

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 2, February 2019

www.ijellh.com

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Cognitive response to Death in Marian Keyes's *Anybody Out There*

Death is a natural disaster which will take away the life of a person and will not bring them back to their normal regular life. Death will overtake the life from its existence. It is a bitter truth but can be acceptable for the human race. Death will cause a serious depression between the loved ones. In the novel *Anybody Out There*, the protagonist Anna was deeply in love with her deceased husband. The sudden death causes her depression and, made her believe in superstitious activities. So the protagonist Anna was in hunt of a good telepathy. But she ends up with spending lots of money and time. Finally she happens to contact her husband through her dreams and gets to know the secrets of her deceased husband. In this case, women encounter lots of depression and will search for a abnormal way to console herself from the loss. The researcher applies the cognitive theory to understand the behavior of our protagonist, who lost herself in superstitious beliefs. It is a reflection of her childhood behavior, which reflects in her present situation.

Key Words: Cognitive theory, Childhood behavior, Superstitious Belief and Death.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be used to treat people with a wide range of mental health problems. CBT is based on the idea that how we think (cognition), how we feel (emotion) and how we act (behavior) all interact together. Specifically, our thoughts determine our feelings and our behavior. CBT aims to help people become aware of when they make negative interpretations, and of behavioral patterns which reinforce the distorted thinking. Cognitive therapy helps people to develop alternative ways of thinking and behaving which aims to reduce their psychological distress. When a person suffers with psychological distress, the way in which they interpret situations becomes skewed, which in turn has a negative impact on the actions they take.

The cognitive approach believes that abnormality stems from faulty cognitions about others, our world, and us. This faulty thinking may be through cognitive deficiencies (lack of planning) or cognitive distortions (processing information inaccurately). These cognitions cause distortions in the way one sees things; Ellis suggested it is through irrational thinking, while Beck proposed the cognitive triad. One interact with the world through their mental representation of it. If ones mental representations are inaccurate or ones ways of reasoning are inadequate then ones emotions and behavior may become disordered.

Death is something unconventional and cannot be replaced. The life less things can be replaced with alternatives, but the life cannot be replaced with any existing things. Once the life was taken away there is nothing left beyond their memories. The impact made by death will differ from person to person. A strong minded person will try to accept the reality and move on. The protagonist is naïve in personality and has strong belief in dreams and spirits and from her childhood choose a abnormal way to exclude herself from the agony. It is said that the childhood beliefs will mould a person's personality in their adulthood. Anna seems to be a

great believer in the occult. Here is a description given by Claire about Anna in the novel *Watermelon*, that how superstitious person was Anna from her childhood.

Anna loved anything to do with occult. There was nothing she would like more than to be possessed by the devil. Or to live in a haunted house. Or to be able to foretell disasters. She was obviously hoping that I was some kind of paranormal phenomenon. (Keyes: 68)

Anna was the fourth girl of the Walsh family and had a special interest towards magic and fairies. This attitude of Anna grows along with her to her adulthood that becomes a part of her personality and helps her to drive her sorrows by clinging to this type of believes. The mental growth of Anna is not really accepting the reality and to escape from the truth and to hide her sorrows she uses the mask of an imaginary world. This attitude has its own percussions when she suffers in the real world.

When Anna encounters the death of her husband it is nearly a bad dream for her. She could not endure the pain of the loss. After the accident which turns down her life she manages to survive and was taken under the care of her parents. Once she gets out from her parent's pampering, it becomes a hard task for her to accept the truth that, she had lost her husband. When she gets back to her apartment after the accident the first thing she did was search for the presence of her husband in their apartment:

... My disappointment was so acute that I had to check every room, just in case.

Not that there were many rooms to check. There was the living room with a cramped kitchen annex carved out of it, a half-bath... and at looking into the gloomy bedroom with its silver of glass... I hobbled from room to room, I even looked behind the shower curtain, but he wasn't there. (Keyes: 117-118)

This attitude of Anna shows her inability to accept the truth of loss and pain. After the disaster which happens in front of her eyes she is still not prepared to encounter and accept

the truth. Cognitive theory helps the people like Anna to regain their strength to encounter and endure the reality with a prepared mind set. The theory will also allow one individual to grow stronger mentally to live it up with the reality. It is hard for a person to overcome death of their beloved partner, but it is even harder for the person with naïve nature for they will be hunting for the help from many mediators to communicate with their dead lovers.

It was hard for Anna when she realized that her husband was dead and there was no chance for him to get back. She dreamt the reality but not recognizing that to be real. When she woke up from the dream of her husband's death that scared her and let her in a deep confusion she needed some moral support to take the death message to her heart. She grabs the support of her sister Rachel to accept the truth:

‘I dreamt about Aiden last night.’

‘That’s normal, one of the thing that’s meant to happen. Like seeing him everywhere, so what did you dream?’ I dream that he was dead. And it’s not about me it’s him I’m worried about. I’m so afraid he’ll freak out when he discovers what’s happened. He’ll be so pissed-off and scared and I can’t help him. Rachel,’ I said, and suddenly I couldn’t bear it, ‘Aiden’s going to hate being dead.’ Rachel looked blank. Like she wasn’t listening to me. Then I realized she was in shock.(Keyes 206)

Anna and Aiden were a happily married couple, before marrying Anna, Aiden had a lover who broke up with him and married another man. After getting married to another man she was pregnant but she was not sure that whose child she was bearing. The baby was born and resembles Aiden so she called him and informed the news. Anna knows Aiden’s past but she is not aware of this incident, Aiden tried his best to reveal this matter to Anna but the car accident takes away the life of Aiden. Anna after realising that her husband was dead and will never be back to her, is confused and feels lonely and empty. At the time of the accident

Aiden was trying to reveal his past to her but he was abruptly snatched by death. This inquisitiveness to know what he wanted to tell her prompts her to take the help of the occult. She tries to communicate with her husband with the help of some mediums to know what he had tried to say on that day, because Aiden invites her to a hotel and he also says that he had something to discuss with her. Her depression level is exhibited when she browses the website hunting to find out good mediums to communicate to her husband. Finally she finds out a Church of Spiritualist Communication and she becomes a member there to communicate with Aiden.

But nothing works out for her, finally she meets her husband's friend who informs her that her husband had a kid with his ex-girlfriend. This shakes her but she pretty well knows that it is not her husband's fault.

After this incident Janie posts some pictures of little Jack to Anna and tries to inform this news directly to her but her efforts to make Anna convince becomes a great failure. Because Anna seems to be very upset to know that Aiden had a Son. "Janie had sent me a Christmas card, which was a photo of 'little Jack' in a Santa hat – she kept writing and sending photos and saying we could meet whenever I wanted. The Maddoxes were also badgering me to meet 'little Jack' and I was still stonewalling them. I would never meet him."(Keyes 532)

"Grief can be described as the intense emotional and physical reaction that an individual experiences following the death of a loved one. Not only is grief characterized by deep sadness but also by an intense yearning to be with person again.(Holmes and Rahe 1967)" She is depressed and builds an imagination where her husband still exists. It shows that her self-focus is on her feelings and emotions. To escape from the reality, she lives through her dreams and she holds up some superstitious belief. She believes that she can be communicating with her husband. She is so naive and is always ready to be fooled by whoever assures her that they are a good medium to communicate with her husband.

Death will cause a major loss. It will plug out a great bond in the family. It will break a bond of mother, father, child, grandpa, grandma, uncle, or aunt. The feelings one nurtures for the person will not vanish but the death will snatch away the bond from the family members. Their loss will make their heartache but it is up to the cognitive ability of the people to recover from the loss. It will be easy for people with a balanced mind but it would be difficult for people with naïve nature. The scars of childhood disable one from recovering soon and if an individual experiences happy childhood then it would be easy for them. This cognitive approach will help to strengthen the weaker mindset of the victim. So it will be good when people tolerate and empathize with someone when they suffer the loss of their beloved. People now-a-days are not showing any due respect to the passed away person. They just stand silent for a few minutes and get along with the entertainment world which is readily waiting for them. They lose their patience to listen to the sufferers. To lend a ear will not cause a misfortune. To tolerate and console the victim is a little type of encouragement to help them grow in healthy mentally. Coping with the loss of a spouse's can be particularly intense for loss is understood as a natural part of life. Everyone reacts differently towards death and employs personal coping mechanisms for grief and the writer keys herself was in the situation and she hated everyone and the same is the case with Anna.

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