

MAY 2022

EXTENDED ESSAY

Group 2: English B HL

Category 3: Literature

Title: Struggle in terms of relationships and isolation

Research Question: In what ways do the main characters in the novels *Go Ask Alice* (Anonymous) and *Speak* by Laurie Halse suffer and cope with the traumas they have experienced in terms of “relationships and isolation?”

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I. Introduction

Go Ask Alice by Beatrice Sparks and *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson are slightly two different stories. However, both stories are about teenage girls in their sixteens who have experienced traumatic moments in their lives and how this trauma has affected their lives in which they try to balance their mental health along with their relationships with their family and friends. The traumas that the girls experience are different but the destructive effect it has on the girls are the same.

This essay will analyze each novel by comparing the similarities and differences of the main characters in terms of the horrific effects of the traumas and how they both respond to all the negativities that they have encountered in their lives. Therefore, I have generated the research question **“How do the main characters in the two novels *Go Ask Alice* (Anonymous) and *Speak* by Laurie Halse suffer and cope with the traumas they have experienced in terms of “relationships and isolation”?**

II. Background Information

A teenager or teen is someone who is between 13 to 19. The teenage years can be a time of experimentation for young people¹ and may have hard times interacting with people. They usually do unusual things, lose control of themselves, and can be

¹ <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/drugs-teenagers-parenting>

negatively affected by the environment they are in. These environments can lead them to use drugs or alcohol, smoke and even worst be sexually abused.

Of course, not always environmental effects drag teens into these situations. But sometimes they want to fit in and be social. As escapism, they use drugs or alcohol and have a sexual relationship which may lead to unexpected and uncontrolled situations which have ever-lasting effects on the individual. Using drugs and alcohol, moreover, having sexual relationships cause traumas to the teen that it is difficult for them at times to overcome. In the novel *Go Ask Alice* the main character's life changes when she starts using drugs that has no turning back, but in the novel *Speak*, the main character's life changes when she was sexually abused but overcomes the trauma by demonstrating her power in the end.

III. Characters

i. Alice

The protagonist in the novel *Go Ask Alice* is a middle-class type girl in the '60s and her life is no different from a teenage drug dealer. Her observations and emotions are written in her diary. She always seeks someone to talk to about her life and problems but never really finds anyone to cry on their shoulder. The only desire she wants is to be understood because she could not find anyone to talk to, therefore; she starts to use drugs to get away with her problems. She is also having adolescent problems and this is the real reason why she started using drugs.

ii. Melinda

The protagonist in the novel *Speak* is a thirteen-year-old high school student, raped by senior Andy Evans at a party the summer before graduation. She has not told anyone about the rape, nevertheless, her classmates abominate her for calling the police which spoiled the night of everyone's joy. She is terrified of opening up to anyone and growing up in a real way. She is smart, but refuses to do her homework, or go to class on account of the rape. Eventually, she falls into depression that makes it difficult for her to cope with life.

IV. Effects of The Traumas on Both Characters

When we first take a look at *Go Ask Alice*, we see that Alice is unwittingly ingesting LSD and has an intense trip (a psychedelic experience is a temporary altered state of consciousness induced by the consumption of a psychedelic substance). Over the following days, she attends to socialize with her peers and tries new drugs. Due to this, she loses her virginity while she is being on acid. After this, she worries that she may be pregnant and that affects her deeply. To calm herself down and to sleep well she starts to take sleeping pills. As seen here, she uses drugs for every problem that she cannot overcome with in her life, and even though she knows the bad effects of these drugs on her life, she still uses them.

Furthermore, her friend Chris and she run away to San Francisco where they meet Shelia. One night Shelia and her boyfriend introduce the girls to heroin and brutally rape them while they are under the influence of the drug. This situation traumatized the girls and the girls feel disgust about themselves.

Even though Alice knows the lousy effects of drugs, she could not stop using them. At one point she ran away from her house and experiences homelessness and prostitution. She loses herself and this results in physical and mental damage. Even if she goes to the psychiatric hospital and comes home clean, 3 weeks later, unfortunately her family finds her dead at home.

In *Speak*, we can see the effects of the trauma from the beginning of the book. Melinda has been raped and relives the effect every day. She is really smart but never does her homework or goes to class. Even if she is in the class, she always sleeps and never talks. Melinda finds everything difficult, for instance, to enjoy life or to trust anyone.

In the book, the author portrays the effects of trauma on a fifteen-year-old girl. She shows how difficult for Melinda to move on from her trauma. Her healing process is slow, but in the end, she regains her voice and is finally able to move on.

V. Family Relationships

When we first analyze “Go Ask Alice”, in the beginning, our main character Alice (as far as is known), is a typical teenager who is mostly concerned with boys, schools, and fitting in. She starts to write her diary because she doesn’t have anyone to talk to. She is desperately looking for someone who understands her. When her dad gets a new job Alice and her family move across the country, she starts a new school. At that time she extremely feels insecure and really sensitive. At first, she tries to make friends but her insecurity affects her communication with people and because of that she stops making new friends and gives upon everything; including looking out for herself.

Eventually, she makes a friend, Beth a Jewish girl, which is a nice girl and Alice feels like she can count on her. "I like her and it's nice to have a true friend (...)" (Go Ask Alice,20).

When Alice comes back from her summer holiday, her relationship with Beth starts to fall apart because she thinks Beth has changed. Later that day, she goes to a boutique where she meets Chris. After meeting with Chris, she starts working, dating college boys, and starts selling drugs to kids. From this situation, we conclude that Alice's friendship with Chris starts as great but when they start using drugs and try selling them to kids it becomes a bad influence on Alice's life but the friendship still goes on.

When Alice and Chris run away to San Fransisco, that is when the trouble starts. They meet a woman called Sheila, who is also a drug user. Alice and Chris's relationship start great but after the party they attended to changes everything. The girls are raped and are wasted. This implies that Alice is so naive that she easily trusts people she does not know.

Considering the relationship between Alice and her friends, it is obvious that her relationship with her family is no different. *"If only parents would listen! If only they would let us talk instead of forever and eternally and continuously harping and preaching and nagging and correcting and yacking, yacking, yacking! But they won't listen! They simply won't or can't or don't want to listen, and we kids keep winding up back in the same old frustrating, lost, lonely corner with no one to relate to either verbally or physically."* This quote explains how she is being treated by her parents, being indifferent as well being abused in different terms. This is one of the most obvious communication problems that Alice is having. Even trying so hard, Alice

never fully opened up to her parents. Her parents' distance relationship never allowed her to open up to them about the wrongdoings as well as the sexual abuse she encountered at the party she went to, her drug addiction.

After some time she returns home and starts a therapy session in which she talks about her family, teen runaways, and drug problem. This makes it hard for her to communicate with the group therapy she is in.

Finally, when she meets Joel, a good student from her father's university, she slowly starts to speak about her past and gains trust in others.

On the other hand, in "Speak", our main character Melinda, a fourteen-year-old teenager, loses the ability to communicate after she is sexually assaulted. She refuses to talk about the incident since she believes that no one would ever believe in her. Therefore, she remains silent and does not talk about anything with anyone. She thinks that if she does not talk, she would forget about the trauma, the rape. However, communication does not necessarily mean to be speaking. Melinda tries to communicate by writing on the bathroom walls and by drawing in her art class, but they are not enough for her to be understood. *"It is getting harder to talk. My throat is always sore, my lips raw. When I wake up in the morning, my jaws are clenched so tight I have a headache. Sometimes my mouth relaxes around Heather if we're alone. Every time I try to talk to my parents or a teacher, I sputter or freeze. What is wrong with me? It's like I have some kind of spastic laryngitis. From this quote, we could fully understand how hard she is trying to speak about her traumas but she just could not. "I know my head isn't screwed on straight. I want to leave, transfer, warp myself to another galaxy. I want to confess everything, hand over the guilt and mistake and anger to someone else. There is a beast in my gut, I can hear it scraping away at the*

inside of my ribs. Even if I dump the memory, it will stay with me, staining me. My closet is a good thing, a quiet place that helps me hold these thoughts inside my head where no one can hear them.”

Moreover, when Melinda wants to tell her former best friend about what happened to her, she slips her a note instead of speaking to Rachel. First, her former best friend accuses her of being a liar and leaves her in such a situation that there is no hope for her. When it comes to her parents, she could not even say a word to them as well because her relationship with her parents were never based on understanding.

In the book, only her art teacher Mr. Freeman is interested in Melinda’s problem and wanted to hear about it. At the end of the book, she finally speaks up about her trauma. *“ You’ve been through a lot, haven’t you? The tears dissolve the last block of ice in my throat. I feel the frozen stillness meltdown through the inside of me, dripping shards of ice that vanish in a puddle of sunlight on the stained floor. Words float up.*

Me: “Let me tell you about it.”

As we can see from the quote, finally she opens her trouble and starts to heal slowly.

Her family is distant from her and she completely is unable to talk about what happened to her. Even her parents’ relationship is complicated. They are always fighting and creating an uneasy atmosphere at home. From the quote below we can see the relationship between them more clearly:

“ I bet they’d be divorced by now if I hadn’t been born. I’m sure I was a huge disappointment. I’m not pretty or smart or athletic. I’m just like them— an ordinary drone dressed in secrets and lies. I can’t believe we have to keep playacting until I graduate. It’s a shame we can’t just admit that we have failed family living, sell the house, split the money, and get on with our lives.”

From the school aspect, we can see that it all started at the summer party where she was raped. When school starts nobody talks to her because at the party she calls the police but cannot talk and everybody assumes that she is calling the police because of the alcohol. *“ I have entered high school with the wrong hair, the wrong clothes, the wrong attitude. And I don't have anyone to sit with. I am an Outcast.”* This quote is from the very beginning of the book and we can make an inference that she was being alienated from the beginning. During the orientation in school, she meets Heather. Interestingly they become friends despite Melinda's attitude (because of her depression and apathy). Their friendship was stable until one day Heather tells her that she needs to be changed. Her depression was disturbing Heather.

Furthermore, David Petrakis, who is a geek in her classroom acts as a true friend to Melinda. But because of Melinda's trust issues, pain, and betrayal she went through she shoves him off. Lastly, Mr. Freeman, her art teacher proves to her that her human connection is not always harmful but necessary and makes happiness.

VI. Isolation, Loneliness, and Depression

In “ Go Ask Alice”, Alice her isolation stems from her inability to communicate. She wants to talk to somebody but she just could not because she is scared of her parent's/friends' reactions. *“ I must talk to someone. I must find someone who understands about drugs and talk to them”*. From this quote, we can clearly see how desperate she is to talk to someone.

Alice's isolation leads her to use drugs. Before using drugs she was lonely and did not fit anywhere. However, by using drugs, she finally thinks that she fits in and thinks

that she has friends, in other words, she finally is part of something. Alice feels isolated because of her own actions.

In "Speak", from the beginning of the book, Melinda has been lonely. After her best friend, Rachel, stops talking to her and she becomes lonely. In school she finds herself rejected and alone. Melinda feels unhappy and lonely and her isolation is a symptom of her trauma.

Moreover, Melinda is not the only one who feels isolated. Her parents are also feeling the same way. They are trapped in a troubled marriage and both of them are unhappy. Melinda's isolation sinks her into a deep depression but when she starts to mature she realizes that she can still connect with people even though she feels bad.

VII. Conclusion

Both "Go Ask Alice" and "Speak" are very similar novels in the theme but the main characters had different traumas. The different traumas similarly affected them.

Understanding both main characters from the aspects of relationships and isolation, Alice's loneliness caused her a great deal of pain, and her trouble with drugs caused her problems at every point of her life. For Melinda, she thought not speaking would solve everything but silence also has a limit and eventually she speaks up and becomes strong as she has now have a voice

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