

Revisiting Trauma of Childhood through Graphic Narratives in Allie Brosh's *Hyperbole and a Half*

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Abstract

Graphic narratives in graphic novels on illness treats the themes of illness and trauma as aspects of transition in life. Visual metaphors used in graphic novels present an idea in pictorial analogy, that represent connotative and denotative meaning of the image. In the graphic novel *Hyperbole and a Half* written by Allie Brosh the author illustrates her life of suffering from ADHD with humorous images and dialogues. ADHD- attention deficit hyperactive disorder is a neurological developmental disorder, in which, the protagonist Allie suffers and tries several activities to cope up with her disorder. Visual metaphors in graphic narratives exaggerate and juxtaposes the idea creating hilarious illustrations of neuro developmental disorder, that becomes coping mechanism for the protagonist of neuro and psychological illness. Using visual metaphors is convenient for protagonist who suffers ADHD as she cannot concentrate to write down her feelings and thoughts. Through graphic narratives, the author feels the unfelt emotions of her traumatized childhood and revisiting the trauma of childhood helps her to have a transition from the victim stage to survivor stage.

Keywords: ADHD; Depression; Graphic medicine; Graphic Narratives; Trauma.

Introduction

Allie Brosh is an eminent American blogger and comic artist, she in her graphic novel *Hyperbole and a Half* elucidates her childhood fears, compulsive disorder, depression and trauma in hilarious illustrations. Her graphic novel *Hyperbole and a Half* is a comic memoir of her childhood suffering with ADHD - Attention deficit hyperactive disorder. The author uses visual metaphors, illustrations, drawings, doodles in her graph-

ic memoir to revisit the trauma of her childhood. Her visual metaphors and graphic illustrations offer insight into the author's coping mechanism of ADHD. Visual metaphors used in graphic novels present an idea in pictorial analogy, that represent connotative and denotative meaning of the image. The use of visual metaphors acts like a figurative language in the graphic medium to creatively present an idea. The visual metaphors allow the comic artist to use humorous analogies, dialogues and punch-lines with exaggerated meaning. In the graphic novel *Hyperbole and a Half* written by Allie Brosh the author illustrates her life suffering from ADHD with humorous images and dialogues.

Graphic narratives on ADHD

ADHD- attention deficit hyperactive disorder is a neurological disorder in which the protagonist Allie suffers and tries several activities to cope up with her disorder. The protagonist is constantly restless which makes her do many activities at her house causing chaos to everyone. She becomes too difficult to take care off and her behaviour frightens her mom.

“Normal children don't have dead imaginary friends. Normal children don't pick open every single one of their chicken pox scabs and then stand naked and bleeding in the darkened doorway to their bedroom until someone walks past and asks what they are doing...Normal children also don't watch their parents sleep from the corner of the room...Please stop. Please, please stop. (Brosh 12)”

The neurological disorder makes the protagonist who is seven years old do crazy things, she often removes dress and goes naked at school and park. Her actions bring discomfort to her teachers, classmates and parents. The protagonist made very slow progress in school compared to other kids, she roamed around pretending to be a dog barking at others, this made her teachers doubt on her developmental process. The protagonist was obsessed with dogs, playing with her dog and training it was one of her coping mechanisms.

People who have ADHD find difficulty in concentrating but they have full focus on things that profoundly interest them. The protagonist who has ADHD is obsessed with dogs and also finds training dogs very interesting. She directs her full focus in training her pet dog Murphy. Her alertness and impulsiveness are used productively in training her pet dog Murphy. She discovers her dog is deaf and dumb so it can't be trained, she starts loving her dog more. Her ADHD makes her life very difficult as she keeps buzzing over things and later finding fault with her with

obsessions. Her obsession over things like dogs, cakes and playing goes beyond her self-control leading to losing self to one's obsession. She obsesses over herself, her thoughts and feelings due to which she frequently falls into depression. Though she suffers from ADHD, her curiosity helps to find search and find new things at home, she finds a crayon and starts drawing. She starts drawing herself and creates a personal journal of what she does every day, her thoughts and feelings get an image form and picturing her thoughts, curiosity keeps her mind away from sadness and depression. She writes a graphic novel on stories that happened to her and tragic incidents that happened to others because of her ADHD. Her coping mechanisms, from ADHD and depression is drawing about her experiences and feelings. Her hyperactivity, restlessness, impulse, depression finds a creative expression in graphic narratives, and drawing about her condition helps her to know what are her positives and negatives. Expressing her thoughts in analogical juxtapositions helps her to create her identity amidst her depression, mania and impulsiveness. The protagonist who has psychological conditions finds expressing her illness and suffering through visual metaphors very convenient as it is simple in form and full of insight. Visual metaphors are used as a tool to create an image to express an idea additionally to candid reality.

Co-relating the ideas in visual metaphors creates sequential images in chronological order creating frames of meaning. Through visual metaphors the protagonist creates connotative and denotative meaning within the panels with extra diegetic gaze. The panels of visual narratives represent world within the panels with extra diegetic viewpoint giving an outward view of the represented world. Visual metaphors exaggerate and juxtaposes the idea creating hilarious illustrations of psychological conditions, that becomes coping mechanism for the protagonist of psychological illness. The protagonist who suffers from psychological illness perceives things around her very intensely, to speak about her depression, thoughts and feelings to her mother is very difficult for her, instead she helps herself by scribbling on a paper, drawing about her thoughts and feelings. These images of her depression are unique as the protagonist finds it difficult to describe the symptoms of depression.

In the selected novels the author of the graphic novels suffer from psychological condition, she uses homo-diegetic narration to become a character in her graphic novel. They write about their symptoms and sufferings through graphic narratives using visual metaphor. The visual metaphor is the background which is represented in dark black shade when the protagonist of the novel feels suicidal.

Fortunately, recovery is about overcoming the difficulties of today and not about defining past experiences, so our lack of clarity about the meaning of 'childhood trauma' shouldn't hold you back. (Kennerley 2)

Drawing is used as a tool by the author to overcome the childhood trauma and graphic narratives of her childhood trauma helps her to get clarity amidst the difficulties of past experiences. Using visual metaphors is convenient for protagonist who suffers ADHD as she can't concentrate to write down her feelings and thoughts. Her anxiety prevents her from reading and writing, she finds very hard in concentrating in a work due to ADHD. Drawing and scribbling her thoughts that bother her from time to time help her in day-to-day life. Her ADHD prevent her from having an organized life, she discontinues schooling and representing her thoughts, feelings is very difficult due to her impulsivity. Though she tries to explain her condition to her mom, it is difficult for her mom to understand what she is going through, people around her often misunderstand her ADHD this is due to various psychosocial factors. Her disruptive behaviors scare her mother and her mother asks her why can't she be normal like other kids. The images drawn by the protagonist explains how no one monitors her or talks to her, she struggles to communicate or talk to her mother verbally, she draws images and uses drawing as a play way method to communicate her emotions and feelings.

Sharing the story behind the drawing is optional, it allows children to feel free to express themselves. Some children are very self-conscious about their drawing." (Kaduson& Schaefer 147)

ADHD is an ongoing chronic psychiatric disorder that causes behavioral disorders, emotional and learning disabilities. Children who have ADHD persists in adolescence and they exhibit risk behaviour that impairs their future life. Children with ADHD turn argumentative, showcase anger, anxiety and become disobedient to the parents. Several genetic and environmental factors contribute to the development of ADHD in children. Parents and teachers need training to handle them and teach them systematical to make them productive. These children exhibit frustration and anger which can be deviated to art, they can be given art therapy as alternate therapy which helps them let go of their suppressed anger, anxiety, and emotions. Art involves ordered steps that help the children develop concentration, controlled attention, attention sequencing and to ignore distractions. Through colouring and drawing children express their emotions and this gives an opportunity to discuss about the work of art they created with their parents and children. When parents and teachers ask

about their drawing the children are able to spontaneously talk about their work of art creating a positive social interactions and positive self-esteem.

Conclusion

The protagonist's anxiety prevents her from reading and writing, she couldn't control her overflowing thoughts and also finds it difficult to concentrate in a work due to ADHD. Drawing and scribbling her thoughts that bother her from time to time help her in day-to-day life. Expressing her thoughts in analogical juxtapositions helps her to create her identity amidst her depression, mania and impulsiveness. The protagonist draws herself and her self-consciousness in her memoir, she draws a small girl with a dejected look, her sullen face explains how the protagonist feels about her everyday events in life, through the visual metaphor of drawing a sullen face with dejected smile, she expresses her feelings of sadness, loneliness, dejection, anxiety and impulsiveness. Using metaphor of a child who is three years old the protagonist expresses her fears, obsessions and loneliness when she was a child. The protagonist uses drawing as a tool to relive her childhood experience, her visual metaphor of a child with dejected look explains her trauma of childhood, she becomes self-conscious of the events that traumatized her, and reliving the traumatic experiences helps her to reintegrate herself to a stabilized mind. The protagonist has used drawing as a play technique to experience her unmet emotions of her traumatized childhood, revisiting the trauma of childhood helps her to have a transition from the victim stage to survivor stage.

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