

TREATMENT OF THE TROPE OF DEPRESSION IN JASMINE WARGA'S MY HEART AND OTHER BLACK HOLES

ADEBUA, Babatunde O.

And

ADEBOGUN-QUADRY, Adenike

*Department of Languages and Literary Studies
Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo,
Ogun-State.*

Email: adebuab@babcock.edu.ng. 2348060685565

ABSTRACT

*Depression narratives have been on the ascendancy in literary writing. This is due to the alarming rate of depression, particularly among teens on a global level. There appears to be a paucity of literature focusing specifically on teen depression. Most studies dwell on depression as a general malady among people of all ages and sexes. Like some other writers of her ilk, Jasmine Warga undertakes an exploration of depression in her teen novel; *My Heart and Other Black Holes*, emphasizing the detrimental impact of negative thinking on the protagonist and her counterpart. This paper examines the novel by applying the Cognitive Theory of Depression of Aaron Beck, which suggests that prolonged negative thinking can lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. This study sheds light on the role of negative thoughts as a significant catalyst for depression in teens, coupled with social and environmental factors. It also investigates the influence of parental involvement in the lives of depressed teenagers and how the healing journey is portrayed by the author. The paper discovers that communication within families is central to the well-being of depressed teens in the novel, particularly between mothers and their children. Through effective communication, children can develop trust, a stronger sense of self-worth and appreciation for life, reducing the likelihood of succumbing to despair. The paper concludes that there is potential for tragedy that arises from a lack of communication and understanding within families, underscoring the importance of fostering open dialogue and empathy to prevent depression as an outcome.*

Keywords: *Cognitive theory, Environmental factors, Family communication, Literary portrayal, Teen, Depression*

INTRODUCTION

The teenage or adolescent stage of a human represents a critical stage in human development, marked by profound transformations in various spheres of life. Nelson et al, (2016) recognize this stage as a crucial developmental stage characterized by notable changes in social behaviours with consistent shifts in social interaction. Presently, teen literature increasingly focuses on the exploration of how teenagers navigate self-understanding, friendships, and romantic relationships within the context of their daily experiences. With this, Trites (2020) contends that teen literature illuminates not only "the fluid ways that the emerging adult negotiates with his or her society" but also the conscious acknowledgement and denial of young adult power. According to a study conducted by Lu (2019), depression is stated as the major cause of suicide in the United States of America among the ages of 10- 19 years. It further states that there is "a growing number of untreated adolescents with major depression from 2011 to 2016" from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health {NSDUH} data". The outcome of the research points to the importance of family and school in the treatment of depression and this increase is not limited to USA but a global disorder.

The objective of this paper is to examine the portrayal of depression by one of the prominent writers of Young Adult (YA) teen fiction prose due to the alarming rate of depression among teens globally. Apparently, most studies dwell on depression as a general mental health disorder among people of all ages and sexes without focusing more on teens. There seems to be a paucity of literature focusing on teen depression in most of sub-Saharan Africa works. This forms the cap this study seems to occupy.



Theoretical Framework

Several theories on depression view the condition as a mental illness and are mostly tilted towards psychological theories. Most of these theories dwell on habits that emanate from childhood trauma and identify unhealthy upbringing, which later manifest at adulthood's life struggles. All these theories emphasis on conscious and unconscious state of human, factors that trigger behavior or actions. Nevertheless, Sigmund Freud's analysis of the subconscious state as an exhibition of previously stored memories, lessons, dreams or behaviours without being aware of their influences whereas consciousness is the response to the present state of awareness or immediate external factors. Subsequently, this study adopts the Cognitive Model of Depression by Aaron Beck, founder and famously known as the father of Cognitive Behaviours Therapy (CBT); The Cognitive model of depression (1967) submits that negative thoughts and beliefs about oneself, about the world and the future can lead to depression (Wierzbicki et al, 1994). Continuous engagement in negative thoughts, emotions and behaviour based on beliefs are outlined as the three triggers of depression, known as the Negative Cognitive Triad [Beck, 2019]. In other words, having the feeling of being inadequate or unworthy, perceiving failure irrespective of efforts, and bleak future are traits of depression. "The development and function of the cognitive triad, are highly influenced by the quality of development and environment during critical periods [e.g. youths and adolescence; Hankin et al., 2008]".

Aaron Beck like his counterpart Shneidman came up with a list of seven cognitive distortions in 1976, as traits of the depressed. These are: 1) Arbitrary interference or interpretation - a depressed person gives different sorts of interpretation to occurrences without facts or evidence. 2) Selective Abstraction - happens by given bias interpretation, without paying attention to other details. This paper tends to point out that traits 1&2 seem to be the same, that is, having evidence, facts and details appear to be attaching a conclusion to tangible reference. 3) Over-generalization 4) Magnification and minimization 5) Inexact labelling- incorrect labelling or judgment of oneself or others by mere perception. 6) Personalisation - wrongful acceptance of fault or blame that was not caused by one. 7) Dichotomous thinking is to perceive everything in binary opposition, such as white and black (culled from Cognitive Behavior Theory, 2022).

Furthermore, it is stated that the depressed pay selective attention to certain aspects of their environment that fit their conjecture (faulty information processing) even when others see the positive side of an issue, they will not because they are selective in their judgement, they magnify negativity, and they block all other alternative suggestions that can lead to positive result, this is regarded as negative schemas.

This paper aim is to examine the portrayal of depression by the author and the protagonist becomes depressed based on her negative thinking, it becomes imperative to hinge the study on theory that deals with negative thinking in order to exhume the salient points in the fiction. This, informs the choice of Cognitive Theory of Depression, which suggests that prolonged negative thinking can lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, as the suitable option to apply on the novel.

However, this study is limited to the Cognitive Theory of Depression traits in order to examine depression that emanates from negative thinking of the protagonist -emotions and behaviour alone, through the narratives in this novel and how the protagonist reverses her thoughts and become a survivor.

Therefore, this paper is a qualitative research using descriptive analysis to accentuate its findings; the content of the novel is the primary data while the secondary data was sourced from journals, books and other related materials to justify the essence of the study. This is an attempt to shed light on the role of negative thoughts as a significant catalyst for depression in teens, coupled with social and environmental factors. It also examines the influence of parental involvement in the



lives of depressed teenagers and how the healing journey is portrayed by the author to justify the essence of effective communication within a family as a cogent factor to minimize the alarming rate of teen depression.

This study will serve as a re-orientation medium for all other teenagers that are considering suicide or are hopeless in depression of possibility of brighter future, if only they could hang on to life and desist from negative thinking.

Author's Profile

In attempt to understand the novel, it becomes necessary to briefly discuss the background of the writer. Jasmine Warga is a prominent teen writer, born on April 24, 1988, in Cincinnati, Ohio. She embarked on her academic journey at Northwestern University, where she pursued a degree in history and art history and later proceeded to Lesley University, where she earned her Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Creative writing. Jasmine Warga's transition from a science teacher in Texas to a published author is a testament to her unwavering dedication to storytelling. It was during her time in the classroom that she discovered her passion for crafting narratives, using literature as a means to explore complex emotions and societal issues. Probably, her multicultural background might have contributed, being the daughter of an American mother and an immigrant Jordanian father, significantly could influence her worldview and, consequently, her approach to writing. In 2015, she made a significant impact on the young adult literary scene with her debut novel, *My Heart and Other Black Holes*. The book delves into the sensitive topic of depression and suicide among teenagers, tackling these issues with empathy and nuance. Inspired by the unexpected death of a close friend, Warga has continued to address challenging themes while providing solace and understanding to her readers. She carved her niche in the literary world with her 2019 children's book, "Other Words for Home." This narrative earns Warga prestigious Newbery Honor and portrays her commitment to showcase diverse perspectives with authenticity and empathy. As Warga continues to explore the depths of human emotion and societal issues, her work remains a beacon for readers seeking stories that inspire, challenge, and resonate on a profound level (Wikipedia, BIO -Jasmine Warga, Amazon.com, HarperCollins Publishers).

Themes of Depression in American Teen Literature.

Literature has long been regarded as a powerful tool for shaping perspectives and fostering empathy. Its ability to transcend boundaries and offer readers a window into lives and worlds different from their own (Mchussain, 2023). Teen literature often delves into the journey of self-discovery and the complexities of identity formation during the tumultuous teenage years (Carlson, 1980). Most often protagonists navigate the challenges of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood, grappling with questions of self-identity, belonging, and purpose as it in most suicide and depression novels; as display by Cody in *I Was Here* by Gayle Forman (2015), in the quest to unravel the mystery behind Meg's suicide, she is able to discover herself and the intricacies of survival. The most conspicuous themes in teen literature are the exploration of friendships, familial bonds, depression, suicide ideation and romantic relationships (Hedeem & Smith, 2012). This is evident between Alexis and Sadie, her childhood friend, they became close again after many years of distancing from each other, the loss of a father and a brother respectively bond them for reconciliation in *The Last Time We Say Goodbye* by Cynthia Hand (2015). Also, teen literature plays a crucial role in destigmatizing mental health issues by portraying characters dealing with anxiety, depression, and other challenges (Howard, 1994). These narratives contribute to fostering understanding and empathy surrounding mental health concerns. The theme of mental health and its portrayal in young adult literature is exemplified by works such as Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964) and Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1994).

In these fictions, the authors navigate the complexities of the human mind, offering readers a glimpse into the challenges faced by protagonists dealing with mental health issues.



Greenberg's work, based on her own experiences as a psychiatric patient, delves into the protagonist's struggles with schizophrenia, exploring the blurred lines between reality and the imaginary. So, do Aysel (Warga, 2015) grapples with mental torture till she realises her errors in the novel under study. Most teen literature actively engages with the concepts of change and transformation adapting and conforming to their experiences within specific contexts and evolving with socio-political ideologies (Bittner, 2012). Evident of this is displayed by Aysel, the protagonist in this novel, as less than a year-old child, she was able to cope with her emotionally insecure father and still survive the trauma at the end.

In contemporary times, romance also plays a significant role in many teen fictions, with a focus on relationships as this is evident in Aysel and Roman's emotional entanglement. Aysel starts her healing from positive emotional connection she gets from the Franklins (Roman's mother) and Roman's ability to understanding of her struggles, she begins to relax from her apprehension. Subsequently, teen literature is influenced by technological and social contexts, most teen fiction published before and after 2000 are impacted in their forms, style and content by the rise of social networking, cell phones, and global synchronous communication.

To this end, Eliza Dresang (1999), provides a framework for exploring how all these influence and shape contemporary teen literature thematically. These are showcased in this novel under study, *My Heart and Other Black Holes* by Jasmine Warga (2015), "Smooth Passage" is the online site, where the protagonist has sourced for her suicide partner. The advent of technology comes with both merits and demerits, which could be linked with some of the prompters to teen's impulsive choices. Similarly, most of the themes aforementioned in other American Young Adult literature are evident in this novel, such as; overcoming adversity, suicide ideation, resilience, complexity of identity is portrayed in the novel, the protagonist starts with confused identity enmeshed in negative thoughts filled with suicidal ideas, but, at a certain point, when she becomes aware, she takes a pause and seeks for her real identity through the decision to see her father before embarking on her suicidal mission and finally, she becomes an advocate to dissuade her suicide partner from committing suicide.

Resilience is portrayed in Aysel's swift pursuit of her class participation, which she had lost interest in especially English class, her future career in Physics and building a healthy relation with her mother & her half-sister, as well as urging Roman to do the same academically and encourage him to bounce back on his basketball game that he has abandoned for suicide mission. etc.

The Synopsis of Jasmine Warga's: *My Heart and Other Black Holes*

This is a 302 pages of an e-book, prose fiction that gives insight into two teenagers' perspectives on handling their struggles. Aysel, the protagonist in the novel, concludes on suicide as a way out of her predicament, seeks a suicide partner online and gets Roman, who feels responsible for the death of his sister through his negligence. While Aysel feels isolated for her father's murderous act. Hence, their suicide mission is set, though, Roman's mother is watchful of him but he uses Aysel as a decoy, he plans to 'off' himself on the date that will mark a year memorial of his late sister (7th April) but, few days to the eventual date, Aysel gets enchanted with the love and kindness shown by Roman and his mother which she lacks. This prompts, Aysel, to seek for clarification of her identity. Thus, becoming aware of herself and try means to discourage Roman from forging ahead with the suicide mission. Roman sensed the red flag. So, he chose to go ahead on his own.

In conclusion, three days before their suicide date, Roman takes his mother's car with permission that he is going to visit Aysel instead he locks himself in the garage with the ignition on and tries to choke himself to death, Aysel, later figure out this after some attempts to locate him at their proposed suicide locations to no avail. He is rushed to the hospital and Aysel is able to make him reason, point out his positive impact on her life, dissuade him from thinking of suicide



attempts. Both Roman and Aysel realize their mistakes and decide to pursue a purposeful life. (e-book)

IMPACT OF NEGATIVE THINKING ON THE CHARACTERS IN THE NOVEL

This section of the study aims to illustrate the impact of negative thoughts as a major trigger of depression of the protagonist in the novel as viewed from the lens of Aaron Beck's Cognitive Theory of Depression. It highlights the social/environmental factors as part of contributors to teen depression and the role of parents of depressed teenagers, along with the healing process from the depression as portrayed by the author. Aysel, a 16-year-old, tagged as a Physics nerd, is the protagonist in the novel. The author creatively makes Aysel to reveal her state of mind at different times and situations. For example; "I spend a lot of time wondering what dying feels like (pg. 9)". Dying is an outrageous thing to wish for others not to mention oneself. This is evidence of negative thought, which is the root of Beck's Cognitive model theory of depression.

1. Arbitrary interference or interpretation

This denote a scenario where multifaceted interpretation is given to occurrences without facts or evidence. On page 33 of the text, Aysel decides that suicide is the solution to her misery based on her interpretation of the situation she finds herself; "all I know is that I'm not going to stick around and find out if I become a monster like my dad". As stated, she is not interested to find out fact or evidence, if she is going to be (murderous) a monster like her father. Based on her narration, her father's action is evidently due to provocation, his father probably might have mental problem which has been described as mood swings that leads to her mother leaving him. It could be said that untamed temper lead to his father's downfall, calling him a monster is another trait listed in the theory as selective abstraction which happens by given bias interpretation, without paying attention to other details. Both arbitrary interference or interpretation and selective abstraction are jointly applicable to Aysel's thoughts. A monster could be described as a huge, ugly and frightening creature that no human being can live with due to its abnormal shape, figure and look. Therefore, it is not right to equate event with creature, though, it could be an ugly and frightening event. The similarity is not applicable to her nor her father. Due to her depressed state, her reasoning is distorted and faulty, thus, her ability to information processing has been altered.

2. Over-Generalisation

Stating the conclusion of an event or situation based on previous occurrence. Aysel and her father does not necessarily need to behave alike. Being a member of a family of a murderer does not make it a contagious disease. Therefore, there is an evidence of negative thoughts that match over-generalisation trait on this quote: "May be if the whispers about Dad stop, maybe Mom starts to look at you again like a normal daughter, maybe if you can guarantee you won't turn out like Dad" (pg.33).

3. Inexact labelling

This is referred to as an incorrect labelling or judgment of oneself or others by mere perception. Calling her father, a monster is inexact labelling. Also, her father was already on edge due to some people pilfering his wares. Thus, making his business unprofitable, calling the man a monster is not an accurate description of his crime in fact, this is giving someone a bad name which is in tandem with inexact labeling. Describing her body as an "efficient happy thought-killing machine". "I need to get rid of the slug; I need to get rid of me" (pg.33) falls on inexact labelling and magnification of occurrences such as "My edges have always been too sharp, my grooves too deep" and that they should write on her tombstone: Aysel Leyla Seran, the Girl Who Never Fit" pg. 24.



4. Personalisation

This is the wrongful acceptance of fault or blame that was not caused by one. This is evident in Aysel in acceptance to kill herself in order not to kill others. She has personalized her father's crime to be her burden. She did not bother to find out how many other families that had experienced almost the same predicament. More so, the law had sentenced her father for the crime, she is just creating an extension for his punishment, based on her mere perception.

All aforementioned are highlighted to show that the theory adopted is in sync with most of the negative thoughts, emotions and behaviour of the protagonist, the difference in the novel is that without seeing a therapist (CBT) like Alexis, in *The Last Time We Say Goodbye* by Cynthia Hand, Aysel heals herself based on communication that develops into trust, affection, supports derived from the Roman's family, she gains self-awareness which curb the negative thinking, and ignites her the quest to sort her identity.

Environmental and Social Factors as Triggers of Depression

"It is cognitive appraisal as cultural milieu that gives meaning to most of emotional feelings and perceptions which may degenerates if its negative as research has assist to elicit the role of shame in a community as anecdotal links to suicide" (Mokros, 1995; Lester, 1997; Kalafat and Lester, 2000). The above quote explains that it is the society that attaches meaning that generates emotion towards an incident or event, if the meaning given is positive, people rejoice and if it is otherwise, people condemn it or the item is rejected, the event is rebuked. Nonetheless, values are determined by the society but the people comply with these standards depending on whose horse is gored. This is evident in Aysel in her perpetual negative thoughts when she compares cutting her employer's hair to her life; "Mr. Palmer can be fixed with "a few scissors clip and he'll be brand-new. There's nothing that can fix me" (pg.10). this is a sign of self-pity, helplessness and a cry of lost hope.

Nevertheless, her employer's response seems outrageous in reality to a 16-year-old girl, it reflects the kind of environment she lives when he said, "I took a risk hiring you, everyone in this town told me you were trouble. Because of your...". Aysel fills the gap in her mind "Because of your father" This statement shows that some adults in that town are insensitive to a teenager's emotion. Naturally, such talk humiliates and casts a stigma on individual with such pathetic background. It is an evidence of emotional abuse that can heighten the already existing triggers of depression in Aysel. It is a heavy burden attached to a small girl, she should not be made to shoulder her father's crime but society does the tagging, they keep attaching her behaviour to her father's and exempt her mother.

Another unpleasant scenario, which could have heated Aysel's depression is during Mike's Tenth birthday (Aysel's favourite half-brother), she observed a dead silence when is her turn to felicitate with Mike and offer him a gift. Aysel got an expensive comic book (as her farewell gift unknown to anyone)"-an edition of *The Amazing Spider-Man* signed by Stan Lee" but one of her step-father's friends queries; "Those things are expensive, I hope you obtained it legally (pg. 83)" and she replied that she bought it with her "own hard-earned cash" this kind of conversation ensued because of her father's crime, her mother nor her stepfather caution the man, Georgia, their daughter was there, other children were there with some other adults but none were questioned of the source of their gifts.

"Tyler tries to hide his shock, but it's obvious to everyone what he's thinking. It's the same thing any of my classmates would think if they saw Roman and me out of context - a good-looking basketball player and the dark girl from school with the murderous father"(pg. 97), this might be entirely Aysel's imagination. Though, Tyler might be taken aback with seeing his classmate's boyfriend ordinarily like anyone else could. But Aysel thinks her classmate would be surprised to see her with a good-looking guy based on her colour and her father's crime. This depicts her peers' attitude towards her or a mere assumption based on an event.



Another instance on environmental/social factor occurred, on the eight days to the suicide date, Aysel goes to Roman's house as planned for them to visit her father together at the correctional facility. She describes her reaction when Roman's mother reaches out to hug her, she states that she jumped, because "I'm not used to people wanting to touch me; most people try to stay as far away as possible, as if by touching me, they could somehow catch my dad's madness" (pg.132). It shows that not all the people living in the town are as judgmental as Aysel's employer, her step-parent's friend and some adults who had warned Mr. Palmer against hiring her.

Social isolation is associated with numerous negative and interpersonal crises that might likely result in anxiety and anger, fear of negative evaluation, pessimism, lower levels of social support and sociability (Cacioppo, et al., 2006). In collaboration with this allusion, at different times, Aysel is confronted with different kinds of emotional abuse and stigma, mere hugging, startles her because it is unusual mode of expression to her. An indication of social isolation and makes one feel lonely amid crowd. Her mode of dressing which was a pair of jean and a stripped gray shirt for almost three years, also, depicts that no one to complement her look or appearance not even her mother.

The Role of Parents of the Depressed Teenagers in the Text

Depression is generated from disruption in parenting of older children and adolescents due to parental withdrawal or avoidance and unresponsiveness to children's needs. Aysel narrates her experience with her dad; "with my dad, you always had to tread lightly, like you were walking on icy pavement- it was so fun when you were gliding, but it was easy to slip" (pg. 24), likewise, she sees herself as an intruder in her mother's second marriage home (pg.20). Aysel describes how she perceives her mother "I can see her struggling with her fear and her doubt. Her sideways glances and cautious probing questions are all her way of determining just how much a mental case I am" (pg. 25).

In addition, "Parental behaviours contribute to a chronically stressful environment for children" (NIH, 2009). Apart from the society, parental behaviour is identified as a contributor and this could be attributed to factors that keep Aysel in a prolonged negative thinking. Interpersonal Theory of Suicide (2011) also states that living in non-intact families is among the predictors of suicidal ideation.

All these narratives by Aysel about the kind of relationship she experienced while living with both parents at different times indicate the unhealthy method of child-raising which contributes to Aysel's perception of herself. Relaying the story of her father's mood swing shows that Aysel had been raised in fear and terror when she was less than a year, her mother left her in the care of her father. She has to be careful while living with her father in order not to provoke him, and after her father's crime, her mother is being careful with her in order not to provoke her.

Co-dependence could be the foundation of the entire crisis, her father could be hanging on her presence because her father did not like her going on weekend visits to her mother, maybe the father became more unnecessarily irritable on that fateful day due to her absence on a weekday for attending her half-brother's, Mike's school game. Aysel narrates; "first little League game.... things were going badly at the store and Dad counted on me to keep him company and help out" (pg. 170).

Aysel's recounts the incident thus; Timothy's friends came over to his shop, but mistakenly knock of an item, his reaction makes them to begin knocking over other items in his store to annoy him more since he started shouting.

One of his friends grabbed a few candy bars and threw them in the air, daring my dad to do something about it. So, my dad grabbed the baseball bat from behind the counter and went after them. I guessed Timothy



stepped out in front and tried to reason with my dad, but he just snapped. nobody could stop him. By the time the police came, Timothy was unconscious and my dad was just sitting next to him, still holding the baseball bat like a madman. Timothy never regained consciousness and he died at the hospital three days later.

She ended her narration with "I don't think my dad even knew who Timothy Jackson was (pg. 171). This statement shows that her father acted on provocation not on maiming Timothy Jackson to take his life.

Aysel complains that she was denied access to see her father again by her mother and also denied a bid to say goodbye to him. Aysel was not allowed to have a closure on the sad event, her mother neither discussed it with her nor asked her about how the sad event made her feel. After all, she had been living with her father before she clocked a year. Pretending or ignoring a child's feelings is another identified trigger in the novel.

Furthermore, it is "specifically stated that family emotional support can significantly alleviate the symptoms of depression when the perceived stress reactivity is low, but when the individual shows a high level of the perceived stress response, the effect of family emotional support in preventing depression will be greatly reduced" (Liu, et al., 2022).

The Therapeutic Process from Depression as Portrayed in the Text

Trust is one of the key factors identified in the course of this study, Aysel did not trust her family nor her friends but she begins to trust Roman and his family. "I look up to Roman. I don't know if it's trust I feel for him. I guess I have to trust that he's going to jump when I do" (pg. 97).

She becomes conscious while recounting her dilemma; "my dad did not only ruin my whole life because of what he did but also because he made me scared of what I am, what I am made of", this thought gives an insight to her identity problem. This thought also prompts her to a new perspective on her life, because she confesses to having a feeling of something new, "something I didn't even know was there, but I feel it crackle and burst, like a tiny sparkler inside of me" (pg.102). This implies that lack of personal identity is a contributory factor to depression. Linking her father's crime to herself has been persistently in her thoughts for three years which distorts most of her judgmental values.

Identity is internalized meaning that clusters around how an individual understands himself as a social object in a relationship to a real person as a child, a group as a family or congregation, as belonging to a social class e.g. race, ethnicity, sex or occupation (Stryker, 1980; Burke and Stets, 2009; Hogg, 2018). The ability to have a clear understanding of one's identity is the beginning of having self-esteem. Immediately, she resolves to see her father, it becomes a way to the healing process to confront that which she has been scared of, seek the resemblance factor and the truth. "I'm not sure I can destroy my potential energy until I understand the root of it all" is a major turn-around-positive thought, a positive way of thinking is getting to the root of a problem in order to identify what exactly is the problem. Thus, make the problem less stressful.

Trusting Roman again flips Aysel mind, "I'm starting thinking that Roman would understand. That he wouldn't hold me accountable for what my dad did". This statement explains that trust enhance all relationships, where there is no trust, there is no genuine relationship. Aysel's co-worker and her boss at Tucker Marketing Concept notice the change in Aysel's mood and her performance at work because she has found someone who understands her.

The power of trust cannot be de-emphasised, it develops overtime, it makes Aysel to call Roman after calling the McGreavy Correctional Facility where his father was kept. "I want to share my thoughts with someone, and he's the only person I could possibly talk to" (pg. 112). Sharing a secret that she has been guiding over jealously for three years in less than a month. She, later admits that... "Everything in life is about the perception of the observer". Aysel also confesses that getting to know Roman has shifted her perspective (pg.130).



Imperatively, in a bid to confront her fear, Aysel and Roman go on camping but the camping grant Aysel to reconsider her identity. Firstly, she notices that she laughed twice when Roman mentioned that they had a chemistry (pg. 151) and after they kissed. she is quoted thus: I can't develop a smiling habit. I wouldn't even recognize myself if I became someone who smiles voluntarily (pg., 152)". In addition, she describes her feelings as: "There's a burning in the pit of my stomach and it feels nothing like the black slug chomping away my happiness. There's a light fizziness where used to be unbearable heaviness and I wonder if my potential energy is changing" (pg.152) and by time, Roman is reminding her the reason for their being suicide partners, she realises that her reason is vague. For the first time since almost from the beginning of her meeting with Roman, she accepted to be a flake and also admits to herself that she was broken but not as much as resulting into suicide. This shows that individual's thoughts are powerful enough to make or mar his or her future. Aysel gets her information processing back on track without going through a therapist but allowing each moment to flow into her realization, she becomes fully aware of her mistakes (suicide).

Effective communication is key in all human's interaction, it transmits trust, builds a concrete bonding between two or more people and defeat the feelings of hopelessness because of emotional support that it involves. This is corroborated by Aysel in the text:

"Roman has helped me to understand myself better. yes, I'm broken. And yes, he's broken. But the more we talk about it, the more we share our sadness, the more I start to believe that there could be a chance to fix us, a chance that we could save each other..... But now I'm starting to believe that life may have more surprises in store than I ever realized..... life can seem awful and unfixable until the universe shifts a little and the observation point is altered, and then suddenly, everything seems more bearable pg.153".

The irony is that Roman aids the healing process of Aysel but he wishes to stay blind to his course and Aysel as a physics nerd, can see that his action does not match up with his adamant stance on the suicide mission because he too is yielding to emotional pleasure and he keeps repeating "it doesn't change anything. Aysel knows that "Everything has changed".

"He is no longer the person I want to die with; he's the person I want to be alive with" That is a positive decision and a full U-Turn from the status quo (negative schemas) evidence of a healed mind. The negative thoughts have changed and turned into a thing of the past, thinking about Roman's likely succeeding with his suicide mission becomes unbearable for Aysel. Sighting her drawn picture by Roman endorsed her positive thinking to stay alive. There is flexibility in personality traits and this serves as the possibility for a better future- Hope (pg.155).

Key Ideas on Depression Derived from the Text

A quote from American poet, John Milton, about *Paradise Lost* -"The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven (pg.181) becomes Aysel's favourite quote of all time because it heralds all that has been discussed into a sentence. Aysel becomes confident, she is able to explain it in relation to Einstein's theory of relativity in her English class by stating that everything is subjective in the human mind. "Our emotions, our opinions, they're all relative. it all depends on perspective". Truly, Aysel is a smart girl, both her English and Physics teacher trust her capacity and they are source of encouragement to her. She could have just thrown away her God-given talent on mere perception. People should not allow situation to define them but they should be the one to define the situation with hope and faith.

Aysel is able to persuade Roman, to discontinue suicide attempts and informs him of his impact on her life "Knowing you has helped me see things differently, see myself differently, and all I want is for you to see yourself the way that I do" (pg. 192), This conversation should have been from Roman's parents, especially the mother in order to dissuade him from further suicide



attempts. Too much privileges, could be taken for granted, instead exposing teenagers to consequences of their action might be useful.

Intimate relationships can only develop from effective communication and trust. This is evident in this novel, the supposed suicide partners end up entangled with emotions, Aysel begins to enjoy good relationship with her mother and the other siblings, especially Georgia, who later borrow her a dress to wear to Maddie's memorial. Romans conceded to stay alive because Aysel is able to convince him of his potential energy. The Franklins act of politeness and hospitality keeps Aysel to be free in coming to their house. If they had treated her otherwise like Mr. Markey did to Theodore Finch in *All The Bright Places* by Jennifer Niven (2015), which results into Finch's suicide, she might feel unwelcome and stay off and Roman, too could have succeeded in committing suicide.

Conclusion

Negative thinking is associated with increased symptoms of depression, and hopelessness. It does impair the ability to solve problems thus, aggravate stress. The schematic appraisal model of suicide conducted by Johnson and colleagues (2008) indicates that suicide risk can be linked to biased information processing. Wenzel and Beck (2008) also affirm the role of distorted information processing. Therefore, individuals are encouraged to be wary of negative thinking in all situations. Self-appraisal should be conducted to check the list of traits in the Cognitive Theory of Depression for one to identify when one is tilting towards unhealthy thought patterns. Better still, children should be groomed to accept, embrace and learn from their mistakes. Since mistakes, failures and conflicts are part of life challenges to equip one for maturity. None of these should be an excuse for withdrawal to the extent of falling into depression or an option for suicide. This paper highlights the hazard of prolonged negative thinking based on the author, Jasmine Warga's portrayal of depression on the protagonist and her accomplice, Roman. The two lives are saved based on verbal communication of feelings without shame or judgmental. Aysel become aware of all that happened to her as a mere conjecture of mind.

The author is able to place two families in contrast situations, the teenagers are of both genders, while Roman is showered with affections from his parents and friends, Aysel feels isolated based on people's utterances and her father's crime; her mother's fears and her detachment from those that are likely concerned for her well-being. However, the situation did not interfere with each teenager's intentions to commit suicide. Financial status, family stability and attention did not alter their negative thinking and plans rather communication with trust becomes the major factor of rescinding the negative plans of suicide victims to survivors.

Therefore, this paper concludes that there is potential for tragedy that arises from a lack of communication and understanding within families, underscoring the importance of fostering open dialogue and empathy to prevent depression as an outcome. Nevertheless, more studies on teenage suicide and depression is recommended in Nigeria, this study would have been on teenage suicide and depression in Lagos, Nigeria but due to paucity of literary works on this particular narrative heralds the study of American Young Adult prose. It is worthy to note that, there are Newspaper reports of Nigerian teenagers drinking sniper, antiseptic liquid and committing other forms of suicide. After all, literature is the mirror through which society sees itself.



REFERENCES

- (Aaron Beck Theory; Beck's Cognitive Model; A Theory of Depression Introduction, Theoretical model framework).
- Achenbach, T.M & Ruffle, T. M (2000). The Child Behavior Checklist and related forms for assessing behavioral/emotional problems and competencies. *Pediatric Review, 21(8)*, 265–271. <https://doi.org/10.1542/pir.21-8-265>.
- Ahmed, Hyggen & Stefansen A., Keil, M.F., Field, A.E., & Yanovski, J.A. (2002). Self-assessment of pubertal stage in overweight children. *Paediatrics, 110(4)*, 743–747.
- Allen, N. B., & Badcock, P. B. T. (2006). Darwinian models of depression: A review of evolutionary accounts of mood and mood disorders. *Progress in Neuro Psychopharmacology and Biological Psychiatry, 30(5)*, 815–826. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pnpbp.2006.01.007>
- Arnett J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood. A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist, 55(5)*:469-80.
- Arnett. J.J Health among Adults Identified with Different Levels of Depression. *Global Sociological Review, VI(1)*, 188–193. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2021\(VI-1\)](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2021(VI-1)).
- Arnett, J. J. (1999). Adolescent Storm & Stress, Reconsidered. *American Psychologist, 317-326*. doi: 10.1037// 0003-066x.54.5.317
- Astone, N. M., & McLanahan, S. S. (1991). Family structure, parental practices and high school completion. *American Sociological Review, 309-320*.
- Amato, P. R. (2004): The consequences of divorce for adults and children. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62(4)*, 1269-1287. Web. <www.jstor.org/stable/1566735>.
- Angermeyer, M. C., Holzinger, A., & Matschinger, H. (2009). Mental health literacy and attitude towards people with mental illness: a trend analysis based on population surveys in the eastern part of Germany. *European Psychiatry, 24(4)*, 225-232.
- Angold, A., Costello, E. J., & Erkanli, A. (1999). Comorbidity. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 40(1)*, 57-87.
- Andersen, S.L., Thompson, A.P., Krenzler, E., & Teicher, M.H. (2002). Pubertal changes in gonadal hormones do not underlie adolescent dopamine receptor overproduction. *Psychoneuroendocrinology, 27 (6)*, 683–691.
- Blakemore, Mills, (et al). (2001). "The 'Reading the Mind in the Eyes' Test revised version: a study with normal adults, and adults with Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism." *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines, 42(2)*, 241–251.
- Burke, P.J., & Stets, J.E. (2009) *Identity Theory*. Oxford University Press. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195388275.001.000>
- Becker, A., Hagenberg, N., Roessner, V., Woerner, W., & Rothenberger, A. (2004). Evaluation of the self-reported SDQ in a clinical setting: Do self-reports tell us more than ratings by adult informants? *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 13(supplement issue 2)*, ii/17–ii/24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-004-2004-4>
- Berger, T.J. (1979). Developmental changes in conformity to peers and parents. *Developmental Psychology, 15(6)*, 608–616.
- Beyer, C. (2021). *Contemporary Children's and Young Adult Literature: Writing Back to History and Oppression*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Bittner, A., Goodwin, R.D., Wittchen, H.U., Beesdo, K., Hofler, M., Lieb, R: What characteristics of primary anxiety disorder predict subsequent major depressive disorder? (2004) *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry, 65(5)*, 618-26.
- Boas, S.R., Falsetti, D., Murphy, T.D., & Orenstein, D.M. (1995). Validity of self-assessment of sexual maturation in adolescent male patients with cystic fibrosis. *The Journal of Adolescent Health, 17(1)*, 42–45.



- Bowlby, J. (1973) *Attachment and Loss: Vol.2. Separation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Carroll, A. (2002). "Art, Literature, And The Harlem Renaissance: The Messages Of God's Trombones." *College Literature* 29.3 pp 57. *Academic Search Complete*. Web. 16 May 2013. *Centre for Disease Control and Prevention: Understanding Suicide-Fact Sheet*
- Emerson, A. & Roundy, L. (2023): *Storm & Stress View of Adolescence/ Overview & Categories*, Study.com
- (Gloria & Steinhardt) 2016 Using multiple imputations to deal with missing data and attrition in longitudinal studies with repeated measures of patient-reported outcomes. *Clinical Epidemiology*. 7:91-106. 31
- George, R. J. (ed.) (1977). *A Nietzsche Reader*. London: Penguin, Horney, K. *New Ways in Psychoanalysis*. New York and London: Norton, 1966
- Grinder, R. E. (1978). *Adolescence*. London: John Wiley & Sons. Havighurst, B. J. (1988). *Developmental tasks and education*. (3rd ed.) New York: Mckay
- Houe, T. M. (2015). *Child behavior checklist/4-18*. Burlington, University of Vermont.
- Hughes, J. (1999). *In Social networks in youth and adolescence*. New York: Routledge. Heart of Darkness. London: Penguin, 1973
- Izadina (et al.): *Social Behavioural Sciences, Procedia-Vol.5* pg.1515-1519. National Library of Medicine: *Depression in Parents, Parenting, and Children: Opportunities to improve Identification, Treatment and Prevention*.
- Jolan, K. R. (2016). Comorbidity of depression in children and adolescents: Models and evidence from a prospective high-risk family study. *Biological Psychiatry*, 49(12), 1071-1081
- Kessler, R. C., Berglund, P., Demler, O., Jin, R., Merikangas, K. R., & Walters, E. E. (2005). Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV Disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 593–602. [https:// doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.59](https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.62.6.59)
- Keyes, C.L.M. (2002). The Mental Health Continuum: From Languishing to Flourishing in Life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 43(6), 207–222. [https://doi.org/ 10.2307/3090197](https://doi.org/10.2307/3090197)
- Langford R, Bonell C, Komro K, Murphy S, Magnus D, Waters E, (et al) (2017). The Health Promoting Schools Framework: Known Unknowns and an Agenda for Future Research. *Health Education & Behavior*. 2017;44(3):463-75. 204.
- Liberman, I. Y., Shankweiler, D., & Liberman, A. M. (1989). The Alphabetic Principle and Learning to Read. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NIH), Bethesda, MD. Retrieved from "Phonology and Reading Disability: Solving the Reading Puzzle," *International Academy for Research in Learning Disabilities Monograph Series*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED308767).
- MentalHelp.net (2015): *Depression- Cognitive Theory of Depression -Aaron Beck*
- Mueller S. A, Abrutyn S, Pescosolido B, Diefendorf S. (2021): The Root of Suicide: Theorizing How the External Social World Matters to Suicide Prevention, *Frontiers Review Article*. 12-2021, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.621569>.
- Mchussain, J. (2023): The Transformative Power of Literature: How Literary Works Shape Human Development. *International Research Journal of Education Research*, 14(4) 1-3, online <https://www.interestjournals.org/educational-research>. html.
- National Library of Medicine: *Suicide bereavement and complicated grief*,2012,14(2): 177-186. Doi 10.31887/DCNS.2012.14.2/iyoung.Dialogue in clinical neuroscience.
- National Library of Medicine (2009): *Depression in Parents, Parenting and Children: Opportunities to Improve Identification, Treatment and Prevention*, 2009.www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov.
- National Library of Medicine (1994): *Interrelated Influences of Contextual factors on antisocial behavior in childhood and adolescence for males*.
- PsychologyWriting. (2023) *Literature Review on Depression*. Retrieved from <https://psychologywriting.com/literature-review-on-depression>.



- Rescorla, L.A., Achenbach, T.M., Ivanova, M.Y., Dumenci, L., Almqvist, F., Bilenberg, N., et al. (2007). Epidemiological comparisons of problems and positive qualities reported by adolescents in 24 countries. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 75, 351—35.
- Said D, Kypri K, Bowman J. (2013). Risk factors for mental disorder among university students in Australia: findings from a web-based cross-sectional survey. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 48(6):935-44.
- Schier A.:(2015) Effects of four-week supplementation with a multi-vitamin/mineral preparation on mood and blood biomarkers in young adults: A randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial. *Nutrients*. 2015;7(11):9005-17.
- Stephanie Perkins's Anna and the French Kiss (2010), Seligman ME, Steen TA, Park N, Peterson C. Positive psychology progress: empirical validation of interventions. *Am Psychol*. 2005;60. 25. Steptoe A. *Happiness and Health. Annual Review of Public Health*.40(1):339- 59. 26.
- Taylor RD, Oberle E, Durlak JA, Weisberg R.P. 2017). Promoting positive youth development through school-based social and emotional learning interventions: A meta-analysis of follow-up effects. *Child Development*. 88(4):1156-71. 202.
- Tillich, P. (1952). *The Courage To Be*. Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Trite, R. Seelinger (2000): *Disturbing the Universe Power and Repression in Adolescent Fiction*, Iowa City University of Bedfordshire.
- Twain, M. (1885). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Published by Mark Twain.
- Van Loon, L. M. A., Van de Ven, M. O. M., Van Doesum, K. T. M., Witteman, C. L. M., & Hosman, C. M. H. (2014). The Relation Between Parental Mental Illness and Adolescent Mental Health: The Role of Family Factors. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 23(7), 1201–1214. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-013-9781-7> 112/
- Van Orden, et al (2010): The interpersonal Theory of Suicide. NIH Public Access, Author, Manuscript, published final edited form; *Psychol Rev*.
- (Vinney, C.: What is the Storm and Stress? VeryWell Mind, reviewed by Marsh Akeem, 2022 updated).
- Walsh, C.A. (2002). Regulation of cerebral cortical size by control of cell cycle exit in neural precursors. *Science*, 297(5580), 365–369.
- Warren, S. L., and Sroufe, L. A. (2004). *Developmental issues*. In Ollendick, T. H., and March, J. S. (eds.), *Phobic and Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents: A Clinician's Guide to Effective Psychosocial and Pharmacological Interventions*. (pp. 92–115). Oxford University Press, New York.
- Wikipedia - Jasmine Warga Biography.
- Wong P.T. (2010). What is existential positive psychology? *International Journal of Existential Psychology and Psychotherapy*. 3(1).
- World Health Organization. (2021). Health promotion glossary of terms 2021. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/350161> Word Health Organization. (2021b).
- (World Journal Psychiatry (2022): Influencing factors, prediction and prevention of depression in college students: A literature review. 12(7): 860-873, ISSN 22220-3206(ONLINE) DOI: 10.5498/wjp. v12, i7.860).