

The Psychological State of Clay Jenson after the Death of Hannah Baker in Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why: An Analysis*

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Abstract: *This study deals with the psychological condition of clay Jensen after the death of Hannah Baker in Jay Asher's Thirteen Reasons Why. In this novel Clay Jensen receives a set of audio tapes from his crush Hannah Baker's who died by suicide two weeks ago. He begins to listen to cassettes. Hannah reveals on the tapes that she decides to take her own life for thirteen different reasons. Clay is among them. What happened to the girl is a mystery that raises several issues and Clay Jensen after listening to the first tapes starts to battle an internal conflict between his mind and heart. His mind wanted him to stop listening to the tapes and not believe a dead girl and his heart couldn't stop listening to the voice of the girl he loved and could have saved. Despite his conflict he uncovers a different side of his classmate and school. This study deals with the psychological condition of Clay Jenson after he receives the tapes and follows its course throughout the novel.*

Keywords: Depression, Internal Conflict, Mental Health, Psychoanalysis, Psychological Impact

Introduction

Literature is a work that replicates the events that occur in an individual's life. It is impossible to separate literature from the component of human life and society. The real dynamics of any society, including their interrelationships, are reflected in literature, which depicts the truth of human life. Literature is used mostly to create imaginative and fictional narratives. "Literature is an expression of society", (Wellek & Warren, 1965, p. 95). Literature deals with almost every aspect and part of society to make it more understandable and approachable and sometimes to highlight the problems and concerns of the society. A variety of taboo topics are dealt with literature and the examples of human experience that are faced by an individual such as loss, suffering, and longing are sometimes challenging to comprehend while studying literature. People can experience troubles in real life; therefore they choose to fictionalize them in a novel, occasionally a series, or a movie. Novels are long narratives that usually portray different sides of society, so that readers can experience the same things as the characters in the story, novels can be written with emotion, feeling, mood, and time. Additionally, readers will gain knowledge about people and how to treat one another with respect and avoid offending one another. Novels usually tend to make things relatable.

One such novel that deals with some of the crucial parts of society that is mental health, depression, sexual abuse and suicide is Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*. It is a heartbreaking story of a girl named Hannah Baker who committed suicide as a result of uncomfortable circumstances. It is a story about mental illness, including depression, bullying, peer pressure, sexual abuse, suicide, anxiety and drug addiction. Hannah Baker, a 17-year-old high school student, killed herself and left behind 13 cassette tapes outlining her motivations. Another significant character, Clay Jensen, who cared profoundly about Hannah and wanted to learn what had happened to her, also had a major role in the plot developments. The story follows two different narratives in the entire novel. One focusing on the events that happened in Hannah's life and how she had no other option to kill herself and other is the narrative of Clay Jensen. He is the student and a close of Hannah Baker, who had a crush on her. He plays a crucial role in the story as he uncovers the truth and wants to get justice for Hannah. Clay receives the set of tapes that Hannah Baker recorded and mentioned the reasons of her suicide and Clay is on that list. My main goal with this paper is to portray the turmoil and the emotional and psychological condition of Clay Jensen after the death of Hannah Baker and how he tries to cope up with it. The journey of Clay throughout the novel and his mental deterioration is the central theme of the study. The reader can empathize to the characters and comprehend what they're going through due to the mixed narration. Hearing the story from Hannah's point of view enables the reader to better understand what is happening in her head, what a mentally unstable person's thought process looks like, how things influence

her, and what emotions are overwhelming her. And follow the journey of Clay to uncover the truth behind the suicide of his love and the problems he faces makes the aftermath and impact on the loved ones of the victims of suicide heartbreaking but understandable. It demonstrates how each person perceives the world differently, and that diversity in perspective may account for why some people decide to survive despite their trials while others do not. The researcher hopes to understand and highlight the emotional and psychological turmoil of Clay Jenson throughout his journey in the novel.

Method

A qualitative method of study is used by the researcher to analyze the novel. For the purpose of conducting this research, two different types of data sources, primary and secondary are used. The primary data source of this study is the novel by Jay Asher, *Thirteen Reason Why* and the secondary sources are various research articles and books related to the novel.

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Discussion

The research focuses on Clay Jenson, another main character of the novel *Thirteen Reason Why* and investigates the character to deliver a discussion about the psychological condition of the character. The novel's main character, the first-person narrator and a navigator through the plot is Clay Jensen. Clay Jensen is an introvert. Even his parents, friends, and the person he loves find it difficult to get close to him.

"Mom, you scared me" I say. "It's nothing. A school project". My go-to answer for anything. Staying out late? School project. Need extra money? School project. And now, the tapes of a girl. A girl who, two weeks ago swallowed a handful of pills. School project. "Can I listen?" she asks. "It's not mine," I say. I scrape the toe of my shoe against the concrete floor. "I am helping a friend. It's for history. It's boring." (Asher, 2007)

Even though he is an introvert Hannah is fond of him and describes him as a nice guy.

I'm not even sure how much of the real Clay Jensen I got to know over the years. Most of what I knew was secondhand information. And that's why I wanted to know him better. Because everything I heard—and I mean everything!—was good. (Asher, 2007)

He is unresponsive, oblivious to what is going on around him, oblivious to his own affairs, and silent even when necessary. He is worried with his reputation and what people think about him, which is also one of his key character flaws. As a result, he hesitated too long before assisting Hannah even though he was the only one who could save her.

Clay Jenson is the one throughout the novel that we find both physically and mentally exhausted throughout the novel. The mental health condition of Clay starts to deteriorate the first time he hears Hannah's voice on the radio. He couldn't figure out what happened and even believe what he was hearing. He wanted to escape the reality and wanted to believe whatever happened or is happening is not real. "No, I can't believe it. Hannah Baker killed herself."

"My stomach squeezes in on itself, ready to make me throw up if I let it. Nearby, a plastic bucket sits upside-down on a footstool. In two strides, if I need to, I can reach the handle and flip it over." (Asher, 2007,)

"These tapes shouldn't be here. Not with me. It has to be a mistake. Or a terrible joke. I pull the trash can across the floor. Although I checked it once already, I check the wrapping again. A return address has got to be here somewhere. Maybe I'm just overlooking it. Hannah Baker's suicide tapes are getting passed around. Someone made a copy and sent them to me as a joke. Tomorrow at school, someone will laugh when they see me, or they'll smirk and look away." (Asher, 2007)

He liked Hannah she was his crush and her suicide left a negative impression on his mental health to begin with. Suicide is one of the leading outcomes of depression. A person who is depressed sometimes falls into suicide but its only one thing that is affected. Everything influences everything and the people who suffer from a mental trauma are the loved one of the deceased. Hannah's death in the same way effected Clay. His first instinct was denial; people may resort to an even more extreme form of repression when they are overcome by the fear that is present in a circumstance.

Physical deterioration will be characterized as a worsening of clinical status that raises morbidity risk for the individual. Suicide, attempted suicide, other self-harm, violence, and other harms to others are the main outcomes for mental health deterioration. (Gaskin and Dagley, 2018)

Young adults frequently have psychological and social problems. Psychosocial difficulties are problems that are both psychological and social in nature and are derived from the phrases "psychological" and "social." Problems frequently stem from misbehavior and include anxiety, despair, problem-solving abilities, and support from the social environment.(Holm, 2017)

Hannah's suicide was enough for clay to feel uneasy and numb and the tapes and the voice added up to what he was feeling already. He soon runs away on his bicycle and goes to Tony and steals his voice recorded, he starts to follow the direction of the tape and with each place and part of the story, he started to hallucinate and started to see Hannah in front. Readers are introduced to Clay's responses to the cassettes, Hannah's story, and his reflections on the past throughout the recordings. Clay differs from the other characters in that he desires justice for Hannah Baker's suicide and holds responsible for her death everyone mentioned on the tapes, including himself. It is significant to note that Hannah Baker appears to Clay Jensen in both his auditory and visual hallucinations.

A total of 168 indicators of a person's mental health decline were found. Interviews with doctors and patients led to the identification of 93 and 120 indicators, respectively. Along with the 53 indicators gleaned from the literature search, these signs were examined. 27 indications came from all three sources, 44 from two sources, and 97 from a single source, indicating that many of the signs were common to several sources (i.e., some signs were obvious in the literature and also surfaced in the interviews with clinicians and people with lived experience). We looked for methods of organizing the clusters because it would be difficult to use several clusters of signs in practice. We discovered that the 38 clusters might be reduced to five deterioration indicators:

(1) reported change; (2) distress; (3) lack of awareness of reality or behaviors effects; (4) loss of function; and (5) increased risk to oneself, others, or property. (Gaskin and Dagley, 2018)

The symptoms of Clay mental decline becomes a topic of concern in the novel as well. We see him more sensitive towards Hannah's death than any others on that tape. While other's follow the map and instructions because of the fear, Clay on the other hand follows them because he wants to uncover the truth. His hallucinations get worse, although he doesn't belong in the list as the reason of Hannah Baker's suicide but he couldn't stop himself from the guilt and the blame.

"You're on the tapes, too", I say. "Right?, So are you, Clay".

My voice shakes from both rage and an attempt to hold back tears. "What makes us so different from him?" (Asher, 2007)

Severe Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder with Traumatic Bereavement, Panic Disorder 300.01 (F41.0), Localized Dissociative Amnesia with Dissociative Fugue 300.13 (F44.1), and Moderate-Severe Early Onset Dysthymia with Mood-Congruent Psychotic Features 300.4 are among the mental health conditions I think Clay Jensen is experiencing (F34.1). (Isfeld, 2021)

Millions of teenagers in this nation suffer from depression, which is one of the main causes of death for American teenagers. The impact of suicide and the reason of suicide still remain as taboo topic to talk about but as taboo as it remains, the intensity and the impact it has on an individual after the death of a loved one because of suicide and decline of mental health can be a beginning of some other person's decline needs understand. Clay Jensen, a normal introverted kid who wanted to live a normal high school life suddenly encounters the death of his love interest and initially finding out about the tapes and him being a potential cause of her death, initiates his mental distress and the psychological state of Clay starts to mess up. Although he doesn't do anything drastic but the empathy and concern he needed at that time remained missing. Everyone on those tapes or around was looking for someone to blame for Hannah's suicide but Clay. He was the only one who was able to understand the reason behind her suicide that was a failed society and school. People failed Hannah Baker and Clay was able to understand that. He failed Hannah Baker and this was one of the reasons for his decline.

“How many times did I stand right here, thinking I would never get a chance with Hannah Baker? I had no idea how she felt about me. No idea, who she really was. Instead, I believed what other people said about her. And I was afraid what they might say about me if they knew I liked her.” (Asher, 2007)

Clay throughout the novel feels uneasy and panic. He feels confused and the trauma he feels is evident in the novel. Despite his psychological state, he doesn't give up. Towards the end of the novel he reaches out the Skyler Miller a girl whom he knew and understood needed help. With his conversation with Skyler Miller, he understood that she avoided people and this time he didn't want to turn his back on someone he knew. Someone he called his friend, so he called her at his school and that's how the novel reaches its end. Although the pain and anxiety cause him all kind of psychological distress but his decision to talk to Skyler makes it evident and if he could turn back time he would help Hannah, if only he understood her cry for help. His psychological state shows development after his decline towards the end. Towards the end we find him accepting part of his social duties, Clay is successful in playing the role of a friend by supporting the other friend. Clay gains more empathy, which is an indication of character growth, despite his psychological decline throughout the novel. He used to struggle with friendship, which helps him to take care of the other friend. He showed less pity for Hannah and Skye, two of his buddies who needed assistance. When Hannah Baker was still alive, he showed her no respect. His remorse over Hannah's passing and his failure to support her through her issues or stop her from killing herself have aided in his psychosocial development, or friend-building. In order to assist prevent the same thing from happening to Skye, he learns a valuable lesson from his previous experience with Hannah. Then he chats to Skye and tries to be as much of her friend as he can, something he was never able to do for Hannah.

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Conclusion

Suicide has and still remains one of the leading of death of teenagers. Young adult literature deals with this topic in order to make people empathic and understand the consequences of their actions. So did the novel *Thirteen Reasons why*. Not only was it able to cover the topic of suicide but the impact of it on their loved ones; the psychological decline of Hannah parents and Clay. Although the topic of concern was Clay Jenson as he occupies a major part in the novel, the decline of Hannah's parents is also portrayed to some extent.

The psychological state of Clay Jenson is continuously decline, be it hallucinations or blaming himself. He is in turmoil throughout the novel. Anxiety, panic attacks and hallucinations are recurring throughout him discovering the truth. Clay goes through a lot throughout but towards the end we do see him develop a little in terms of empathy as we see him talking to a classmate Skyler and taking care of her. Thus, making his psychological state both declining and to some extent developing towards the end.

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