

Analysis of Emotional Regulation in Koe No Katachi

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Abstract

This descriptive qualitative research aims to identify the forms of emotion regulation of the main characters in the film Koe no Katachi (A Silent Voice) using Gross and John's (2003) Emotion Regulation Process Model, and to analyze their narrative representation through Chatman's (1978) Story and Discourse framework. The study employed the documentation method for data collection and Thematic Analysis for interpretation. This analysis involved Theory Operationalization and Initial Coding, where Gross and John's framework classified psychological forms and Chatman's framework categorized narrative structures. The research findings indicate that healing and successful emotional regulation must begin with adaptive antecedent-focused strategies. Narratively, the film critiques the suppression of expression driven by collectivist cultural norms and ideologically promotes emotional openness as an absolute prerequisite for achieving narrative New Equilibrium. This research contributes to providing an integrated reading between clinical psychology and cinematic studies. Practically, this study serves as a foundation for educators and counselors to utilize film as an educational medium in mental health literacy programs in schools.

Keywords: Chatman's narrative theory, Emotional regulation, Koe no katachi.

Introduction

When a teenager becomes a victim of bullying or faces extreme social pressure at school, common reactions often observed include withdrawing from social interaction, avoiding eye contact, or responding to problems with a forced smile. This action of hiding or managing emotions in response to a situation is what is known as emotional regulation. To understand this action further, Emotional Regulation itself is formally defined by Gross and John (2003) as "conscious or unconscious efforts made by individuals to influence what emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express them."

In regulatory efforts, the strategies used can be classified as adaptive or maladaptive. Adaptive strategies are effective coping mechanisms that help individuals manage their emotions without causing long-term psychological impact. For example, Cognitive Reappraisal changes the interpretation of a situation to reduce negative emotional impact. Conversely, maladaptive strategies are unsuccessful coping attempts that do not help individuals overcome environmental demands or achieve goals, and may even worsen underlying psychological problems. As explained by Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Schweizer (2010), maladaptive strategies (such as Expressive Suppression) have a strong correlation with various psychopathological conditions because they do not address the root causes of suppressed emotions. The tendency to use these maladaptive strategies is reinforced in collectivist cultural environments, such as Japan, which prioritize social harmony over personal emotional expression. This psychological and sociocultural phenomenon of emotional regulation difficulties is explored in depth in the animated film Koe no Katachi (2016), which highlights the long-term psychological consequences of unmanaged emotions.

This research relies on basic literature on emotional regulation, thus ranking it at the forefront of human development. According to Thompson (1994), emotional regulation capability is one of the main themes in psychological development. In the traditional psychoanalytic approach to this area, Freud (1923) indicates that the relationship between the ego and the "id" plays a major role in how people control their emotional desires in order to adapt to reality. This was further clarified by Goleman (1995), who asserts that the capability for emotional intelligence in regulating mood plays a much more vital role than the capability of intellectual intelligence in someone's success at social adaptation. Koole's (2009) work can be seen as an integration review in bringing in both the cognitive and motivational roles in regulating this function. In terms of its underlying constructs, Smith & Lazarus (1990) postulate that emotions are the "result of adaptive judgments of the environment" in which how people perceive events will define how they adapt in terms of coping mechanisms. For mechanisms specifically in how this can be implemented, how people apply either distraction or reappraising cognition in how they can handle bad emotions was the tasking of the paper from Sheppes, Scheibe, Suri & Gross (2011). On the

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negative side, bad regulation like emotional suppression has been empirically shown to obtain a robust relationship with all types of psychological problems like “anxiety and depression” in the meta-analytic view in the work of Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema & Schweizer in the year 2010.

Emotion regulation processes cannot be distinguished from the role of the social and cultural surroundings. Matsumoto and Juang (2017) and Mesquita and Frijda (1992) discuss how, in collective cultures, especially in Japan, emotional regulation is encouraged so that social harmony is ensured. Concerning the school setting, the role of emotional regulation breakdown, especially triggered by bullying at school, is explained in detail through the conceptual model given by Olweus (1993). The effects of this breakdown, including severe withdrawal, have been researched clinically through the study of social isolation disorders given by Beny Hermawan (2015). Apart from that, some external stimuli, like family and permissive parenting, also influence the problems of emotional regulation faced by children, as explained in the study given by Nita Ambarwati (2016).

The application of anime in research is valid and consistent with experts because of the capability of anime in representing psychological realities. Brenner (2007) explained that anime applies specific visual symbols that can show the internal condition of a character that cannot be described, making it a powerful tool for communication among adolescents. In connection with this, Cavallaro (2014) pointed out that “anime may be viewed as a symbolic vessel for examining themes of trauma and repression.” In this sense, the application of a semiotics approach, specifically Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), helps describe the construction of meaning from the “visual grammar” that includes symbolism and framing. Another evidence of the capability of anime in representing human emotions was provided by Borlaza (2021) involving emotional realism, and also Achsan Gibran Elang Perkasa and Nurul Vinisa Aisyah (2017) involving child abuse problems. In the movie *Koe no Katachi*, specifically, Samsudin Nur Hidayat (2019) was also successful via a semiotics analysis, determining that this film contains specific narrative aspects involving the complexity of interpersonal and emotional aspects.

Although previous research has confirmed that the film *Koe no Katachi* is a valid text for psychological and narrative studies, there are still significant gaps because these studies are descriptive and isolated. Previous studies have tended to stop at character descriptions or general symbol discovery, and have failed to create a methodological bridge between clinical emotion classification and cinematic storytelling mechanisms. This gap lies in the lack of analysis that integrates Gross and John's (2003) psychological framework (for classifying specific forms of emotion regulation such as Expressive Suppression) with Chatman's (1978) narrative framework (for analyzing the structure of Discourse presentation). This integration creates a novel contribution: it allows researchers not only to accurately identify what forms of maladaptive emotion regulation are occurring, but also to structurally explain how the film uses specific narrative devices (Focalization, Symbolism) to visualize and validate the characters' experiences of isolation and repression. Thus, this study aims to fill the literature gap by providing a dual validation analysis of emotion representation. Based on the background and research gaps mentioned, the objectives of this study are: (1) To identify and analyze the forms of emotion regulation depicted by the main characters in the film *Koe no Katachi*; (2) Analyzing how the film *Koe no Katachi* narratively represents this emotional regulation.

Research Method

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach with a focus on text analysis, aiming to interpret and explain the complex meanings of emotional regulation representations in film. This method is suitable for analyzing the in-depth and unstructured representations in film media. The research object is the representation of emotional regulation in the animated film *Koe no Katachi* (A Silent Voice) (2016), while the research subjects are the narrative and visual elements that directly depict the forms of emotional regulation of the main characters, Shouya Ishida and Shouko Nishimiya. As defined by Sudaryanto (2015), the research object is “the problem or target to be researched,” and the research subject is “the data source where the research object is found.”

The data in this study consists of primary data (scene snippets, dialog, and symbols indicating emotion regulation) and secondary data (journals, Gross & John's and Chatman's theoretical books). The primary data collection technique is documentation, which involves repeated viewing, marking key scenes, and copying relevant visual-narrative data. The procedure for selecting primary data was carried out using thematic criteria, meaning scenes were chosen that showed non-verbal (facial expressions, body language) or verbal (dialogue, monolog) manifestations of emotional regulation.

Data analysis was conducted using the thematic analysis technique on an ongoing basis. The analysis procedure began with Theory Operationalization and Initial Coding: Gross and John's (2003) framework was operationalized as the basic code classification framework for the first question (e.g., Expressive Suppression or Cognitive Reappraisal), while Chatman's (1978) framework was operationalized as the contextual coding framework for the second question (e.g., Point of View or Symbolism). Next, the codes were grouped into larger Themes (e.g., Cultural Maladaptation, Visualization of Guilt, Self-Redemption). The final step is Interpretation and Triangulation, where the findings from the psychological coding in the first question are cross-validated with the narrative findings in the second question to explain how and why specific forms of emotion regulation are presented cinematically.

Result and Discussion

This part presents the findings from a descriptive qualitative analysis of the animated film *Koe no Katachi* (A Silent Voice), outlining the representation of emotional regulation experienced by the main characters, Shouya Ishida and Shouko Nishimiya. The analysis was conducted using triangulation theory, which combines the framework of emotional regulation psychology, narrative theory, and visual semiotics. The results and discussion are grouped into two main sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter identifies and categorises the forms of emotional regulation in the film, using the emotion regulation model to distinguish between types of emotional regulation. The second sub-chapter discusses how emotional regulation packaged and communicated through the film's narrative structure, discourse, and visual symbols.

Forms of emotional regulation portrayed in Koe no Katachi

This part aims to identify and classify forms of emotional regulation, experienced by Shouya Ishida and Shouko Nishimiya in the film. The analysis was done using the Emotion Regulation Theory framework from Gross and John (2003), which divides interventions into Antecedent-Focused Strategies and Response-Focused Strategies.

Table 1. Form of Emotional regulation

No.	Form of emotional regulation	Data	Description
1.	Situation Selection	Scene 0:01:41 	In that scene, it is shown that Shouya Ishida attempts suicide by jumping off a bridge to escape his feelings of guilt and the negative behaviour of those around him.
		Scene 0:08:45 	In this scene, Nishimiya is seen standing away from her classmates. This is because Nishimiya wants to avoid unwanted negative feelings.
		Scene 0:09:08 	In this scene, it is clear that Nishimiya only watches her classmates chatting from a distance and avoids getting closer to minimise the negative emotions she feels towards her friends who bully her.
		Scene 0:24:05 	Here we see Nishimiya running away when she encounters Shouya Ishida. This is because Nishimiya is avoiding negative emotions and flashbacks from her past, when she was bullied by Shouya Ishida.
		Scene 0:28:04 	Shouya attempted to end his life in an effort to avoid the negative views of society, shame, and future pain.

2. Expressive Suppression		Dialogue: I was going to jump of a tall bridge and die yesterday
	Scene 1:13:26 	In this scene, Shouya Ishida meets his old friend Kazuki Shimada. This reminds him of his past when he bullied Nishimiya, which made him feel guilty, and when he was isolated by others for bullying Nishimiya so much. Therefore, Shouya Ishida avoids Shimada so as not to remember the bad events of his past and avoid negative emotions.
	Scene 1:38:12 	Nishimiya chose to end her own life so as not to be a burden and to avoid the negative views of society, shame, and future pain for Ishida, which made her feel guilty because Nishimiya thought it was all her fault.
	Scene 0:10:09 	In this scene, Nishimiya says 'Frens', which means she is inviting Shouya Ishida to be friends even though Shouya Ishida has bullied her. Nishimiya's attempt to befriend him is a way of suppressing the pain she feels as a result of being bullied.
	Scene 0:13:14 	
	Scene 0:13:58 	Here we see that Nishimiya is bullied repeatedly by her classmates, who take away her hearing aid, throw it away, shout loudly in her ear, hit with a broom on the leg when she tries to pass, scribbled on her books, splashed with water, and forcibly taken her hearing aid until her ear bleeds. After all the bullying done by Shouya Ishida, Nishimiya hides her emotions and acts like nothing happened, and she apologises to Shouya Ishida.
	Scene 0:14:50	



Scene 0:20:26



Here we see that Shouya Ishida experiences bullying similar to what he did to Nishimiya. Shouya is pelted with balls, strangled from behind, his shoes are thrown in the rubbish bin, his books are torn up, and doused with water. Shouya Ishida acts as if nothing is wrong, even when Nishimiya tries to help him by cleaning the table that his friends have dirtied. He refuses to do so, showing that Shouya Ishida is suppressing his emotions in order to appear fine.

Scene 0:29:33



Dialogue:

I realized that your sins , always come back to bite you

Scene 0:29:39



Dialogue:

And that I had to bear that cross and the punishment that came with it

Scene: 0:44:43



In this scene, it is revealed that Nishimiya's younger sister posted Shouya's photo on Twitter using a fake account under Shouya's name, and because of that, Shouya was suspended from school and banned from the lake. However, after Nishimiya's younger sister confesses that she was the one who posted it, Shouya acts as if nothing happened and thinks that Shouya deserved it, and even takes him home to eat together.

Scene: 0:30:16



Shouya turned his eye away from other people by placing an X on the faces of people he did not know. He did this to distract his attention from other people.

3. Cognitive Reappraisal

4. Attentional Deployment

Scene: 1:22:40



While others argued about who was at fault and who was on whose side, Shouya Ishida chose to look down to distract himself.

This part presents an in-depth analysis of the forms of emotion regulation used by the main characters, Shouya Ishida and Shouko Nishimiya, based on the Gross and John (2003) framework of Antecedent-Focused Strategies and Response-Focused Strategies. The research findings collectively indicate that the characters' emotion regulation is dominated by maladaptive strategies centered on avoidance and suppression, with the primary goal being to disconnect from negative emotions resulting from bullying trauma and internal guilt.

The most prominent form of emotion regulation in both characters is response-focused strategies, specifically Expressive Suppression. In the case of Shouko Nishimiya, this is manifested through empty/fake smiles and silence in the face of bullying. Analysis shows that the emphasis on this expression is driven by cultural pressure to maintain social harmony. This aligns with the findings of Matsumoto and Juang (2017) and Mesquita and Frijda (1992), who explain that collectivist cultures tend to encourage emotional suppression. Expressive suppression is a maladaptive strategy because, although it successfully maintains external peace, it increases internal pressure and has a strong correlation with various psychological disorders, as confirmed by the meta-analysis of Aldao, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Schweizer (2010).

Chronic failure to use adaptive emotion regulation strategies leads to catastrophic consequences through maladaptive forms of antecedent-focused strategies. Situation selection reaches a critical level, where suicidal ideation in both characters (Scene 0:28:04; Scene 1:38:12) is the final attempt to avoid eternal guilt and social judgment. This action implies that suppressed emotions have become an unbearable psychological burden. Furthermore, Attentional Deployment is visualized through the 'X' mark covering the faces of others. This 'X' mark is a psychological mechanism that forcibly diverts Shouya's attention from potential judgment, reflecting extreme self-isolation. Theoretically, the dominance of Expressive Suppression, extreme Situation Selection, and maladaptive Attentional Deployment (isolation) proves that bullying trauma (Olweus, 1993) is a primary trigger for emotional regulation failure in Shouya and Shouko.

Despite the dominance of maladaptive strategies, the film depicts a crucial adaptive shift through Cognitive Reappraisal in Shouya. He began to see his isolation and suffering not as meaningless torment, but as "deserved punishment" and atonement for his past sins. This shift is crucial because it transforms the interpretation of guilt into a motivation for redemption—a step that replaces destructive repression with acceptance and responsibility. The theoretical implication is that the film *Koe no Katachi* accurately depicts that healing and successful emotional regulation must begin with adaptive antecedent-focused strategies, rather than with a cosmetic emphasis on expression alone.

How Koe no Katachi depict emotional regulation narratively

This part analyzes how the emotional regulation identified in the previous subchapter is packaged and presented to the audience through the film's narrative structure, which is analyzed using Seymour Chatman's Narrative Theory (1978). Chatman distinguishes between Story and Discourse. Through this perspective, emotional regulation is not only seen as a psychological symptom (Story), but also as a narrative element that is communicated visually and structurally (Discourse). This analysis will highlight the use of visual symbols and point of view used by the director to express the inner condition of the depressed character.

Table 2. koe no katchi emotional regulation depict

No.	Narative Aspect	Data	Description	Connection to Emotional Regulation
1.	Story: character	Protagonist: Shouya Ishida	These two protagonists are the triggers of Shouya and Nishimiya's negative emotion towards each other, Shouya by switching his attention and Nishimiya by suppressing her emotions, while the antagonist is the main cause of negative emotion, such as naoka ueno.	The main regulatory conflicts experienced by the character are manifestations of Expressive Suppression (Shouko) and Attentional Deployment (Shouya).
				
		Shouko Nishimiya		
2.	Story: events		At the equilibrium stage, everything is still normal and there are no conflicts or	This sequence shows that the release of emotions is a requirement for
		Antagonist: Naoka ueno		
				
		Equilibrium: when nishimiya first arrived Scene 0:04:38	At the equilibrium stage, everything is still normal and there are no conflicts or	This sequence shows that the release of emotions is a requirement for

	 Disruption: when Nishimiya was bullied Scene 0:10:16  Recognition: when Ishida was bullied Scene 0:20:26  Repair: When Ishida met Nishimiya again Scene 0:23:46  New equilibrium : after Ishida entered the hospital Scene 1:49:42 	emotional regulation; everything is peaceful. At the disruption stage, conflicts begin to arise, the previously peaceful conditions become unbalanced, such as when Nishimiya invites Ishida to be friends even though Ishida has been bullying Nishimiya. In the recognition stage, Ishida begins to realize that there is a problem, such as him bullying Nishimiya excessively, which causes people around him to distance themselves from him. In the repair stage, Ishida makes an effort to resolve the conflict and restore balance, such as meeting Nishimiya again after a long time. In the new equilibrium stage, a new balance is established that is different from the original one, such as Ishida's old friends returning and Nishimiya's and Ishida's parents becoming friends. The sequence of events establishes trauma as the root of the conflict, which can only be resolved through emotional resolution at the New Equilibrium stage. achieving a new balance, not just the final outcome of the story. An unsafe school environment that forced Shouko and Shouya to use Expressive Suppression and Situation Selection. Bridges and rivers become the main symbols of self-redemption and emotional release, where the process of Cognitive Reappraisal begins. The Japanese urban environment strengthens the cultural background that supports the suppression of negative emotions as a social norm.
3. Story: setting	Time setting: Elementary School Scene 0:04:00	The setting of time in elementary school is the beginning of trauma This period shows Ishida as the bully and Nishimiya as the victim. Adolescence occurs School environment strengthens the narrative that past emotional regulation failures (Disruption) control



Adolescence / high school
Scene 0:29:49



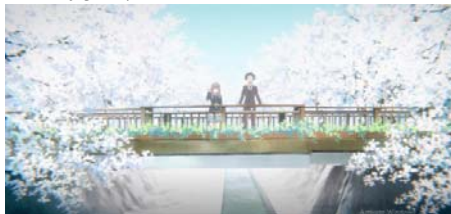
Place setting:
School
0:29:49



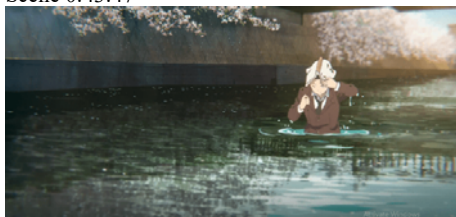
Classroom
Scene 0:04:00



bridge
Scene 0:32:27



River
Scene 0:43:47



japanese urban environment,
Scene 0:57:35

after the timeskip. This period focuses on Ishida, who is ostracized by those around him and begins a process of redemption. The school or classroom setting becomes a place of bullying. In high school, the classroom symbolizes Ishida's exclusion by those around him. The bridge becomes the meeting place for Ishida and Nishimiya and the site of Ishida's suicide attempt. The river, where Nishimiya jumps in followed by Ishida.

character actions in the present.

		 Park Scene 0:09:08 	
4.	Story : theme	bullying and regret Scene 0:13:12  The main themes in the movie "A Silent Voice" are: Systematic bullying and trauma in elementary school (hearing aid removal, ostracism). and the regret that caused Shouya's deep guilt after ostracism, driving him to meet Nishimiya and seek redemption. The theme of regret in this film depicts the main trigger for regulatory failure, leading to socially imposed trauma (narrative disruption) that forces the characters to choose maladaptive strategies. The theme of regret in this film triggers adaptive cognitive reappraisal (transforming guilt into a goal of redemption) and situation modification (attempting to repair relationships).	
5.	Discourse: point of view	The film uses a third-person point of view, but it's filtered through Shouya's perception. Scene 1:58:54  This film uses a third-person point of view that focuses on Ishida with a little addition of Nishimiya. The film shows how Ishida bullies Nishimiya and how Ishida feels and reacts when he is bullied, resulting in maladaptive emotional regulation to repress his negative emotion. This point of view validates Ishida's guilt and forces the audience to feel the repressed emotional burden of Shouya, strengthening the psychological impact of self-isolation.	
6.	Discourse: symbol	x mark on the face scene 0:30:16  Nishimiya's empty smile Scene 0:13:14 The X symbol represents rejection and total isolation. The X symbol represents Ishida's guilt and social anxiety, which causes Shouya to be reluctant to look at faces and interact with other people. Shouko's empty smile is a mask to hide her suffering, pain, and frustration. This smile is Shouko Nishimiya's attempt to tell everyone that she is fine. The symbol 'X' is a visualization of the maladaptive Attentional Deployment strategy. A blank smile is a visual representation of Expressive Suppression.	

			
7. Discourse: Ideological Framing	Moral of the film: Healing requires open communication, accepting vulnerability, and breaking the cycle of isolation (Festival/Final Reunion Scene). Scene 02:04:38 	This film promotes an ideology against social silence.	This film subtly critiques Expressive Suppression (a Japanese cultural norm) and promotes emotional openness as the only way to achieve well-being.

This part analyzes how psychologically identified forms of emotion regulation are packaged and presented to the audience through Chatman's (1978) narrative framework. Analysis shows that emotional regulation failure is not just a passive theme but a driving force of the plot, structurally communicated through the Discourse layer.

The film's story layer is responsible for building the trauma foundation that forces characters to adopt maladaptive emotional regulation. The theme of bullying and regret that drives Ishida to become central establishes a narrative disruption that can only be overcome through emotional resolution at the New Equilibrium stage. The non-linear use of time setting (from elementary to high school) structurally reinforces the narrative that past failures in emotional regulation control the character's actions in the present. The School/Class background serves as a trauma trigger, forcing Expressive Suppression and Situation Selection, while the Bridge/River is the primary symbol of redemption, marking the beginning of the adaptive process of Cognitive Reappraisal after emotional confrontation.

The Discourse layer is how the film cinematically validates and visualizes repressed emotional burdens. The film predominantly uses Shouya Ishida's Internal Focalization (Point of View), a technique that validates his guilt and forces the audience to experience the isolation his character feels. This narrative choice reinforces the psychological impact of social withdrawal. This focalization justifies a strong Visual Symbolism. The 'X' mark covering the other person's face is a Discourse mechanism that visualizes Shouya's maladaptive Attentional Deployment strategy, representing total rejection and self-alienation. Meanwhile, Nishimiya's empty smile serves as a central symbol of Expressive Suppression, acting as a visual language that communicates the emotional burden held beneath the mask of friendliness. This careful use of visual language aligns with visual semiotics theory and anime's reputation as a powerful symbolic vehicle for trauma themes.

Analytically, film discourse serves as a methodological bridge that validates psychological findings: the presence of visual symbols and subjective viewpoints proves that emotion regulation strategies like Expressive Suppression truly operate as the characters' internal reality. Finally, the film conveys an implicit ideological critique. Through its narrative of Ideological Framing, the film structurally critiques Expressive Suppression driven by collectivist cultural norms. The narrative promotes the view that healing can only be achieved through open communication and the acceptance of vulnerability, highlighting that narrative solutions are only reached when characters successfully release their repressions and replace them with adaptive emotion regulation strategies, aligning with the ultimate goal of well-being.

Conclusion

This research aims to identify the forms of emotion regulation experienced by the main character in the film Koe no Katachi and analyze how these emotion regulations are represented through the film's narrative structure. Overall, the findings confirm that film is an effective and insightful medium for analyzing the consequences of social trauma and cultural pressure on adolescent mental health, with emotional regulation failure serving as the central conflict to be overcome.

Regarding the form of emotional regulation, the characters of Shouya Ishida and Shouko Nishimiya are dominated by maladaptive strategies that focus on avoidance and suppression. This strategy primarily involves Expressive Suppression, manifested through Shouko's empty/fake smiles and extreme Situation Selection, which reaches suicidal ideation levels in both characters. This finding proves that bullying trauma is a major trigger for emotional regulation failure. The theoretical implication is that the film Koe no Katachi accurately depicts that healing and successful

emotional regulation must begin with adaptive antecedent-focused strategies, such as the Cognitive Reappraisal performed by Shouya, rather than focusing on suppressing cosmetic expression.

This failure of emotional regulation is presented narratively through the Discourse layer of Chatman's framework. The film uses Shouya Ishida's point of view and is supported by strong visual symbolism (such as the 'X' mark that visualizes maladaptive attentional deployment strategies and the empty smile that represents expressive suppression). Its critical implication is that film discourse serves as a methodological bridge that structurally validates the internal psychological operations of the characters. This film implicitly critiques the suppression of expression driven by collectivist cultural norms and ideologically promotes emotional openness as an absolute prerequisite for achieving narrative New Equilibrium.

Overall, this research is expected to provide an integrated reading between clinical psychology and cinematic studies. This research is expected to broaden insights and make a significant practical contribution. This research is expected to serve as a foundation for educators and school counselors to use films like *Koe no Katachi* as a rich educational medium in mental health literacy programs. Film can be integrated into counselling guidance sessions to encourage open discussions about bullying, social isolation, and the dangers of emotional repression, as well as to promote adaptive emotion regulation strategies among students.

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