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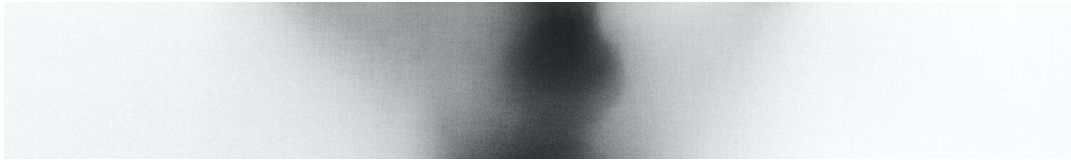
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Don't be afraid of the monsters within: grief in The Babadook

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Grieving is an individual experience. Each person reacts, processes and copes with a major loss and the ongoing demands of life in their own way. What is most beneficial to accepting this loss is having the space to express the hurt, anger, pain, and sadness that are most common in these situations—it is key to beginning the course of emotional healing.

The Babadook (2014), directed by Jennifer Kent, takes a closer look at one mother's grieving process; she is never allowed, mostly by herself, to have the time and mental space to grieve for the loss of her husband. What results is unpredictable, violent emotional outbursts that eventually take a near-lethal turn. The horror film focuses on the lives of single-parent Amelia Vanek (Essie Davis) and her six year old son Samuel (Noah Wiseman). The anniversary of her husband's death is quickly approaching and Amelia's reluctance to allow herself to grieve threatens to take its toll.

Amelia struggles to get through the day with a smile while trying to be the nurturing, caring parent and nursing aid that she thinks the world expects her to be. In his Attachment Theory, John Bowlby argues that to deny oneself the due time to process these emotions is only doing that person a disservice. When a person experiences the loss of someone significant in their lives, the loss of the person is not the only thing they lose; Amelia's husband provided her with emotional stability which declines with each day she fails to confront her loss. The day that her husband died was the same day her son was born so Amelia has buried

these emotions to cope with fulfilling the needs of her child. Amelia cast aside the emotional burden of a loss and shouldered the huge responsibility of single parenthood, along with starting a new career to pay the bills.

When the people around Amelia ask how she's doing she smiles faintly and repeatedly states that she is fine, everything is fine because she tries to avoid the process of grief where pain and anger are acknowledged and worked through. When pressed with more questions, Amelia closes up further, unable to admit her emotional pain to herself because that would require addressing its cause. The stress of maintaining a cheerful disposition while dealing with the demands of work causes Amelia's social façade to unravel. The appearance of the Babadook book marks the beginning of Amelia's grief breaking through the surface and manifesting itself in her subconscious thoughts, actions and speech.

Unwilling to process the loss of her husband and confront her emotions, Amelia desperately tries to hide the book as she tries to hide signs of her unacknowledged grief. Bowlby argues that grieving the source of emotional stability is a natural process; similarly, in *Tasks of Mourning*, J.W. Worden notes that working through the negative emotions provoked by loss is a key stage of emotional healing. But Amelia cannot do this. She tries to destroy the book by tearing it apart and burning it to keep (what she perceives to be) her shameful and dark emotions hidden.

Unfortunately, none of these strategies work and Amelia's mental stability continues to decline, causing her son to become increasingly more scared and protective of his mother. They both start to see the Babadook more often as it approaches closer and closer.

Despite his mother's best attempts, Samuel can sense his mother's hurt, anger and pain. Amelia's withdrawn behaviour starts to take a toll on her son and while he may not comprehend the extent of her emotions Samuel knows it is consuming his mother. Samuel's inexperience with grief and how an adult's need for comfort differs from his own makes his soothing attempts (such as making a catapult) ineffective. To the audience it can appear like an annoying attention grab. This young boy is grieving for the father he never knew. He sees other families with two parents and is even called out on the uniqueness of his family situation by his cousin. Being unable to put a name to his feelings and discuss them with his mother leaves Samuel with few choices to express himself. He takes refuge in physical defense and visual distractions in order to break through his mother's emotional miasma.

When Amelia tries to reach out to her social network for support, she is told to 'move on already' as it's been seven years since her husband's death; Amelia hasn't had seven years to complete her 'Tasks of Mourning'. She cannot emotionally 'move on' as she has yet to accept her husband's death and work through her pain and anger. Instead, she tried to adjust to her new reality of life without her husband but by not giving herself permission to grieve she will never truly be able to heal. While at her niece's birthday party, the other mothers try to comfort Amelia but their attempt was adversarial and patronising, causing Amelia to grow defensive and emotionally pull away again. When a person is grieving, callous remarks made by members of their close support network can be detrimental and lead to a person regressing in the grieving process. It can lead to feelings of betrayal, mistrust, misunderstanding and further loss.

The Babadook fully manifests itself when it enters Amelia and strips away her emotional barriers. The anger and frustration she tried so hard to bury are directed towards those she cares about the most: her son and pet dog. Amelia's mental instability is clearly reflected in the disarray of her kitchen and outward appearance which mirror common indicators of sadness following a loss. While in this state, Amelia unearths her husband's violin which she had previously kept buried in the basement along with his memory. She begins her grieving process as she lays in bed with an artifact of her husband's, accepting that he is no longer there with her.

Through a series of his booby traps, Samuel makes his mother acknowledge the Babadook and how she is feeling in an attempt to protect her from her emotional volatility. This leads to a cathartic moment where she simultaneously expels the Babadook from her body and successfully expresses her rage and grief at it. Acknowledging her pain and grief allows her to start the journey of healing she previously denied herself, no longer continuing to do herself a disservice by ignoring negative emotions and impeding her healing.

Babadook demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the ugly sides of grief. When losing someone significant, survivors may question their sense of self as they need to redefine their lives without their loved ones in them. Amelia's unwillingness to allow herself to grieve and her failure to confront her emotions manifests in the nightmarish Babadook that continues to reappear until it is finally confronted and can no longer torment both mother and son.

Adeline Panamaroff is a freelance writer located in Edmonton, Alberta. She loves to share the smaller details in movies and anime in her writing, and how they serve to enhance the storytelling experience. Writing about nerdy topics is one of her many passions in life.

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