

# JOHN GREEN'S TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN: A REVIEW ON OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD) IN ADOLESCENTS

<sup>1</sup>M. JEBASELVI, <sup>2</sup>M.V. SIVAKUMAR

<sup>1</sup>PhD. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Chidambaram.

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Guide & Supervisor, Department of English, Annamalai University, Chidambaram.

## Abstract

This paper deals with Obsessive compulsive disorder of young adults with reference with 'Turtles All The Way Down' a contemporary young adult novel written by John Green. This title is not just a random combination of words but an expression of Paradox referring to the "unmoved mover" which is actually an old philosophical joke on the idea that Earth is flat and its floating on the back of a giant turtle. Some states it as an old joke that are often used as a rebuttal for the existence of God. This novel might give way to explore bigger themes in the book. Since John Green is believer of Christianity, we could expect to raise some questions surrounding faith and the point of life that appear in Turtles All the Way Down. This novel portraits about a young teenage girl who tries solving the mystery of a missing billionaire, while struggling all long with same mental illness that has affected author throughout his life. John Green says "This is my first attempt to write directly about the kind of mental illness that has affected my life since childhood, so while the story is fictional, it is also quite personal". Thus, her story shows some reflection of John's own experiences. This paper discusses about writer's sensitivity to brings out the sufferings caused by both obsessive-compulsive disorder and fiscal malfeasance in the novel. This paper also focused more on Aza's psychological circumstances, her anxiety disorder, and her intense fear of germs despite being raised in such a complex social issue. The issue of class and corporate corruption is discussed briefly in this paper. Aza's personal anxiety and socioeconomic realities are main theme of this research paper. The paper addresses adolescent mental health since it will extend to adulthood and its preventive measures to lead fulfilling lives as adults. Hence this paper entitled as "JOHN GREEN'S TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN: A REVIEW ON OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD) IN ADOLESCENTS" is much important to understand the psychological issues of adolescent with disorder for better empowerment of youth.

**Keywords:** Young adult literature, adolescent issues and challenges, Anxiety and depression, OCD in adolescent, OCD treatment, Socioeconomic reality, young adult fiction.

## INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is most challenging years of life which is unique in their emotional, multiple physical and social changes that help teens to develop their own personality and quirks as they attempt to circumnavigate the turbulence. Their exposure to poverty, violence or abuse at young age can make adolescents vulnerable to mental health problems. One such problem in

adolescence is known as obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) seen in small percentage of teens in America. This psychiatric disorder in adolescent shows unusual behaviours and quirks resulting in serious mental health issues and distress. In further severe cases of this OCD can be devastating. This paper gives brief view to recognize the adolescence suffering from OCD and necessary steps to overcome it. Subsequently promoting psychological well-

being and protecting adolescents from adverse experiences and other risk factors are important for their growth, better development of physical and mental health in adulthood. This paper discusses about the protagonist Aza Holmes who suffers from OCD disorder and her mental health and adventure with Daisy in search of missing billionaire.

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim and objectives of this research are to recognize and eradicate the mental health of young adults such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) in reference with John Green's novel "Turtles All The Way Down". To help the researchers to understand the value of Young Adult Literature for further research; to identify the issues and challenges faced by adolescence through Young Adult Literature; to familiarizing Young Adult Literature as a source of research to know about the young adults in society; to creating awareness on emancipation of child's development in modern period; to know about physical, mental and emotional growth of young adult; to know about how challenges in society affects the young adult personality development; to encourage the readers to understand the value of Young adult literature that reflects society.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on primary and secondary sources to reveal the fact and made an attempt to extract the theme narrated by John Green's *Turtles All The Way Down*, a Young Adult Literary work. The researcher used printed articles, e-sources, magazines, printed books as secondary sources to enrich this research title. Analyzing, narrative, explanatory methods to write this research based on YAL.

## HYPHOTHESIS

This research is identified the mental health, issues of OCD and challenges that are reflected in Young Adult Literature are true in present scenario and which helps the elders, teachers and readers enable them to understand and try to implement effective measures to solve the problems of adolescence child at home and

school environment which is much more important than in paper textual execution as it deals with character development of young adult to become better adult in future.

## LIMITATIONS

This research has focused only one character from John Green's novel "Turtles All The Way Down" and not analyzing the entire Young Adult novel. The chosen character for the research is Aza Holmes as she suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), her mental health is discussed and which act as mirror reflection of disordered adolescences in modern society. This research includes psychological problems of adolescences belonging to OCD issues in America. However, this research is much more valid due to its theme which represents and to understand psychological disorder of some teenagers in America.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Michael Green is a contemporary American Author and well-known YouTube content creator since 2007 under channel named "vlogbrothers". John Green was born on August 24, 1977 to the couple named Mike and Sydney Green in Indianapolis, Indiana. His debut novel entitled as *Looking for Alaska* has won the 2006 Printz Award. Several of his subsequent books has debuted at number one on The New York Times Best Seller list. The most popular novel of John Green is *The Fault in Our Stars* which later adapted to film under same title in 2014, gained number one box office and it was commercial and critical success. In the same year he was listed as one of The 100 Most Influential People in the World, in the following year another film based on Green novel, *Paper Towns*, was released on July 24, 2015. *Turtles All the Way Down* is John Green's fifth solo novel and his seventh overall, published on October 10, 2017, by Dutton Books. Besides being a novelist, he is well known for his online content creation on YouTube. Along with his brother, Hank Green he launched the 'Vlogbrothers' channel on YouTube in 2007. Subsequently, John and Hank have launched events like Project for Awesome and VidCon. They also created 11 online series which

comprises Crash Course, an academic channel teaching literature, history, science, and other topics. John Green also hosts the weekly comedy podcast named Dear Hank & John and therefore the monthly essay podcast entitled The Anthropocene Reviewed, both of which the brothers have gone on the road and performed live versions of it.

## **TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN PLOT**

The novel centres on sixteen-year-old Aza Holmes, an American high school student with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and anxiety issues. Aza Holmes is partly enthused by some of John's own experiences. It is all about her adventure of searching for missing billionaire who happens to be a neighbour's father along with grappling with mental illness and explores her friendship with her best friend, Daisy who is Star Wars fan. The story developed on lifelong friendship, the intimacy of an unexpected reunion, Tuatara and Star Wars fan fiction. The novel explores the teenager's mind which is at war with itself in most of the times.

## **WHAT IS OCD?**

Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a mental illness, often seen in late adolescence or early twenties, even though it begins in childhood. As name suggests, person who suffers from OCD have obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours. This obsession usually has repetitive thoughts, mental images that are unwanted or disturbing negative thoughts causing high levels of anxiety and distress. This frequent obsession or constant bombardment of unwanted negative thoughts can make young adult to lose focus, on studies, at school or work or they have low chance to enjoy life at this age. An estimation found that at least 4 out of 10 individuals is diagnosed with OCD which later becomes a chronic disorder. Further research estimated that nearly 40% of individuals who develop OCD in childhood will recover from the disorder by adulthood but in other 60% of cases, from childhood this disorder will be both severe and chronic. There are high chance of suicide by an individual with OCD and the risk is higher in case of suffering from a mood swing or anxiety disorder.

## **AZA HOLMES WITH OCD AND ITS CHALLENGES**

Aza Holmes is 16th year old protagonist of the novel "Turtles All the Way Down," who suffers from dreadful anxiety and obsessive-compulsive disorder. Her obsessive-compulsive disorder case is not easily managed. Aza's case stand as an example for people with such disorders will have repetitive behaviours, one such instance is that she has a wound on her finger since she was little, being self-inflicted she covered it with Band Aid but she repeatedly reopens in order to drain and re-sanitize the wound from infection. As common obsession includes fear of germs, worry about becoming ill or dying, worry about something bad happening, disturbing sexual thoughts, urges, or images, troubling thoughts that are religious in nature and worry about sexual orientation. Aza Holmes has all these common obsessions, in order to reduce the anxiety and distress caused by the obsessions, she does engage in compulsive behaviours, such as excessive hand washing, arranging things in a certain order, or counting. Aza's compulsive behaviours consume so much of her time that make her unable to be productive at all. But the compulsive behaviour brings temporary relief to Aza.

"...I slipped the band-Aid off my finger and dug my thumbnail into the callused skin until I felt the crack open." (Pg 6)

"I washed my hands, put on a new one Band-Aid, but now I was being pulled all the way down." (Pg 210)

This repeated action is seen through in the novel. Aza does this action repeatedly to ensure herself that the wound is not infected. The two common behaviours types of OCD are checking and ordering. Compulsive hoarding, are used to be considered a type of OCD but, now classified as a separate disorder. This shows psychiatric disorder in Aza that can cause significant distress in future. OCD are usually diagnosed only if the obsessions and compulsions are interfering with teen's ability to function normally or cause significant distress. But it doesn't mean if a teen is a "neat freak", he or she has OCD. An individual with OCD will have one or more other psychiatric disorders as well. The most common co-occurring disorders are depression, bipolar disorders, substance use disorders, eating disorders, ADHD / ADD, and

anxiety disorders such as social phobia or panic disorder. The existence of another psychiatric disorder will often make it more challenging to successfully treat the obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Aza's repetitive negative thoughts on 'Human Microbiota' are her true frustration. She is obsessed with and repulsed by the bacteria that lives within her body and outside her. She can't stop nerve-wracking about the growl in her gut, or the breeding microbes within, or the chances of contracting an infection named *Clostridium difficile*, or the idea of sweating, or not having the ability to prevent sweating, or touching someone who is sweating. Aza quotes her repeated thoughts as below,

"The thing about a spiral is, if you follow it inward, it never actually ends. It just keeps tightening, infinitely." (Aza Holmes, page 7)

Obsessive-compulsive disorder can have a tremendously negative impact on adolescent. That's why it's so important to recognize the signs of OCD and get it treated sooner is better for adolescent's mental health otherwise the obsessions and compulsions typically become worse over time without treatment. Some signs of OCD in adolescent observed in Aza in the novel such as the fear and thoughts of human microbiota causes her to become anxious and sweaty all over. She makes complaints of having frequent disturbing thoughts and feeling they can't control them. She has unusual or illogical behaviours that she can't explain for instance, washing already clean hands several times frequently or until the skin is fresh and becoming upset or anxious if something is out of order, and needing to fix it right away, depressed mood or frequent anxiety, suicidal thoughts and behaviours and so on. Those thoughts on *C. diff* are never ending for her. When she reads Daisy's fanfiction for the first time, she realizes that Daisy has been using it as an escape for her frustrations with Aza. On learning the truth, she continues to spiral into a panic attack and end up drinking her hand sanitizer, and passing out. Their friendship is shortly weakened while Aza is driving and having heated argument with each other and resulting in car accident. Aza spends some weeks in the hospital, during which she also has a panic attack, due to *C. diff* and ends up drinking sanitizer again. She improves and renews her friendship with Daisy once she is healed and taking new medicines that can help

her with anxiety issues. In order to fight off her stupid thoughts on *C. diff*, she urges to put hand sanitizer in her mouth thinking it will kill *C. diff* that lives within her body. As shown in the text below,

"Took out the aloe-scented hand sanitizer. I took a gulp, then another. Felt dizzy. You can't do this. This shit's pure alcohol. It'll make you sick. That's enough. You'll be clean after this. Just get one last swallow down. I did. Heard my gut rumbling. Stomach hurts.

Sometimes you clear out the healthy bacteria and that's when *C. diff* comes in. you gotta watch out for that. Great. You tell me to drink it, then tell me not to." (Pg. 210)

As readers we read about Aza's head, listening to her swiftly and unsteady thoughts, helps to understand people with OCD better in real life. The normal doings of her are to see a therapist and irregularly takes medication, have negative self-talk to others and her mind full of civil war with thoughts on Human Microbes.

## CONCLUSION

OCD in children is generally diagnosed between the ages of 7 and 12 where children naturally feel anxious about fitting among classmates, resulting in discomfort and stress by

OCD can make them feel frightened, out of control and left out. There are certain steps to overcome obsessive-compulsive disorder in young adults with certain treatment available, that can significantly reduce symptoms and make them manageable such as medication, prescribed by a psychiatrist, and a specialized type of therapy called Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with Exposure and Response Prevention (CBT with ERP). Adolescents with slight to moderate OCD may do well with individual therapy or a combination of therapy and medication but those who are with severe OCD, a comorbid disorder such as depression, bipolar disorder, or an eating disorder, or at risk of suicide may require a better level of treatment for a long period of time. There is high possibility of committing suicide among young adults is due to their battling with emotional anxiety, depression, OCD, bipolar disorder and other mental health illness that comes along with the age. Their OCD symptoms may also get

worse if they're dealing with something stressful or traumatic. Some adolescences may engage in non-suicidal self-harm, such as cutting or burning themselves, or turn to alcohol or drugs if they're having a tough time coping. For example, Aza Holmes in the novel suffers from severe anxiety and fear of human microbes who later engages in non-suicidal self-harm, even under medication she does drink a hand sanitizer twice due to her anxiety issues. In Case of Aza Holmes, treatment like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy with Exposure has been followed but not much effective. If she has treated with ERP that involves exposure to things that makes her anxious while providing her with the skills to cope with her anxiety without engaging in her rituals. As time passes, she will experience less anxiety and is able to cope better. There should be parenteral support and understanding the needs of adolescent is necessary in treating OCD issues. As for young people, reaching out to family and friends for support is important especially when they are exhausted or struggling emotionally and they must find ways on their own to manage and reduce stress, such as yoga, meditation, or exercise. In any situation both parents and adolescent should stay positive and hopeful for best future.

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