauma, and literary expression, fostering a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including textual analysis, surveys, and interviews with readers to understand the impact of neurodivergent characters on audience perceptions.

The insights gained from this research contribute to a growing body of literature on neurodivergence and trauma and using psychoanalysis, they offer new ways of thinking about the complexities of the human mind and the challenges of navigating the world around us.

Acknowledgment

I extend my gratitude to the Almighty and all the individuals who contributed in various capacities to the completion of this research. Most importantly, I express my appreciation to myself for persevering through despite all the odds.

References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>
- Barry, P. J. (2009). *Beginning theory: An introduction to literary and cultural theory* (3rd ed.). Manchester University Press. (Original work published 1995).
- Brenner, L. S. (2020). Autism as a mode of being. In *The Autistic Subject* (pp. 3–20). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50715-2_1
- Crenshaw, W., & Mayfield, J. (2020, February 7). *The relationship between PTSD and ADHD: Symptoms, diagnosis, treatment*. ADDitude. <http://www.additudemag.com/ptsd-symptoms-adhd-diagnosis-difficult>
- Flynn, T. (2006). *Existentialism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Freud, S. (1923). The ego and the id. In J. Strachey (Ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIX (1923- 1925): the Ego and the Id and Other Works* (Vol. 19, pp. 1–66). Hogarth Press.
- Freud, S. (1961). *Beyond the pleasure principle* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company.
- Freud, S. (2010). *The interpretation of dreams: The complete and definitive text* (J. Strachey, Ed. & Trans., 8th ed.). Perseus Books Group. (Original work published 1955).
- Fung, L. K. (Ed.). (2021). *Neurodiversity: from phenomenology to neurobiology and enhancing technologies* (1st ed.). American Psychiatric Association Publishing.
- Jung, C. G. (1989). *Memories, dreams, reflections* (A. Jaffe, Ed., R. Winston & C. Winston, Trans., 4th ed.). Random House, Inc. (Original work published 1961).
- Marco, E. J., Hinkley, L. B. N., Hill, S. S., & Nagarajan, S. S. (2011). Sensory processing in autism: A review of neurophysiologic findings. *Pediatric Research*, 69(5 Part 2), 48–54. <https://doi.org/10.1203/pdr.0b013e3182130c54>
- Mind. (2020). Personality disorders. *Mind*. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/personality-disorders/about-personality-disorders/>
- Mind. (2023). Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). *Mind*. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/about-ocd/>
- Murakami, H. (2014). *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and his years of pilgrimage* (P. Gabriel, Trans.). Vintage Books.
- Nakao, M., & Takeuchi, T. (2006). The suicide epidemic in Japan and strategies of depression screening for its prevention. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 84(6), 492–493. <https://doi.org/10.2471/blt.06.031476>
- Pindar, S.-A. (2019). Autistic dreaming: A phenomenological study of dreaming and well-being. In *Sheffield Hallam University*. <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/27510/>
- Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism* (1st ed.). Vintage Books.