

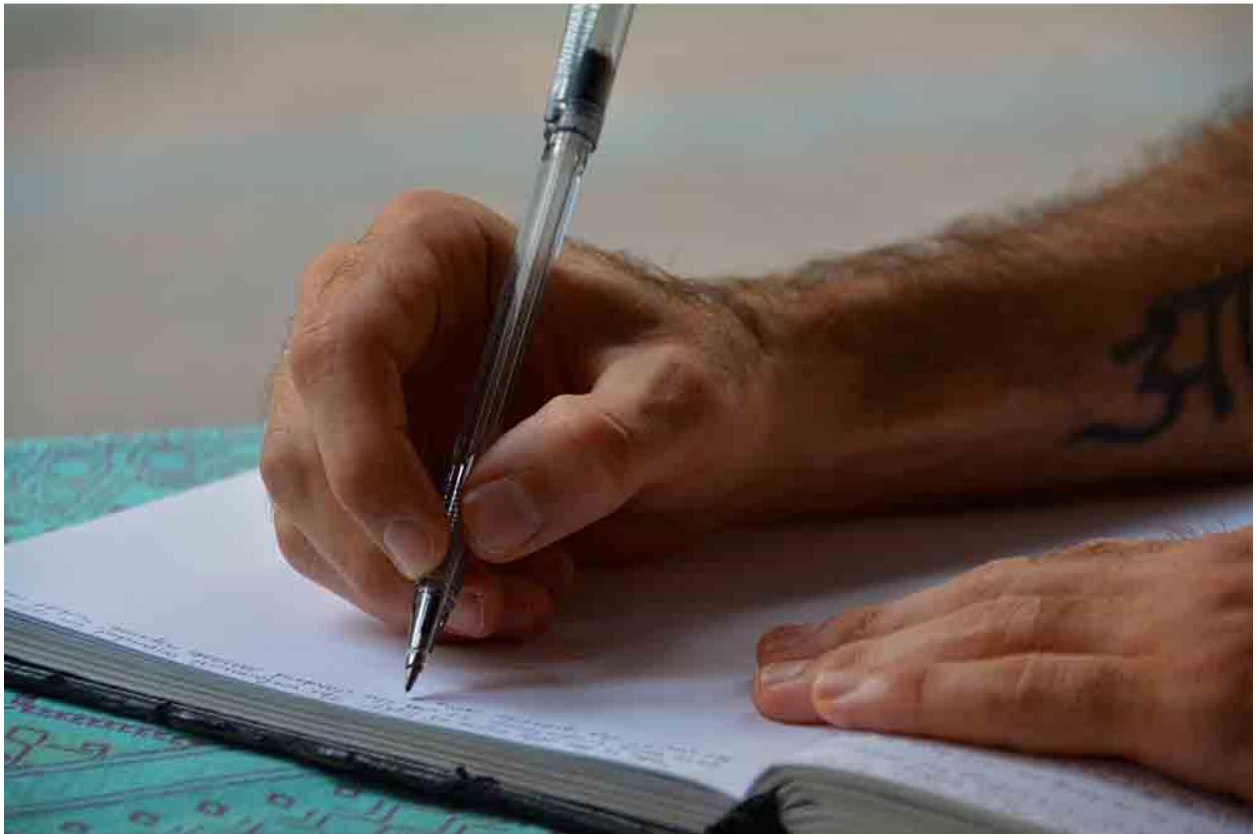
ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

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

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 7, Issue 4, April 2019

www.ijellh.com

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Mental Illness and Egoistic Suicide in Jennifer Niven's all the Bright Places

Abstract

Mental illness is the mental health disorder that has adverse effects on mood, thinking, and behaviour. Depression, Anxiety Disorders, Schizophrenia, Eating Disorders, Addictive Behaviors are some of the examples of mental illness. Mental illness cause problems in everyday life by making life miserable. Medications and talk therapy can be used to manage the patients. Suicide is the act of intentionally ending one's own self. Individuals suffering from depression, bipolar disorder and other psychological disorders are at risk of committing suicide. There are many academicians who has provided different theories of suicide like Thomas Joiner's Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicidal Behavior, Aaron Beck, Roy Baumeister, Edwin Shneidman and Emile Durkheim's theories of suicide.

The novel All The Bright Places revolves around two teenage characters Theodore Finch and Violet Markey who are constantly struggling with their lives. Violet is in trauma after the death of her sister Eleanor and was suffering from survivor's guilt whereas Theodore wants to die and is always preoccupied with suicidal thoughts. The aim of the paper is to study the elements of mental illness and to analyze Theodore's suicide from Durkheim's theory of suicide and in that theory the focus will be on Egoistic suicide.

Adolph Meyer in the late 1800s stated “we cannot understand the individual presentation of mental illness, [and perpetuating factors] without knowing how that person functions in the environment.” In order to understand Theodore’s social functioning we will see his conduct in his school and in his home. Finch the protagonist of the novel who is suffering from bipolar disorder always devise new plans to kill himself. He has saved Violet Markey from committing suicide by jumping off school’s bell tower but gave impression that he was saved by Violet and made her hero in the school. It was natural for the students and staff to believe this way of story because Theodore has deviant behavior in school, he is already on probation because of his involvement in many incidents in school involving hurling of desk at chalkboard, guitar smashing incident during assembly, an illegal use of firework and many fights and he is often called “worthless stupid” by his school mates even he also called himself “Theodore freak”. There are many factors which are significant in shaping finch’s personality like separation of his parents, his father’s abusive behavior towards him, his father’s second marriage and his concern towards new family, his mother’s plight and his own secretive personality. He hate math but excel at “guitar, sex and constantly disappointing my dad” (6). He doesn’t share anything with anyone not even with his school counsellor Mr. Embry. He never wants his mother to know about his thoughts, activities because it would made her sad. Never admit before school counsellor about his wish of ending his life. He already analyzed that violet wants to die not by jumping “but more along the lines of please, earth swallow me whole”(29). Theodore had two sisters and called himself a mistake. He thinks that his mother must see his father in Theodore and hates him like she despises her husband. Despite all these concerns in his life he was able to save violet who was suffering from post traumatic stress disorder after her sisters death. He was able to restore normalcy in her life but he himself couldn’t save his life.“ No more winter at all. Finch, you brought me spring”(265) . This is what Theodore done to Violet’s life.

Mr. Black's project became the cause of bringing Theodore and Violet together. He is a guitarist, writes messages on his wall, through this wander Indiana project he gave meaning to Violet's life but was unable to integrate, to give meaning to his own life. He joined classes to get his bipolar disorder cured and there he met Amanda of his class who is the famous girl and was shocked to see her. It is because of social stigma associated with mental illness that people don't want to talk about it to anyone. And teenagers are the worst victim of this mental illness where they can't see anything but putting an end to their lives as the best possible option.

When Violet's parents refused her to meet Finch and told her to put a stop to her project and when Finch got expulsion from school he decided to visit the remaining wanderers of Indiana and tell Violet about them through messaging her on Facebook and he had made his Facebook ID just to befriend Violet. Violet was saved by Finch but Finch didn't get any Violet who could save him and he ends his life by drowning himself in the water. Theodore wants to visit all the wanderers of Indiana and appreciate them, he thinks they all are important because even the smallest places mean something. This is what Theodore wants for himself too that he is also important, he wants to be heard but he was never visited and appreciated neither by his father nor in his school by teachers or by classmates. This is what people do "they explain people away as illnesses" (272) and don't look deep down into their lives. No one tries to see the cause behind Theodore's actions. "I want to get away from the labels" (284). He wants to be seen as Finch not as clutter of illnesses.

Theodore was unable to find out meaning in his life and thus ends it by committing suicide and his suicide can be studied from a sociological point of view too. Durkheim's Suicide presents a theory of suicide according to the nature of social causes in them: egoistic, altruistic, anomie, and fatalistic. Durkheim employed two explanatory variables, integration and regulation, such that in social circumstances in which integration is low, egoistic suicide

results; when integration is high, altruistic suicide results; when regulation is low, anomic suicide results; and when regulation is high, fatalistic suicide results. We concentrate on Durkheim's theory of social integration, and in particular the theory of egoistic suicide. We ignore Durkheim's theory of regulation, and within the theory of integration, altruistic suicide. According to Durkheim, Suicide is not an individual act nor a personal action. It is caused by some power which is over and above the individual. He viewed "all classes of deaths resulting directly or indirectly from the positive or negative acts of the victim itself who knows the result they produce". Many psychologists and doctors develop the theory that majority of people who take their own life are in a pathological state, but Durkheim emphasizes that the force, which determines the suicide, is not psychological but social. He concludes that suicide is the result of social disorganization or lack of social integration or social solidarity.

The novel opens with Theodore Finch's wondering "Is today a good day to die"(3). He knows a lot about suicidal facts, writes a lot about different ways of committing Suicide. Finch reflects a prolonged sense of not belonging, of not being integrated in a community. He is not able to integrate himself with school, with his classmates and even with his family. He has hostile behavior towards his father. This absence of love in his life results in meaninglessness, apathy, melancholy, and depression too. He was suffering from bipolar disorder but he was unable to share it with anyone not even with his school counsellor. Durkheim maintained that individuals who were not sufficiently bound to social groups were left with little social support or guidance, and therefore more likely to commit suicide. Same is the case with Finch, he was not bound with any social group he even keeps himself away from his family and no one understands him really. He was called deviant in school, a troubled kid at home. "Listen, I'm the freak. I'm the wierdo, I'm the troublemaker. I start fights. I let people down. Don't make finch mad, whenever you do. Oh, there he goes again,

in one of his moods. Moody Finch. Angry Finch. Unpredictable Finch. Crazy Finch. But I'm not a compilation of symptoms. Not a casualty of shitty parents and an even shittier chemical makeup. Not a problem. Not a diagnosis. Not an illness. Not something to be rescued. I'm a person" (307). This is what Theodore said to Violet that he is also a person who is meant to be understood but his mental illness which is something abstract is not recognized by anyone and he is misunderstood by all that's why he said, "It's my experience that people are a lot more sympathetic if they can see you hurting, and for the millionth time in my life I wish for measles or smallpox or some easily understood disease just to make it easier on me and also on them"(16). Theodore is wishing for physical manifestation of his disorder so that people would understand that he is not making things for the sake of attention and there is something wrong with him. He was unable to integrate himself with the people around him because they could see real Finch and even Finch couldn't tell people about his ordeal. Finch had made his own world in his room. Had there be someone to understand him he would be able to cope with situations but low social integration, extreme individualism results in his suicide. This is Theodore's philosophy, "the urge to be, to be count for something, and, if death must come, to die valiantly, with acclamation- in short to remain a memory" (56). Theodore want to be count and if not than to be a memory. "You deserve better. I can't promise you. I'll stay around, not because I don't want to. It's hard to explain. I'm a fuckup. I'm broken, and no one can fix it. I've tried. I'm still trying"(227). Theodore was broken because there was no one who could bring his spring, he was alone and so succumbed to his loneliness unlike Violet who had not only rescued by Finch but her parents and her social image also help her in accepting the situations in her life.

Conclusion

Thus we have seen that how mental illness has effected the main protagonist of the novel and also saw the stigma associated with it that how people are afraid of discussing it and the effects it can bring in someone's life and people's indifference towards mental illness. Then we have also seen how social forces shapes our life and the effects that lack of social integration can do to someone's life.

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