Charlie’s Intelligence In Daniel Keyes’ Flowers For Algernon

People who are intelligent often face many challenges in life. This is certainly true in

Daniel Keyes’ novel, Flowers for Algernon where the main character, Charlie faces many

challenges after he becomes intelligent. Charlie’s transformation into an intelligent person leads to him facing a lot of different social problems as well as him going through a wave of different emotions all at once. Therefore, Charlie’s life is more difficult now that he is intelligent.

Firstly, Charlie experiences many challenges with his emotions once he becomes intelligent. Charlie learns that the bakers have been mistreating him the whole time and are not his friends. When Charlie gains his intelligence, he learns what shameful things the bakers were saying such as “Now I know what they mean when they say ‘to pull a Charlie Gordon’ I’m ashamed” (Keyes 42). Charlie came to realize that the bakers have been making fun of him behind his back, even though he considered them as his friends and thought that they viewed him as equal. The only reason Charlie wanted to become intelligent, was for his mother’s love and acceptance because ever since he was a child, all she wanted was for him to be smart. The only thought that constantly went across Charlie’s mind was how he “never stopped wanting to be… the smart boy… so that she would love me.” (Keyes 111). As he was not intelligent while growing up, he thought that the only way his mother will love him and be pleased if he was smart. At Professor Nemar’s cocktail party, Charlie Gordan admits that his life was better before the operation because back then he had friends, but now his intelligence has caused him to isolate from everyone. At the end, Charlie also adds that “Intelligence... that hasn't been tempered by human affection isn't worth a damn.” (Keyes 191). He believed that along with intelligence he would also receive love, friends and acceptance, however, the opposite occurred making him came to the realization that without love, intelligence is worthless. Therefore, Charlie comes to a realization that being intelligent doesn’t give you a better life.

Furthermore, Charlie encounters several social problems as a result of his intelligence. He got mistreated several times by others because he was not smart. While he was talking to Professor Nemur, Charlie expresses himself and tells the Nemur that he “was a person before the operation. In case you forgot.” (Keyes 89). He felt as if he was treated more like an object than a human being and this was mainly because the professor was incapable of considering someone with low IQ a human being. Charlie Gordan starts changing into a new person towards the end of the story when he loses his intelligence, and this is shown when Alice comes to visit him but he doesn’t let her in. “I wouldn’t let her in because I didn’t want her to laff at me.” (Keyes 235) says Charlie as Alice Kinnian was the only woman he ever loved and Charlie didn’t want her to stop loving him because he was losing his intelligence. Charlie Gordan used to be the person who always people to laugh at him so he would feel happy, but due to his current mental state, he has become the opposite which is creating distance between him and the woman he loves. At the end, Charlie Gordan looks back and reflects on the experience he gained while he was living life as an intellectual. “Now I know I had a family and I was a person just like evryone.” (Keyes 238) says Charlie as he starts to recall his past and family. Although he lost his intelligence, he still ended up recognizing that he is a person of value. Ever since

Charlie got smarter, he lost more than he gained.

In conclusion, Charlie’s life becomes more challenging ever since he turns into a significantly intelligent person than he was before. Charlie had to deal with a lot of different emotions and also had to put up with issues regarding his mother and people he considered friends. Furthermore, he also has to face a lot of problems with society, simply due to the fact that initially, he was not as intelligent as the people around him were and was forever being judged. Therefore, it is very common for intelligent people to go through various different struggles in their lifetime.