
Anxiety, Depression and Counselling: A Literary Survey of Cultural Imaginaries of Counselling

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Abstract

This paper explores how contemporary literature, poetry, and music represent the emotional and psychological struggles of young individuals facing trauma, loneliness, and depression. By examining texts such as Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak*, Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the study highlights how silence, social isolation, and stigma shape the mental health experiences of adolescents. The paper also draws on poems like Anne Sexton's "Wanting to Die" and Emily Dickinson's "I Felt a Funeral in My Brain," which use metaphor and imagery to express inner turmoil and the fragility of the human mind. Songs like Sia's "Breathe Me" and Logic's "1-800-273-8255" reflect the growing cultural awareness of depression and suicide prevention in modern times. By connecting literature with psychological and social contexts, this paper aims to demonstrate that art not only reflects mental suffering but also serves as a form of healing, empathy, and self-expression. Ultimately, it highlights that literature and music play a crucial role in understanding and destigmatizing mental health issues in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Adolescent Mental Health, Trauma and Depression, Literary and Musical Representation, Silence and Social Isolation, Emotional Healing through Art

Introduction

Mental health has always been one of the most sensitive areas of human life. But it is the most neglected topic in our society. People experience pain, anxiety, trauma,

and loneliness, but society avoids talking about them openly. Literature becomes a powerful medium to express these hidden emotions. Through stories, poems, and songs, writers and artists reveal individuals' experiences of depression, fear, or inner emptiness, and try to heal. Literature gives voice to those who cannot express themselves in real life.

The term *counselling* usually refers to professional psychological help, but in a broader sense, it also encompasses emotional sharing, friendship, and empathy. It is the human ability to listen and understand. In many cultures, especially in South Asia, people hesitate to talk about mental health due to social strategies and fear of judgment. This silence deepens their pain & suffering. However, literary and cultural texts help to break this mental suffering as a shared human experience rather than a personal failure.

This paper explores how anxiety, depression, and counselling are represented in different forms of literature and culture. The primary focus is on *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999), *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007), and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (1999). Along with these novels, the poems of Emily Dickinson and Anne Sexton, and songs like Logic's "1-800-273-8255" and Sia's "Breathe Me," are also examined. They form a bridge between literature and psychology, demonstrating how writing, reading, and music can serve as a form of therapy.

Body of the paper:

I. Representation of Trauma, Anxiety, and Depression in Literature

Literature has worked as a vessel for the articulation of the unspoken pain, silence, trauma, and different psychological states defining human vulnerability. In the modern and postmodern eras, specifically through adolescent and confessional narratives, writers have illuminated the complex connection between lived experience and psychological breakages. The three selected novels *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999), *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher (2007), and *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (1999) each portray the upholders whose internal realities are harmed by anxiety, depression, and trauma. Additionally, Emily

Dickinson and Anne Sexton's spiritual voices as well as the emotionally raw compositions of contemporary musicians like Logic and Sia, collectively form a cultural and literary map of psychological struggle and recovery.

In "Speak, Anderson constructs a portrait of post-traumatic silence through Melinda Sordino, a high school student who is sexually assaulted by her early statement "*You can't decide not to see yourself anymore. You can't decide to turn off the noise in your head. You live with it. You breathe it.*" shows the common nature d. Thus, we feel unsafe, even when surrounded by many reliable people. We feel lonely in a crowded place & are continuously thinking about the incident. Also scared of the repetition.

Her refuge, described as "*a good place to go when the noise in my head is too loud*", acts as a metaphorical womb, into darkness where one can escape the judgment of the world. Anderson's comments on depression and anxiety are observed in the raw textures of everyday alienation, loss of appetite, distance from friends, irritability, and stress. The act of closing the closet door becomes both a protective measure and a symbol of internal isolation.

Similarly, Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* uses a posthumous narrative structure. It represents the voice of Hannah Baker after her suicide to depict the cascading effects of depression. Her observation that "*when you mess with one part of a person's life, you're messing with their entire life*" shows the fragility of the human psyche in a society which is driven by gossip, betrayal, and judgment. Through Hannah's recorded tapes, Asher reveals how interconnected acts of cruelty can accumulate into unbearable emotional weight. Victims may seem to be going through their everyday life, but it's a total mess in their lives that's not revealed. Problems such as separation of parents, relationship traumas, betrayal in friendship/relationship, Divorce, and losing someone may cause mental breakdown, a long-term unhealthy lifestyle, and finally lead to depression. Not having a good bond with parents or other family members has become so common nowadays. Children grow up with the care of a maid or grandparents. Thus, in later life, children cannot entertain their parents in their personal lives. With the flow of

time & real-life difficulties, children become frustrated, drug addicted & commit crimes. All these problems lead to anxiety, depression, and sometimes suicidal cases. Some parents think that with enough money & luxury life, children may be happy. But it happens the opposite. Leading a luxurious life may seem happier on the outside, but on the inside, one may suffer from a lack of authentic love, care & bonding.

Hannah's loneliness "*I felt myself floating away from everyone around me*" shows depression as a form of dissociation, a sense of being present yet detached from one's body and surroundings. The inability to "call out" or "be heard" marks a profound alienation that many individuals suffering from anxiety or depression experience. No matter how much the victims overcome, they can't relate to their everyday life anymore. The mind blurs the lines between reality & illusion literally. To cope with one trauma, and another appears instantly. For example, in a public gathering, there will likely be some people who will either directly or indirectly reveal our soft spots and poke fun at us. Thus, in a massive gathering of festivals, traumatised people can't enjoy or adjust.

The depiction of depression is characterized by blurred boundaries between memory and reality, past and present, showing how trauma resurfaces in unpredictable waves. Poets like Emily Dickinson and Anne Sexton offer earlier yet enduring depictions of the mind's instability. Dickinson's "*I felt a Funeral in my Brain*" shows the somatic symptoms of depression. With long-term or sudden but extreme anxiety, sadness, or trauma issues, our internal chaos causes a total blackout in our brain most of the time.

Sexton's "*Wanting to Die*", by contrast, offers a confessional voice of someone trapped between the desire for peace and the fear of death. Her lines "*I have nothing against life. I just don't want to be in it.*" capture the essence of suicidal ideation: a longing not for spoiling, but for relief. With the grief & hate for the cruel world, people just blame themselves & escape reality, perhaps most cruelly, perhaps by suicide. Both poets, separated by a century, converge on the same theme: the mental self as both the battleground and the casualty of emotional pain.

Music, a more contemporary form of expression, carries forward these emotional motifs. Logic's "1-800-273-8255" named after the American suicide prevention hotline and Sia's "*Breathe Me*" articulate depression in the language of the 21st generation. Logic's refrain "*I don't wanna be alive, I just wanna die today*" expresses despair in direct, unembellished language, making the song itself a counselling outreach. Struggling with any mental breakdown destroys our mental peace and ultimately pushes us towards the wrong step in life. When we can't find any option to yell out our unspoken turmoils, or there is no one to hear us, life pushes us step by step to the end. The only choice we consider to escape the cruel reality is to vanish from the world.

Similarly, Sia's "*I have
lost myself again I have
been here many times
before,*

Hurt myself again today,

"And the worst part is there's no one else to blame."

embodies the recurring nature of mental illness, the tendency to relapse, to loss of mind repeatedly. Recalling the same pain or facing triggers that lead to repeated mental breakdowns becomes more dangerous than before.

In both songs, music functions as therapy, providing a safe auditory space where pain is both shared and soothed. Thus, across literature, poetry, and music, the recurring image of mental suffering underscores the universality of anxiety and depression as defining elements of the modern human experience.

II. Silence, Stigma, and Counselling Hesitancy

Although the recognition of trauma has grown in cultural discourse, the act of seeking help or counselling remains complicated by stigma, fear, and social misunderstanding. In each of the core texts, silence becomes both a symptom of suffering and a social construct gazed upon by external judgment. In *Speak*, Melinda

articulates this conflict when she says, *“It’s easier not to say anything. Shut your trap; button your lip. All that crap you hear on TV about expressing your feelings is a lie.”* Her silence is not merely a refusal, but a reaction to a world unwilling to hear her truth. Finding supportive people can be particularly challenging in this type of situation. Fear of being judged, stigma, and so on make the victims suffer in silence. Individuals often prefer to remain silent or be misunderstood rather than argue or provide explanations. Nowadays, people always accuse girls of being harassed due to their attire. No one talks about the culprits, but rather the attire of the females. But does society really have any excuse about the child? Lancet Global Study on Sexual Violence Against Children (SVAC) shows that, 30.8% women including child were sexually abused by the age of 18 in India. Also 13.5% Indian men suffered the same abuse. But not all of them were brave enough to raise their voices so high. The fear of disbelief, victim-blaming, and mockery of real-world patterns of gendered violence where survivors are doubly punished, first by the assault itself.

In societies where success and perfection are highly valued, vulnerability often becomes a source of pain.

This collective hesitation toward counselling reveals the suppressed healing by cultural expectations. Patriarchal societies often entertain tolerance and self-silencing, especially for women. They are taught to “adjust,” to preserve family dignity, social image, and self-prestige, and to suppress emotional pain. Men are suggested to be stoic. In both cases, the result is emotional repression. In a South Asian context, these patterns are reinforced by moral hierarchies and class expectations. Therapy is often viewed as a luxury or as something “Western,” deterring those who need it most. This social neglect transforms private pain into public tragedy, manifesting as rising rates of suicide, addiction, and self-harm.

Thus, counselling hesitancy in these texts is a cultural problem which portrays the absence of empathetic spaces. Listening, understanding, and non-judgmental communication are consistently shown as lacking. When Melinda says, *“Nobody really wants to hear what you have to say,”* or when Hannah realizes, *“They don’t*

really want to hear what I have to say,” both voices testify to a world deaf to pain. The silence of the victim becomes the echo of a silent society.

III.Cultural Pathways to Healing and Counselling

Despite the weight of silence, each text also offers a pathway toward healing through voice, empathy, self-acceptance, and community support. Counselling, in these literary and cultural imaginaries, becomes an act of recovering one's story.

Despite the weight of silence, each text also offers a pathway toward healing through voice, empathy, self-acceptance, and community support. Counselling, in these literary and cultural imaginaries, becomes an act of recovering one's story.

In *Speak*, Melinda's final assertion “*I have survived. I am here... I'm finally speaking.*” marks a crucial psychological transition from repression to reveal. By confronting her assaulter and narrating her trauma, she symbolically reclaims her body and voice. Some victims come forward not to be isolated anymore & spare the culprits. Some try to fight against their inner turmoil and speak for themselves, while also speaking for others. The best skill one can develop is to learn how to maintain a peaceful mind & happy life. So, some people raise their voices that don't drain them, but rather fuel them. As a result, it brings them clarity, energy & desire to live long. For example, if a teenager faces any molestation by teachers in school, at first they may remain silent & suffer loneliness. However, if they come to know of something similar happening to another friend, they may take instant or strict measures together. Revealing the mask of the culprit can spread awareness to others. This way, the victims also receive some relief from their inner suffering. The novel's ending reinforces the importance of safe spaces such as classrooms, friendships, or art where individuals can transform their pain into power.

In *Thirteen Reasons Why*, the redemptive moment arrives not through Hannah's survival but through Clay's awakening. His recognition “*Listening is how you help someone who's hurting*” transforms passive empathy into active care. Asher thereby reimagines counselling as a communal act, rooted in the ethics of listening. Our biggest communication problem is that we do not listen to understand, but instead we listen to comment, criticize, or judge. Only listening to the sufferer sometimes

eradicates half of the heavy weight from the heart. It helps to overcome the trauma. I would like to share my personal experience here. Most of the time, I feel the “why me” type of confusion. At the very beginning of my journey at AMU, some of the surroundings used to mock my English accent, my Bengali speaking, my nature, even my gestures or the way I talked, laughed, or behaved in general. At that time, I thought I wouldn’t be able to cope here & continue my studies. Every single moment, I searched for someone who would understand me, my inner turmoil that I couldn’t describe in their native language. My mood was always gloomy, and I was suffering from extreme tensions, suffocation, and fear of people. After a few days, I found some friends and overcame the situation as if it had never happened to me. In this sense, the novel suggests that counselling is not confined to professionals; it can occur in friendships, classrooms, and ordinary conversations anywhere compassion is practiced sincerely.

Chbosky’s *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* expands this idea further. When Charlie says, “*My doctor asked me questions about my dreams, and I remembered things I didn’t know I remembered,*” therapy becomes a process of curing, bringing the unconscious to light. This mirrors Freudian psychoanalysis, where repressed memories resurface through guided dialogue. His eventual insight “*Things change. And friends leave. And life doesn’t stop for anybody.*” signals acceptance, the final stage of healing. A positive push factor helps us feel relief from any critical situation. Due to a long, melancholy, and stressful life, people often forget their inner innocence. They forget or no longer feel any interest in their favourite food, colour, favourite activities, or any other thing that used to make them happy. For example, our parents always work hard to give us a better life, to fulfill all our demands, and to make us happy. At the end of their lives, they forget about themselves, their happy memories, or their comfort zone. Thus, depression in old age is a widespread phenomenon nowadays. Specifically, in old homes, the older adults just wait to die soon. Our little initiatives, such as visiting them, celebrating their birthday, or any other Special day, make them happy, give them a home-like feeling, and they want to live longer. Therefore, people should always think about their possibilities, not their limitations. Here, Chbosky’s depiction of counselling emphasizes self-understanding and acceptance of impermanence as essential to emotional growth.

Music also provides alternative forms of therapy in the cultural imagination. Logic's "*I-800-273-8255*" and Sia's "*Breathe Me*" transform personal suffering into shared experience. When Logic's narrator moves from despair to hope "*You got everything to give right now*" the song itself performs the role of a counsellor, offering reassurance and validation. Sia's "*Be my friend, hold me, wrap me up*" articulates the basic human need for affection, and Sufferers most often seek help in silence & hope to have someone supportive so that they can eradicate their pain & suffering. These songs reveal that sometimes counselling is not about diagnosis or therapy sessions but about being held, heard, and understood. The act of listening is central to both music and counselling bridges isolation.

The transition from silence to speech, despair to hope, represents not a linear recovery but a cyclical process. Each deterioration, each moment of doubt, forms part of the healing continuum. The cultural narratives of counselling, as seen in these works, challenge the binary between illness and health. Instead, they depict psychological well-being as fluid, shaped by relationships, memory, and language. Healing, in these texts, arises as a collaborative process between the self and society, between silence and speech.

These narratives also have broader social associations. They promote empathy over judgment, listening over silence, and community over isolation. In this sense, literature and music play a vital cultural role: they democratize counseling by transforming it into a shared moral practice rather than an expensive medical service. Through their portrayal of trauma and recovery, these texts remind readers that counselling begins not in an Institute, but in conversation.

IV. Reimagining Counselling in Cultural Context

All these texts show that counselling is not merely a medical practice, but rather it is a cultural imaginary, a collective understanding of societies dealing with inner turmoil & recovery. In Western literature, counselling is often portrayed as therapy; in contrast, in Eastern and postcolonial settings, it is usually presented through storytelling, native rituals, or spiritual beliefs. The novels, poems, and songs discussed here bridge both worlds, explaining the process of psychological healing

that requires cultural adaptation.

For example, *Speak* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* discuss the necessity of safe spaces in educational institutions, highlighting a Western awareness of mental health. Also, they critique their shortcomings, discussing how bureaucratic counselling systems often fail to address emotional complexity. In contrast, the confessional mode of Anne Sexton and the introspective lyricism of Emily Dickinson predate the development of formal therapy. Yet, they perform similar psychological work namely, naming the pain, narrating the depth, and finding symbolic solutions through art. These poetic forms anticipate the principles of modern counselling: catharsis, articulation, and self-awareness.

In a global cultural context, songs like “*I-800-273-8255*” serve as public counseling interventions, providing access to hope. Similarly, Sia’s “*Breathe Me*” shows the loneliness of the modern age and the yearning for human touch. These works, taken together, create a new cultural imaginary of counselling that is rooted in empathy, accessibility, and creativity.

V. Towards Healing: Literature as Therapy

Ultimately, all these texts conclude on a singular truth: literature and art themselves are forms of therapy. Writing, reading, and listening enable emotional release and understanding. When Melinda paints, when Charlie writes letters, when Hannah records tapes, when Sexton writes confessions each act becomes therapeutic and a relief of their inner turmoil. They serve as the medium to translate inner chaos into meaning, transforming pain into power.

Thus, the literary survey of *Anxiety, Depression, and Counselling* not only documents suffering but also participates in healing. These cultural imaginaries teach us that counselling is not only an institutional process, but also a humane, creative, and ethical act: an act of listening, speaking, and being.

Conclusion

The study of these literary and cultural texts shows that anxiety, depression, and trauma are deeply human experiences, shared across time, culture, and society. Each writer and artist transforms pain into art, turning personal suffering into a message of hope for others. Melinda in *Speak* learns to confront her trauma and speak out; Hannah in *Thirteen Reasons Why* exposes the importance of empathy and listening; and Charlie in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* finds comfort in friendship and therapy. Poets such as Emily Dickinson and Anne Sexton represent inner pain through their poetry. Similarly, modern songs by Logic and Sia demonstrate how music can serve as a form of emotional release and raise public awareness about mental health.

Across all these examples, one message remains constant: healing is not only found in medical therapy but also in connection, communication, and creativity. Literature, poetry, and music offer safe spaces for self-expression and reflection. They remind us that sharing one's story can itself be a form of counselling.

Thus, literature works as both a mirror and a medicine: it reveals our hidden emotions and helps to cure them through empathy and understanding. Reading or writing about pain does not make it disappear, but it gives it shape, meaning, and voice. In this way, literature and art become vital tools for emotional survival. They teach us that to heal, we must first listen to ourselves, and to others.

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