

Diaspora within the Family in Jordan Sonnenblick's *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*

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Abstract

Diaspora deals with leaving the native place due to life changes. It not only deals with the external self but also affects the psyche of any person who has moved from their homeland. Home and family are the roots of self-development. It teaches us the qualities of life, real-life struggles, love, and much more of this sort. Home plays a major role in nurturing one's life. It is the starting point of learning all the basic qualities that enhance one's behaviour. The qualitative method is used in this research paper. It attempts to study the psyche of the characters who get isolated and abandoned within the family with reference to the novel, *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie* by Jordan Sonnenblick. People are in need to earn for their survival. Thousands of people immigrate to other places leaving their beloved families. Though they work hard for the welfare of the family they too own struggles and sufferings. In a few cases, the characters move within the native but they get affected. Even if half of the family separates it affects the other members of the family. Though they live in their native place it feels as if they are in an alien land. The findings of this research paper will establish the positive impact and the power of coping strategies through which every stressor can subjugate any negative state of mind.

Keywords: loneliness, psyche, home, isolation, parental attachment

1. Introduction

Diaspora deals with the problems of a person who feels isolated not only in the place he is working but also within his own family. Isolation does not necessarily mean living separately. It has another face which affects mental health and can't be cured easily. In most families, at least one person, especially, children feel isolated or lack enough love from their family members. Even the family is not dysfunctional, the problem is in this mechanical world which makes humans nothing but a machine. Family means unity. It gives strength to the family members. If one person in the family gets isolated or not given enough love and care then the family becomes meaningless. Even if half of the family gets separated for a few medications for a child it will affect other children in the family as they don't get affection from the parents.

The immigrated persons who work for their family in an alien land or people living far from their homeland undergo a lot of struggles and obstacles in their life. It will affect their mental health and daily life. This not only suits migrated people but some unlucky people who live their lives in loneliness even within their own family like immigrated people. For instance, in the novel *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*, our hero, Steven Alper, feels alone and isolated from his own family. His younger brother, Jeffrey Alper, is diseased with leukaemia. So, his parents often go out with him for his treatments and medications.

The concept of this paper is about a thirteen-year-old teenage boy, Steven Alper, from the novel *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*, who is deprived of his parents' love. His mother is always with his younger brother and his father pays less attention to Steven. This novel elucidates the loneliness and the feeling of disappointment in Steven's life which in turn distresses his mental health.

2. Review of Literature

Deborah Stevenson (2005) in her review on *Drums, Girls and Dangerous Pie*, explores the throbbing and isolated life of the teenager, Steven Alper. She also adds how much the isolation within his home has affected his school life and his passion for playing the drums. Jordan Sonnenblick in his interview on his novel, *Drums, Girls and Dangerous Pie*, tells that he has experienced isolation and loneliness because of his parent's divorce. And it is reflected in the character of Steven Alper who feels two types of isolation physical and psychological isolation.

In Teen Book Reviews, Mary Kates (2021) gives her review on Jordan Sonnenblick's *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*. She analyzes and describes the life of Steven Alper, a thirteen-year-old boy whose life turns upside down when his brother is diagnosed with Leukaemia. Also, she recommends this book to everyone, especially, young readers which can make them feel all sorts of emotions at once. She also adds that

no one knows what is happening in one's house. We don't know their hard feelings or whether they are being isolated even living with a family.

Sue Jackson (2021) a freelance writer and reviewer has reviewed Jordan Sonnenblick's *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie* in one of her blogs. She explains the mentality of Steven Alper whose brother has cancer. This book gives a rollercoaster experience of emotions. She describes Steven's pain of isolation and also tells that he yearns for his parent's love and care as they spend their time mostly with his younger brother.

Jennifer Rees (2005) an editor of "Scholastic Books for Children and Adults" depicts how Jordan Sonnenblick dwells in the mind of Steven who feels isolated in his own house. His family concentrates on his sick brother while Steven yearns for his parents' love. According to her, *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie* is a story that promises and never disappoints, delivers and never falters.

In the article, "Parental coping with children's negative emotions: Relations with children's emotional and social responding", Richard A Fabes et.al., (2001) examine the relationship between parents and children. This study also investigates the reaction of parents to children's negative emotions and social competence. The findings of the study concluded that children having distressed parents will have low social competence and become socially detached.

Pamela Li (2022) in her article, "Coping Skills for Kids – Strategies That Work", tells about coping skills that help children to deal with stress. There are various kinds of stress which children undergo such as conflicts with their parents, academic pressure, bullies in school, problems with friends, etc., The author suggests that children can learn positive coping skills from their parents to avoid such pressures or problems.

Tami M. Videon (2005) in his article, "Parent-Child Relations and Children's Psychological Well-Being: Do Dads Matter?" talks about the importance of the father's role in adolescents' life and how they influence adolescents' psychological well-being. Grade seven students who are living in intact homes are taken for the study. The results show that adolescents frequently change their behaviour in relation with fathers more than to mothers. This study also emphasizes the unique contribution of fathers to their children's psychological well-being.

Yoon Phaik Ooi, et.al., (2006) in their article, "The Impact of Parent-Child Attachment on Aggression, Social Stress and Self-Esteem", examines how parent-child attachment influences child behaviour. For this study, they have taken ninety-one boys ranging between 8 to 12 years of age. Through their analysis, they find that the boys who are all having less attachment to their parents are often involved in fighting and teasing others while boys having good parental attachment show high self-esteem and low aggression and they socialize with everyone.

2.1 Methodology

Researchers use the Qualitative method to analyze the current study. The selected text for this study is Jordan Sonnenblick's *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*. The select text is explored, interpreted and analyzed on the concept of Diaspora concerning the psyche of children. The characters selected for the current study are Steven Alper, the protagonist and his brother Jeffery. It further explores the relationship between parents and children, children and their psyche and children and their association with society.

2.2 Research Gap

So far, no research work has been carried out on the novels of Jordan Sonnenblick. There are only a few articles and interviews on the selected text and the author. Various studies have been carried out on the topic of Diaspora. For this study, the researcher is analyzing and interpreting the selected work by incorporating the characteristics of diaspora.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Researchers employ Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as, "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984 p.141). Coping strategies help to solve problems and reduce stress. According to H.W. Krohne (2001), "Lazarus and co-workers distinguish eight groups of coping strategies: confrontative coping, planful problem-solving, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance and positive reappraisal".

Social coping is an effective coping strategy identified by Lazarus and Folkman who are pioneers in coping theory. People under mental stress and frustration can use coping methods to overcome their depression. A strategy to relieve themselves from stress by seeking social support is known as social coping. Social coping methods or social support include friends, neighbours, teachers, or any other distant relations, etc. There are various kinds of social coping methods.

The two most significant methods are emotional support and informational support. Emotional support is sharing positive concerns for an individual. To a stressor, it offers care, affection and nurturance. Informational support is the timely guidance and advice given to the stressor to solve a problem or to overcome his stress.

In this novel, Renee Albert and Samantha help Steven to overcome his loneliness and make him a better person. Renee Albert has helped him to raise funds for his brother's treatment and is a good friend of Steven throughout his struggles. Samantha has made him realize the significance of his brother's feelings and that has made him develop a lovable bond with them. Both the characters Renee Albert and Samantha have helped him emotionally and informatively. Because of these characters, he overcomes the feeling of diaspora which he has experienced within the family.

3. Discussion

The word 'family' defines loveliness. It is where the beautiful bond of happiness starts. It is where we can find a person who loves us deeply and unconditionally. Parents work hard to bring joy and delight into the life of their children. Their love towards them never fades. Parents should not compare their children with others. If there are two children in a family, they should not show a difference in sharing their love. If one of the children feels deprived of his parent's love it will affect him/her mentally.

Diaspora is living far away from the native land. It includes struggles, hardships, and depression people undergo in an alien land. Even if not about immigration but some people feel lonely and isolated within the family which gives them a diasporic feeling. One such character is Steven Alper, a thirteen-year-old teenage boy from the novel, *Drums, Girls and Dangerous Pie*. It is a heartrending novel written by Jordan Sonnenblick. The themes of this novel include finding ourselves and coping with love and care. It also deals with the hardships faced by young adults in their life. Although it is a heartbreaking novel it acts as a guide for overcoming stress and difficulties in life.

Steven Alper, the protagonist of the novel is an eighth-standard student. Mostly he spends his time with his friends, playing the drums and he has a crush on his classmate, Renee Albert. Steven has a younger brother Jeffery Alper who is diseased with leukaemia. He enjoyed his life before his brother become sick. After Jeffery is affected by blood cancer, Steven's world is turned upside down. His parents, often, spend time with Jeffery for his treatment and medications. Steven feels sad that his parents always take care of his younger brother. It makes him jealous because he thinks that his parents love Jeffery more than him. It initially makes Steven feel bad for it. He undergoes two types of isolation. They are physical isolation and psychological isolation. Physical isolation is being alone at home or spending most of his time playing the drums and reading books. Psychological isolation is denial, anger and avoidance. His anger and jealousy are reflected through the following lines in the novel *Drums, Girls, and Dangerous Pie*,

Having a brother is horrible. Having any brother would be horrible, I suppose, but having my particular brother, Jeffrey, is an unrelenting nightmare. It's not because he's eight years younger than I am, although that's part of it. How would you like to be a King of the Planet for eight glorious years, and then suddenly get demoted to Vice-King?" (Sonnenblick, 2004 p. 4).

He feels irritated because his brother follows him everywhere. His parents shower love on his brother and spend more time with him. This makes him angry and jealous and as a result of his pain, he becomes isolated.

Later, when he came to know about the seriousness of the disease his brother is undergoing, he starts to support his brother. Though he understands his brother's sickness still he feels neglected and lonely. It is evident from the following lines,

I started crying, but when my mom started coming over to hug me, I ran upstairs for bed. If I had known that this would basically be the last time I'd have both parents paying attention to me at once, I probably would have taken the hug. I could hear my parents talking for a long time before I fell asleep, but nobody came up to check on me. Jeffy groaned in his sleep once or twice in the next room but never woke up. I was alone.... And I muttered to myself in the darkness, Guess what, Mom? I'm going to be the star of night spring concert. (Sonnenblick, 2004 p. 44 - 45)

As Steven is feeling low and alone, he started to talk to himself in the dark. The isolated feeling makes him more stressed and it affects his psyche. This is because his parents spend less time with him. His father has stopped talking to him. This makes him slowly lose interest in his studies and gets detached from his friends. Because of his lack of interest in studies he gets fail marks in mathematics.

Jeffery's condition becomes worse and he undergoes chemotherapy. Though he is too young he is confident and has the mental strength to bear the painful treatments. But Steven who is elder than his brother feels lonely and distressed as he doesn't get enough attention from his parents. The situation of the family becomes worse. They spend money on treatment and medications. In this situation, the family faces a money crisis. Because of this Steven decides to quit drums class. But luckily his drums teacher allows him to continue the classes because playing the drums is the only stress buster for Steven.

Renee Albert notices the changes in Steven. She helps him to raise funds for Jeffery's treatment through a musical concert. At a certain stage, Steven feels guilty. It is clear from the following lines,

There is another thing for which I will feel guilty forever: Jeffery was driving me so nuts with his need attention that I was often relieved when he went back into the hospital. I mean, I needed the time off from him so I could catch up on schoolwork, but how hideous was that? I wished for my own baby brother to be hospitalized just so I wouldn't have to play some one-sided Chutes and Ladders games. (Sonnenblick, 2004 p.135)

The above lines picture his thinking and it shows how much it has affected his psyche because he has wished a lot for his parent's love and attention. But all his pain has ended in vain.

Often, he feels annoyed by his brother. But at some point, he realizes the situation and starts to accompany his brother to the hospital. There he meets a girl named Samantha who is also diseased with leukaemia. She tells him that her sister abandoned her after knowing about her disease. She also tells him how much she is depressed because of her sister's actions towards her. So, she asks him to be with his brother. "Stay with your brother, Steven. Stay with him. No matter what. Do you promise?" (Sonnenblick, 2004 p.232). Then only he realizes how important is to look after his brother and not to hurt him anymore. It is through her words he decides not to let his brother feel lonely and be a strong support to him. Timely guidance from the right people helps the stressor to move on the right path and make his life more meaningful.

4. Conclusion

The word diaspora may seem simple but it encompasses all sorts of emotions which can change a happy or an active person into a sad or a passive one. A person feels isolated when he or she lacks love from others and longs for a happy life in the past. Normally, diaspora means people living in foreign countries by leaving their native land. Meanwhile, a person can also encounter diasporic feelings even within the family. Mostly, children are the victims in the family. This happens because of parents' carelessness or irresponsibility.

Family is a treasure. It is the foundation of positivity, inner strength and delight. It differs from the characteristics of a dysfunctional family. Family should teach morals and good behaviour to children. It should not affect their mental or physical health. Whatever the situation or problem is parents must always share their love equally with their children. Parents should spend time and listen to their children. Parents must be aware of the change in children's behaviour, daily life and also mental health.

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