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The Deep Sadness Experienced by the Main Character as Reflected in Porter's The Lady in Black

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Abstract: The subject of the research is a short story entitled The Lady in Black written by Eleanor H. Porter. Meanwhile the object is the deep sadness experienced by the main character. The aim of the research is to analyze the deep sadness experienced by the main character, adopting the qualitative approach, the data were analyzed descriptively using a psychological angle. The result of the research shows that the main character experienced a deep sadness due to the loss of her daughter. The features that indicate the feeling of grief of the main character are depression, anxiety, anger and hostility, anhedonia, loneliness, agitation, fatigue, low self-esteem, sense of helplessness and hopelessness, suspicious, interpersonal problems, yearning for the deceased and preoccupation with the memory of the deceased.

Keywords: Deep sadness, Psychological approach, The Lady in Black

1. Introduction

Losing someone whom you love or care deeply is very painful. One may experience all kinds of difficult emotions. It may feel like pain and sadness that one can never let go. Some of them express their deep sadness by wearing dark clothes and crying day and night. These are normal reactions to a significant loss. This is called grief. This is affected by the loss of a loved one. It indicates a period of grieving, marked by withdrawal from social events and silence. The more significant the loss one feels, the more intense the grief.

Next, grieving is an action of feeling of grief. It is a personal and highly individual experience. How people grieve depends on many factors, including their personality and coping style, their life experience, their faith and the nature of the loss. A grieving process takes time. Healing happens gradually. It cannot be forced or hurried. Some people start to feel better in weeks or months. For others, the grieving process is measured in years.

Grief is a natural response to loss. It is an emotional suffering that one feels when something or someone the individual loves has been taken away. What the mother, Helen, in The Lady in Black had experienced is a natural response to loss of someone whom she loved. Her grief is the issue that will be studied and discussed in this research. The way Porter told the emotion of grief in the story was so touching that it indicates a big love she had for her daughter.

2. Discussion

Many experts have formulated the features of grief. Stroebe and Stroebe (1987) had summarized the features or the symptoms of grief as follows:

Affective Aspects

a. Depression

In Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Summer 2003, p.421), depression means "a medical condition that makes you feel very unhappy and anxious and often prevents you from living a normal life." The depression experienced by Helen was shown by her withdrawal from the society. It was not normal in her life. Her depression was also shown by her feeling of a deep sadness.

Helen locked herself in her room restlessly and decided not to join his husband and son, Bobby who were playing outside the house. She did not want to meet her only son. What Helen had done shows a withdrawal of her from people including her own family. No matter how her son tried to approach her, she did not want to respond to

him. She preferred to stay in her room alone rather than playing with her son. She even asked her only little son to stay away from her.

b. Anxiety

In Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Summer 2003, p.55), anxiety means “the feeling of being very worried about something.” Anxiety is a feeling of fear of something unlikely to happen.

According to Stroebe and Stroebe (1987), anxiety is a feeling of fear, worry, and uneasiness, usually generalized and unfocused as an overreaction to a situation that is only subjectively seen as menacing. It can be seen from the quotation that Helen was worried and anxious about her daughter named Kathleen. She was afraid that Kathleen would feel alone in her grave because Kathleen was buried alone on the hillside. It makes her experience uneasiness when communicating with her husband. She shouted and cried as if she was the only one who cares about Kathleen. The fact is Kathleen had already passed away. It is impossible for her to feel alone. The anxiety experienced by Helen is unreasonable and unlikely to happen.

c. Guilt

In Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Summer 2003, p.721), guilt means “responsibility and blame for something bad that has happened”. Feeling guilty is usually followed by self-blame and self-accusation about events in the past, especially about events dealt with death (a feeling that more could have been done to prevent the death). Yet, Helen did not blame herself toward the death of Kathleen. Therefore, Helen does not experience this feature.

d. Anger and Hostility

In Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Summer 2003, p.49), anger means “a strong feeling of wanting to hurt or criticize someone because they have done something bad to you or been unkind to you”. Hostility means “when someone is unfriendly and full of anger towards another person (Summer 2003, p.787).”

Helen experienced the feeling of anger and hostility during her grief. Her first anger is at the time when Kathleen had just passed away. This happens as Helen was not ready to accept and face the reality that Kathleen had passed away. Helen's anger became bigger when she looked at Bobby because Bobby reminded her of Kathleen.

e. Anhedonia

People who have anhedonia experience losses of appetite, not enjoying hobbies, social and family events and other activities which were pleasant before even if the one who is dead was not actually present. It feels like nothing can be enjoyable without the existence of the deceased.

Since Kathleen had passed away, Helen was no longer able to enjoy her time with her family. Helen cannot enjoy her time playing with Bobby because Kathleen was not there anymore. Every activity seemed unpleasant without Kathleen. Helen used to play and enjoy her time together with Bobby and her husband. Since Kathleen left her, all that Helen did just looking them playing gloomily outside the house.

f. Loneliness

In Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Summer 2003, p.40), alone means “feeling unhappy and lonely”. Loneliness is feeling alone even being among others. Loneliness is an intense periodic suffering.

Helen liked to be alone although she had her family around her. She felt as if she was the only one who was suffering because of the death of Kathleen. It makes her felt alone. She thought that no one can understand her feelings. That is the reason why she preferred to be alone rather than to gather with others. Her loneliness was described by the silence. The word “peculiar silence that comes only to a room” indicates that the only one who feels alone in that house is just Helen. She still had her husband and her son in the house but she still did not want to join them and decided to lock herself in her room. The word “silence” means the loneliness and the word “peculiar” means it is strange to be alone while she was with two other persons in the house.

Behavioral Manifestations

a. Agitation

Agitation is indicated by the feeling of tension, excessive fidgetiness, nervousness, searching behavior (looking for the deceased, even though they "know" this is useless). It can be seen from the quotation which refers to the situation where Helen was worried and anxious about her daughter named Kathleen. She was afraid that Kathleen will be lonely in her grave because Kathleen was buried alone on the hillside. The fact is Kathleen had already passed away. It is impossible for her to feel alone.

She liked to go to the grave to look for Kathleen. Helen really wanted to see Kathleen although she understood that was useless and impossible to do. She talked to Kathleen's tombstone as if Kathleen could hear it. Helen did it because she was afraid that Kathleen felt alone.

b. Fatigue

In Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Summer 2003, p.576), fatigue means "very great tiredness". Fatigue is a state of condition when people feel exhausted.

Experiencing feeling of grief can drain Helen's energy. It is because there are so many feelings that should be felt by Helen such as anger, hostility, anxiety, sadness and etcetera. Being so emotional was tiring her. Crying all day long, shouting and moaning are the activities following Helen's grief. That is why Helen was exhausted. She stumbled and fell on Kathleen's tombstone. It indicates that she was so weak and almost lost her energy.

c. Crying

In Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Summer 2003, p.380), crying means "when someone produces tears from their eyes, usually because they are unhappy or hurt". The proofs that Helen cried can be seen as follows.

Tears always came from Helen's eyes. It was not unreasonable. The tears running down Helen's eyes is because the pain that she could not endure deep inside her heart. Everything that reminded her of Kathleen made her cry. The memories of Kathleen were too painful for her to remember.

Attitudes Toward Self, the Deceased, and Environment

a. Attitudes Toward Self

1) Self-reproach

Self-reproach is similar with the feeling of guilt. The one who is grieving blaming her/himself about what has happened. Helen did not blame herself for the death of Kathleen. Helen does not experience this feature.

2) Low Self-esteem

Low self-esteem is a state of mind when people feel of inadequate, worthlessness, and failed without the existence of the loved one who is dead. Helen does not experience this feature.

3) Helplessness and Hopelessness

The helplessness and hopelessness felt by Helen was depicted by the silent clock. The clock depicts the hope of Helen. If the clock stops ticking, it means that Helen has no hope anymore. The clock also depicts Helen's life. It can be seen from the sentence "Of what possible use were the hours it would tick away now?" The ticking of the clock seems so useless that it did not need to tick anymore without Kathleen. That is what Helen felt in her life. Her life seemed very useless just like the clock. She felt like she was nothing without Kathleen. She felt like she wanted to kill herself as she killed the clock but she knew that it did not help. She fully understood that what happened to Kathleen was helpless. Killing herself will not bring Kathleen back. She thought that nothing she can do to make the situation back to normal.

4) Sense of Unreality

Sense of unreality means the one who is grieving feels like what has happened to him/her is not real. Helen does not experience this feature because she fully understood that all the things happened to her were real. She just needed time to accept the reality.

5) Suspiciousness

Feeling suspiciousness is a feeling that makes the griever doubts the purpose of people who come to help. Suspicious means the feeling of doubt or no trust in someone or something. Helen experienced the feeling of suspiciousness in her grief. She did not trust what her husband said. She thought that his husband did not care to Kathleen anymore but she was wrong with her opinion. Her husband did care to Kathleen but he realized that they still had Bobby to live with them. Her husband did not want Bobby to be neglected by her mother. He also did not want Helen to fall in the deep sorrow and never got back to be a mother she used to be anymore. Helen's husband just wanted to help Helen.

6) Interpersonal Problems

People who have interpersonal problems have difficulty in maintaining social relationships, keeping away from society, and withdraw themselves out from social functions. Helen locked herself in her room restlessly and decided not to join his husband and son playing outside the house. She did not want to meet her only son.

b. Attitudes Toward the Deceased

1) Yearning for the Deceased

Yearning for the deceased means looking for the deceased and thinking about the deceased all day long. The quotation depicts the searching behavior done by Helen. Helen experienced this feature by always looking for Helen in her grave. She liked to go to the grave to look for her. Helen really wanted to see Kathleen although she understood that it is useless and impossible to do. She talked to Kathleen's tombstone as if Kathleen could hear it. Helen did it because she missed her little Kathleen. Helen did the yearning activity almost every day. Her husband had already asked and even begged Helen to stop doing that thing but she did not want to hear it. Finally, in the end, she met a gray-haired woman who made her realize that all the things she did in Kathleen's grave were a waste.

2) Imitation of the Deceased's Behavior

Imitation of deceased's behavior like copying the way of speaking, walking, doing what the deceased always did. Helen does not experience this feature.

3) Idealization of the deceased

Idealization of the deceased means the griever only remembers the good side of the deceased during his/her life. Helen does not experience this feature.

4) Ambivalence

Ambivalence means the change of feelings about the deceased. Helen does not experience this feature.

5) The hallucinations images of the deceased

Helen does not experience this feature. Helen does not have any hallucination images of Kathleen.

6) Preoccupation with the memory of the deceased

Preoccupation with the memory of the deceased happens with both sad and happy memories. Everything reminds her of Kathleen. Kathleen was always on Helen's mind. It was difficult for her to let her only daughter go. The memories made it difficult for her to move on. There were too many memories of her daughter, but Helen always denied it. It was too bitter to remember it for her. That is why whenever Bobby reminded her of Kathleen; she was always sad and angry. She did not want to remember the sweet things of Kathleen that cannot be found by her anymore. She did not want to remember her voice because she knew that she could not hear it anymore. That is why Helen did not want Bobby to call her "mother" because it reminded her of Kathleen who used to call her that way, too. Helen also cried when she heard the story of a mother who lost her little boy because of an accident. She cried because the story reminded her to what happened to Kathleen.

4. Conclusion

From the discussion, it can be concluded that Helen as the main character in the *Lady in Black* does experience the feeling of grief. She feels a deep sadness because she lost her daughter. Helen experiences not all of the features of grief. She only experiences some of the features. The features of grief experienced by Helen in the affective aspects are depression, anxiety, anger and hostility, anhedonia, and loneliness. In the behavioral manifestations, Helen experiences agitation, fatigue and crying. Helen also experiences low self-esteem, helplessness and hopelessness, suspiciousness, interpersonal problems, yearning for the deceased and preoccupation with the memory of the deceased.

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