Portrayal Of Schizophrenia In The Film, ‘Words On Bathroom Walls’

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Schizophrenia, Diagnosis, and the Clinical Context of Words on Bathroom Walls

The definition of schizophrenia, within the DSM-5 context, refers to chronic and severe mental disorders affecting the perception, behaviour and thoughts of an individual. King (2011) classifies symptoms of schizophrenia into three general categories: negative symptoms, positive symptoms, and cognitive deficits. People with schizophrenia witness incidents and beings that are not actually present, and they have to exist in a world that is twisted and terrifying and takes the person into isolation. The highly disordered thought processes sometimes result in saying unusual things, and their body movement can become strange. The social exclusion is due to the feeling of being alone in a world that no one around seems to understand. Statistics suggest that the suicide risk increases eight-fold vis-à-vis the general population. The primary positive symptoms are hallucinations, movement disorder, thought disorder, and delusion. The impairment of normal functioning results in positive symptoms that reflect on the exposure to added above when compared with normal behaviour.

Negative symptoms are worrisome because they result in a behavioural deficit, social withdrawal and reduction of normal functioning. For example, flat affect suggests that the person expresses no or least emotional empathy towards others. Lastly, cognitive symptoms are those that alter executive functioning (memory) and affect decision-making power. Nevertheless, the causes of schizophrenia also vary in psychological, biological, and sociocultural categories. Nieto-Rucian & Furness’s (2019) research focuses on the impact of a parent with schizophrenia on the immediate kids through a qualitative study investigating the experience of six individuals from spatial proximity of Spain who spent a significant amount of their childhood or adolescence living with one of the parents with schizophrenia. The research adopts interpretive phenomenological analysis with three themes pertaining to ‘who am I?’ along with prison of silence, and role change and loss. This study highlights the lack of support, especially emotional deprivation at an early stage of life, and other lasting negative effects. This is also true in the case of the film’s protagonist ‘Adam,’ whose loss of father at an early stage of life placed a deep hole in the heart of Adam. People around Adam lack understanding of the way he actually feels in the presence of other beings outside the real world, that is, the three characters, which sometimes become more than three. The results of the study explains each theme, for example, the ‘role change and loss’ refers to the transformation of social role and respective household environment that resulted due to schizophrenic condition of the parent. In the

study, participants reflected on their experiences, especially women losing more of their freedom when compared with men. Family members of the parent with the condition also face disturbances in the role change within the household structure, where the mom is cared for in the same fashion as she used to do when the condition was not present. The child feels deprived and undergoes pain equivalent to the loss of someone.

Metacognition, Self-Compassion, and the Search for Meaning

On the other hand, Bercovich et al. (2020) research attempts to explore the interactive effect of metacognition and self-compassion on the cause variable of 'meaning in life,' but in the case of individuals with schizophrenic conditions. The findings of the research suggest that meaning in life is reflected in two subscales of self-compassion and one subscale of metacognition (master). At the self-compassion level, mindfulness and self-kindness are the two scales that tend to provide hope in gaining positive results. The statistical analysis of the study also suggests that the self-compassion has a moderating effect on the meaning of life. High-level self-compassion individuals tend to have found metacognition as a source of light in the darkness. The eventual outcome of self-compassion is attaining meaning in life with the ability to successfully utilize metacognition. There are various myths associated with schizophrenia, which include the myths of multiple disorders, genetic transfer from parents to children, violent behaviour, deprived intelligence and lack of social acceptability when considered worthy of a mental hospital.

Freudenthal's "*Words on Bathroom Walls,* 'is an American romantic drama film written by Nick Naveda (2020). The protagonist of the story is Adam Petrazelli, who is a high school senior in his mid-teenage. The narrator's voice is of the protagonist, Adam Petrazelli, and the story begins with Adam narrating the history of the diagnosis. In the opening scene, Adam explains the initial doubt of health care practitioners thinking, 'There was something wrong with my eyes,' states Adam (Freudenthal, 2020, 00:01:08). And, later explains the process of hearing voices, including dark voices of extra-territorial being say, 'Adam' (Freudenthal, 2020, 00:01:30).

Adam's step-dad is worried and expresses concerns about the kid's well-being when discussing the matter with her mother regarding her going to a healthcare institution where optimum care can be managed (Freudenthal, 2020, 00:07:07), which he perceives negatively. Additionally, the characters like Rebecca, amongst other two, which Adam explains in his words, "She's sort of Dalai lama meets Coachella" (Freudenthal, 2020, 00:07:35). Another totally contrasting from the hallucinatory world of Adam is 'Bodyguard … temperamental but loyal' (Freudenthal, 2020, 00:07:48). Bodyguard is reflective of the weaknesses that create way for fear, and the tag-line of the character is 'You have to always watch your back.' Lastly, Joaquin is explained as a '… horny best friend from a 90's teen movie' (Freudenthal, 2020, 00:08:00), representative of the 'unconscious mind' because he says all the thoughts of Adam in an 'unfiltered' fashion. These are people who coexist in the real world for

Adam and are accurately portrayed in the film, although the actual cases are more violent and vary on a case-to-case basis.

Adam's Symptoms and the Film's Representation of Mental Illness

The protagonist 'Adam' of the story fulfils the diagnostic criteria set for schizophrenia condition under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 295.90), whose impacts vary from emotional, behavioural, and cognitive dysfunction. Adam experienced symptoms of hallucinations and disorganized speech, the most obvious one of which impairs social and occupational functioning. Adam has several characters in the world that are beyond the real-world experience and sometimes come in contradiction with reality, resulting in psychosis. The failure to accomplish the desired level of academic, interpersonal, and occupational functioning is reflected in Adam's school life, where he receives a 'D' grade for his exam while others around him secure an 'A' grade. The treatment of schizophrenia can be lifelong, and it includes medication and therapy. Medication is the prescribed drug of antipsychotic medication and aims to reduce the harm carried out by the disorder's symptoms. Adam witnesses deterioration of hallucinations when taking medication regularly and feels a life that he has not remembered experiencing since then. Antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs supplement the medication that Adam was taking, and he mentioned in the name of a few that he is taking but not working in the initial time period of the medication.

The two concepts of social psychology related to Adam's case are first impression and confirmation bias, which places him in an uncomfortable position in the socialization process. The portrayal of abnormal behaviour has severe negative repercussions for the person with a schizophrenic condition. When Maya first meets with Adam at the student café, she actually asks, 'No offence, but are your special needs?' and they are the first impression image of a person with a schizophrenic condition. The mental image of that person is formed as the first impression of the real world, which places Adam in a disadvantaged position. In a similar way, confirmation bias refers to the solidification of already established bias when selecting information suitable for consumption and discards the contradictory paradigms that don't fit with the already displayed bias. The existing attitudes of people around Adam cause emotional instability and form dissatisfaction with the role Paul has taken over as a father, coupled with reflecting on childhood traumas. For example, Adam's father leaves him for his personal realization of life's achievement, and he feels that the reason his father left him was the condition.

The combination of medication, psychotherapy and social support in the form of friends and family contributes positively to the control of schizophrenic conditions, especially in the adolescent population. Adam started recovering when her mother hired a tutor 'Maya' from her school to assist him in improving his grades. It is the required social support, coupled with medication and psychotherapy, that worked for Adam. However, the societal pressure is high because the journey of

recovery is in real-time, which means his step-father's role remains marginalized despite the goodwill. Adam's lack of stability at the emotional level depends not only on the process of treatment but also on the biases that exist in society. The movie is Adam's narration to a counsellor at psychotherapy, which resulted in sustaining the journey, although getting her mom aware of the therapy sessions disrupts the pattern of smooth recovery in the first act of the movie. Confirmation bias and first impression are the two crucial social implications for individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia because they are at a two-front war, one in the real world at the socialization level, while the other is actually to reduce the symptoms of the condition. The portrayal of schizophrenia in the film, 'Words on Bathroom Walls,' is reflective of the real-life struggles faced by many in the urbanized and individualized lifestyle.

References

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