

Good flowers for algernon by daniel keyes essay example

[War](#), [Intelligence](#)



Most people especially in the traditional societies considered persons with mental disability as people with incurable illness. As such, people had very negative attitudes towards the mentally challenged. As such, the aspect of mental illness has been a realm of the mental health professionals such as psychiatric workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, and related fields. Following the deinstitutionalizing of the mental patients during the 1960s and '70s, people did not give much consideration to the subject of mental health and people with mental illnesses (Borinstein 1). The families that had members with mental illness treated the condition as an issue that was off-limit to people who were not doctors or family members. Consequently, the mentally ill people were not considered as people who were capable to being independent and employed (Karlsson 173). The deinstitutionalization of the mental illnesses and the establishment of community-based mental health centers during the 1960s was the turning point that enabled people to gain awareness regarding mental health.

Keyes' narrative *Flowers for Algernon* provides an interesting fictional story about artificial intelligence and its effectiveness in humans and their surroundings. The main character in the story is Charles Gordon, a man of 37 years who was born with a low IQ of 68. Gordon acknowledges the fact that he is not as smart as he would like and states thus " all my life I wanted to be smart and not dumb. But it is very hard to be smart" (Keyes 250). This is evidence that he feels intellectually inferior as compared to other people. Gordon works at a bakery in the city of New York as a keeper and a delivery boy. Other employees in the bakery habitually taunt and pick on him. However, Gordon is not able to understand that he is a subject of mockery

among his peers. He treats his fellow employees as worthy friends. However, though he is generally ignorant, Gordon acknowledges that he lacks the abilities that other people have particularly with regard to reading and writing. Gordon's determination to be smart leads him to undergo a mental experiment to triple his intelligence.

At first, Gordon becomes disillusioned because he believes that the operation did not improve his intellect but gradually improves his grammar and language. Consequently, his report improves (Keyes 149). Because of the experiment, Gordon can perceive life in a different perspective. His thoughts become more sophisticated and he starts using complex vocabulary with the correct spelling and grammar. Eventually, Gordon becomes more intelligent than even the doctors who carry out the experiment. Further, he is able to learn the agonizing truth that his colleagues in the factory, whom he considers to be his friends, were not genuine friends as they had made him an object of mockery. However, his joy is short-lived and his intelligence deteriorates fast to his former self. Consequently, people are more compassionate than before the experiment. The ending of the novel is inspiring. The fact that the experiment worked on the Gordon case, albeit briefly, is impressive. This shows that the people who have mental illnesses are not hopeless and with the right kind of treatment they can become as good as or even better than people that society considers to be 'normal'. The fact that Gordon's co-workers welcome him back to work and understand him better and their encouraging gestures from Miss Kinnian is inspiring. The kind treatment that Gordon receives from fellow employees at the bakery is also inspiring in the sense that once

people understand the predicament that people with mental illnesses undergo, they are able to respect them for who they are and assist them accordingly. The narrative provides a source of hope to other people that are living with mental ailments. People can draw from the unique experiences of Gordon to provide inspiration and instill hope in the lives of the mentally ill. From the story we learn that the mentally ill are able to decipher that they are not as intelligent as other people. As such, it is important to understand that people with mental illnesses do not talk, move, or act as 'abnormal' intentionally.

There is no definitive statement regarding the role of intelligence in the novel. As such, the author explores the role of intelligence in human life as an open idea. In the novel, one can encounter various understandings regarding the role of I. Q. and intelligence. For instance, although Gordon gets an enhanced intelligence he is doubtful regarding the meaning of I. Q. This is apparent when he says, "I'm not sure what an I. Q. is". Consequently, in a conversation between Dr. Straus and Dr. Nemur, the latter defines intelligence as the something that measure how intelligent a person is. However, Dr. Strauss does not agree with Dr. Nemur's definition and contends that I. Q. cannot determine intelligence whatsoever. Dr. Nemur opines that I. Q. depicts how intelligent a person can become. There is usually an argument that people use I. Q. to measure the level of understanding from the things that a person has already learn. Through the experiences that Gordon goes through before and after the experiment, he is able to know the importance of intelligence. The narrative provides certain themes that depict ignorance as a good thing as the

intelligence that Gordon gains following the experiment turns out to be disingenuous (Hill 2). He is hurt when he discovers that the things that he believed previously such as his friendship with his co-workers were a lie. Further, he learns that people have a condescending attitude towards him due to his condition. Consequently, he becomes aware that he has never had an honest friend. This shows that people do not like being associated with those they consider to have mental challenges (Inland 192).

Intelligence is also depicted as an insatiable desire for knowledge. This aspect is apparent from Gordon's behavior. As his intelligence surges, he starts to feel an irresistible need for knowledge. Consequently, he learns the importance of learning and expertise. Though he does he is not a genius yet, Gordon makes some important interventions such as the manner he discovers a new way to align the machines at his workplace thus saving the proprietor from spending thousands of dollars every year. Later on his superiors become intimidated with Gordon's intelligence that they demand his dismissal. This situation irks Keyes to the point that he asks himself "What's wrong with a man becoming intelligent and wanting to acquire knowledge and understanding of the world around him?" (Keyes 264).

Further, complexity of Gordon's thoughts and expressions makes him unable to communicate freely with other people. He experiences loneliness and isolated from other people. The foregoing developments show that most people are intimidated by those who seem to me more intelligent than them to a point where they refuse to associate themselves with those with superior intelligence. Consequently, because the people who have mental illnesses consider themselves less intelligence as compared with the '

normal' people, they fear associating with the latter for obvious reasons, they feel intimidated.

The narrative also shows intelligent people as having the ability to do certain things while those with diminished intelligence are considered hopeless.

When the intelligence of Gordon is considered more than the ordinary persons, he is able to do things that the others cannot. Consequently, Gordon believes that he would not be able to do certain things when his intelligence declines. As such, he sets out to use his knowledge and intelligence for use by future generations. He believes that he has a lifetime chance to make important discoveries that were even beyond the doctors. He therefore dedicates his remaining time towards completing the projects that Doctor Strauss and Nemur has been developing. Eventually, he acknowledges the importance of knowledge by stating thus, " I bet I am the first dumb person in the world who ever found out something important for science. I remember I did something but I don't remember what. So I guess it is like I did it for all the dumb people like me" (Keyes 275). At the beginning the narrative shows Gordon as not being able to do certain things such as reading and writing but after gaining more intelligence following the experiment, he is able to carry out functions that are even beyond ordinary human beings. As such, the novel shows intelligence as something that is capable of being gained or lost. According to the book, people should exploit their intelligence as much as they can while they still can.

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