

Here Comes the Sun: A Novel Portraying Quarter-life Crisis of a College Graduate

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ABSTRACT

Quarter-life crisis (QLC) is a period of uncertainty and questioning that typically occurs when people feel trapped, uninspired, and disillusioned during their mid-20s to early 30s, which is the currently most discussed and concerning topic nowadays since this issue is causing problems in twenty-somethings. Using the Quarter-life Crisis theory, this thesis explores the symptoms, causes, and solutions of QLC. Using psychological realism as its genre, this novel will explore the interior life of the main character, Rei, who experiences QLC. This novel tells the story of Rei, a fresh graduate who is unemployed for six months and is pressured by his father, under the influence of societal structure, to look for a job. Through the story, it can be seen that Rei's symptoms of QLC are anxiety, identity crisis, and depression. The causes of his QLC are high expectations from his surroundings, sudden responsibility changes, and self-doubt. Solutions to his QLC are acknowledging his own QLC, asking for help, and accepting himself.

Keywords: causes, novel, psychological realism, quarter-life crisis, solutions, symptoms

INTRODUCTION

Quarter-life Crisis (QLC) is a period of uncertainty and questioning that typically occurs when people feel trapped, uninspired, and disillusioned during their mid-20s to early 30s (Robinson, 2015). People who encounter QLC may feel stuck in a job that they are not passionate about and cannot make a romantic relationship last while their friends and other people in the same social group are advancing in their careers and are married and having children. "Twenty-somethings" are struggling to find out their own identity in the transition to being an adult (Gulotta, 2022). The pressure to find out their purpose in life is also affected by the instability of young adults, which is also one of the factors of the Quarter-life Crisis symptoms. The symptoms of QLC vary in many aspects of young adults' life. It includes depression, anxiety and addiction (Robbins & Wilner, 2001). Another source mentioned anxiety, impulsiveness, longing for change, feeling lack of motivation, and feeling lonely, trapped, and directionless (Gulotta, 2022). As mentioned before, people in QLC experience unstable mental states, and it is not a surprise that their anxiety about their future can be excessive since they are not confident in themselves. It is also expected of young adults who just finished their education to get a job when the reality is not as easy and simple as that. Their hardworking effort does not always pay off as they expect. Young adults who fail to do so will most probably suffer the anxiety of feeling useless, stuck, and worthless.

QLC is one of the most discussed and concerned topics nowadays. According to research conducted by Gumtree.com, 86% of 1,100 young people questioned admitted feeling under pressure to succeed in their relationships, finances, and jobs before hitting 30 (Hill, 2011). Another survey by LinkedIn stated that 75% of 25-33-year-olds have experienced a quarter-life crisis (LinkedIn, 2017). Twenty-somethings are concerned about being pressured to get a job, marry, have children, not earn enough living, and have a complete career change. Research regarding the quarter-life crisis on 1.5 million tweets on Twitter based on US and UK regions, in early adulthood reveals that their language tends to be future-oriented regarding their feeling

stuck and career. This concludes that young adults nowadays tend to feel stuck and anxious about their future. The current phenomenon does not only happen in the UK and the US only but also in Indonesia. They are concerned a lot about their future, whether it is about career, love, family, or health but in an excessive amount which affects them negatively, leading to depression, anxiety, and identity crisis.

Upon surfing social media, a basic routine for young adults, they are also exposed to suffering a quarter-life crisis. Research on Facebook concludes that users who often use social media have poorer self-esteem because of the exposure to social comparisons in social media (Vogel et al., 2014). The exposure to their peers' achievements through social media posts gives them the tendency to compare themselves. Research done by Agarwal et al. (2020) revealed that in early adulthood (age 18-30) 1.5 million users on Twitter express their opinion of encountering QLC with feeling mixed emotions, feeling stuck, longing for change, career, worrying about illness, school, and family, which orientation is on their future. Sadly, this will negatively affect people who encounter QLC. On Instagram, we sometimes see friends that already make money for their own living and can afford a high-class lifestyle, or probably we see friends that have married and have offspring. Upon encountering their friends' achievements on social media, young adults tend to compare themselves with those aspects. Research in Indonesia stated that twenty-somethings are feeling stress, anxiety, and fear of their future which seems terrifying and makes it difficult to use social media (Permatasari et al., 2022). They would also feel that while their friends are striving for achievements and milestones in their life, they are still pondering where to start and are confused about which choices to choose.

The form of my creative work will be a novel, a fictitious prose narrative, or a tale of considerable length, usually, one long enough to fill one or more volumes, in which characters and actions are representative of the real life of past or present times are portrayed in a plot of more or less complexity (Hawthorn, 2023). The main reason that I picked a novel as my creative work is to emphasize the interior life of characters on QLC which is better conveyed through a novel instead of other creative works. Choosing a novel would give the advantage of character development and add multiple dimensions to the character in detailing emotions and thoughts. A novel could give a sort of intimacy to the readers through the first-person point of view and relatable topics.

The genre in my creative work is Psychological Realism, traditionally understood as a genre of prose fiction that focuses intensively on the interior life of characters, representing their subjective thoughts, feelings, memories, and desires (Vrettos, 2011). The genre will mostly take the story revolving in the head of the characters, exploring and digging into the mind of the characters. In addition, this genre focuses on the motivations and internal thoughts of characters (Kennedy, 2019). One implementation of this characteristic is that this genre explores the reasons why a character does any action in order to understand the character's motives.

The theory implemented in the story is Robbins & Wilner's Quarter-life Crisis. QLC focuses on the major change in structured educational life into free adult life. In high school and college, every step to reach every goal is clear. But after graduation, the pathways blur and twenty-somethings have to figure out the steps and plans to reach their goals. According to Arnett, this phase gives them the most freedom they can achieve in their whole life (Arnett, 2000). Although the term exploration gives the positive impression in the process of finding their purpose, the process and the outcome can be quite the contrary. There are two results in facing the freedom of countless options, a hopeful approach and a helpless loss. In the process of adjusting to adult life and finding their identity, twenty-somethings can encounter problems classified as major crises. That concludes that QLC is not only just a common stage, but it can become hazardous since depression is one common result of the quarter-life crisis. In this phase, twenty-somethings usually doubt themselves in every aspect; decisions, abilities, readiness,

past, present, and future. The main question is whether they are ready for the transition to be an adult, while people in their twenties are still changing and exploring their love, work, and worldviews; thus not ready yet to be given the vast choices and the uncertainty of each choice (Arnett, 2000). Three main things about the subject explored in this project are the symptoms, causes, and solutions.

In this project, I raised three questions: a) what symptoms Rei shows in the Quarter-life Crisis, b) why Rei experiences Quarter-life Crisis, and c) how Rei overcomes the Quarter-life Crisis. The purpose and answers to these questions are that a) Rei shows symptoms of the Quarter-life Crisis including anxiety, identity crisis, and depression, b) Rei encounters the Quarter-life Crisis because of the high expectation from his surroundings, sudden responsibility changes, and self-doubt, and c) Rei overcomes the Quarter-life Crisis by acknowledging his own QLC, asking for help, and accepting himself.

The story of my novel revolves around Rei. He was a former college student who excelled with an almost perfect GPA. After he is out of college, life does not seem to be on his side anymore. He is in the midst of looking for a job, but it seems like luck has not been on his side in recent two years. He is pressured by his own father based on his friends' achievements to get any job that he can apply for until he falls into despair. He drowns more in despair knowing that his friends are getting jobs, getting married, and living their life at their best. He feels that he has no reason to live, and a suicidal thought strikes his mind. A call from his crush stops his attempt, and then afterward, he will meet people who will change his point of view.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Theme

The topic of my creative work is overcoming the quarter-life crisis phase. Specifically, the theme of my creative work is focusing on the importance of understanding the quarter-life crisis as a life cycle in life that is confusing and frightening but can be overcome by accepting oneself. To apply the theme, Rei will encounter pressure that comes in the forms of social media posts, conversations with his father, and his past experience. Upon experiencing this phenomenon, he feels confused about what to do with his life because everything seems impossible and scary. As a cause, Rei will suffer the symptoms of QLC, namely depression as the biggest obstacle. In order to solve the problem, he will learn ways to cope with QLC, such as acknowledging the QLC itself, asking for help from others, and in the end, accepting himself in order to deal with his current situation.

Plot

The introduction part will cover the background of the character and thoughts about his current situation in QLC that he suffers. Rei is a post-graduate college student who recently finished his studies in Literature. His endeavor of looking for a job seems like it resulted in nothing. As a result, he has been unemployed for six months straight. He took a break for three months after graduation which he considered to be a rest from a hectic sixteen years of education. He thought that it is okay that he is taking his time on finding out his purpose until problems emerge. He begins to feel discouraged upon finding out that his friends are already working fine jobs, getting married, and living a good and proper life. He compares himself with his friends' conditions and starts to doubt whether he is capable of living and doing well in life since he is struggling for a start when his friends are already striving for achievements. He feels that he is different and something is wrong with him. These doubts are emphasized even worse when his father, who is not aware of the problems encountered by their son is still stuck in the old ways of thinking, compared Rei with his other successful peers. Upon this treatment, he feels different and strays from normal life. Just like how his father used to live, fresh graduates

are supposed to have a job as soon as they graduate and start creating careers, which is totally backward to what Rei is doing now.

The rising action starts when one day, Sera, his closest friend and also the person Rei was in love with and currently in an on-and-off relationship, contacted him, asking him about meeting up. They have lost contact for months. Everything seems to be fine when they meet. They are talking about changes in their appearance, habits, and personality until hitting the sensitive topic in their relationship, months of silence. Rei insists that Sera is to blame for the silence until Sera says that it is probably his own rejection of what he thinks. Sera reasons that she was busy with her effort of looking and doing her job while Rei was drowning in his failures and disappointment and tells Sera that he was worried about his responsibilities as a father if they are going to really commit. Sera says that she is going to support him and not weigh him down, but Rei is still not convinced. In the end, Sera asks whether Rei still loves her or not, and Rei answers no. Sera says that she also feels somewhat the same and does not want to meet Rei anymore. They end their relationship in a bad condition.

Rei then meets one of his closest friends, Corinth, who is currently working as a barista at a cafe near their university. He starts to tell Corinth about his anxiety about the uncertain future, especially relating to his career, and how he feels useless and hopeless responding to his father's rampage. If Rei does not find a job right away, he is going to be kicked out of his home. On the other hand, Corinth tells his story about running away from his parents. He was working in an office in another city because of his father's connection. Not enjoying the job, he turned to drinking, smoking, and tattooing, until finally he could not hold it anymore and decided to go out. Corinth's father was mad at Corinth because what he did was disappointing the father's connection, so Corinth decided to run away from home and become a barista. It is in the past now and Corinth's relationship with his parents is okay now. Rei begins to tell that he broke up with Sera and realizes that he was being a bad guy for the way he treated Sera before. Rei then asks Corinth about religious stuff on the problem of pain, and Corinth answers that something good is coming and it is a matter of how long he will be able to cope with the law. To no avail, Corinth's answer does not convince him. Before Rei leaves, Corinth says that Rei should ask Sera for help.

The climax begins when Rei attempts to contact Sera to no avail. To Rei, this means the end of the world because he cannot help himself, and the only person who can help him seems to not bother. He feels that death is an absolute solution to the problem of pain. His hesitation about not committing suicide breaks down when he thinks that there is no point in being selfless in a selfish world. Even more, drowned in his negative thoughts, he finally decides to suicide with a cut on his wrist. Later, Rei wakes up in a hospital and finds out that Sera is falling asleep next to him, waiting for him to wake up. When Sera wakes up, she is angry with Rei because Rei tries to commit suicide. Sera did not expect that Rei would take action that far. Sera told him that she is scared to lose him. Rei then asks her for help to get him out of his miserable life. Sera tells him that she will plan a trip that will clear his mind.

The falling action begins when Rei meets again with Corinth for a while. Corinth tells Rei that his relationship with his parents is getting better. Rei then asks Corinth whether he feels anxious when thinking about his future. Corinth says that he also feels anxious about his future since he took his father's offer because he is scared of not getting a job with all the struggles awaiting him. At this moment, he acknowledges that QLC is also happening to his friend and probably to other people around his age too.

As Sera said that she is going to plan a trip, Rei is now hiking a mountain with Sera. They are currently in the summit attack for a sunrise scenery on the peak. Sera intentionally plans a hike because it will give Rei the philosophical idea of how hard work pays off and about

meeting people in life. At the peak, they are welcomed by the splendid scenery of the sunset. Not long, Rei begins to tell Sera how his family is on the brink of destruction; his mother went to live for an undetermined time in her relative's house, Rei lives in a boarding house and his father stayed at home. Sera says that she is going to help Rei in case he needs help getting his family back together again. Afterward, Sera begins to teach Rei how to love herself. She told her that he has to make peace with his miserable past and begin to start a new hopeful life. This makes Rei open his eyes and clear the fog inside his heart and begin to accept himself wholly.

The ending begins when Rei wakes up and finds out that a company contacts him through email for a job interview. While he is preparing for the interview, words of courage come from Sera and Corinth. In the end, he thinks things positively and finally takes a step into a hopeful life. He is going to try hard for the interview and give back the love Sera has given him.

Characters

Main Characters

- Rei

Age: 22 years old

Rei is a post-graduate college student who has been unemployed for the recent two years. He is 171cm and 65kg. Light brown skin, slit-eyed, a bit thick lips, just like a typical ordinary oriental-faced guy. A bit of beard and mustache—as a reminder of becoming an adult. He has some pimple scars on his cheeks and some pimples on his jaw edge. He is not skinny but not fat either, so in between. Not a muscular body, and likes to wear minimalist outfits—plain shirts with jeans, and sometimes shirts with rock band logos and albums. Chinese blood, but raised in the Javanese society which makes him not really used to Chinese customs and cultures. Black short hair with glasses. He is a very pessimistic person, who loves freedom and hates structure. He is raised in a Chinese family with a big hope for a son and is pressured to a certain standard by his father. He is the second child of two siblings. He has not had a job yet for six months while his sister has a steady job already in the US. His parents demand that Rei will also do well like his sister; getting a job soon after graduation. Rei loves to play games, listen to music, read novels, and expose himself to Christianity. He is a talkative person who likes to throw cheesy jokes at his friends, especially to Sera. A very curious person who wants to find out the why question even to trivial things that are not really important. His curiosity is not easily cured since he has to find a logical explanation that fits his way of thinking. Dealing with a tremendous and sudden feeling of QLC, everything he has learned seems to be in vain now, even now he doubts his belief in God. He used to be a cheerful and positive person, but ever since the troubles hit him, now he thinks negatively about all things. A person who is not lost and in need of outside help.

Supporting Characters

- Sera

Age: 22 years old

One of Rei's best friends. She is around 160 cm and 50 kg. Javanese-Chinese blood, mostly she inherited her physical appearance from her mother. Pale white skin, a bit chubby, big-eyed, with long eyelashes, a bit big nose, and thin lips. Wavy medium violet-highlighted black wavy haircut. She was in skinny love with him in high school and college as they studied together at the same major. Post-graduate, she lost contact with Rei. She is also busy with her job as a freelancer recently. She is a cold person outside, but a very heartwarming person if you've already been close enough with her.

She is a girl whose love language is physical touch so she frequently has physical contact with Rei in the story. She is a very determined and hard-working person, especially relating to work. When falling in love with something, she falls in love deeply to the point that she will try her best not to lose it. She is a pretty devoted Christian, but still finding out answers to difficult questions. Upon finding out that Rei's condition is in need of support and help, she is the one who takes action to save his dearest person in life—also to connect the red thread if possible.

- **Corinth**

Age: 22 years old

Not a close friend of Rei, but he is a good friend. He is around 165 cm and 45 kg. Chinese–Japanese blood, skinny and white skin. Born with black hair but dyed it yellow because of his hobby of K-pop. Currently working as a barista in one of the famous coffee shops in town. Throughout Rei's college years, he helps him through many troubles from the easy ones to the hard ones. He is wise, patient, and open-minded, so he is a good friend to consult with many types of problems. A person who pretends that everything is okay while holding up problems inside him until he cannot hold it anymore. He has a different accent from Rei and Sera since he comes from another region. Upon Rei's encounter with QLC, Corinth is also a place for Rei to find a way—or at least some signs—to get him back on track and try to get out of his bad situation.

- **Father**

Age: 49 years old

Rei's biological father. He is a typical-old Chinese who still holds his ancestors' traditions and values. Around 165 cm and 70 kg. He has a strong-profiled face, is a bit bulky and muscular, and has a bit of bulge in the stomach. Darkened brown skin—because of his job, a tidy short black haircut, and slit-eyed—a typical middle-aged old man that rarely smiles and is frightened by any person who wants to hit on his children. A very materialistic person who considers everything else against his view worthless. As a Chinese, he also has big hope for his son to be more successful than him and also Rei's sister. Deep down, he loves his son and wants the best for his son, but the problem is that he does not really understand the condition of his son because his mind is still stuck in the past.

Conflicts

Two conflicts are available in my story, Man vs. Self as the main focus and Man vs. Man. First, Man vs. Man is the fight of a character against an unambiguous challenger opposing the main character in terms of outlooks, opinions, or goals (Edwards, 2020). It is classified as a type of external conflict which is mostly in this case a clash between the protagonist and the antagonist who are against each other's ideas. In this case, Rei is fighting against his father's idea about the pressure to succeed in life as soon as college graduation, which is the representation of society's expectations and standards. This includes society's expectations such as creating a career as soon as they graduate and success at a young age. Second, Man vs. Self is “a character battling indeed demons, one who has an inner moral conflict or is simply striving to become a better person” (Edwards, 2020). This conflict is classified as an internal conflict. It is mostly that the characters face mixed emotions over their actions or decisions that were made or had to be made. In other cases, it might be characters facing mental illness or who cannot forgive themselves for what they did. Rei's biggest opponent will be himself, fighting against his feeling of helplessness and pessimism. I choose Person vs. Self as more dominant because it is a matter of accepting ourselves to overcome the problems of QLC.

CONCLUSION

This novel tries to portray the issues surrounding the quarter-life crisis. The purpose of this creative work is to explore the symptoms, causes, and ways of overcoming quarter-life crisis. The novel shows how Rei, the main character, struggles with societal construction in the form of his father while trying to find out his identity and meaning in life.

The first issue discussed in the novel is the symptoms of QLC, including anxiety, identity crisis, and depression. The main character's anxiety is mostly shown in the interior monologue in the first chapter, where he talks about his fear of the future, regrets of the past that might affect his future, and guilt feeling to the people near him. Rei's identity crisis is shown in how he feels alienated from his generation when he feels he is the only one failing among successful others. Moreover, this issue is emphasized by his past successful life in high school and college and how his life now is totally contrary. He also feels that he does not deserve to have a place in society so he locks himself in his room all the time. His depression is shown through his feeling of being stuck, unworthy, helpless, and suicidal intentions. The strongest part picturing Rei's depression is his attempt at suicide.

The second issue shown in the novel is the causes of QLC, including high expectations from his surroundings, sudden responsibility changes, and self-doubt. In the story, Rei encounters the pressure of having to find a job quickly by his father whose mindset is to achieve a high level in society. Meanwhile, on his social media, his friends also show their success by showing material things on their accounts. This gives him the pressure to do the same thing while also emphasizing his 'uncommon' condition. The issue of sudden responsibility changes is discussed through the dialog with Corinth. Rei says that all things are already structured to be followed in the educational world but in the adult world, he needs to figure out how to build his own path to reach his goals. The problem is that he is not used to figuring out the path and fails in the process. The story also portrays Rei's self-doubt on how he thinks that he might not find a job, build his future with Sera, and even to survive in life.

The third issue discussed in the novel is solutions to QLC, including acknowledging his own QLC, asking for help, and accepting himself. Upon getting himself out of his own self-isolation of desperation, Rei finds out that Sera and Corinth also encounter the same struggle after graduation, such as difficulty in finding jobs that also suit them. He finds out that his fight and his struggle is also experienced by his close friends. Through Sera's story about freelancing and Corinth's story of getting out of an office job to be a barista, Rei acknowledges that QLC is normal and a lot of people around his age encounter just the same thing. After his suicide attempt, Rei finally asks for Sera's help to overcome his troubles because he cannot handle them himself anymore. Furthermore, to stabilize his emotion, Rei is scheduled to meet a psychologist each week which is professional help. At the end of the trip scene, Rei finally accepts himself and decides to stay alive no matter what happens and keep trying everything in life. He succeeds in making peace with himself, forgetting about his past, and starts moving forward for a better life.

Through this novel, I hope the readers will understand further regarding the Quarter-life Crisis that it is totally normal for them to encounter problems and anxiety about their future. If they cannot handle the situation themselves, I encourage them to ask for professional help or just ask their friends for moral support if they cannot face the issues themselves. No matter how harsh our past was, there is always a chance to be better in the future by just doing our best each day. Also, I hope that every one of us will be able to live our life happily with our own definition of happiness and not with others.

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