Transitioning from Childhood through Adolescence to Adulthood – Traumas in Literature

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Abstract

Age can be both subjective and objective. A hostile environment challenges the phase in which a child grows, resulting in older subjective age. The study draws on evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health and the American Psychological Association to support its questions: Does age change course in the account of hardship? Does this change affect family structure? Can a psychological approach be connected to literature? The safety net of adulthood becomes normalcy to the ubiquitous danger (be it family or society). Starting as a cumbersome effort to protect themselves, it incarnates into a plethora of burdensome sulking. The study focuses on three writers and their characters to support the argument presented.

Keywords: Age, Maturity, Growth, Psychological, Selvadurai, Mistry, Mordecai.
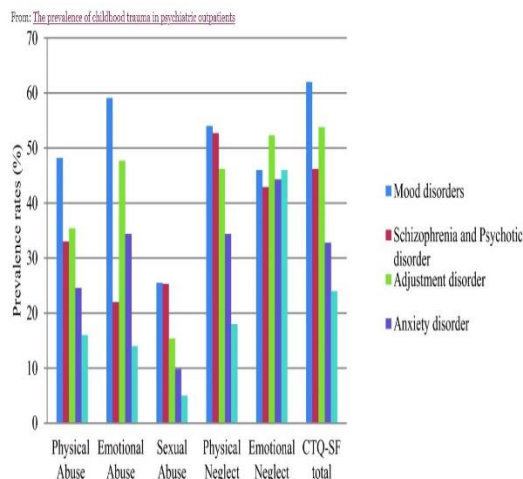
INTRODUCTION

Age is a fundamental category of organizing social life, from "interpreting age as a structural element" to "assessing the impact of age upon societal stability and change" (Riley xiii). Cultural influence, familial ties, and environmental spaces create an essential variation in growth, physically and psychologically. There are three reasons for how emotional age attains linear growth when linked to hardships: age-graded roles, responsibilities, and hatred towards life. Robert Weiss' research on mental development notes children from broken families and families below the poverty line "grow up a little faster" (99) as a subjective result to take care of themselves in unsafe situations. Another study shows children from a family with both (happy) biological parents feel younger and consider themself more child-like even when they reach adulthood. Multiple research groups have found similar results in subjective age development, self-concept and self-identification.

There have been multiple studies and researches regarding mental health disorders and their impacts. Psychiatric studies conducted in 2020 aimed to identify the factor between trauma and age. The first analysis confirmed exposure to early life adversities resulted in psychological and chronic health diseases. This research performed by Colich and a team that studied more than 3,253 people showed mixed results from cortical thinning, reduced cognitive processing, emotional processing etc. It is important to note different adversaries caused different results. In the second research by APA, 116,000 participants were tested in a more elaborate meta-analysis that showed changes in the DNA strands of children who suffered trauma. An India based study in 2019 documented 354 patients with mental health disorders between 14-35years and presented a complied graph. When categorised, three waves of abuse (physical,

emotional and sexual) and two types of neglects (physical and emotional) charted (Figure 1.) showed four varied discomforts. The importance of this study with relevance to the paper is its emotional abuse quotient; 59.1% suffered from emotional abuse. This emotional factor opens a broader significance to trauma and age when connected with sociological theories.

Figure 1.

Sociologists have always shown interest in social structures – forms and patterns and how they are developed and transformed. The agents that affect these social structures are the environment, individuals, and age. Role Theory and Identity Theory introduced in the early nineteenth century spoke about aspects that influence people's lives and choices. Role theory defines every person holds a definite role in society; their duties, expectations, and behaviours have created a hegemony for centuries (Biddle 9). Every community is age-structured, exposing the group's roles and identities. Identity theory, on the other hand, is about mind and self. It seeks to determine multiple identities a person possesses, influenced by feelings and emotions (Burke 4). These sociological studies on age, surroundings and families form a crucial foundation in most literary works. Joel Best, in his work, Threatened Children: Rhetoric and Concern about Child-Victims, talks about "sentimental perspective . . . defined children as priceless innocents whose boundless potential is gradually constricted through contact with the adult world" (181). The above quote is the core statement of the paper in connection to literary works of English.

Literature is a mirror of society. Most literary script travels with a protagonist whose past life primarily influences his present. His work provides a canvas for a writer, and the characters give the colour. The protagonist is, in turn, a reflection of the author or his repressed memory. A vast debate of psychotherapy on its own, these repressed memories are triggered by identifiers linked to them. Identity theory digs out these identifiers (be it the place they lived or events witnessed, or traumas underwent) and formulates them into a past, paving the way to the present. Now that it's established that a character is a fruit of the writers' thoughts and experiences, we can study them both under Role and Identity theory as 'age' being the factor.

A marginalised child sees the world with a different eye, whereas a child from a sophisticated mainstream family has an altered perspective. However, a child of a privileged family with suppressed feelings and emotions has a different outlook altogether. When an author falls into one of these categories, they pin down a character who emote the same feeling. The paper focuses on such authors and their protagonists. Shyam Selvadurai, a Srilankan immigrant to Canada, Selvadurai left his country during the height of the Tamil-Srilankan riot in 1984. Like his childhood, the protagonist of his novel Funny Boy (1994) faces the grim reality of war and riots. Arjie, a Srilankan Tamil boy from a lavish upbringing, starts noticing moral and verbal anomalies between his Tamil and Sinhalese classmates since seven years of age. He understands the seriousness of cultural differences when his aunty Radha falls in love with a Sinhalese youngster and her attack in the riot. This cultural fumfering in school and society was beyond an infant mind, subsequently forcing him into an adult world. Nancy L. Galambos explains this pseudo maturity in adolescence. Her study between two controlled groups reveals subjective maturity and chronological maturity are associated with markings of problematic behaviour and troubled

environment. Selvadurai was a part of an unsettled environment. The need to move during the riot and his sexual vulnerabilities and confusions made him twice removed from reality and family. Arjie, as Shyam agrees, is semi-autobiographical.

Taking Mordecai Richler's novel The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz into account, Duddy comes off as a bully throughout the story. Yet, his attachment to his family and longing for his father's approval makes him a relatable character. Childhood and adolescence encompass "critical decisions affecting life trajectories…" (Johnson). Accelerating his young life, Duddy never had youth. The little financial means he grew with gave him a thirst for respect and wealth. He bore the weight of his family on himself, including Lennie (brother) dropping out from medical college. Though his father's love for Lennie had a higher trajectory, Kravitz was a victim of parental neglect. His violated age experiences feed his subjective age, manipulating innocence into responsibilities. Duddy balances school and work by assuming an adult role to achieve an adult status. Monica Johnson writes: an adult role is attained only by crossing a few indicators (completing school, working full time and establishing financial independence). Though these are more conservative indicators, the outline is when age-based expectations are unmet, an individual skips progress, leaving a void.

Like his character, Mordecai moved to Canada and felt like an outsider all along through his admission. The same zeal is observed in his protagonists, the pursuit of a goal, a dream, and intent but underlying neglect, financial poverty and Montreal. He says in a voice-over production named "Mordecai Richler: The Writer and His Roots", "Each novel is a failure, or there would be no compulsion to begin again" (2:20 – 2:25).

The last writer of interest is Rohinton Mistry. His works focus on grown adults choosing their children aspirations among many themes of racism and culture. Establishing an independent household is essential to keep parental pressure away from toddlers and adolescents. Expectation to a carefree environment comes as a great responsibility. Gustad Noble, the protagonist of Mistry's novel Such a Long Journey, represents parental pressure. His son, Sohrab, struggles with guilt for disregarding his father's dream and the conflict between his life and goals. One of the pioneering works on the middle-age crisis and its psychological adaptation, Middle Age and Aging, emphasises that midlife ageing involving mortality reorients one normative timetable forcing a significantly curtailed dominance over one's children (532). Though Mistry was not a target of parental authority, he was, however, a witness of war, political hypocrisy and cultural injustice. Living in Bombay (Mumbai) for 23years, he absorbed every change around him. His novels were written from a Parsi perspective about poverty and discrimination.

Having identified examples for the proposed research, one can experience and benefit from the importance of role theory and identity theory in psychological development. The initial effects during childhood form a foundation throughout living. Age and growth move in different momentum, and every individual is designated to their own pace. However, the environment provided to them implies their life-course. It is crucial to emphasise that the select authors are mere examples of oceanic literary writers.

If questioned, what does literary work have in connection to a scientific theory?; the answer is unmistakeably simple; literature and scientific theory apply to life and are encapsulated in society. The hypothesized paper measures the degree of the approved outcome. They seem to find strength in an albeit hostile environment. Although, considering the results, not all negatively impact the children, dwindling into lifeless or emotionless skeletons. The finding affirms age-inappropriate development, and the writing denotes similar output.

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