
A Child's Determination: Supporting Parent to Cope with Depression in Elizabeth G. Bedia's *Balloons for Papa*

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ABSTRACT

In appealing to readers below the age of thirteen, picture books can prove formative in children's mental growth and well-being. Nevertheless, despite their potential importance, few studies have explored children's picture books that focus on children grappling with familial struggles and mental health, such as depression. This research therefore examined the children's picture book, *Balloons for Papa: A Story of Hope and Empathy*, written by Elizabeth Gilbert Bedia and illustrated by Erika Meza, primarily aiming to reveal 1) how a child's determination and depression are portrayed, and 2) the author's ideology and critical position. A qualitative approach was taken to analyze the data. Hall's representation theory, which focuses on the constructionist approach, was chosen to gain a better understanding of how the author's culture, situation, and society contributed to their creation of the book. Meanwhile, Barthes' semiotic approach was utilized as a tool to examine the illustrations. The findings underscored the empathetic qualities of Arthur, the main character of the story, which drive his relentless pursuit to restore his father's happiness. However, it is critically acknowledged that the representation of Papa may not offer a definitive portrayal of depression. Nevertheless, Bedia's narrative still aligns with the broader discourse on depression awareness and the resilience of a child's determination, contributing to a nuanced understanding of these complex themes within the context of the picture book. In addition to providing insight into the pivotal themes of hope, empathy, and mental well-being within the context of children's literature, this research unraveled the intricate interplay between hope and empathy, while also portraying a child's determination against the backdrop of depression.

Keywords: *depression; mental disorder; picture book; representation; self-determination*

INTRODUCTION

A children's picture book is a piece of literature designed for children aged 0 - 13 years, combining written text with illustrations or images to narrate a story (Kusumayanti, 2019). These books typically feature vibrant artwork that enhances the narrative, making them captivating and accessible to young readers (Setiarini et al., 2021). This article discusses a picture book entitled *Balloons for Papa: A Story of Hope and Empathy* (henceforth *Balloons for Papa*) (2021) written by an American audiologist, researcher, and

teacher from central Iowa, Elizabeth Gilbert Bedia. Bedia's story is a poignant one (Paulson, 2020) of a boy whose world is clouded by his mother's illness and his father's depression.

This picture book tells us a story about a child named Arthur and his gloomy Papa. Every morning, they walk past the same seller of balloons on their way to visit Mama in the hospital, and Arthur always asks Papa to buy him some balloons. However, Papa always says no to Arthur's request. Papa has lost his smile

since Mama gets hospitalized, but not until one day do they notice some balloons tangled in a tree. Arthur grabs the balloons and gives them to Papa. From this, Arthur realizes why he wants the balloon in the first place, which is to help Papa find his smile again.

This picture book is primarily focused on Arthur's side. To sprout a strong determination to help others in need in his surroundings, Arthur needs to have some empathy and motivation. Children's determination to chase something that they want often arrives with some motivations that grows within them. The motivation that the children have is often associated with the achievement of their dream, and at the same time, it is frequently linked with pleasant perceptions of psychological need fulfillment (Sebire et al., 2013). These factors in psychology may be the cause of increasing children's efforts to pursue what they are interested in.

In the case of empathy, whether or not they have high determination, children aged 5 to 6 could detect facial expressions in the shortest time and with the lowest visual effort, and individuals with high empathy performed better in the search than those with low empathy (Yan et al., 2017). Hence, it is only a matter of how fast children can recognize through facial expressions whether people around them need helps or not. However, the decision in helping them solely relies on the level of empathy.

It is interesting to find a well-written children's picture book that discusses mental disorders because they can be as chronic as physical disorders. Another point to add is that mental disorders can last a long time and rarely totally go away (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2022). The problems with mental disorders have a wide range, from the feeling of worry to the extent where such feeling gets serious and has long-term impacts. Most people who suffer from mental disorders can usually accept this condition, particularly if they get help, which they need early on (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023). Unfortunately, more than half of these people who suffer from various mental disorders merely go unhandled medically, and it makes them sustain such unnecessary pain because the symptoms (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014).

There are many types of mental disorders, such as addictive behaviors, depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and schizophrenia, to name but a few (World Health Organization, 2023). This research only

focused on depression as its main issue to scrutinize. The word "depression", in the broader understanding of people, seems to emphasize the mental sensation of being weighed down, as if under a heavy burden that dampens one's desire to live. This description coincides with the sentiments often expressed by individuals experiencing depression, such as feelings of sadness, melancholy, or simply being down all the time (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023).

In this study, Hall's Theory Representation was employed due to its relevance to the subject matter. Additionally, Barthes' semiotic approach was utilized as a tool to examine the illustrations. The goals of this study were 1) to find out how a child's determination and depression are portrayed and 2) to discover the author's critical position. In accordance with this, the theoretical frameworks should assist in both constructing the structure of the analysis and achieving its goal.

Hall's theory of representation connects meaning and language to culture; it is a process to produce and exchange meaning between the members of a culture. Meaning is never attached to the object in itself (Hall, 1997). Meaning is produced and shared. The production of meaning will soon create knowledge that we share with others through language. Furthermore, there are two systems of representation that give us the possibility of understanding the meaning. They are mental representation and language representation, as stated:

A set of concepts that we carry around in our heads every day is a mental representation. Without the so-called mental representation, we can never decipher the world meaningfully at all in the first place. The meaning itself depends on the system of images and concepts that are formed in our thoughts which can stand for, or 'represent' the world.

(Hall, 1997: 17)

In Hall's Theory of Representation, three approaches can be used to explain how representation works. They are *reflective*, *intentional*, and *constructionist* approaches. The constructionist approach is used to conceive of the relationship between the author's background and the subject that is talked about in the picture book. In the constructionist approach, meaning is constructed

and produced by the author using a conceptual system of culture and a representational system (Hall, 1997). Anything that influences her and the context portrayed in the picture book cannot be separated. Therefore, the function of Barthes' semiotic approach is used to examine the data in the form of illustrations. The incorporation of a semiotic approach in this study aligns with Hall's view that it is a general approach to understand signs in culture and culture itself as a form of language (Hall, 1997). Barthes' semiotic method, as employed here, delves into the relationship between meaning and knowledge production through language, specifically dissecting the illustration in the children's picture book under investigation.

Building upon Barthes' (Barthes, 1964) semiotics, which aims to encompass any system of signs, regardless of their substance and boundaries, the examination involved recognizing the signifier and the signified within Saussurean terminology, where the substance—be it in the form of words, images, or sounds—acts as the signifier. By scrutinizing the visual elements, the study aimed to uncover the contextual significance of the illustrations in the picture book, highlighting the intricate process by which meaning is generated through the combination of the signifier and the signified. This includes images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the intricate connections among them, which comprise the content of rituals, conventions, or public entertainment. These elements, to say the least, constitute systems of signification (Barthes, 1964).

Previous studies that are correlated with the topic of the picture book have brought important insight to discussions on child determination and depression. For instance, Sukma (2018) has given an incredible example of utilizing the theory of representation by Hall. She analyzed how the author of *The Girl on the Train* represented the woman's choice discourse through all the problems that are experienced by women in that specific era based on the post-feminist perspective. Meanwhile, Iodice et al. (2021) studied the relationship between gratitude and depression, their results showing that individuals with higher levels of appreciation and gratitude traits report more positive effects, optimism, and fulfillment in life.

Yan et al. (2017) found that children detect painful expressions faster than others compared to expressions of anger, sadness, and happiness. With

the ability to detect expressions faster than others, this leads us to the next article by Pekince (2018). His article sparks interest in children's perspectives on the right to self-determination. He finds that the students can make decisions on daily matters such as clothing and food, but they are given no options in matters that could affect their lives, such as school selection.

A picture book is full of illustrations with, sometimes, a lot of colors, hence an idea that discusses color is needed. Tavaragi & Sushma's research report on color (2016) fits current study. They talk about colors' significance and their effects on humans' psychology. This article helps to interpret the meanings of every color utilized in Bedia's picture book.

Despite the comprehensiveness and complexity of the previous studies, none have used representation theory as a framework or semiotic approach as a tool to discover the representation of child determination and depression in *Balloons for Papa* (2021). The correlation between Bedia's background and the story that she wrote is also worth further exploration.

The core assertion of this present article is that *Balloons for Papa* urgently tackles the issue of raising awareness about depression within the family environment for young readers. Bedia uses Arthur's character to vividly portray the real-life challenges encountered by children with depressed parents, offering readers a compassionate pathway to navigate through such hardships.

Surprisingly, there has been a conspicuous lack of articles dwelling into the topic of mental well-being in children's picture books. This article seeks to fill that gap and bring attention to an area that has long been left unexplored. The significance of this exploration cannot be overstated, as it sheds light on a topic of profound importance for the well-being of young minds grappling with familial struggles.

This study applies a qualitative approach to analyze the data. The data are taken from Bedia's children's picture book (2021) on pages that necessarily contain the primary information. The primary data on a child's self-determination and depression are in the form of verbal dialogues stated by the characters, visual presentation, and narration on the plotline in the picture book. These also include Bedia's perspective on depression and a child's self-determination, which are written on her social media and websites.

This current research starts with collecting and

analyzing the primary data. This process reveals all the changes that Arthur has, mainly on how Arthur becomes so determined to help Papa find his smile again, and on discovering the representation of the symptoms of depression. The second step is gathering and analyzing all information correlated with Bedia. The last step is to connect the verbal and visual data with the author's biographical context. This process culminates in the revelation of Bedia's background to seek out her critical position.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A Child's Determination

The goal of this research is to unravel every single impact of Papa's action that leaves Arthur feeling sorrowful and blaming himself. Another point to add, even though Papa's cold treatment of Arthur is unacceptable and pretty much wrong for any parent to do, Arthur still somehow finds the motivation to keep on going with the goal of helping Papa cope with what is bothering him. With this sudden Arthur's determination, every single aspect that inspires him to be this way should be found out.

In this picture book, all Arthur wants is the bundle of balloons to make Papa smile again, because those balloons never fail to make him smile. His determination to get what he wants is so powerful that what he truly wants appears in a dream. In his dream, there is Mama, who is illustrated smiling and wearing a white summer dress with a flower pattern on it while holding onto the bundle of balloons that Arthur desperately wishes to have. Mama's depiction in Arthur's dream—which appears like a day and night compared to Papa's depiction—indicates what Arthur truly wants. He wishes to see Mama healthy, and witnesses Papa gaining his smile once again. However, Arthur does not recognize it just yet.

The summer dress with a flower pattern that Mama wears is illustrated in white. To Tavaragi and Sushma (2016), the color white is often associated with clarity and purity, while to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), white means glory. This portrayal of Mama's dress indicates the clarity that is about to come in the middle of the adversities that Arthur and Papa come across. Following Barthes (1964), this color white signifies Arthur's pure intention of helping Papa cope with his sadness. While for the flower pattern on Mama's dress, it might have been added by Bedia to

give some more positive emotions in Arthur's dream. There is a strong relationship between flowers and positive emotions, and it has been shown that they could enhance positive moods and make people smile (Huss et al., 2017). The flower pattern in Mama's dress is given the colors of red and yellow. Red symbolizes life, and yellow portrays happiness (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016).

Besides Mama, there is also a kite flying around her. The kite itself is often associated by people as a symbol of freedom because it resembles the ability of a bird that can fly high up in the sky (Arteno & Gray, 2023). The color of the kite is pink which symbolizes love and gentleness (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). In other words, this portrayal of a flying pink kite can also be interpreted that it is time for Papa to let go of all the burdens that he bears, and to start to be kind to himself.

On the page about Arthur's dream, all the birds are depicted flying around. Bedia possibly considers it this way to show Arthur's increment in his determination to help Papa find his smile again. This page on Arthur's dream about Mama could also work as a transition to a brighter overall tone of the story where Arthur is about to put a smile on Papa's face. For that reason, the birds are depicted flying around instead of sitting on the branches of the trees.

Birds' portrayal in literature is generally used as a symbol of love, a feeling of peace, and freedom (D'coutho, 2016). Compared to the sitting birds on the branches of the trees that symbolize Papa's impediment to act the way he used to behave due to the storm brewing inside his head, the flying birds can be seen as a representation of freedom and peacefulness. In other words, Arthur and Papa eventually need moments of freedom and peace from all the obstacles they encounter. Ultimately, they need to feel love for each other and perceive life from a brighter perspective.

People have an instinctive ability to connect with the emotional states they detect during interactions (Herrando & Constantinides, 2021). Consequently, Arthur who constantly interacts with Papa feels the same way as Papa during every interaction, such as sad, gloomy, miserable, and particularly, guilty. These traits which Arthur absorbs from Papa make him blame himself for what Papa has come to be. Arthur also manifests these traits through his facial expressions, body language, and external factors, like the weather

surrounding him, can also be a manifestation of the characteristics that he absorbs from Papa.

Throughout the entire story, Arthur is depicted with so many emotions, starting from a happy face due to wanting some balloons, a resentful expression that he shows because Papa rejects his requests, and finally, a sad and teary face when the overall feelings of Papa have been fully absorbed by Arthur. All these emotions that Arthur displays are materializations based on what Papa has inside his head, despite the minimal conversations that they have throughout the entire story. Even if the interaction lacks verbal signs, researchers have proven that emotions can still be infectious (Herrando & Constantinides, 2021).

In earlier pages, Arthur is depicted as having good posture. Nonetheless, as the story progresses, his upright posture gradually deteriorates into a slouched or poor posture. His change in body posture happens the more he imbibes Papa's emotions through the interaction that happens between them. He may walk normally at first, but as the story progresses, his back droops toward the ground as if he could feel the same burdens that Papa bears all this time.

The colorful balloons in this picture book are one of the most often seen, or not, the most standout portrayals which can be seen almost on every page. It is no wonder since the focus of this picture book itself is the balloons that are depicted as colorful amongst the world inside the picture book which seems so depressing and unfeasible to live for. This depiction of the contrast of the colors among the balloons and their surroundings is no matter of chance, Bedia intends it that way. Through this contrast, she shows how miserable life may seem from the perspective of Papa and Arthur when both individuals must deal with hard times in the story.

The colors of the balloons that Bedia uses in this picture book are mainly leaned on bright spectrums to make the contrast against the surrounding works. Although the balloons' colors are presented slightly differently on each page, they remain in the same spectrum of colors. All this choice of colors might have been chosen specifically to depict elements which Bedia wants to convey in her picture book. To explain the overall meaning of these colorful balloons, each color needs to be broken down little by little. Their colors which are based on the entire pages in this picture book are for the most part red, yellow, purple, green, blue, and pink.

Red is the color of choice to choose when attention is needed to be drawn, and it is the color of life. Red is also the color selection to show excitement. Yellow symbolizes the warmth of the sun which for people it can be seen as happiness and laughter from good times. Purple personifies the spiritual awareness of someone where wisdom is often the result of it. Green strikes eyes in such a way as to require no adjustment whatsoever and is, therefore, restful. Being in the center of the spectrum, green is the color of balance. Pink is the color of romance, love, and gentle feelings, to be in pink is to be soothed. Blue is the color of calmness, thus no wonder many bedrooms are painted blue.

(Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016)

Through this portrayal of the color selection of the balloons, Bedia appears to attach positive traits that Papa currently lacks in the earlier pages. He seems so lifeless, so giving red to the bundle of balloons adds another aspect to make it slightly alive and even more exciting. He is never depicted laughing hence adding yellow gives a sense of happiness. He does not appear to have self-control over his own mind due to grief or depression. Hence, purple which embodies spiritual awareness fills the wisdom he used to have. He is also portrayed as unable to do his task as Arthur's parent because of his ill wife, therefore green gives a balance. Pink fills the love that Papa has not possessed ever since Mama has fallen sick. Finally, Papa is always portrayed in a hurry every time they go visit Mama, as a result, the color blue in the balloons adds to the overall feeling of calmness, which he does not wield.

Arthur is always depicted wearing bright yellow shoes. It has been worn by Arthur since the first page, however, presumably not many readers have given attention to the slightly unnoticed bright yellow shoes at the first glance. Let alone assume that this could perhaps signify something. Yellow is the equivalence of the sun's color which is often linked with optimism (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016) Although the coloration on these shoes appears to be small and seems to be nothing compared to the other colors, the power of consistency mixed with some optimism is often underestimated by many. Though all his doing does not seem to work at first, he keeps trying again and again.

Despite Papa's contagious sadness and for a

split moment, Arthur also feels overwhelmed by his own thoughts, his powerful determination guards him to keep on going. This can also be seen in the depiction of Arthur's bright yellow shoes. The color yellow stimulates the part of the brain that produces serotonin; hence, it is psychologically the strongest color that can bring out emotional strength and optimism (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). Through Arthur's bright yellow shoes, Bedia symbolizes his strong determination. Arthur's little feet, though relatively small compared to Papa's, are functionally effective to make Papa find his smile again.

Arthur's sadness that he receives from Papa is also narrated through verbal text as well, "Arthur knew it wasn't his fault, but he still wondered, *why is Papa being this way?* His tears fell as fast as the rain." (Bedia & Meza, 2021). Despite it not being his fault, he still does not understand the reason why Papa acts so cold and distant, especially to him for no apparent reasons. This alone is enough to make him break down into tears, as if he shares the same sadness that Papa feels. The environment around him reflects this feeling too. The sky above him pours down a heavy load of rain, "The clouds burst open with a downpour. Arthur gazed up at them. 'Are you sad, too?'" (Bedia & Meza, 2021).

The Symptoms of Depression

In the second part of this discussion, the focus is prioritized on finding out whether Papa suffers from depression or grief through the symptoms or acts that Bedia shows in the children's picture book that she writes. In grief, the feelings of painfulness often arrive in the swell and rarely commingle with happy and positive memories of the dead ones, the self-esteem of someone who is in grief tends to be secured, and the notions of taking their lives only emerge when imagining, or thinking about partaking of the deceased loved ones (Torres, 2020). While in depression, the will to keep on living or the interest that once used to be there are slowly decreasing more or less in two weeks, the feelings of self-hate and being unworthy of everything are generally common, and it is normal that people who suffer from depression only focused on ending their lives every single day because of the feeling of the worthlessness, and undeserving of living due to the incapability of one to subsist with the pain of depression, which is often lifelong (Torres, 2020).

Barthes (1964) posits that even when visual

images closely resemble the objects they represent, they remain signs requiring interpretation. This perspective aligns with the idea that dominating gray color, as discussed by Kartashkova & Belyaeva (2021), can evoke feelings of emptiness and hollowness. The association of certain shades of gray with depression and a lack of direction underscores the need for interpretation of visual elements, emphasizing the nuanced meanings conveyed through colors and visuals in the study of signs and symbols. In this children's picture book written by Bedia, almost every object that is depicted is drawn in a dark color tone, for instance, gray color. The trees, every character's clothes that they wear, the birds, the clouds, the streetlamps, every seller in the park, the benches, and even the grass are portrayed in a grayish, sort of black and white type of color scheme, with a lack to no variations of colors. A lack of color is depressing, and when everything in someone's world turns gray, they are instinctively conditioned to draw in and start experiencing drowsiness (Kartashkova & Belyaeva, 2021). The portrayal of gray color in this picture book is intended by Bedia to show how miserable and depressive the world is from Papa's perspective.

The color black is often accompanied by grief in the western world, and it is a serious color that arouses strong emotions because it is easy to overwhelm people with too much of the color black (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). There are two significant psychological repercussions for the color black, for instance, it forms protective barriers by absorbing all the energy that comes towards it and enshrouding the personality (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). Even though the color black has certain positive traits, for example, it can convey a sense of clarity, sincerity, weight, eloquence, and unwavering brilliance, and it looks exceptionally effective with the color white. Nevertheless, since no wavelengths are reflected in the color black, it is essentially still an absence of light and it is often associated with the trait of coldness (Tavaragi & Sushma, 2016). It goes the same with the portrayal of Papa in this story, every part that represents him is made from a darkish color tone, hence creating this nuance that Papa has the personality of an uncaring person, especially towards Arthur.

Every author of literary works needs to have a specific background color that makes a significant contribution according to the message that they want

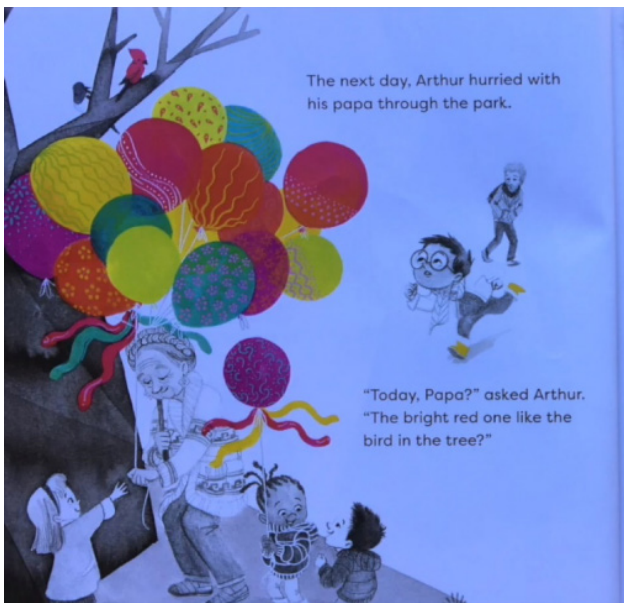


Figure 1. Arthur Excitedly Running towards the Balloons Seller.

to convey in their literary pieces (Gaiman, 2022). The reason behind it is that it can prompt the reader's associations, exude their emotions, and codes both rational and emotional information (Kartashkova & Belyaeva, 2021).

Hence, the compulsion of every literary author to make a choice of the background color of their piece of work, Bedia chooses a dark blue color. Some nuances of blue, or too much of it, can exemplify an uncaring, unemotional, unfriendly, aloof, and cold message (Kartashkova & Belyaeva, 2021). These all make perfect sense since the main theme of this picture book is how Arthur helps Papa cope with his depression or grief. These two traits are always associated with their cold and unfriendly characteristics due to the incapability of coping with the overwhelming sad feelings ones forcefully suffer with no control over at all (Torres, 2020).

This children's picture book most of the time shows the depiction of bad weather. The presence of dark clouds and rain is not coincidental with the narrative. Rain and dark clouds' portrayal is one of the most apparent and widely circulated uses for undertaking a depiction of a sad and gloomy mood for the entire segment. Thus, the weather in the picture book is characterized in this manner because Bedia intends to prolong her characters' feelings and emotions beyond the constraints of words. Tavaragi

& Sushma (2016) claim that dark color is often associated with negative effects on human perception, including sadness, coldness, and heaviness.

In the case of this picture book, Bedia intends to depict what Papa feels through the portrayal of dark clouds in the earlier pages. As the story goes, the clouds are only getting darker, the sky is about to rain, and almost every light from the sun is getting blocked out through the dark, tight clouds. Thus, it generates a feculent kind of weather with little to no sunshine, and then the rain finally pours out heavily when the middle part of the story seems so miserable and even more depressive than before. This portrayal of heavy rain occurs when Arthur feels pressured by Papa's sadness, while Papa himself seems unable to let go of the burden that he bears.

On this page, there is a repetitive sound of the rain, which is depicted through the onomatopoeia 'drip, drop, drip'. This rain sound in the verbal text goes hand in hand with the illustration of the falling rain, which shares the same condition and portrays a monotonous tone. By having this repetition, it allows Bedia to imprint the impression of the overall vibe of the story even more, which has already been given by the visual images. A youngster becomes acquainted with something by reiterating it multiple times repeatedly (Brown, 2022).

Each emotion has its own features and physical manifestations (Dursun-Karsli et al., 2010). Sadness is manifested in how Bedia describes the figure of Papa. Papa is represented as one with a sad, miserable, and deadpan facial expression to show that he indeed is not mentally able to function as a father properly. He is also depicted as one with a slouched back, always walking with his head looking down with a blank stare glued to the ground, which can also be an indication of sadness.

The sadness or depression, that Papa suffers can also be seen through his facial expression. His facial expression is represented by Bedia with arched eyebrows, glazed eyes, and frowning mouth. To add volume to his overall miserableness, Papa does not even have time or energy to shave his beard due to his misery. The appearance of the characters is used as signs and symbols to operate as a representational system, in language, to stand for or represent concepts, ideas, and feelings (Hall, 1997). Basically, Papa is shown with a saddening and helpless type of face where he does not even bother with his own personal

hygiene. Sadness is infrequently a momentarily and immobile emotion, which can also be characterized by helplessness and disappointment, and it is one of the most enduring feelings (Dursun-Karsli et al., 2010).

Bedia, in her children's picture book, furthermore utilizes birds as the representations of Papa's and Arthur's feelings on different occasions. For instance, in the earlier pages, the birds are consistently depicted sitting on tree branches, without flapping their wings or soaring high in the sky. This static portrayal coincides with the frequent presence of dark clouds and rain, symbolizing Papa's internal turmoil. The depiction of birds confined to the branches represents Papa's struggle to interact normally with Arthur. It reflects the storm brewing inside his head and hindering his usual behavior. Despite Papa's best efforts to reassure himself as a parent and show his child that everything will be alright, he still cannot overcome the overwhelming sadness consuming him.

According to Torres (2020), the incapability of coping with the overwhelming sad feelings one forcefully suffers with no control at all is one of the traits of someone who suffers from depression or who is grieving. Another portrayal of nature in this picture book is trees. Trees are drawn with no leaves at all here. Although trees particularly do not shed their leaves during the rainy season, most of them do so in the autumn season (Villazon, 2020). Despite the odd portrayal of the trees where they have no leaves at all at the beginning of the story, there must be a meaning behind it, which Bedia intentionally conceives it that way. It is the portrayal of Papa's recent behaviour. His behaviour is something that is not supposed to happen to him as the head of the family, or even as a parent. He is supposed to act strong and act normally in front of Arthur during times of crisis. However, since Papa is human and has some limitations as well, it is normal for him to feel exhausted and sad knowing that Mama has fallen sick.

Frequent encounters with sorrowful events in life can often lead to depression. In Papa's case, the unaddressed sadness he experiences gradually accumulates over time, manifesting in symptoms of depression, such as his lost smile, "Ever since Mama went to the hospital, Papa had lost his smile. Sometimes Arthur did, too" (Bedia & Meza, 2021: 4). One of the symptoms of depression is a persistent feeling of sadness (World Health Organization, 2023).

Papa's lost smile indicates that he may suffer from depression, yet one of the only prominent signs to differentiate between depression and grief is knowing for how long a person has been feeling down (Torres, 2020). Bedia does not specify the time for how many days Papa's wife has fallen sick and got hospitalized, which is an indication of Papa's first trigger to feel sad and down in this story.

Bedia has also included another symptom of depression, such as changes in nature from being optimistic to being more pessimistic and always seeing the world from a negative perspective, for instance, "Sadness filled Papa's eyes. 'No, Arthur. We need to hurry. Besides, the blustery clouds will whisk it away'" (Bedia & Meza, 2021: 5). In this dialogue, Papa always refuses Arthur's request to buy him some balloons. Papa seems to have been experiencing a heavy heart, which leads to a long-stuck sadness since Mama has gotten into the hospital. Hence, it is only reasonable if he frequently prioritizes Mama's health over some balloons. However, it will take more than that to make a legitimate representation of depression in a piece of literary work.

Although it may be true that Papa suffers from depression, yet, according to Torres (2020), grief can also occur with feelings of pain which mentally often arrive in the swell of a short time. Since the difference between depression and grief is paper-thin, thus, as long as Bedia does not specify the distinctive time of how long Papa has been feeling down, depression and grief will always fight their way to be the representation of what Papa suffers from.

Bedia's Critical Position

Related to the main theme in *Balloons for Papa* (2021), Bedia has also faced her fair share of difficult times when she experienced depression or profound gloom, much like the character Papa in the story, "I had feelings of worthlessness, and sometimes, I simply did not want to get out of bed in the morning" (Bedia & Meza, 2021: 31).

One of the first times Bedia felt depressed was when her daughter, who was just born, was unable to be comforted, and she was feeling exacerbated as well. She had tried everything she could to make her newborn daughter soothed but nothing worked, and it made her cry in desperation. However, one of the things that made Bedia feel in awe was when her six-year-old son's immense compassion tried to mitigate

her desperation in soothing her crying daughter. It was at that moment that she knew that her son had compassion toward her emotions. Based on that experience, she knew that children have honest souls and are true observers, "It was such a simple gesture, yet he knew and felt something was wrong with me and wanted to help." (Bedia & Meza, 2021: 31).

Those feelings that devastated Bedia did not just end there. A couple of years prior to the release of her children's picture book entitled *Balloons for Papa* (2021), her husband was diagnosed with stage three colon cancer. The terrible news that took her family by surprise indeed left everyone in the wreckage. They were really struggling, and barely functioning as a proper family because of her husband's diagnosis. However, "it was our daughter's strength and emotional awareness that helped each of us make it through the difficult journey together as a family" (Bedia & Meza, 2021: 31).

A day shortly after Bedia's husband got diagnosed with stage three colon cancer, her daughter tried to comfort her when she was about to go to school. Bedia's daughter turned her body to her and smiled while saying, "I'm here. I'll be strong for us, especially for Dad." (Bedia & Meza, 2021: 31). When Bedia's daughter showed her some empathy that she would be strong for their family, especially for her sick husband, it made her realize that it requires something beyond herself to persevere through such a stressful time, and it has made her reminded that it is not a sign of weakness to request some assistance.

Inspired by her real-life's tough times and her experience with depression, she continued to write on a few drafts which she had already written before her husband's diagnosis of stage three colon cancer. The heart-wrecking moments that she went through solidified her ideas about the child's character named Arthur and his storyline. Her daughter's compassionate traits also inspired Bedia to write about such an empathetic character like Arthur. The character Mama in the picture book is inspired by Bedia's husband because both suffer from illness. The character of Papa is the depiction of Bedia herself when she was battling with her sad feelings while simultaneously facing various obstacles.

Knowing that these characters are based on Bedia's family members indicates her critical stance on the topic she seeks to convey, especially since the entire storyline is a direct representation of her real-

life experiences. In other words, her critical stance demonstrates her complete support for the issues being discussed. The discussed issues in the picture book revolve around a child's determination and awareness of depression. She builds awareness of the readers of the book—be it children or parent—on how to handle and position each of the family members in a situation similar to the story.

CONCLUSION

By utilizing the Representation Theory by Hall and a semiotic approach by Barthes for this current study, the analysis of *Balloons for Papa* reveals that, first, Arthur possesses a profound level of emotional intelligence. His empathy and determination to restore Papa's long-lost smile, following Mama's illness, are evident throughout the story. Although Bedia does not explicitly express Arthur's empathy through his dialogue, it is perceptible through his actions and the surrounding environment, which Bedia intentionally shapes to underscore Arthur's empathetic traits.

Second, the depiction of Papa cannot exactly be pertained as a legitimate portrayal of depression due to the lack of representation of how long Papa has been feeling down. However, it can still be appreciated since the goal of Bedia is not to depict comprehensive symptoms of depression, rather to foster awareness and understanding of such condition to the readers.

Third, Bedia's critical position supports the thematic exploration of a child's determination and depression awareness in *Balloons for Papa*. Arthur's poignant quest to restore Papa's smile during difficult times draws inspiration from Bedia's own life experiences, where she grappled with profound sadness in the middle of various obstacles. Additionally, all the characters in the book are influenced by Bedia's family members, adding depth and authenticity to the narrative.

COMPETING INTEREST STATEMENT

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