Suicide as an Escape from self in Janifer Niven's – All the bright places

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Abstract:

The article analyses the suicide of the character "Theodore Finch" by viewing his suicide as an escapism from his self. At first, it can be stated that the reason for Theodore to attempt suicide was depression. Not every person who are clinically depressed attempts to suicide and depression cannot be the only reason for someone to attempt suicide. At times suicide can be seen from the perspective of escape from self. This perspective of suicide as an escapism was downplayed and ignored. A person who wants to escape from their own self, sees suicide as a solution. There are six main steps in "Suicide as Escape from Self by Roy F. Baumeister", and through these steps, this article would analyze the cause for the Theodore's suicide.

Keywords: suicide, escapism, depression.

Janifer Niven is one of the best contemporary authors. She has written ten novels and won serval awards all over the world. She has tried all the kinds of different genres, such as fiction, non-fiction, historical and contemporary. She has written novels for both adults and young adults. Her works share a common theme and that is ordinary people doing extraordinary things.

The novel "All the bright places" portrays mental illness as its main theme. The two teenagers, Violet and Theodore are facing some mental issues though Violet recovers with the constant support of her parents and Theodore. Theodore has some disturbing family issues. His mother does two jobs to support her family and therefore has no time to take interest in Theodore's life. His father has a separate family with whom Theodore is obligated to meet once in a week for dinner and at his early age, Theodore was subjected to physical abuse by his father whenever he got into his dark moods. Theodore and Violet fell in love while doing their Geography project together. When Theodore was not allowed to meet Violet by her parents due to his behavioral status in the school, he sank into depression. Later on, Theodore suicides in a lake called "Blue hole".

There are six main steps and these steps can be viewed as the choices and the factors that made Theodore Finch to choose suicide as an escapism.

The first step is "having higher expectations, or recent stresses and setback". The initial factor for Theodore's escape from his own self is the adverse conditions in his family. His parents were divorced. His mother had no time to look after Theodore as she was expected to give good living to her kids and had to work two jobs. Theodore's father has a whole separate family and he offered them a high standard living which caused dejection to Theodore. He had a high exception to lead a life like his stepbrother, Josh Raymond. He is jealous of Josh as he has a complete family and a satisfactory life both mentally and materialistically. Theodore builds a higher expectation to have a complete family and a satisfactory light though he very well knew that it was not possible.

The main event that caused Theodore Finch to use suicide as a means to escapism was Violets parents not allowing him to meet her and when violet broke his trust and revealed about his mental illness to her parents. Theodore saw it as a setback as he was not able to formulate a good relationship with Violet's parents. Theodore has faced similar setbacks before as well. He was not able to formulate a good relationship with his parents, especially with his father since he used to physically abuse him when he got into his dark moods. He could not formulate a good relationship with his classmates because everyone considered him to be weird and a freak. Everyone started to call him freak when he opens up about his

mental issues with his friend, Roamer. Roamer misunderstood and took lightly the situation that Theodore was dealing with and leaked the situation to entire school and from there after he was called a "Freak".

Theodore learned to deal with those things but after a long time, he felt that someone could actually understand him, and he fell in love with Violet. Violet was the only person to whom he revealed his mental issues and his dark moods. When Violet broke his trust and revealed everything to her parents, he could not tolerate it. He wanted at least Violet's parents to consider him normal and when they knew the truth, he feared that he would lose Violet forever as for sure they won't let Theodore to meet her. Escaping from the fear and the pain to lose Violet forever was the initial step towards using suicide as escapism.

The second step is "self-blame and low self-esteem". According to the escape theory, failures and setbacks lead to suicide only if they attributions such as self-blame and low self-esteem and negative implications about the self. Theodore blamed himself because he could not feel normal, he felt uncomfortable in his own skin. Theodore's guidance counselor, Mr. Embry suggests that he might be suffering from Bipolar disorder, a chronic disorder which causes shifts in the moods. Theodore faced denial because he does not want to be labeled as ill. He self-loathes himself for not being able to feel normal like his others and he would sacrifice anything to lead a normal life.

Theodore Finch had a low self-esteem because he understood the fact that he was different and everyone around called him a freak due to this difference. At the start of the novel, Theodore tries to suicide by standing of the ledge of the Bell tower, a fellow student notices him but does not care because he was infamous for doing weird stuffs. This cold attitude by others towards him can be one of the reasons for his low self-esteem. Theodore blames himself for taking Violet to the Purina tower, losing the track of time and staying up there whole night and this gave an opportunity for Violet's parents to learn the truth that he was dealing from anger and depression issues. In front of her parents Theodore takes all the blame up on him because he really thinks that it is his fault.

Theodore Finch was mostly subjected to the negative thoughts. He was obsessed with death. Thinking about death was his daily habit and also, he had a folder in his computer where he used to note down the different methods of dying. Theodore was sure from first that death is something that is going to happen really soon, and he also thinks about the words and phrases to be carved in his tomb stone. If had to be alive, he must have a strong reason and the reason was Violet. Theodore blaming himself for ruining a good relationship with Violet's parents and their perspective on him is the second step towards suicide as an escapism.

The third step is high self-awareness. A person who chooses to suicide as an escape are highly aware of their short-coming and their faults. Theodore is highly aware of how he looked. According to him, he had a pale skin, black hair and blue eyes. He considers his body to be in disproportion, his ears and his elbows jolting out. Theodore was highly aware about his height and his long feet. He was aware of his negative thoughts and he tried to run, drive fast, compose songs to get rid of them. He used the stick the label by writing words and phrases that came to his mind on the wall as to keep track of them. When he sank into depression, he had made rules to himself that would save him feeling more miserable. He knew the step by step procedure that he had to follow, when he had his dark moods.

These kinds of people who are highly self-aware of their faults and shortcoming show some destructive behavior. Theodore Finch didn't attend school in the regular basis. He didn't take his counselling sessions seriously and he should not be remained that he has some issues and to be helped. He is in a denial that he is ill. He gets suspended to beat-up Roamer, though Roamer was the one to start it. Beating up Roamer was Theodore's destructive behavior even though he very well knew that Roamer is using his anger issue against him. Theodore was highly aware of his short comings and faults, his negative thoughts which resulted in blaming himself and it in turn bought the fear of losing Violet in his life. The fact that Violet's parents were aware of his anger and depression issues, made him aware of his faults and short comings. This was his third step towards suicide as escapism.

The fourth step is the negative effect that comes from being highly aware of the shortcomings and faults. Two main effects

are anxiety and depression. Theodore was anxious because he didn't not feel comfortable in his own skin and so he developed different personalities for himself. He thought that he could find solution for everything once he knew who he really was. One of the reasons for his depression would be his bipolar disorder and his stubbornness to not accept it. The other reason would be his loneliness in home, in the school because he was constantly being alienated. No one paid attention to him and he never trusted anyone. After Violet, things seemed to be bit brighter for him. He found someone with whom he could share what he is going through. When Violet's parents didn't allow him to meet her, he sank into depression and another factor would be Violet breaking his trust and saying everything to her parents. Theodore didn't want Violet to say this to anyone because he didn't want anyone to see him differently, ask him to seek help or call him a freak. His anxiety and depression due to his incapability of being normal, negative thoughts, alienation, fears, is the fourth step towards suicide as an escapism.

The fifth step is responding to this unhappy state by escaping from meaningful thought into a relatively numb state of cognitive deconstruction. After the recent events with Violet's parents, Theodore permanently shifts into the cupboard, a limited and isolated space. He does not come out of his room and makes some rules to prevent himself from having any further negative thoughts and interactions. He starts painting his room blue, coating the paint again and again on the wall to get rid of his thoughts. Theodore had a reputation of being missing for somedays and those days he used to wander. This can be seen as a way to escape from his thoughts. At the end after Violet has broken the trust Theodore goes missing for a long time. Theodore isolating himself from others and wandering to escape from his thoughts is the fifth step towards choosing suicide as an escapism.

The sixth step is strong willingness to die. Violet was his only reason to stay awake, to live. When he was not allowed to meet Violet, the reason to live was lost. He tried hard to fight his depression, but he lost this fight when Violet also considered him to be ill and told the truth to her parents in order to ger some help. His willingness to die became strong and then he jumped into the lake called "Blue Hole". Later on, Violet discovers his cloths, phone and car near the Blue hole.

Theodore was unable to express himself, he felt uncomfortable in himself due to self-loathing. He was unable to trust anyone and those he had trusted before, had broke his trust. Deep down he was afraid of losing someone close to him. He was unable to bear his negative thoughts, his anxiety and depression. He longed to be a normal person with normal thoughts. He used suicide as a solution, as an escapism from his incapability, fear, comfortability, self-loathing, alienation, depression and anxiety. He uses suicide as an escapism.

Though these choices can be changed with the constant support of parents, friends and by taking up a professional help. Violet Markey is an example for coming out of the depression that was caused when she lost her sister in an accident.

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