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# Analysis of the Theme of Substance Abuse and Violence in Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler

Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler takes you to the year 2024; environmental degradation and economic collapse have all destroyed American society. Diseases like measles ravage the population, people fight and die over water, and new drugs take over the survivors. The only safety is found in closed communities like the one Lauren Olamina lives in with her family trapped where suburban families have come together to survive. This essay will discuss the struggles that substance abuse and violence cause throughout the book and in the society we live in today. Substance use disorders (SUDs) are associated with numerous medical, psychiatric, psychological, spiritual, economic, social, family, and legal problems, creating a significant burden for affected individuals, their families, and society.

Exposure to violent crime damages the health and development of victims, family members, and entire communities. Low-income communities and racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected. These topics play a big role in my life, coming from a low-income community where violence and substance abuse happen daily just like in Parable of the Sower. Octavia Butler uses the theme of violence throughout the entirety of Parable of the Sower. An effective way to view the violence in this novel is to, view it in the perspectives within which Butler positions it: it can be inherently harmful, inherently beneficial, and even a necessity for survival. When it comes to illegal substances, society has determined that the use is harmful and has placed legal prohibitions on its use.

This is to both protect individuals' well being and shield society from the costs involved with related healthcare resources, lost productivity, the spread of diseases, crime, and homelessness. The abuse of illegal substances has a direct connection with the violence. For example, the Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment noted that more than 75 percent of people who begin treatment for drug addiction report having performed various acts of violence, including mugging, physical assault, and using a weapon to attack another person. This shows that substance abuse affects the mental state of individuals and causes them to act in poor ways. In Parable of the Sower, there is a drug that makes individuals start fires in the community bringing them to destroy the homes of many families causing them to either end up homeless or dead.

The two types of drugs in the novel are, pyro and parateco. In the novel, these drugs are believed to cause extreme pleasure which makes it difficult to quit. According to the author, Pyro makes it better than sex to watch the fire burn. Keith, Lauren's brother, explains his close

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experience with pyro with his family, 'Hey, I saw a guy get both of his eyes gouged out. After that, they set him on fire and watched him run around and scream and burn'. The addicts of the drugs are known as 'paints' because they 'shave off all their hair - even their eyebrows - and they paint their skin green or blue or red or yellow. They eat fire and kill rich people'. Even Keith, who Lauren views as a psychopath, thinks that pyro is a bad drug that affects people negatively. The social importance of the paints killing rich people feeds into the division between the wealthy and the poor and the animosity that these breeds. The other drug is, Parateco - This drug is the reason for the hyperempathy syndrome that Lauren, Emery, Grayson, and other members of the community have. Called the 'smart pill' or 'the Einstein powder', Lauren's mother used it in graduate school. It became the status quo for students to use the pill because it made it easier to learn and retain knowledge. Only later did the bad side effects of the drug come out. Lauren's mother died while giving birth to her, and it is postulated that Parateco might have been the reason.

Arguably, the pivotal event of Butler's novel is when Lauren's community is destroyed and almost everyone is killed. During this event, everyone but Lauren and two other residents are brutally killed by either gunshot or fire, leaving their neighborhood in shambles. Butler uses this scene to help portray the harmful violence that occurs throughout the novel. Zahra Moss, one of the survivors, describes to Lauren about how she was raped before she was able to escape. Those that destroyed the community were on the drug Pyro. Another instance of harmful violence related to drugs occurs when Lauren describes her brother's death. "Someone had cut and burned away most of my brother's skin. Everywhere except his face. They burned out his eyes". When Keith decided to go beyond the gate, he got into dealing with these harmful drugs. His family suspects that he was tortured and killed by other drug dealers that saw him as a competition. These events show that the drugs are the basis of the harmful violence found throughout the novel. Another perspective portrayed in the novel is that violence could also be beneficial for some individuals.

After Lauren's community is destroyed, she returns to find many of the street poor scavengings through the empty houses and stealing things from the corpses. Not everyone is able to live within the safe, gated communities; therefore, they are able to benefit from the violence that was imposed onto communities by stealing from people's bodies or the houses. Another example of violence being beneficial for some is the idea that violence can be used to end the pain. When Lauren and some others from her neighborhood go shooting one day with her dad, they come across some dogs that are potentially dangerous. After her dad shoots one, it doesn't completely die. Lauren can feel its pain, and it becomes too much for her so she herself ends up shooting it. This can be seen when she states "With my right hand, I drew the Smith & Wesson, aimed, and shot the beautiful dog through its head." Lauren only uses violence here to end her own pain and suffering, as well as that of the dog.

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All things considered, substance abuse and violence in different communities affect the way the community functions and the way families work together as well. As explained before, exposure to violent crime damages the health and development of victims, family members, and entire communities. Low-income communities and racial and ethnic minorities are disproportionately affected. Although a large number of people may believe that violence and substance abuse only affect the people who are engaging these activities, substance abuse and violence affect everyone who is being surrounded by this activity as well. In addition to this, people who witness violence, whether it is hearing, seeing, or experiencing it, are at higher risk of PTSD.

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