

Surprise, It's Depression!

APRIL 21, 2016 • ADMIN • RESEARCHED RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Mental illnesses have a way of revealing themselves when you least expect it. *Hyperbole and a Half* is a graphic novel/memoir written by Allie Brosh who begins with wondering about her mental state as a child, then documents various parts of her life. Brosh makes you laugh, she makes you cry; and she takes you through her ups and her downs. One of Brosh's more significant "downs" in her life is when she had her first official descent into depression. The American Psychology Association devised a list of criteria for Major Depressive Episode which included: "diminished interest in activities, significant weight loss of gain, psychomotor retardation, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness" all symptoms that Brosh displays throughout her depression (Monroe, Reid 69). Brosh's depression affected how she acted with herself, her friends and family, and how she went about her day-to-day activities. Her depression is interesting because there does not appear to be a clear reason for why she begins to suffer. Brosh admits that, "I just woke up one day feeling arbitrarily sad and helpless... my sadness didn't have a purpose" (99). Brosh not being able to connect her depression to a source made her feel helpless, alone, and angry. Professors of psychology, Scott Monroe and Mark Reid, argue that "major life events may initiate one's first depressive episode, but 'sadness without cause' may characterize subsequent recurrences" (70). This quote directly proves how Brosh's depression experience becomes a regularly recurring cycle in her life.

Depression is a mental illness that comes and goes in waves. The writer of *Hyperbole and a Half*, Allie Brosh, went through two very serious bouts of depression. The depressions neither began nor ended the same way- they appeared to be one continuous cycle. At the end of each episode of her depression she appears to have been "cured". For example, at the end of the chapter titled "Depression Part One" there is a singular panel with Brosh riding on a bicycle; her arms in the air, a smile on her face, and the words "Nothing can do anything to me" splayed at the top of the panel (Brosh 120). The panel shows that Brosh seems to have been freed from her depression- both mentally and physically. Despite that, the audience knows that to be incorrect because the next page begins the chapter titled "Depression Part Two". Similar to the end of "Depression Part One", "Depression Part Two" ends with Brosh explaining that, "my sense of hope and positivity is still shrouded in a thick layer of feeling like hope and positivity are bullshit" (Brosh 155). This quote proves that Brosh still struggles with depression and feeling like her situation is hopeless from time to time. Brosh is right about feeling that her depression is still affecting her because, as she may not be aware, recent studies have shown that "depression is frequently recurrent and cyclical, or sometimes chronic" (Monroe and Reid 68). Once someone goes through depression once, it does not completely leave them forever; in fact, it will probably reoccur many times throughout their life. Throughout *Hyperbole and a Half* Brosh continually has a lot of reflection on her mental state, often dipping back into depression or a state of perpetual sadness. Brosh's family and friends were involved in her mental illness journey and recovery; however, Brosh's friends were not educated in how to approach/care for people with depression which only perpetuated their view negative view of mental illness. Her friends and family tried to help Brosh stay afloat; however, they did not understand how depression affected her or how to properly approach her.

Family and friends of those that suffer from depression do not usually know how to help effectively. Throughout both "Depression Part One and Two" the audience sees that a lot of Brosh's family and friends try to lift her out her depression, but none of them are successful. In one panel, Brosh is talking to friends and her friend argues that, "I know exactly how you feel... delicate and vulnerable... like you'll crumble at any moment..." (Brosh 146). Friends of those that struggle with mental illness often want to place themselves in the shoes of those effected; however, that only does more harm than good. Brosh merely wanted her depression to be recognized, not brushed over or appeased. Brosh tries to rationalize why none of her friends are helpful. She believes that, "they try to help you have feelings again so things can go back to normal, and it's frustrating for them when that doesn't happen" (Brosh 127). It appears that none of Brosh's friends want to understand exactly why Brosh is depressed, they just want her to magically be happy again, which reflect results taken from a National Opinion Research Center study. This particular study discovered that, "there was a great disparity between intellectual appreciation and concrete recognition" (Halpert 591). Brosh's friends would like to believe that they understand Brosh and her situation, but that is usually far from the truth. There is a common theme of ignorance and naivety in regards to mental illnesses. In an Illinois study on public opinion of mental illness it was discovered that, "public attitudes toward the mentally ill were found to be largely negative" (Halpert 591). The public usually deems mental illness as an excuse for lazy people or something that does not actually exist. Physical disabilities are more easily seen and identified while mental illnesses are not. These kinds of assumptions contribute to the negative stigma that mental illness is given.

The "negative attitude" towards mental illness is found in *Hyperbole and a Half* in Brosh herself. The audience has the opportunity to see how Brosh thinks and feels about her depression with her "subconscious" constantly berates her conscious self. The subconscious demanded that Brosh, "stop it. Stop being sad. Right now." (Brosh 101). This quote demonstrates that Brosh herself did not fully understand why she was depressed. Brosh believed that she could "fix" herself to not be depressed anymore, which is simply not true. Brosh uses her graphic novel as a way to illustrate just how her depression personified itself. Throughout "Depression Part One" there are panels of Brosh battling with her subconscious. The battle is shown with multiple split panels with real-time Brosh on one side and subconscious Brosh on the other. Having the panel split down the middle is Brosh's way of signifying how split her personality is when dealing with her own depression. The audience is bombarded with multiple panels subconscious Brosh berating herself and saying she hates herself. The hatred stems from a misunderstanding of her mental illness which she tries to further explore in her graphic novel.

Brosh uses dark colors and frames with herself to represent depression visually. Graphic novels have the opportunity to showcase a more personal side to the story, allowing the audience to place themselves in the author's shoes. According to Lan Dong, an associate professor of English at the University of Illinois, and Robert Weiner, an associate humanities librarian at Texas Tech University, "comics remind us visually that memoir is a process of interpretation..." (Dong and Weiner 107). Brosh wrote *Hyperbole and a Half* as a way to convey her mental illness journey in a way that is relatable to her audience. By using dark colors, Brosh wants the audience to feel how dull and lifeless her period of depression was. This trend is especially shown on page 129 of *Hyperbole and a Half*. The top panel illustrates Brosh by herself in a dark gray room with no escape. This is analogous to how Brosh felt while she was depressed: trapped, by herself, with no end in sight. Brosh also admits to "spending months shut in my house" and constantly created panels that demonstrated how alone she was, both physically and mentally (110). Brosh separated herself both in the real world and in her graphic novel due to her depression.

Depression is a mental illness that effects millions of people around the world. Many authors choose to disclose their stories as a way to make those dealing with mental illness feel less alone. Allie Brosh wrote her memoir that included her battle with depression and multiple instances of self-doubt in order to empower others who are going through the same struggle. Graphic novels in particular have the ability to connect with the audience and have them feel less alone, a problem everyone on earth suffers from.

Works Cited

Brosh, Allie. *Hyperbole and a Half*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013. Book.

Dong, Lan, and Robert Weiner. *Teaching comics and graphic narratives essays on theory, strategy, and practice*. Jefferson: McFarland, 2012. Book.

Halpert, Harold P. "Surveys of Public Opinions and Attitudes About Mental Illness: Implications for Communications Activities". *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 80.7 (1965): 589-597. Web. 26 March 2016.

Monroe, Scott M., and Mark W. Reid. "Life Stress and Major Depression". *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 18.2 (2009): 68-72. Web. 26 March 2016.

May 2016						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					
« Apr						

RECENT POSTS

- [The Effects of Social Media](#)
- [Say What You Need to Say](#)
- [Metamorphosis](#)
- [Looking Back to Look Forward](#)
- [Surprise, It's Depression!](#)

RECENT COMMENTS

ARCHIVES

- [May 2016](#)
- [April 2016](#)
- [March 2016](#)
- [February 2016](#)
- [January 2016](#)

CATEGORIES

- [Blog Posts](#)
- [Researched Rhetorical Analysis](#)
- [Social Media Biography](#)
- [Visual Memoir](#)
- [Visual Rhetorical Analysis](#)

META

- [Log in](#)
- [Entries RSS](#)
- [Comments RSS](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)