

Critical Analysis of Five Novels on Depression: A Compendium

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Abstract:

Teenage depression is on the rise. This study explored the world of teenage depression through a compendium of literatures that critically analyze depression through the eyes of a teenager. Young adult literature that focuses largely on depression and suicide. This compendium is anchored by various literary criticism theories, namely, Structuralism Feminism, Reader-Response and Cultural criticism. The researcher came up with the following literary criticism theories to be able to plot down the elements, themes, and the analysis of the characters. A critical analyzation of the five young adult novels, "Cut" by Patricia McCormick, "By the Time You Read This I'll Be Dead" by Julie Ann Peters, "13 Reasons Why" by Jay Asher, "Love Letters to the Dead" by Ava Dellaira and "My Heart and Other Black Holes" by Jasmine Warga. This study accomplished the following questions through in-depth qualitative research.

Keywords —Depression, Compendium of Literatures,

I. INTRODUCTION

Teenage depression is on the rise. The Institute of Mental Health reports that about 3.2 million 12- to 17-year-olds have had at least one major depressive episode within the past 12 months. Teen who are depressed often struggle with anxiety and substance abuse as well, which is why early detection of the mood disorder can be tricky. Symptoms of adolescent depression frequently differ from symptoms in adults. For example, youth may experience more irritability and moodiness, sleep at extended times of the day, and isolate themselves from adults, particularly family members, but still long to be with peers. Adults, however, may experience insomnia, intense bouts of sadness and isolate themselves from both friends, and family. (Lohmann, 2019)

In addition to varying with age, symptoms also differ by gender. According to a study published in the Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care, girls report feelings of sadness, guilt, worthlessness, punishment, tiredness and low energy, whereas boys report more irritability, depression and suicidal thoughts. With all of this symptomatic

variation and conflicting information, it's easy to miss the warning signs and chalk up adolescent depression to "typical" teen behavior. Consequently, many depressed kids don't get the help they need. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that only 20 percent of youth suffering from a mental health disorder, like depression, receive treatment for their condition that means 80 percent, or about 12 million youth, are undertreated or not treated at all, and that is a significant concern, especially as adolescent depression is on the rise. (Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care, 2019)

II. INTRODUCTION

One million Pinoys suffer from Depression

The Philippines has one of the highest cases of depression in Southeast Asia, affecting more than three million Filipinos, a lawmaker in the House of Representatives said. Rep. Rida Robes of San Jose del Monte, Bulacan revealed this in a privileged speech last Tuesday evening as she lamented the rising rates of suicide among the country's youth. She expressed alarm over depression becoming as prevalent as the common cold in the country,

affecting around 3.3 million Filipinos. “It is recognized by our own Department of Health (DOH) as a serious health condition, and the weight of haplessness, hopelessness, and helplessness—the three dreaded ‘H’ symptoms of depression—gravitate towards what now is the new high-risk group: the young population,” she said. Citing a 2017 World Health Organization report, Robes said eight in every 100,000 Filipinos commit suicide. Of this figure, six are males, while two are females, aged 15 to 29 years old. The same report showed that an average of 3,000 people worldwide takes their own lives every day, or a suicide case every 40 seconds.

Behind the rise

In the Philippines, the rise in the number of suicide cases and youth with mental health issues is brought about by a mix of social and biological factors. However, a common theme stands out: disconnectedness and deterioration of relationships brought about by social media and technology. Experts said young people today tend to be more disconnected despite the internet supposedly opening up the world to everyone. “With all the social media, there’s just too many things to do; too many things to prove.... Young people today tend to be very pressured, very stressed, live very complicated lives, and tend to be socially disconnected,” Chua said.

The lack of connectedness can often lead to a breakdown in relationships, which are crucial in fostering scattered in different government agencies and varies across years. The available data in the Philippines recorded by the WHO, that over 2,000 cases of suicide from 2000 to 2012 with most individuals dying by suicide also aged between 15 to 29 years old. But beyond the numbers, experts said paying attention to mental illnesses among the youth remains urgent. “You also know it’s on the rise if you feel and see one person suffering and that story isn’t very different from others. You know it can happen to anyone,” Nadera said. Experts added the problem is not hard to fathom, with most people knowing at least one person who

may be dealing with a mental health illness or even unstable mental health. Balderamma added, “There’s always somebody we know. We communicate it as urgent because it cuts all strata, and it cuts all professions.” (Rapper on Mental Health awareness, 2018)

Goal of the Study

The study came across with the researcher goal of understanding teenage depression through this compendium of critical analysis of five young adult novels. The critical analysis of the novels, “Cut” by Patricia McCormick, “By the Time You Read This I’ll Be Dead” by Julie Ann Peters, “13 Reasons Why” by Jay Asher, “Love Letters to the Dead” by Ava Dellaira and “My Heart and Other Black Holes” by Jasmine Warga, will show the different faces of young adult depression, this re-search study was anchored in the researchers’ point of view that these selected young adult novels serve as a compendium and linkage to the growing mental health problems like youth depression.

Through an in-depth view of the novels, from the incidents in the novels that portrays depression, the literary themes used, the basis of depression the literary elements used, analysis of the characters in the novels in association to the literary critical theories to the literary critic theories used, will be analyzed as the research goes by from time to time. The importance of this research topic to the researcher herself is that it would awaken the minds of all people, not just the teachers or the parents, that these novels serves as a compendium of novels about depression.

Mental health program in Region 1

To address the limited number of psychiatrists in the country, Salangad said the DOH has been capacitating municipal health officers in rural health units (RHUs). In the region, she said their department has started to capacitate the medical practitioners in the grassroots. “We have started teaching them on how to handle mental conditions

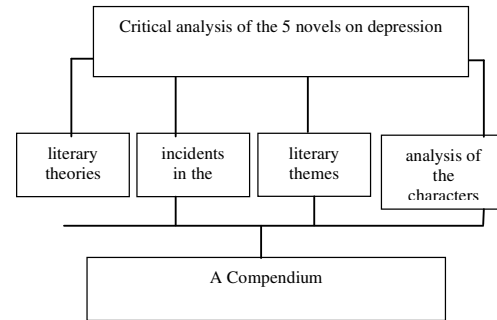
that can be treated at their level. Worse cases, however, are still referred to tertiary level hospitals,” said Salangad. Grade 11 and 12 students in the region are also introduced to discussions on depression and suicide in various fora organized by the DOH Region 1. Further, for the upcoming observation of Mental Health Month in October, the department will conduct a Mental Health Fair. Free medicines are also given to patients diagnosed to have a mental illness.

Working together vs mental health disorders

Meanwhile, Dr. Magnolia Brabante, medical officer III of DOH-1, encourages everyone to help people who show signs of mental health disorder. “Let us work together to fight the stigma against mental health,” Brabante said. She added, “We hope that people will open their minds and hearts to the plight of patients suffering from mental health.” Mental health disorders, she said, can be associated with the following: persistent sadness, loss of interest, change of appetite, low self-esteem, intermittent sleeping pattern, and poor concentration “If we know some of our family members, friends, or colleagues who might be battling with mental health illness particularly depression, let us have the compassion to talk to them and encourage them to seek professional help,” said Brabante. (Joanne Namnama Parrocha-Dilim, 2018)

Concept

This compendium is anchored by various literary criticism theories, namely, Structuralism Feminism, Reader-Response and Cultural criticism. The researcher came up with the following literary criticism theories to be able to plot down the elements, themes, and the analysis of the characters. This compendium is anchored by various literary criticism theories, namely, Structuralism Feminism, Reader-Response and Cultural criticism. The researcher came up with the following literary criticism theories to be able to plot down the elements, themes, and the analysis of the characters.



Demonstrates the flow of the study through a critical analysis of the five young adult novels, “Cut” by Patricia McCormick, “By the Time You Read This I’ll Be Dead” by Julie Ann Peters, “13 Reasons Why” by Jay Asher, “Love Letters to the Dead” by Ava Dellaira and “My Heart and Other Black Holes” by Jasmine Warga. Where the analysis of the novel were based on the literary criticism theories to identify the incidents, themes and the analysis of the characters in the novels.

My Heart and Other Black Holes by Jasmine Warga

In the novel “My Heart and Other Black Holes” by Jasmine Warga, the researcher gathered several points and instances that the main character, Aysel went depression where:

“Depression is like a heaviness that you can’t ever escape. It crushes down on you, making even the smallest things like tying your shoes or chewing on toast seem like a twenty-mile hike uphill. Depression is a part of you; it’s in your bones and your blood.”(page, 14, 26 days left, My heart and other black holes)Aysel visualized depression when she was listening to her teacher at an Physics class, Anyway, physics at least feels useful to her. Unlike English, where we’re reading poems by depressed poets. Not helpful. Aysel’s teacher, Mrs. Marks, makes this big production out of trying to decode what the poets were saying. From her perspective, it’s clear: the character is depressed and she want to

die. It's painful to watch all her classmates tear apart each line, looking for the significance. There's no significance. Anyone who has been that sad can tell you that there's nothing beautiful or literary or mysterious about depression.

By the Time You Read This I'll Be Dead by Julie Ann Peters

In the novel "By the time you Read This I'll Be dead" by Julie Ann Peters, the researcher gathered several points and instances that the main character, Daelyn underwent depression.

"So the new medication is working?" Dr. Novotny peers intently at Dad. Like Dad would know. I'm supposed to let them in on how I'm feeling; if this antidepressant makes me sad or suicidal. What is beyond suicidal?(page 21, By the Time You Read This I'll Be Dead) Daelyn was undergoing therapy for her overweight and eating disorder, has she tries to manage her depression and thoughts about getting everything away with suicide. Dr. Novotny was her Therapist, and every weekend, she goes to his clinic to consult and remind Daelyn what she needs to take. "Today I'll take the pink pill first. My throat closes in anticipation. It still hurts to swallow them whole. Chip wanted to crush them for me, but the doctor told him they were time-release tablets, less effective if cut or crushed. It goes down like gravel. The white pill is my antidepressant. I hate to tell Chip and Kim no antidepressant in the world is going to change the past. I know medication is supposed to make me feel more hopeful and happy.

Cut by Patricia McCormick

The novel is told from a point of view of the narrator, Claire, where she is the one narrating her experiences inside the Sea Pines treatment facility. According to Teff, Point of view is the angle of

considering things, which shows the opinion or feelings of the individuals involved in a situation. In literature, the point of view is the mode of narration that an author employs to let the readers "hear" and "see" what takes place in a story, poem, or essay. (2014) The novel presented a Symbolic manner, based on the story, there are symbols of depression, like the word "cut" wherein, the main character is harming herself. Also, cut symbolizes self-mutilation, According to Psychology Today (2017) Individuals who self-injure may feel that doing so helps release pent-up feelings of anxiety, anger, or sadness. But evidence finds that over time, those raw emotions—along with new feelings of guilt and shame—will continue to be present, and may even worsen. Besides, self-harm can be dangerous in itself, even if the individual has no wish to cause themselves significant damage where Claire is harming herself out. Callie's symbol is a drop of blood to represent her problem with self harm.

Problem no. 3 Basis of depression gleaned from the analysis of the novel.

"Cut" By Patricia McCormick

Based on the analysis and the researcher's gathered data, there are five basis of depression gleaned from McCormick's novel. First is Self-Mutilation, Second is the treatment facility called, Sea Pines, Third is the Group therapy that Callie belongs in, Fourth is the "Cuts" on Callie's body and Fifth is the Blade or the so-called, kitchen knife in Callie's kitchen. Self-Mutilation is the first basis of depression as read in the novel. It is when Callie was cutting herself with a knife, "I use my mom's Exacto knife." I stare at my shirtsleeve. "Or her embroidery scissors." Excerpt From: McCormick, Patricia. "Cut." Apple Books. Callie has an obsession with cutting herself whenever she's stuck in a situation where she has to make a tough decision.

Statement of Purpose no 4. Literary themes present in the novel.

Theme no. 1: Repercussions

In the novel “cut” by Patricia McCormick, Callie was often left out in a situation she can’t handle like when Sam, her brother, got sick and she didn’t know what to do, oftentimes, she cuts herself out. Repercussions is one thing that Callie is aware of, the effects of her anxiety and depression led her to cutting herself or self-mutilation. In the novel, *By the Time You Read this, I’ll be dead* Daelyn was bullied, and there-fore, the effects of her past are haunting her in the present, Daelyn was constantly reminded of her friends, specially, Taylor and other characters in the novel, how worthless she is because she is overweight and fat. She was also forced into a “Fat Camp” to remind herself of what she is.

Theme no. 2: Betrayal

In the novel “Cut” by Patricia McCormick, Callie was often betrayed by her parents, typically, her father because he never visited Sea Pines. Callie was often wondering about him and how he cares about her sick brother. In the novel, *By the time you Read This, I’ll be Dead*, her parents betrayed Daelyn in the latter part of the novel, where she was promised to be picked up after her therapy but her dad had forgotten it, also by her friends when Daelyn was called out fat and overweight.

Theme no. 3: Parental Obliviousness

In the novel, “cut” by Patricia McCormick, often, Callie’s parents were unaware that she cut herself when she was stuck in problems. Callie was often neglected by his father, “If you’re looking for Dad, he’s not coming,” Sam said.” Excerpt From: McCormick, Patricia. “Cut.” Apple Books. She always wonders how her father could not come to visit her at the treatment facility.

In the novel, “*By The Time You Read This, I’ll Be Dead*” Daelyn’s Parents are always struggling to

push her to what she doesn’t want, like being in the “Girl’s Scout” where she was constantly mocked and made fun of. Her parents are busy doing what matters, making a living, in the lines, A smile tugs her lips before setting the book down. “They were difficult clients, an-yway. Nothing I ever did was right. When your business is going under, you don’t blame the accountant.” (page 20) Daelyn’s mom was explaining how busy it was when she got to work. Another was when Daelyn’s dad forgot to fetch her up from her therapy in the lines, Dad shouts, “I’m really sorry I forgot.”

Theme no. 4: Subjugation of the Female Body

In the novel, “*By the Time You Read This, I’ll be Dead*” There was a massive topic on the forum of the suicide site called through the light, in the lines, Heavy topic on the Final Forum: Sexual Assault. I don’t want to read those stories. Bullied attracts me again. (page 18) Daelyn was constantly reprimanded about her past on how she was assaulted during middle school by a boy her age. There were at the bathroom and Toomey was assaulting Daelyn in the lines, “For a second their grips loosened, and I made a run for the door, but someone caught my skirt, so I swung around and dodged into a toilet stall. A hand grabbed my leg and I slipped on the wet floor and fell and they tried to drag me out, but I held on to the toilet and they couldn’t. I felt my skirt being lifted up and I flattened myself on the floor and squeezed my legs together. One of them said, ‘Let’s go, dude. Leave her be.’ Toomey snapped, ‘I say when we go.’ He tried to pull down my underwear, but he couldn’t get it very far.” It is clear that something happened between Toomey and Daelyn, which the character remembers it all too well.

Theme no. 5: Exposing the Truth

In the novel, “cut” by Patricia McCormick, Callie was scared to tell her side of the story why she cuts herself, she was called as silent treatment because she never talks about it. “What about you, Callie?” Claire’s voice is loud. “Can you control it?” The room is dead quiet. ” Excerpt From McCormick,

Patricia. “Cut.” Apple Books. Amanda was asking Callie if she can control her cutting, the room was silent as Callie was left with no words to say why she does. In the novel, “By the Time You Read This, I’ll be Dead” There were buried secret and truths that Daelyn wants to forget through committing suicide, one of it is in the lines, Deep down I knew the truth. But she made me believe.” Deep down did you ever want to die? The character was thinking about her status and how she wanted to commit it something so fatal. In the novel, Love Letters to the Dead, Laurel’s truth behind her anxiety and depression and why she was writing those letters to dead artists is May. Laurel could not grasp the fact that May is dead and the sad reality behind her parent’s split. “The truth was too sad to feel right away. May couldn’t see how she was letting me get hurt, because she was hurting, too.” Excerpt From: Dellaira, Ava. “Love Letters to the Dead.” Apple Books.

Theme no. 6: Bullying

In the novel, “cut” by Patricia McCormick, There are other patients of the facility that opened up on bullying, “ The food-issue guests—Tara, a really skinny girl who has to wear a baseball cap to cover a bald spot where her hair fell out, and Becca, another really skinny girl who wears white little-girl tights that pool around her ankles and who came straight here from a hospital after she had a heart attack, and Debbie, a really, really overweight girl who says she’s been here the longest” Excerpt From McCormick, Patricia. “Cut.” Apple Books. Similar to this, Amanda and Cal-lie suffer from the issue that coincides with bullying and self-harm.

Statement of Purpose no 5. literary criticism theories in the novels.

“Cut” by Patricia McCormick

In the novel, “Cut” by Patricia McCormick, Callie was a progressive character; she was the one telling her experiences in Sea Pines. The author wanted the readers to be aware of Callie’s situation in the

therapy sessions, treatment facilities and her family. The Readers should respond in the way they would feel what is like in Callie’s current situation; also, the Reader-response literary theory was adopted, because Callie and Amanda connected in some ways, in the lines, “then I laugh and he laughs and I offer a silent thank-you to Amanda, who couldn’t possibly know how she helped me.” Excerpt From: McCormick, Patricia. “Cut.” Apple Books. Amanda was a moving character to Callie because she helped her through her mutilation process, the readers are quite aware that they helped each other get well. In the structuralist point of view, the novel “cut” was moving one, because of Callie’s situation around her parents, where her mother is the one visiting her, and her brother Sam was sick, “Which meant my dad would be spending more time than ever at work—or more time out with customers, or people he hoped would be customers but somehow never turned into customers.” Excerpt From: McCormick, Patricia. “Cut.” Apple Books.

“By The Time You Read This, I’ll Be Dead” by Julie Anne Peters

In the novel by Julie Anne Peters, the characters are dynamic in the perspective of the readers. This novel is critiqued by using reader-response. Since the novel was told in the character’s perspective, the author is trying to show the readers what was Daelyn’s world is. As its name implies, reader-response criticism focuses on readers’ responses to literary texts. (Tyson, 2019) Julie Anne Peters created a novel that would touch on the reader’s senses while responding Daelyn’s world. According to a critical analysis book by Lois Tyson, anytime an essay analyzes the act of reading or readers’ responses, one could classify it as reader-response criticism.

Feminism is also viewed in the novel by Julie Anne Peters, and it shows how a girl battled her

depression and suicidal thoughts that she was about to commit in the later part. According to Lois Tyson, the inferior position long occupied by women in a patriarchal society has been cultural, not biologically, produced. As seen in Daelyn's father in the novel, he was intact with the patriarchal belief that a father is the superior of the family, even if he neglects his own daughter in many ways. Santana, on the other hand was a friend and served as a patriarchy figure in the novel.

Cultural criticism is also viewed in the novel through the use of the cyber world as it is in modern times, where the background of Daelyn's family is economically middle class. According to a Critical Theory today book, Cultural criticism is the analysis of the rapidly expanding global culture industry that includes entertainment, advertising, publishing, television, film, computers and the Internet. (Liam, 2018) Daelyn was living in an internet world where everything is accessible. The same reason why Daelyn easily accessed the suicide site.

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