

To Capture A Ring: A Novel Exploring the Effects of Quarter Life Crisis of a Young Adult on Her Relationship

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the quarter life crisis (QLC), a common struggle for people in their mid-20s to early 30s who feel stuck and uninspired. Using quarter life crisis theory, it will examine the symptoms, causes, and coping mechanisms to this issue. The research will take the form of a contemporary romance novel, focusing on the main character, Faye. The story follows Faye, who found herself caught between pursuing her dreams and advancing her career, while her mother constantly pressured her to settle down, especially after receiving a wedding invitation from her younger cousin, Maudy. This event intensifies Faye's internal conflict, making her question her life choices between following her dreams or settling down. Through the story, it can be seen that Faye's quarter life crisis symptoms are uncertainty feelings, depression and relation concerns. The causes from her QLC are the fear of stepping into a new phase of life, a feeling of disappointment, as well as the potential for more changes ahead. Faye's coping mechanisms through her QLC are acknowledging the existence of QLC and seeking help.

Keywords: causes, coping mechanism, novel, quarter life crisis, symptoms

INTRODUCTION

As the world keeps evolving, technologies and human knowledge also get better. Now that people have easy access to the internet, humans are more aware about a lot of things in comparison to the past, one of them being mental health awareness. Reported by Kompas (2023), a result of a 2022 survey conducted by the World Market Research Institute Ipsos, which gathered responses from 23,507 individuals across 34 countries shows the increased awareness of mental health. According to GiShawn Mance (2024), literacy around mental health has increased exponentially, coupled with the rise of public figures speaking openly and candidly about their challenges. In 2020, former first lady Michelle Obama publicly shared her experience with low-grade depression. As a public figure and as a black woman, her honest admission was pivotal to the discussion of mental health.

Just when mental health issue awareness grows—individuals—particularly those in their early twenties, begin to recognize a widespread issue known as the quarter life crisis. Understanding this crisis is crucial, as it validates young adults' struggles, encourages open dialogue and discussions about mental well-being, and helps those individuals develop coping strategies to navigate this challenging phase. Quarter life crisis is a crisis that may be experienced in one's twenties, involving anxiety over the direction and quality of one's life (Zed Bee, 2020). This concept is familiar to young adults who are in their twenty-something phase. According to Robbins and Wilner (2001), people who come across quarter life crisis might feel disillusioned and cannot make a relationship last with their love partner while on the other hand, their friends and other people in their society are moving forward with their life either in their career, love and marriage, even having children.

Robbins and Wilner also mentioned that one of the significant consequences of experiencing a quarter life crisis is the intense pressure and internal struggle to identify what

feels missing or lacking within themselves. Individuals going through this phase often struggle with feelings of being trapped – whether it is in their job, university life or a stagnant relationship. This sense of being stuck can lead to confusion and uncertainty about the decisions they have made, leaving them questioning their choices and the direction their life is taking (Robbins and Wilner, 2001). This emotional confusion can cause a heightened sense of frustration and a yearning for change.

Thus, this story aims to explore the quarter life crisis by using the Contemporary Romance genre, a genre that lends itself well to delving into the emotional complexities and personal dilemmas characteristic of this life stage. According to Kate Grand (2023), a romance book reviewer, the Contemporary Romance genre is where love reigns supreme and anything is possible, tackling real life issues such as career challenges, family conflicts, and social pressure. Kate Grand also mentioned that at the heart of every contemporary romance novel is the love story—whether it is a slow-burning romance or a whirlwind affair, the chemistry between the characters is what keeps the readers turning the pages. In these stories, love can transcend boundaries, and characters frequently find themselves discovering new aspects of themselves and their world through their relationships. This genre provides an ideal platform to explore the turbulence and uncertainty that often define one's twenty-something years, a time when many people face significant life transitions, including career choices, romantic entanglements, and questions about their future.

By using the contemporary romance genre, the story can capture the internal and external conflicts of a protagonist who may feel lost or disillusioned as they navigate the pressures of growing up and forging meaningful connections in a complex, fast-paced world. The narrative can explore the tension between personal dreams and societal expectations, portraying how romantic relationships may serve as both a source of comfort and challenge during a quarter life crisis. Love and relationships, whether they bring joy or heartache, are often central to how individuals in their twenties perceive themselves and their path forward, making this genre a natural fit to depict the struggles, self-discovery, and eventual resolution that can come with this life stage. In essence, Contemporary Romance will not only allow me to portray the romantic and emotional aspects of a quarter life crisis but also provide a rich, relatable context to show how individuals in their twenties face complex questions of identity, purpose, and connection. Through the exploration of love and personal growth, this genre will offer a compelling way to bring the experience of a quarter life crisis to life, providing a narrative that is both heartfelt and relatable.

In addition, another reason why we want to use the contemporary romance genre is that love is one of the major elements of human life, and, as such, the plot of falling in love is universal. This aspect is what draws people to this genre. Since many people are attracted to this genre, it is natural that romance is one of the most popular genres. According to Sweet Savage Flame (2023), the Romance genre generates over \$1.44 billion in revenue. Romance reached over 39 million printed units sold in 2023. The high demand of the Romance genre and the sub-genres is the reason why we want to write this creative work using the contemporary romance genre. With this benefit, we can reach a bigger audience reading my creative work.

Moreover, we think this genre is a good fit for the quarter life crisis topic, as it often revolves around an individual's evolving relationships, personal growth, and internal struggle. The quarter life crisis is a time when many individuals grapple with self-doubt, uncertainty about their future, and a sense of disconnection from those around them. These themes are deeply personal, while the contemporary romance genre, with its focus on relationships, emotional connections, and character development, provides an excellent platform to explore these issues. Romance stories often go through into complex emotional dynamics, from navigating romantic entanglements to reconciling personal desires with societal expectations.

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By using the contemporary romance genre to depict relationship challenges and to portray the protagonist's internal battle, we can create a nuanced narrative that not only reflects the emotional confusion of this life stage but also highlights the hope, growth, and strength that come with it. The relatability of romantic relationships in contemporary settings allows for a deep exploration of how individuals in their mid-twenties face the tension between romantic aspirations and personal fulfillment, making it an ideal genre for telling such a story. Ultimately, we believe that through the lens of romance, we can authentically showcase the struggles and triumphs of those navigating the complexities of their quarter life crisis.

Furthermore, my creative work would be in the form of a novel. According to Amanda Prah from ThoughtCo (2004), a full-time writer and editor and a former faculty associate at Arizona State University—where she created and taught undergraduate and graduate courses in theater and film, a novel is a narrative work of prose fiction that tells a story about specific human or character experiences over a considerable length. The novel is a genre of fiction, and fiction may be defined as the art or craft of contriving, through the written word, representations of human life that instruct or divert or both. Novels have the ability to show more than just dialogues, but also detailed expressions of the characters, how the characters interact with each other, and detailed narratives. Sometimes authors can put their intrusive thoughts inside to make it more interesting and fun. With these elements, novels would be a perfect form to convey the struggles, the roller coaster of emotions and nuances of my story. Also, according to BBC (2019), reading fiction has been said to increase people's empathy and compassion. Dutch researchers have conducted research that shows that perhaps reading fiction does make people behave better. Certainly some institutions consider the effects of reading to be so significant that they now include modules on literature. We think this strength of novels to influence people is a good reason why we chose my creative work in the novel form.

My creative work will be a novel entitled *To Capture A Ring*. The reason behind this title is about my main character's struggle to find herself and chase her dreams or marry her boyfriend at such a young age due to her mom's constant nagging. In this story, when Faye hits her 23th birthday in her last year of college, she suddenly starts to question the worth of her life as she feels underachieving, and she goes missing in action to the people around her and starts to crumble by herself. Worried, her friends start to try to reach out for her, but it makes her feel worse and acts colder than before. She goes missing until her boyfriend, Jordan, finds and confronts her. Through this experience, Faye begins to understand the importance of the value of human connections, realizing that true success does not come at the cost of personal relationships and mental health.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Theme

This creative writing theme focuses on overcoming the quarter life crisis that is often related to coming of age and the mental health matter. To be more specific, it focuses more on the importance of understanding that the quarter life crisis phase is one of a life cycle that is confusing while it is possible to be defeated once an individual accepts it, which will be written in the novella form. In order to apply this theme, the main character in my creative work will have to go through a roller-coaster-like emotional journey while dealing with her QLC. My main character will learn from people around her and especially her boyfriend Jordan how to face life's struggles until they finally reach their happy ending.

Plot

On the exact day of Faye's 23rd birthday, everything could be considered great except Faye's boyfriend, Jordan, was late to congratulate her at midnight, which made her a little disappointed. In the morning after she came back from her morning class, her aunt and her baby cousin Maudy, invited by Faye's mom, came to visit her and to join her birthday lunch at her house. While eating, the question about when Faye was going to get married was brought up by her aunt, Aunt Annie. Not understanding what was the point of the question, her aunt and Maudy gave them Maudy's wedding invitation. Realizing that Faye's baby cousin was getting married, Faye's mom started to nag at Faye to get married as soon as possible, which on the other hand, Faye strongly disagrees with the idea of her getting married quickly.

Later in the evening, her friend that was close to Jordan too, Leo, picked her up from her home to 'somewhere', which turned out to be a restaurant that was prepared for Faye's birthday party by Luna, her best friend, and Jordan. At the party, Jordan told Faye that he had something to tell Faye and Faye said yes. After arriving at Faye's house, Jordan decided to propose to Faye as a promise that they are going to get married. Unfortunately, due to her quarter life crisis and triggered by the confrontation that she had with her mom earlier in the morning that day, Faye started to freak out, resulting in her declining Jordan's proposal straight away and decided to break up with him instead.

The next day, Faye decided to go missing in action to her friends including skipping class, which made friends especially her best friend get worried that Luna started to look for her. Finding Faye at Faye's house looking like a stray cat under the heavy rain, Luna decided to make Faye talk about what happened. It turned out that Faye had skipped her class to seek professional help, but she felt that she did not get the answer from them. After telling Luna about what happened, Luna told Faye to call Jordan and make things clear between them.

Later that night, Jordan met Faye at her house to hear what Faye wanted to tell him. Faye decided to be transparent to Jordan while saying sorrys, and luckily Jordan understood her, even though there were some points from Faye that he disagreed with. At the end, they laughed together and decided to make up, with Jordan tossing his proposal ring to Faye for her to catch it.

Characters

Main Characters:

- Faye
Age: 23 years old

Faye is the only daughter. Being the only daughter in a Chinese-Indonesian family does not make her a spoiled brat. She has a lot of dedication as a person and prioritizes her education. As she is an introverted person, she only has a few friends that she cherishes a lot. Plus, she has a boyfriend named Jordan that always supports her no matter what. Also, Faye has fair skin, dark brown eyes and her hair dyed red that compliments her overall look.

- Jordan
Age: 23 years old

Faye's childhood best friend and boyfriend. Jordan is the oldest sibling of two. He has a black hair and wears glasses sometimes. He is loud and people around him consider him

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as ‘the life of the party’. He might seem childish, but he knows when to get serious too, especially when it comes to Faye. He believes that action speaks louder than words, so he does that to show his love to Faye.

Side Characters:

- Leo
Age: 23 years old

Jordan’s best friend, pretty close with Faye and Luna as well. He is a curious person, so he always initiates things before Jordan, Faye or Luna says anything. He is extroverted and a playful person, so his friends often laugh because of him.

- Luna
Age: 23 years old

The closest to Faye, knows Jordan and Leo well. As Faye’s only girl best friend, she understands Faye the most. Even Faye thinks Luna understands her more than her mother. She is more on the cheery side between the four of them.

- Faye’s mother
Age: 57 years old

Faye’s mother loves her only daughter so much to the point sometimes it frustrates Faye, especially about her asking when will Faye and Jordan get married. She loves her daughter so much to the point she is afraid Faye might end up alone in the future if Faye does not get married soon.

- Maudy
Age: 21 years old

Faye’s baby cousin who is younger than Faye by two years. They have been pretty close since their childhood. She is cheerful and has a kind heart, but quite timid sometimes.

- Aunt Annie
Age: 54 years old

Faye’s mom’s younger sister which makes her Faye’s aunty. Maudy’s mother. Has a great personality, but sometimes her actions and behaviour confuses people around her.

Conflicts

There are two types of conflict that happen in my creative work. The first one is Man vs. Man, where my characters “Man vs. Man conflict describes the antagonistic dynamic between two (or more) characters, fuelling many of the stories we enjoy over our lifetimes.” (Villirilli, 2024). In the story, Faye will have a conflict with her mom in which her mom wants her to get married quickly before she dies while on the other hand, Faye is not ready yet, especially since she is still in college. The second one is Man vs. Self which is “It is a type of internal conflict, and refers to the struggle a character has to face with their own beliefs, which stand in the way of achieving their goals” (Dario Villirilli, 2024). Both of these types happen in stories but in my story, the Man vs. Self is domineering because we want to focus more on the QLC. In my story, the Man vs Self conflict is shown by Faye dealing with her inner self through

her quarter life crisis phase in her life—she tries to seek professional help but fails in coping through her QLC and chooses to be missing in action.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through the hard struggle and the help of my advisor, this thesis has examined the phenomenon of the quarter life crisis as a significant developmental stage in emerging adulthood, characterized by coming of age and mental health matter. The purpose of this creative thesis is to explore the symptoms, causes and the coping mechanism of overcoming the quarter life crisis. This novel shows Faye, the main character, struggles with the societal pressure of settling down in the form of her own mother pressuring her on getting married as soon as possible as her baby cousin is getting married before her, while still trying to chase her dreams and career in the future.

The first subject discussed in this thesis is the symptoms of quarter life crisis including uncertainty feelings, depression and relation concerns. The main character's uncertain feelings are shown through Faye's consideration about chasing her dreams while her mom's nagging for her getting married as soon as possible surfaces. Faye's depression and relation concerns can be seen that through her quarter life crisis, she feels frustrated that she can not show her struggles to her boyfriend as it will be a burden towards Jordan, resulting in Jordan not being able to understand her and their relationship break apart.

The second matter that can be seen in the novel is the causes of the quarter life crisis, including low mental health, dysfunctional family, and the intolerance of uncertainty. In the novel, Faye encounters the uncertainty of the phase of life, about what to do after graduating college as now that her educational phase in her life is done. In the story, Faye faces a dilemma: whether to chase her dreams of getting a master's degree and a good career in the future, or to start considering her mom's nagging to get settled down as soon as possible as she is not ready yet for a marriage. Her depression makes it difficult for her to think clearly, plus her dysfunctional family (she only has her mom now) and the intolerance of uncertainty also play a big role in affecting her ways of thinking.

The last matter in this novel is regarding the coping mechanisms of the quarter life crisis, including acknowledging the existence of quarter life crisis and seeking help. In the story, Faye eventually acknowledges that she is going through a new phase of her life and tries to seek help from professionals, even though it was a failure. However, she ended up telling her thoughts to her best friend, Luna, who actually helps her to clear her mind a little and pushes Faye to fix her relationship with Jordan.

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