

OPTIMISM VALUES IN RACHAEL LIPPINCOTT'S *FIVE FEET APART*

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Abstract

This study, entitled *Protagonist's Optimism Values in Rachael Lippincott's Five Feet Apart*, aims to analyze the optimism values reflected through the main character, Stella Grant, using a qualitative descriptive method. The analysis focuses on how Stella's behavior demonstrates optimism as she faces the challenges of living with cystic fibrosis. Despite her illness, Stella remains positive, adheres to her medical treatments, and strives not to burden her parents with grief. Her encounter with Will Newman—a more pessimistic patient—further shapes her understanding of life, resilience, and self-compassion. The study applies Snyder's framework of optimism as cited in Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*, identifying five core optimism values: having expectations for recovery, persistence, self-motivation, self-confidence, and resilience. The findings reveal that Stella most strongly embodies the values of maintaining high expectations for recovery and demonstrating high self-confidence. These aspects underline the novel's central message of hope, perseverance, and emotional strength in the face of suffering.

Keywords: *Expectation; High Self Confidence; Optimism Value; Self-Motivated*

1. Introduction

Literature is a body of written works traditionally associated with imaginative poetry and prose, noted for their author's intent and aesthetic quality. It can be classified by language, origin, period, genre, and subject. Clear definitions are essential, avoiding trivial aspects like catalog classifications. Literature can be categorized into two primary types: unwritten forms like myths and legends, and written forms (Sudjiman, 1986). Written literature as imaginative creations such as songs, poems, novels, and dramas that offer insights into the author's personal experiences (Bressler, 1994). Prose can be divided into nonfiction, which is reality-based, and fiction, which is imaginative (Roberts and Jacobs 1995). Novels, capture human experience and behavior through lengthy, intricate prose. Literature artfully depicts social reality, using language to add artistic values (Taylor 1981) explains. Optimism, seen through Goleman's (1996) emotional intelligence lens, is a self-defense mechanism helping individuals manage adversity by maintaining a positive outlook.

Rachael Lippincott's *Five Feet Apart* (2018) tells the story of Stella Grant, a teenager with Cystic Fibrosis. Despite her worsening condition, Stella remains optimistic, sharing her journey online to educate others. Her relationship with Will

Newman, a pessimistic patient, highlights her influence in encouraging optimism. This study uses Goleman's theory to analyze Stella's optimism, focusing on her life in the hospital and her impact on Will.

Based on the description above, there are two main questions: what types of optimism values are found in Rachael Lippincott's *Five Feet Apart*, and how are these values revealed in the novel? The objectives of this study are to explore the types of optimism values in the novel and to analyze how these values are revealed. This study focuses on the optimism values of Stella Grant in *Five Feet Apart*, particularly her daily hospital life and interactions. The analyzed values include high expectations, perseverance, self-motivation, self-confidence, and resilience. Practically, this research provides insights for students and readers on applying optimism values in real life. Theoretically, it offers a reference for analyzing optimism in literature, focusing on Stella Grant's character in *Five Feet Apart* (Lippincott, 2018).

2. Literature Review

Literary psychology delves into literature through a psychological perspective, viewing literary works as reflections of mental processes. Authors channel their psychological faculties into their creations, integrating personal and psychological elements into their narratives. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of characters' motivations, internal conflicts, and development while uncovering complex themes such as trauma and identity. It also provides insight into how an author's mental state and personal experiences influence their work. By exploring the emotional and mental dimensions of characters and stories, literary psychology links fiction to real-life psychological conditions, enhancing our comprehension of both texts and readers.

In this context, optimism is a key motivational force that enhances performance and success across various aspects of life. As a hopeful outlook that drives individuals toward their goals, optimism is supported by self-belief and resilience (Snyder & Lopez, 2003). Originating from the Latin word "optimus," meaning "the best," optimism represents a positive attitude crucial for overcoming challenges. It fosters resilience and helps prevent despair, enabling individuals to maintain a constructive outlook even in the face of adversity (Goleman, 2002).

1. Having Expectation to Recovery: Optimism drives individuals to maintain high expectations and hope during difficult times, encouraging persistence and effort.
2. Not Easy to Give Up: Optimists remain enthusiastic and resilient despite obstacles, viewing failures as temporary setbacks rather than permanent defeats.
3. Able to self-Motivated: Optimism fuels self-motivation, helping individuals to stay driven and goal-oriented even in the face of challenges.
4. High Self-Confidence: Optimistic individuals exhibit strong self-confidence, believing in their ability to overcome difficulties and achieve their goals.
5. Not Easy to Surrender: An optimistic attitude involves not easily surrendering to difficulties, maintaining a proactive approach to solving problems and achieving goals.

Several studies have explored optimism values in literature:

1. Lestari (2014) : Analyzed optimism in the film *Negeri 5 Menara*, focusing on the protagonist's pursuit of education and success.
2. Fatimah (2014) : Examined *Cinta Suci Zahrana*, highlighting a woman's balancing of career and personal life with an optimistic outlook.

3. Tanjua (2018) : Investigated *Sepatu Dahlan*, depicting a boy's persistence in pursuing his dreams despite hardships.

These studies, employing qualitative methods and Goleman's theory, reveal optimism values in characters. Inspired by these findings, the researchers investigate the novel *Five Feet Apart* to explore optimism values in the character Stella Grant, using Goleman's framework.

3. Research Method

In this study, the researchers adopted a qualitative approach, following Sugiyono's (2016) post-positivist philosophy, which emphasizes researching natural conditions with the researchers as the key instrument (Sugiyono, 2016). Data collection is done through triangulation and analyzed inductively, focusing on meaning rather than generalization. Darmalaksana (2020) highlights that qualitative research is exploratory, while quantitative research is used for measurement (Darmalaksana, 2020). This descriptive research aims to systematically describe social phenomena, particularly the values of optimism as depicted in the novel *Five Feet Apart*. Data was collected through intensive reading and documentation, identifying themes and patterns of optimism. The analysis steps: organizing and preparing data, reading through it to identify major topics, and interpreting the data to uncover the types of optimism values motivating the main character, Stella Grant (Given, 2008).

4. Discussion

4.1 Data Analysis of Optimism Values of Stella Grant

A. Having Expectations to Recovery

Having expectations should be owned by every human. Stella has high expectations that everyone should have. With having expectations triggers us to stay try and not give up in the face of things which is difficult. High expectations must be accompanied by effort. So that what we do is not in vain and becomes fact. There are several points that Stella Grant makes in the novel *Five Feet Apart* that reflect having expectations to recovery:

I shake my head "We still have spring break together! And I haven't missed a spring break 'Besties Weekend' since eighth grade, when I got that cold!" I say smiling smiling hopefully and looking back and forth between Camila and Mya. (Lippincott, 2018: I, 5)

Based on the quote above Stella having expectation to recovery because she hopes to be able to do 'besties weekend' on the next spring break and she is currently still focused on her recovery so she cannot follow the trip to the Cabo and having expectation on the spring break vacation.

It's not every day you see a happy couple coming into a hospital. Watching them holding hands and exchanging longing glances, I wonder what it would be like to have somebody look at me like that. People are always looking at my cannula, my scars, my G-tube, not at me. (Lippincott, 2018: I, 15)

Based on the quote above, Stella having expectation of having a partner who can hold her hand, who can look at her lovingly, who can accept all of her healing scars because Stella

wants it in her recovery time.

I hope when my parents come to visit over the next few days, my breathing is a little less labored. (Lippincott, 2018: I, 16)

Based on the quote above, Stella having expectation that her breathing can be normal and she is in good shape when her parents visit her in the hospital because she does not want to see her parents anxious about her condition.

I wonder what it would be like to go all around the world but never be able to get outside the walls of the hospital. I don't mind being in the hospital. I feel safe here. Comfortable. But I've been coming to the same one pretty much my whole life. It's home. (Lippincott, 2018: IX, 84)

Based on the quote above, Stella having expectation to recovery because she want travel the world, not because she is uncomfortable in the hospital but she wants to enjoy the outside world without having to be confined to the same hospital continuously since she was a child.

I breathe in and out, feeling the ever-present struggle of my lungs to rise and fall, and I wonder what it would be like with new lungs. Lungs that, for a short while, would completely change life as I know it. Lungs that would actually work. Lungs that would let me breathe, and let me run, and give me more time to really live. (Lippincott, 2018: XIX, 150)

Based on the quote above, Stella talks to Will that she has expectation of having a new lung because she wants to feel breathing normally with a well-functioning lung and give her a longer life.

B. Not Easy to Give Up

Not easy to give up is a very unexemplary attitude, because it can lead to laziness and not wanting to try. People who are easily discouraged usually consider everything they do in vain. But unlike an optimist, she wants to get back up even if she falls several times. Not discouraged includes commendable morals towards oneself and being able to provide motivation to others. Stella owned this attitude not easy to give up. There are several points that Stella Grant makes in the novel *Five Feet Apart* that reflect not easy to give up:

This particular tune-up just happens to be centered around the fact that I need to be pumped with antibiotics to finally get rid of a sore throat and a fever that won't go away. (Lippincott, 2018: I, 4)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude that does not give up easily because she is still willing to undergo all treatments so that her fever and cough condition gets better so as not to cause her lung function to weaken.

I've been making YouTube videos for about half that time to raise awareness about cystic fibrosis. Through the years more people than I could have ever imagined began following my surgeries and my treatments and my visits to Saint Grace's, sticking with me through my awkward braces phase and everything. (Lippincott, 2018: I, 10)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude that does not give up easily because even though she has a deadly disease and she does not stay silent and give up just like that, she can make YouTube videos as motivation and increase people's understanding of the disease she is experiencing.

“You can’t be trusted,” she says, cutting into my killer impression.

“So, here’s how this is going to work. We’ll do our treatments together so I know you’re really doing them.” (Lippincott, 2018: VIII, 72)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude that does not give up easily because she is able to give her spirit to Will where she and Will must continue to do all the treatment from the hospital together so that their illness will improve immediately. She shakes her head, her face serious. “But I can’t, Will. Not now. I have to make it.” (Lippincott, 2018: X, 93)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude of not giving up easily because she knows she will die if she doesn't get a new lung, so all Stella can do is stay alive by undergoing every treatment.

“Living is the only choice I have, Will!” she snaps, standing up and glaring down at me. (Lippincott, 2018: X, 93)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude that does not give up easily because she still wants to fight for life. He did not give up on doing all the treatment at the hospital so that his parents would not be devastated by his death. Because all Stella can do is not give up on life because she doesn't want her parents to feel the loss of their child again after the death of her sister, Abby.

C. Able to Self-Motivated

Self-motivation is an attitude that is deeply ingrained human soul to better achieve a goal. Someone who has this kind of behavior, she able to push herself to keep moving forward and able to accept what has become. There are several points that Stella Grant makes in the novel *Five Feet Apart* that reflect able to self-motivated:

My eyes travel down the long to-do list I made for myself this morning, starting with “#1: Plan to-do list,” which I’ve already put a satisfying line through, and going all the way down to “#22: Contemplate the afterlife.” (Lippincott, 2018: I, 3)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude to able self motivated where he can motivate herself who is sick to keep doing all the lists she will do. She does not choose to be silent but she chooses to motivate herself with a series of lists that she makes so that her life in the hospital is not monotonous.

I shake my head and smile, leaning over to grab a bottle from the medicine cart. “That means taking my medications on time, wearing my AffloVest to break up that mucus, and”—I hold up the bottle—“a whole lot of this liquid nutrition through my G-tube every night. If any ladies out there are wishing they could eat five thousand calories a day and still have a Cabo-ready beach body, I’m up for a trade.” (Lippincott, 2018: I, 10)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude to able self motivated because she can motivate herself to stay excited to do all the same treatments continuously so that she can go on vacation with her friends in the future without to be afraid of thinking about her illness.

I swallow hard and give her hand a comforting squeeze, but my mind instantly travels to the G-tube. The spreadsheets. The app. A big 35 percent practically sitting on my chest. Until I get the transplant, that number isn't going back up. Until then, I'm the only one who can keep me alive. And I have to. I have to stay alive. Because I'm pretty sure keeping me alive is the only thing keeping my parents going. (Lippincott, 2018: IX, 80)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude to able self motivated because she motivates herself that who else can keep her alive besides herself. So until later she finds a lung transplant, she must continue to motivate herself to stay alive so that her parents are also happy.

I tap her leg with the pool cue, but for once I'm not kidding. There's something I actually want. "How 'bout a promise, then? To stick around for the next one?" She looks surprised, and then nods. "I promise." (Lippincott, 2018: XVIII, 143)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude to able self motivated because she has an promise with Will that she must stay alive until their next birthday.

D. High Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is one aspect of personality which is very important in human life. Person who are confident in their own abilities and have realistic expectations, even when their hopes didn't come true, they kept their minds positive and can accept it. There are several points that Stella Grant makes in the novel *Five Feet Apart* that reflect high self confidence:

And right underneath all that vibrancy is . . . my pile of medical equipment, sitting right next to a hideous green faux-leather hospital chair that comes standard for every room here at Saint Grace's. I eye the empty IV pole warily, knowing my first of many rounds of antibiotics over the next month is exactly an hour and nine minutes away. Lucky me. (Lippincott, 2018: I, 3)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a high self confidence where she feels confident because she is lucky to be able to undergo all the treatments provided by the hospital because it is not an easy thing but she is lucky to be able to have it without needing to think about the cost.

"New lungs can come in at any moment, so I've got to be ready!" I say the words like I believe them wholeheartedly. (Lippincott, 2018: I, 11)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a high self confidence because she believes that new lungs can come at any time and she has to be ready at any time because the opportunity to get a new lung is not an easy thing and this opportunity has been waiting for her since she was a child.

So, after all that CF has stolen from me—from us—I’m stealing something back.” She holds up the pool cue defiantly, fighting for every one of us. “I’m stealing three hundred and four point eight millimeters. Twelve whole inches. One fucking foot of space, distance, length.” I stare at the video in total admiration. “Cystic fibrosis will steal no more from me. From now on, I am the thief.” (Lippincott, 2018: XVI, 136)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a high self-confidence because she believes that this time she can steal from Cystic Fibrosis where since she was a child she has been stolen by Cystic Fibrosis, this time she is confident that she can take a closer distance with her fellow Cystic Fibrosis patient, Will, for this time she stole it.

For the first time in a long time, I don’t feel sick. (Lippincott, 2018: XXIII, 183)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a high self-confidence where Stella feels that she doesn't feel sick after a long time, having fun with Will can make her confident and forget for a moment about the illness she is suffering.

I don’t need new lungs to feel alive. I feel alive right now. (Lippincott, 2018: XXIII, 184)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a high self confidence where Stella is confident and believes she doesn't need a new lung, she believes that she can live a normal life without a new lung. The reality is that Stella cannot live normally without a new lung.

E. Not Easy to Surrender

Not easy to surrender or not resigned in doing something. Not surrendering means that there is no anxiety in living life and willing to accept failure or a calamity without complaint of any occurrence that fell on him. Not being resigned means not make a calamity that befalls him with just keep silent but have the will to act more actively so as not to be trapped in the calamity. It can be said that there is a will or actions to change it. There are several points that Stella Grant makes in the novel *Five Feet Apart* that reflect not easy to surrender:

One step at a time. I head over to the wall oxygen, double-checking the flow meter is set properly, and listen for the steady hiss of the oxygen coming out of it before I pull the tube around my ears and slide the prongs of the cannula into my nose. Sighing, I sink down onto the familiarly uncomfortable hospital mattress, and take a deep breath. (Lippincott, 2018: I, Page 8)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude that does note easy to surrender because Stella does all the procedures of her treatment correctly even though she has done all of this since she was a child and she likes to be in this hospital because by being in the hospital and going through all the stages she can recover.

We’ve fought CF together for a freaking decade. Well, together from a safe distance anyway. (Lippincott, 2018: I, 12)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude that does note easy to surrender, she is

fighter but she is not fighting alone against her illness. She has a friend named Poe, who is also a CF patient. Poe has been Stella's friend since childhood and since they were admitted to the same hospital. They are very familiar and struggle together to face their illness.

"Stella is fighting for her life in there. And she's doing it for you."
(Lippincott, 2018: XIV, 115)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a attitude that does not easy to surrender where she continues to struggle in the operating room where the surgery is the surgery that she has been waiting for for a long time, namely surgery to get a new lung. She fights for her parents so that they don't feel anxious about being abandoned again by their child, for her nurse Barb and for Will.

The air struggles in and out of my lungs, and I take my portable oxygen on my bedside table, putting the nose cannula in and turning it on to give them a hand. (Lippincott, 2018: XV, 124)

Based on the quote above, Stella has a nature of not giving up easily where she still uses all her medical equipment so that she can still breathe normally even though she is after surgery but she does not give up doing the same thing over and over again.

5. Conclusion

Rachael Lippincott's *Five Feet Apart* presents the story of Stella Grant, a young woman living with cystic fibrosis whose journey embodies profound optimism and emotional resilience. Through disciplined self-care and unwavering hope, Stella demonstrates that optimism can serve as both a coping mechanism and a source of strength in confronting life-threatening illness. Her determination to recover, her self-motivation, and her confidence reveal the multifaceted nature of optimism as defined in Goleman's framework. Stella's interactions with Will Newman, a more pessimistic counterpart, further illustrate how optimism can inspire transformation in others and reshape one's understanding of life and love in the face of mortality.

The study concludes that five key optimism values—expectations for recovery, persistence, self-motivation, self-confidence, and resilience—are central to Stella's character. Among these, maintaining hope for recovery and demonstrating high self-confidence emerge most prominently. The novel ultimately emphasizes that optimism not only sustains individuals in times of hardship but also strengthens emotional connections and inspires perseverance in others.

For future research, scholars are encouraged to deepen their analysis of character development through psychological and literary theories, expanding upon how emotional intelligence informs literary characterization. Educational institutions are also urged to integrate both theoretical and practical approaches in literary studies to foster more holistic and contemporary analyses.

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