



## **Impact Of Death Anxiety: A Study On Julie Murphy's Side Effects May Vary**

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### **APA Citation:**

Dhinesh, A., & Sumathi, P.N., (2021). Impact Of Death Anxiety: A Study On Julie Murphy's Side Effects May Vary, *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(3), 2400-2403.

Submission Date:08/10/2021

Acceptance Date:22/12/2021

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### **Abstract**

The life consists of sequential events, which is the mixture of pleasure and pity. The events of life leave few impacts on the character of the person. Few occasions it produces Anxiety or Trauma in the mind. Anxiety occurs out of the following situations like Death, Disease, Rape, War and so on. The present study explores the Anxiety comes out of Death. Death Anxiety is also called as Thanatophobia, which means Fear of Death in Greek. It grows from thinking one's own death or other's death. The researcher chooses the novel, *Side Effects May Vary* by Julie Murphy for the Study. The Death anxiety of the protagonist, the impacts occurred on her life and how she applies her defense mechanisms to reduce her Anxiety are the core of this study.

**Keywords:** Death Anxiety, Displacement, Sigmund Freud, Julie Murphy.

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### **1. Introduction**

Human beings are performing their actions in the episodes of life. Life has a number stages like birth, growth, obstacles, tasks, wishes, diseases, ageing old and death. No one escapes from the clutches of Death either Rich or Poor. The word 'Death' plays a crucial role in the stages of life, because it is uncertain. It may occur at any stages of life. According to Yalom D. Irvin, "*Our existence is forever shadowed by the knowledge that we will grow, blossom, and, inevitably, diminish and die.*" [Yalom 1].

Death Anxiety is a type of Anxiety, which arises out of one's own death or other's death. The Greek term, Thanatos means death. Thanatophobia is a Greek term, which means, fear of death. It differs from Necrophobia, which is also an anxiety, occurs out of other's death. Sigmund Freud, Ernest Becker and Erik Erikson have analysed the anxiety of death and its impact on humans. Sigmund Freud classifies three types of Anxiety, namely, Reality Anxiety, Neurotic Anxiety and Moral Anxiety. As per the argument of Freud, Death Anxiety comes under the category of Reality Anxiety. Defense Mechanisms starts to reduce the level of Anxiety. Sigmund Freud and her daughter, Anna Freud identifies few types of defense mechanisms. Denial, Displacement, Intellectualization, Projection, Rationalization, Reaction Formation, Regression, Repression, Suppression and Sublimation.

Julie Murphy is an American Novelist, who is the bestselling author of New York Times. She contributes a number of fictions to American Literature namely, *Side Effects May Vary*, *Dumplin*, *Romana Blue*, and *Puddin*. In the event of National Novel Writing Month, she has written her novel, *Side Effects May Vary*. Anxiety arises out of a number of situations like War, Rape, Disease, Death and so on. The present study focuses on the Anxiety comes out of Death. Death Anxiety is also called as Thanatophobia, which means Fear of Death in Greek. It occurs from one's own thoughts about death or the encounters of other's death. The researcher selects the novel, *Side Effects May Vary* by Julie Murphy. Alice is the Protagonist of the novel, who is taken for the study. She is sixteen years old girl, who is affected by Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia Cancer. Alice said "*I think I'm going to die.*" [Murphy 71]. The words of Alice shows that the fear of death occurs in the mind of protagonist. The researcher finds that she is having Reality Anxiety. Reality Anxiety "*is the most basic form of anxiety and is typically based on fears of real and possible events, such as being bitten by a dog or falling from a ladder*". [3]. The conversation between Alice and Harvey shows that she is in Reality Anxiety. The psyche of Alice searching for a Defense Mechanism but she finds it in a later stage only. It chooses 'Displacement' as a defense mechanism for her Anxiety over death. The Id stage of our mind starts dominating the Ego and Super Ego. This stage is the initial stage of human mind, which does not care about the consequences arises out of the actions.

Death is an unavoidable event in all the living things, humans are not exception too. Evidently, the fear of death arises in older people. People, who are with disease, are fearing a lot on death. Fear of death is not arisen suddenly in to our human brain, but it is grownup from our childhood days. It's in the case of Alice, the fear of death starts in earlier days itself comparing to older persons. Because, she is sixteen years old, affected by Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia Cancer.

Displacement is a term, introduced by Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud, who is Sigmund Freud's daughter. She has used this term in her work, "*The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*", written in German and published in the year 1936. Cecil Baines translated that work in to English and Published in the year 1937. If Id starts working, it will dominate Ego and Super Ego. This is similar to childhood activities, which is having less attention on the consequences. The researcher finds that Alice behaves in a weird way in order to avoid the fear of death like a child. Because, she is sixteen years old but behaves like six years old. She does not care about the consequences, but she needs to completes her wishes. She gets the help of Harvey, who is standing with Alice throughout the novel. Even few reviewers commenting that he is the second protagonist or hero in the novel whereas Alice is the first protagonist or heroine of the novel.

The researcher explores that the attitude of Alice Elizabeth is become sadistic after she experiences Anxiety. She finds happy and forgets her pains with the help of her sadistic pleasure. Luke reveals the secret affair of Alice's mother, Bernie. Alice gets angry at him and she wants to take revenge over Luke. Alice says, "*I wanted to destroy them both, but all I felt was powerless and foolish*". [Murphy 38]. She executes her plan with the help of Harvey. The revenge on Luke, does not happen as she planned. But, in the course of revenge, Luke gets naked on the stage. He gets suspended from the school. She feels happy after taking revenge on Luke. Though it is not her plan succeeds but accidentally Luke gets naked on the stage during the actions of her plan. Alice says, "*That was so not part of my plan, but kudos! Now, just so we're on the same page*" [Murphy 122], which shows her attitude of sadism. The pleasure she drives from the suffering of more enjoyable to her. She forgets what happens to her and the pain which she undergoes due to the chemotherapy. On the day of executing her plans, she is not well physically but she gets the help of Harvey. The researcher assumes that the moment of revenge gives her much pleasure as well as it reduces her death anxiety.

In another incident, Alice wants to take revenge on Celeste for the same reason. She gets the help of Harvey, because she is not well physically. She needs to take revenge on the day, because that day is more important in the life of Celeste. She completes her revenge on the day and feels much happy. The researcher finds that though she is not well physically on the days of taking revenge, she is taking the revenge with mental strength. As a result, she drives certain amount of pleasure which reduces her level of Anxiety. The following quote shows the happiness of Alice, "*Alice shook against my body, laughing*

*so hard I almost thought she was crying.*" [Murphy 172]. Alice is not only derived pleasure from taking revenge but also, she derives pleasure from thinking over the actions of her past revenges.

Mindi is the other character, who reveals the secret of Alice's mother and makes fun on the class about her appearance. Alice expects a perfect day to execute her plan of revenge over Mindi. The day, she gets that the day of fund-raising dinner for Alice. Mrs. Barton, who is the head of Parents Teachers Association, collects fund for Alice's cancer treatment. Mrs. Barton is the mother of Mindi, so Mindi sits in counter of collecting the money. Alice visits the dinner with Harvey plans to take revenge on Mindi. She speaks loudly about the Pregnancy test done by Mindi. Mindi gets very much upset, but Alice is much happy as she is cured from cancer. The researcher confirms that the psyche of Alice gets changed due to the Anxiety. She gets reduced by taking revenge on the characters. She is not worry about the consequences of her actions. The abovesaid reduction method categorised as 'Displacement' by Sigmund and Freud's defense mechanism.

The researcher assumes that the sense of belongingness which makes human to afraid in the face of death. The person who knows the eternal truth of life may not have fear over death. The human beings are coming in to this world, lived for some decades and get away from the world. Death Anxiety arises in the mind of humans due to the insufficient knowledge over the eternal truth. The eternal truth of life and death can be understood either from the perspective of science or from the perspective of religion. The answer of both fields, is an energy or a soul come from somewhere and dwell in the body and complete the wishes of its own or its surrounding then vanish from the body.

At the outset of the novel, Alice is sharing her anxiety with Harvey. The researcher finds Alice's action may reduce her level of Anxiety. Harvey allows certain space to Alice to talk about her inner thoughts. Even the Psychiatrists give space to talk while giving treatments. This is one form Anxiety reduction. When the patient narrates his or her own life, he or she may speak out the repressed thoughts.

According to Mollaioli et al., "Anxiety and depression scores were significantly lower in subjects sexually active during lockdown. Analysis of covariance identified gender, sexual activity, and living without partner during lockdown as significantly affecting anxiety and depression scores ( $P < .0001$ )" [2]. The researcher finds that Alice may not have fulfilled her wishes due to her ill-health. Sexual Intercourse is a method of Anxiety reduction. In the chosen novel, Alice is having sexual intercourse with Eric and Harvey.

As per the knowledge of a person, the life is meaningful or meaningless but the soul or body needs to complete its wishes before its end or death. Alice is not only an exception to the abovesaid statement. She creates a bucket list or to-do list. She needs to accomplish the event, which she is mentioned in the list, before her death. The researcher finds that even though Alice is frightened by death, she accepts it. It shows that she in Reality Anxiety, where the person gets in to Anxiety of possible events.

In order to reduce her Death Anxiety, Alice visits the places that she visited in her childhood. Alice and Harvey visits Lake Quasipi with Dennis and Debora. Alice says that, "*My memories from Lake Quasipi were perfect little slices of nostalgia where everyone got a happy ending. I remembered riding the mini mine train with Harvey when we were kids...*" [Murphy 127]. The researcher finds that the anxiety reduced by visiting the places of childhood memories.

**2. Conclusion** The researcher concludes the study that the anxiety over Death is not avoidable. The level of anxiety can be reduced by using defensive mechanisms advocates by Sigmund Freud and his daughter, Anna Freud. Displacement is unique way of Defense Mechanism used by the character of Alice in the novel. Alice says that, "*We all die. We are dying. I'm just in the fast lane, I guess, dying faster than the rest of you slugs.*" [Murphy 71]. She also uses various techniques to divert her mind from Anxiety. Visiting the places, revenging her enemies, having sex and speaking about her inner feelings are the certain methods used by Alice to reduce her Death Anxiety.

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