Perceptions of Teenage Psychological Disorder: How do Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Teenage Literary Characters with PDs Compare and Contrast?

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ABSTRACT

The twenty-first century brought unprecedented rates of teenage psychological disorder (PD), with conditions such as depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia reaching all-time highs. Young adolescents, despite having been recognized as a psychologically vulnerable demographic, are constantly excluded in their own mental health evaluations, and teachers in the American education system play a pivotal role in addressing this gap. Thus, in this paper, I specifically explore how high school students and teachers perceive teenage PD by examining their opinions on literary portrayals of mentally ill adolescents. This article thoroughly investigates this inquiry by utilizing quantitative, open-ended survey research followed by a thematic and comparative analysis. A total of 43 students and 24 teachers participated in the study, and I identified five recurring themes throughout their responses: the validity of teenagers' struggles, PD's relation to teenagers' school life, PD's relation to teenagers' social life, trust in professional treatment, and the potential of recovery. My findings demonstrated that although both groups showed a mutual concern for the mental welfare of teenagers, there were stark differences between students' and teachers' perceptions of teenage PD. These results present a fundamental ideological dichotomy that must be bridged in order to help adolescents benefit from their schools, and an implementation of comprehensive mental health and social and emotional well-being (SEWB) training for all teachers may be the first step to achieving this goal.

Introduction

In recent decades, symptoms of psychological disorders (abbreviated to PDs) have become an inherent component of everyday dialogue. Offhand jokes about *anxiety* and *eating disorders* are now normalized. *Bipolar* is used colloquially to describe an individual with mood swings. *Depression* has become such a common term that many appear to be jaded to the actual condition. For most people, these tendencies end at indifference.

Others, however, do not have this same privilege. With the dawn of the 21st century came rising rates of PDs in the United States, especially among youth. Over 2.5 million adolescents have major depressive disorder, though the real estimate is significantly higher when accounting for undiagnosed individuals (Mental Health America, 2022). Including other relatively common PDs such as anxiety disorders and schizophrenia, the numbers have reached an all-time high.

Public stigma follows these statistics, as prejudice against mentally ill people is widespread. Positive and accurate portrayals of PDs in entertainment media is an effective way of expelling these attitudes, but reality has not yielded favorable results. Although some studies have confirmed that PDs are less stigmatized now, the media not only distorts PDs to make them seem dangerous but also "[models] negative reactions" to them (Stuart, 2006). Middle-grade and young adult media have also reflected this trend, as proven by the popularity of films and television shows like *Thirteen Reasons Why*, *Joker*, and *Euphoria* (Carter et al., 2021; Scarf, et al., 2020; Wilson et al., 2000). With

fictional media having become increasingly accessible on a global scale, more constructive and optimistic depictions of characters with PDs have never been more necessary or wanted (Alaska, 2020).

Subsequently, psychiatric patients are calling for proper treatment and representation. In the US, teenagers have especially dominated this movement, creating various student advocacy groups that work to improve mental health education and combat stigma. Naturally, teachers are an integral element of their efforts, as they are the backbone of most school activities. This calls both students' and teachers' perceptions of PDs into question, as they are crucial indicators of successful psychological instruction. Therefore, in this paper, I will evaluate and compare their views on teenage PD in contemporary literature. This will consist of a thematic analysis of qualitative survey responses, which will be able to gauge the values and emotions of the participants. Such research will shed light on the relationship between students' and teachers' perspectives on a strikingly relevant topic and engender further discussion about the steps school districts should take to improve their mental health curricula.

Literature Review

Public Perception of Teenage Psychological Disorder

Among the many relevant health issues in America, mental illness is one that is constantly under the public's scrutiny. Public perception of PDs is considerably divided; while some shun them due to individual prejudice, others sympathize with and advocate for those combating it. Modern studies have discovered that the stigma of PDs remains overwhelmingly prevalent in the United States. According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) and other contributing organizations, people who display symptoms of PDs are "less likely to agree that people are caring and sympathetic to people with mental illness" than those who do not (p. 4). Similarly, the American Psychological Association (2019) found that as much as 33 percent of American adults are frightened by people with mental health issues. However, the same study also discovered that 87 percent of the respondents believed that PDs should not be a source of shame. In general, these conflicting opinions illustrate a more welcoming and accepting mindset toward PDs than that of several decades ago.

The same cannot be said for the public perception of teenage mental health. For reasons that psychologists have been unable to determine, people tend to stigmatize teenage PD even more than they do adult PD. In one analysis, researchers tested which age group of psychiatric patients Americans stigmatized the most and found that they desired the greatest social distance from adolescents (Martin et al., 2007). Moreover, another study discovered that the public is very likely to endorse making formal treatment mandatory for children with depression, even if the subjects are unwilling (Parcesepe & Cabassa, 2012). This is most likely due to the preconceived notion that children with mental health issues are violent and belligerent, a harmful stereotype that impedes progress in the field of adolescent psychology.

These stigmatizing attitudes discourage teenagers from seeking professional help, as they believe that it will ultimately cause only embarrassment and discomfort (Radez, 2021; Corrigan, 2007). This substantiates the theory that many adolescents struggling with their mental health refuse to be transparent with their parents for fear of social rejection. In relation to this, results from a nationally representative study of public response to child PD suggested that most American citizens are too ignorant, cynical, and/or misinformed to properly assist in children's recovery (Pescosolido et al., 2008). Thus, public perception of teenage PD has been and is still a major hindrance to the advancement of adolescent psychiatric care.

Portrayal of Psychological Disorders in the Media

Along with other primary contributors like cultural values and personal experiences, the portrayal of PDs in popular media is a cardinal factor that influences public perception. Over the past century, countless people have

depicted PDs through mediums like literature, television shows, films, and art. Typically, such works revolve around the life of a young individual who grapples with their mental health. Depending on how a creator renders this character, viewers' perceptions of PDs can change for the better or for the worse (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).

Most media is infamous for its misrepresentation of PDs, often generating stereotypical, unfavorable, or in-accurate images of mentally ill people (Antwi, 2021). In general, it is most detrimental to characterize these individuals as "'incompetent, dangerous, slovenly, [or] undeserving'" (Fawcett, 2015, para. 3). Crime dramas like the American TV series *Criminal Minds* frequently depict violent offenders as people with diagnosable psychiatric disorders (Parrott & Parrott, 2015). Although they are technically not erroneous portrayals, they play into the prevalent idea that people with PDs tend to be vicious criminals. Even the groundbreaking novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey, which was largely intended to critique psychiatry of mid-1900s America, had an unintended harmful effect: Domino (1983) found that the film adaptation negatively influenced college students' attitudes toward individuals with PDs and psychological institutions. Although the psychiatric field has improved immensely since then, depictions in the media have not changed, resulting in the continuance of such cynical and adverse views. Positive portrayals are few and far between, with films such as *Homeland*, *Silver Linings Playbook*, and *A Beautiful Mind* being praised for their precise and realistic representations of PDs.

Additionally, research confirms that these deplorable portrayals have permeated not only adult media but also children's media. Lawson & Fouts (2004) analyzed the representation of PDs in Disney animated films by coding certain content as demonstrative of clinical symptoms. Results showed that 85 percent of the movies contained references to psychologically disordered characters, including Mrs. Jumbo from *Dumbo*, Maurice from *Beauty and the Beast*, and Jafar from *Aladdin*. In relation to this, Stuart (2006) contends that the generic depictions of PDs in children's television without any specific symptoms or diagnoses "invites negative generalizations to all mentally ill people" (p. 100). Thus, the censored nature of children's media opens the possibility for a vaguer interpretation of these characters' behavior, thereby precipitating a more toxic perception of PDs. This ambiguity also augments the social mindset that mental illness is a subject that is to be either sugarcoated or avoided as a whole.

This trend extends to modern literature. Authors commonly portray PDs as insurmountable obstacles for their characters, which contributes to the negative image of PDs. For example, Lennie, a central figure of the lauded American classic *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, accidentally murders a woman as a result of his developmental disability. Steinbeck has been repeatedly criticized for characterizing Lennie as helpless, clumsy, and destructive (Milton & Holmes, 2018). Moreover, other novels have been condemned for appearing to romanticize or inappropriately illustrate pressing issues regarding mental health like depression and suicide (Campbell, 2018). One of the most notable examples of this is *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher, which was further sensationalized by its 2017 Netflix TV adaptation.

Role of Educators in Teenage Mental Health

According to the Education Policy Institute's Annual Report on access to child and adolescent mental health services, recent years have witnessed an unprecedented increase in teenagers who struggle with their mental health (Crenna-Jennings & Hutchinson, 2020). Specifically, Mental Health America (2022) asserts that over 10 million students between the ages of 13 and 18 in the United States have mental health issues that require professional help. Despite this, there remains a chronic unavailability of support systems for them due to youth's general unwillingness to report their mental issues and a lack of financial ability to afford psychiatric treatment. Thus, state officials have begun to view schools as the ideal source of such assistance. In particular, education in *social and emotional well-being* (SEWB) is becoming an increasingly vital element in public schools (Hoagwood et al., 2007). This naturally places teachers at the center of students' endeavor to heal.

Educators play a pivotal role in the evolution of teenagers' mental health. Even at a young age, parents who are concerned about their children's welfare typically contact teachers before referring to physicians (Ford et al., 2008). In addition, psychologist Sax (2003) found that teachers are often the first to suggest a diagnosis of attention-

deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in elementary and middle schoolers. Meanwhile, high school students, who are more conscious of their mental states, usually reach out to guidance counselors or school therapists for aid on their own.

Taking these tendencies into consideration, Miller & Wiltse (1979) claim that teachers should prioritize SEWB education, as their attitudes often set the emotional atmosphere of the classroom. Most prospective teachers in the U.S. are required to educate themselves on the symptoms of common mental health issues, and they are also recommended to be vigilant against warning signs of PDs in order to quickly identify struggling students (Marsh, 2015; Johnson et al., 2010). However, studies indicate that mental health training still remains abysmally inadequate. Many states do not even make it mandatory, and it is proving difficult to propose legislation that will make it so (Krebs, 2019). To add, some teachers disregard these duties completely because they believe that counselors are responsible for students' SEWB, not them (International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Educational Standards, 2020).

Furthermore, an alarming statistic presented by the World Health Organization (2021) suggests that half of all PDs begin before children reach age 14. This signifies that early intervention by teachers can be instrumental to later developments, especially for conditions as deleterious as depression, personality disorders, and anxiety disorders. To corroborate this, in one study, Lucier-Green (2014) and his colleagues compared different risk models of normative stressors for adolescents in military families. They found that consistent encouragement from teachers and effective psycho-education are associated with reduced behavioral issues and depressive symptoms. Overall, most psychologists agree that mental health training should be an essential component of teachers' holistic wellness strategies due to educators' powerful influence on teenage mental health. Therefore, it is all the more crucial that their perceptions of adolescent PD is not negative, stereotypical, or biased, as such stances will only obstruct students' treatment.

The Gap

Public perceptions of PDs have been evaluated before. However, contrary to what one may expect, there is very little research on how people view adolescent PD. Most studies explore the general idea of psychiatry and tend not to spotlight teenagers, despite their status as one of the most at-risk populations for psychological distress. Additionally, students' perceptions have barely been investigated at all, and most examinations of teachers' are limited to their own pupils or districts (Kamel et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2021). As it stands, empirical comparative research on the subject is exceedingly rare.

Considering all of these factors, I concluded that a gap remained in the research of students' and teachers' perceptions of teenagers with PDs. However, I also took into account that when analyzing educators' views on mental illness in the media, researchers often choose to use mediums such as films or television shows, not books, and negative, not positive, portrayals (Aluh et al., 2022; Kim & Seo, 2010). Therefore, I formulated the following inquiry: How do students' and teachers' perceptions of teenage literary characters with PDs compare and contrast? I hypothesized that students would display a more empathetic attitude because they would recognize their own struggles reflected in the characters' experiences, while teachers would express more sympathy because they would want to care for them.

Methods

Survey Research

In order to effectively address the research question, I created and administered two identical open-ended surveys to different demographics: one for high school teachers, and the other for high school students. This was done so that the responses from each population could be coded and analyzed separately, which is more convenient for a comparative study.

The surveys consisted of 10 questions, with each of them concerning a famous novel that features a mentally ill teenage character. Before each question, I also provided relevant background information about the general premise of the particular book as well as a short excerpt, which I instructed participants to refer to when describing their thoughts. As intended, the questions targeted the perceptions of the respondents. For example, in regards to the novel *How It Feels to Float* by Helena Fox (2019), I asked, "Does it surprise you that none of Biz's [the protagonist] friends and family are aware of her psychological issues?" (see the Appendix for a complete table of the given information about each book and the corresponding question).

All 10 books incorporated in the survey have been widely acclaimed for their accurate and raw portrayals of teenage mental illness; I valued the literary recognition that they received highly during my selection process. The survey questions were designed to be more broad and unspecific in order to generate a greater variety of potential discussion topics, which is integral to the identification of recurring themes (see the Thematic Analysis and Comparative Research subsection). Moreover, to prohibit the psychological wording effect and decrease as much bias as possible, the questions did not include any charged language (Tabibnia et al., 2008).

It was decided that surveys were the optimal research methodology because personal opinions were critical to the final results and conclusion. Firstly, the nature of the research study itself requires subjective input; analyzing others' perceptions is based on an investigation of their emotions. Surveys have been established as a reliable and effective methodology for social science research, especially in the field of psychology, because they can inspect "cognitive, affective, and perceptual processes within individual people" (Jans et al., 2015, p. 3). Jans and his colleagues (2015) also maintain that open-ended surveys tend to be more efficient than questionnaires that utilize "yes or no" questions or the Likert scale, which limit responses to a certain number of points. Open-ended inquiries thoroughly examine respondents' feelings and do not restrict their answers in any way, providing room for more variety and receptivity.

Participants

All participants were required to be residents of the United States, and the process of gathering willing respondents was expedited by directly contacting principals of high schools across the country and requesting them to distribute the surveys to their staff and students. From there on, I also utilized snowball sampling, which quickly expanded the subject pool and increased the diversity of participants (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). However, one point of consideration is that I did not allow school therapists or guidance counselors to participate in the study because I made the assumption that their enhanced insight into teenage mental illness may contribute to outliers or otherwise skewed responses.

I chose to administer the survey through the Google Forms platform due to its accessibility and ease of distribution. Before participants took the survey, they were required to sign an informed consent form that provided all of the necessary information to understand the purpose and methods of the survey. If students were younger than 18 years old, their parents or guardians also needed to sign the same form. In addition, the entire survey was completely anonymous in order to protect the respondents' names, identities, schools, and other sensitive personal information. Instead, each participant was coded with a number (e.g., Teacher/Student 1, Teacher/Student 2, etc.) in order to maximize confidentiality. The respondents understood and agreed to this arrangement.

Thematic Analysis and Comparative Research

The final step of the methodology was thematic analysis, a technique frequently used in qualitative research that identifies, systematizes, and evaluates prominent themes found in verbal or textual data (Nowell et al., 2017). In this case, I was able to implement thematic analysis by reviewing all of the received responses and locating common ideas across them. I read the responses in sets of four to five for a more focused inspection (Silverman, 2013). Each set was then codified, and I grouped specific words that indicated the same theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, I

titled the themes and gave them concise descriptions according to participants' conceptions of them. Furthermore, thematic analysis complemented my research question because it suited the purpose of a comparative study. For each theme, I could easily examine how the perceptions of teachers and those of students were similar and different.

Results

Survey and Participants

The surveys were first distributed on December 18th, 2021 and closed on January 26th, 2022. During this time, 46 students participated in the survey. However, three responses were removed due to the usage of inappropriate and/or explicit language; thus, a final sum of 43 student responses were analyzed in the results of this study. Meanwhile, a total of 24 teachers responded to the survey, and all of them were deemed acceptable for further analysis.

Findings

Table 1
Definition of Identified Themes

Theme	Definition
Validity of Teenagers' Struggles	Both students and teachers expressed their beliefs about the validity of teenagers' struggles with PDs and of how they cope with them. Codes for this theme included appropriateness, acceptability, personal values, realism, practical decision-making, logic, and validity.
Relation to Teenagers' School Life	Individuals described their perceptions on how PDs could impact teenagers' school lives or vice versa. Codes for this theme included school, academics (including courses and grading), extracurriculars, students, and teachers.
Relation to Teenagers' Social Life	Individuals described their perceptions on how PDs could impact teenagers' social lives or vice versa. Codes for this theme included socialization, interpersonal relationships, family, friends, partners, romance, social attitudes, and public image/reputation.
Trust in Professional Treatment	Respondents maintained bold stances on the subject of professional psychological treatment and whether or not its effectiveness could be trusted. Codes for this theme included treatment, institutionalization, hospitalization, therapy, psychologists, psychiatrists, and professional clinicians.
Potential of Recovery	Several individuals had differing ideas about the potential of relatively successful psychological recovery for teenagers. Codes for this theme included recovery, rehabilitation, institutionalization, improvement, hospitalization, determination, resolve, healing, and relapses.

Discussion

Theme 1: Validity of Teenagers' Struggles

Most of the participants discussed the validity of teenagers' struggles with PDs, specifically regarding the difficulty of managing them. This theme considered the manners in which the characters coped with their PDs, as well as whether or not they were distressing enough to be clinical stressors. In this aspect, 93 percent of students (n=40) agreed that they were. For example, Student 8 commented, "I feel that although Holden [the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye*] is trying to save as many people as he can from the same situations that he went through, he is reacting appropriately to his circumstances…. Holden is obviously affected by the trauma that he has endured." Student 14 even viewed a protagonist's suicidal thoughts as "fair, and, in her [the character's] position, very understandable" because "she is in a very vulnerable state and even minor things can make her feel terrible." Similar sentiments were echoed throughout the student responses, with the individuals emphasizing with the characters' struggles and validating their PDs.

However, most teachers expressed the opposite idea, with 75 percent (n=18) conveying their discontent with the teenagers' management of their PDs. Specifically, 15 of these 18 teachers said that their coping mechanisms were "unrealistic," "unhealthy," and "inappropriate." For example, Teacher 9 said, "Holden feels responsible for his loved ones' distress and must deal with his grief, but his circumstances do not warrant his reactions." Teacher 1 provided a justification for this belief, stating that "not all children can be shielded from trauma, and they do not all respond appropriately." Teacher 16, who was one of the few who validated teenage PD, said that the given character's reactions were appropriate for "someone of his age," possibly implying that adults would be more rational and level-headed when facing the same struggles. Overall, these descriptions indicate a subtle prejudice against teenage PD, as they suggest that the characters' struggles are not valid enough. Nevertheless, despite their disapproval of how the teenagers dealt with their PDs, some teachers, such as Teacher 2, displayed concern for them: "[Holden] is not practicing any level of self-care that might help him heal himself." Teacher 11 even wondered, "How do you help somebody with [suicidal] thoughts?" which implies that they want to provide assistance to such students.

Moreover, respondents who felt a personal connection to the characters were more likely to validate their PDs. Regarding Susanna Kaysen, the suicidal protagonist of *Girl, Interrupted*, Student 6 blatantly stated, "I relate to her," and Student 16 disclosed that "Kaysen's thought processes are very familiar because I feel as if every moment in time is a moment I should consider death." Teacher 8 stated that they "grieve for Lia [the protagonist of *Wintergirls*]" because they also combated similar issues throughout their adult life. 65 percent of students (n=28) revealed that they related to at least one of the excerpts, while only 8 percent of teachers did the same (n=2). This disparity may be due to the fact that the characters are, like the students, adolescents, but it also may correspond to the current mental health epidemic present among youth.

Theme 2: Relation to Teenagers' School Life

Another recurring theme was how PDs influenced teenagers' lives as students. Most of the responses regarding this subject emerged from Question 3 of the survey, which focused on Craig, the intelligent but depressed protagonist of the novel *It's Kind of a Funny Story*. Participants commented on how the pressure to maintain sublime performance at school could be detrimental to teenagers' mental health. In this aspect, all teachers and students unanimously agreed that inordinately high standards of academic excellence could trigger psychological spirals and that existing PDs could detract from adolescents' efforts at school. Not a single individual invalidated these concerns, which demonstrates how significant of an impact respondents considered school life to have on mental health.

However, teachers and students attributed these psychological struggles to different factors. 70 percent of students (n=30) indicated that PDs affect school life due to external pressures, mainly from parents and guardians.

Student 41 stated, "A lot of teenagers, myself included, are willing to put themselves through hell to please their parents, teachers, or whoever else is telling them to study. Every time I think that I should stop, I'm reminded of my future." Student 35 extended this idea, boldly claiming that "most parents these days are only concerned with getting their kids into good colleges and don't even notice that the students who get straight A's are the same ones who've contemplated suicide." Meanwhile, 88 percent of teachers (*n*=21) stated that most teenagers' stress is self-imposed. Teacher 8 said, "Teenagers struggle mentally because they do not realize that success looks different depending on the person," and Teacher 15 sympathized by adding, "Sadly, teenagers are of the belief that they need to do it all and be the best, especially after almost two years of unproductive virtual learning. If they let go of this mindset, I think that they would feel much better."

Theme 3: Relation to Teenagers' Social Life

The third theme, relation to teenagers' social life, mainly consisted of two elements, with the first being outsiders' reactions to teenage PD. Regarding this point, 93 percent of students (*n*=40) agreed that most people's attitudes toward teenage PD are negative and harmful. For example, Student 16 commented that "mental illness is still completely frowned upon" and that, as someone who suffered from PDs themself, "mental health awareness events at school feel condescending." 10 students also noted that even if people are not afraid of or disgusted by PDs, they more often than not pity individuals with them. However, 6 students stated that younger generations are more open about PDs because mental health is such a common problem in modern society, and Student 11 even hypothesized, "Older generations were forced to work [PDs] out themselves and want us to do the same." In addition, 71 percent of teachers (*n*=17) reiterated these ideas. Teacher 1 said that "society still sees [PD] as a flaw," and Teacher 20 added, "Most people are judgmental and cannot figure out why an individual with [PD] cannot overcome one's illness and function 'normally.'"

The second aspect of this theme was the possibility of concealing PDs from others, especially loved ones. This specific subject was present in all 43 student responses, and 95 percent (*n*=41) stated that they were not surprised by the fact that outsiders can fail to notice an adolescent's inner struggles. Student 13 said, "It's so much easier to put a fake smile on your face than to open up to people, even if they're your close friends," and Student 11 agreed that "most people hide their mental illnesses to conform to society." Student 35 also stated, "99 percent of the time, family just doesn't notice, but there is that 1 percent where they do recognize the signs but deny it because they're ashamed of [the individual]." Meanwhile, 75 percent (*n*=18) of teachers were shocked that hiding PDs were even possible, expressing disbelief at the proposal. For instance, Teacher 19 said, "I don't understand how people don't notice things like this. It makes me wonder if I've missed anything about my family," and Teacher 16 asked, "How can [the protagonist of *How It Feels to Float*'s] parents and friends be so blind to her pain?"

Theme 4: Trust in Professional Treatment

An indication of trust in professional psychiatric treatment was yet another prominent theme among responses. This theme revealed considerably optimistic results regarding psychiatric care, with 83 percent of teachers (*n*=20) and 88 percent of students (*n*=38) having faith in psychological clinicians and therapy. For example, Student 9 claimed, "I think you should always try coping mechanisms that professionals recommend, even if they seem ineffective at first." Student 22 trusted such authority figures even without any personal knowledge, saying, "I have no experience with therapy, but if your doctor puts it in your treatment plan, then it probably works." Similarly, Teacher 19 said, "It's good that Aza [the protagonist of *Turtles All the Way Down*] is using the methods that her psychiatrist recommended…. She should believe in them."

However, the student-teacher disparity lay in the necessity of treatment. Although 95 percent of students (*n*=41) stated that PDs were difficult to manage without help, 79 percent of teachers (*n*=19) stated that they could be handled alone. For example, Student 28 asserted that "Eliza [the protagonist of *Eliza and Her Monsters*] has no control

over her anxiety right now, but she can improve with therapy." In complete contrast, Teacher 4 stated, "I think people are fully capable of dealing with their [PDs] without professional treatment, but it is always available as an alternative measure."

Theme 5: Potential of Recovery

Lastly, the fifth and final theme that I identified involved the likelihood of relatively successful recovery for teenagers with PDs. The responses to this theme varied the most because participants read about 10 different experiences, but there was a definite pattern among them. For students, 86 percent of students (n=76) felt that recovery was likely for teengers who genuinely wanted to improve and took real steps toward that goal. One of the most notable responses came from Student 25, who expressed substantial positivity: "Anyone who is resolved to improve their mental health can recover…. Of course, you need good treatment and a support system… but you should remember that you can do it." Meanwhile, Student 22 was more inhibited in their encouragement but still delivered a similar message, saying, "I doubt that there are many teenagers who don't [want to go] on the correct path to heal. As long as Caden [the protagonist of *Challenger Deep*] keeps at it, he'll eventually improve."

75 percent of teachers (n=18) agreed with this idea. However, 54 percent (n=13) also believed that most teeangers with PDs do not resolve to improve in the first place, though this sentiment seems to have originated from sympathy rather than condescension. For example, Teacher 5 stated, "Recovery is always possible if you have the strength and resilience because it's a long and difficult journey…. The problem is that most teenagers are too young to have enough willpower." Similarly, Teacher 17 felt that "teenagers nowadays have so much to do that they don't even have the time to take care of themselves." Overall, students appeared to be more confident that teenagers could recover from PD than teachers did.

Limitations

However, despite my best efforts, there were several limitations to my research process and results. The most evident one is the limited number of responses, especially for teachers. The disproportionality between my student and teacher responses could have made my results for teachers' perceptions more unreliable. In addition, profession is not the only factor that affects perceptions; any individual cognitions, preconceived biases, or stereotypes could have influenced the results. I simply assumed that teachers would have a greater insight into this topic due to their work. Moreover, interpretations of the excerpts were subjective, so depending on how participants interpreted the excerpts, they may have felt compelled to write about a different idea than other respondents.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Conclusively, I answered my research question by analyzing five core themes that high school teachers and students found relevant to the subject of teenage PD, and with these results, I came to three final understandings. Firstly, teachers and students disagreed more than they agreed on these issues. Oftentimes, a mutual concern for teenagers' well-being was not enough to bridge this gap, but my second conclusion provided a possible explanation for this pattern: many participants expressed their social ideologies in their responses. Although the surveys asked about teenage PD, respondents naturally discussed several other societal issues in order to justify their beliefs, and teachers and students usually did not see eye to eye on those as well. Lastly, although my hypothesis was ultimately correct, it did not encompass the many nuanced opinions that I found in the responses; participants voiced their opinions on numerous topics and ideas that my hypothesis did not concern.

To continue, there are also several implications of my research, which lend themselves to future directions. It is abundantly clear that students would be hostile to the teachers' ideas about teenage PD. The education system

must begin generating ways to eliminate this divide in order to best ensure students' well-being, and the most obvious way is to implement comprehensive mental health and SEWB training for all teachers, regardless of who their students are. Moreover, this project only discusses teachers' and students' perceptions on teenage PD, but there should be more research on the responses of educational districts as a whole during this epidemic of adolescent mental health.

Acknowledgements

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