



Void of Representation of Psychological Maladies

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Full Text

Representation plays a major part in the makeup of the present day understanding capacity of the general populace, especially when it comes to that of movies based on mental maladies. The concept of psychosis morphs into diluted and very often, misinterpreted depictions onscreen, to fit in with the storyline of the given movie. Thus, causing misconceptions about the true dimension of the original problem, which is given in a heavily misinterpreted format itself.

In the present day and age, with mounting pressures in everyday life, the question that seems to nag the majority of the population is whether any one is truly free of any psychological problems. With anxiety and depression levels rising fast, combined with panic and phobic disorders, it is no surprise that society fears more than it knows, while struggling to hold onto a healthy and sound state of mind and at the same time, having a skewed belief that psychological deviations are communicable. In our scramble to appear 'sane', we hardly give a thought to what causes such deviations and instead worry as to what extent, our involvement and stature in society will be affected if we had such problems or know someone who does.

These psychological deviances are further obscured in the various depictions they receive in social entertainment forums, mostly movies, in which, the psychological problems are misrepresented, or are cloaked under multiple diluted aspects of several psychological maladies. Without proper comprehension, they lead to misdirected, incorrect and half-baked understanding of certain delicate conditions that have to be properly studied and understood.

7 Khoon Maaf and *Gone Girl* are two such movies that deal with psycho-neurosis and psychosis, with female leads, who exhibit sociopathic and psychopathic tendencies. Patterns of familial isolation, in social relationships on the surface level and in psychological workings on a deeper level, play a very integral role in the deviances that is shown in both films.

7 Khoon Maaf gives us the story of a 'femme fatale', who murders her six husbands, each a representation of the cardinal sins as their fatal flaw. The movie chronicles the downward spiral of human morals and the eventual complete disregard to guilt of murder.

Gone Girl chronicles how a psychopathic wife, with identity and existential issues, goes to extreme lengths, in a bid to get back with her apathetic husband, by staging her own kidnapping. It showcases how psychological exploitation can induce sadism and masochism.

The research will attempt to give a comparative psychoanalysis of the psychological deviances showcased in both *7 Khoon Maaf* and *Gone Girl*, in order to gain an understanding of the extent to which we tend to overlook, misread and misunderstand them.

According to Sigmund Freud, we as human beings operate on the basis of the pleasure and reality principles, where the former posits gratification of need over all else and the latter subordinates the former, in view of what needs to be done. Freud says that the sexual desire becomes the most primary urge and that in order to function in any society, it has to be sublimated into more productive means that are approved in our given society. The inability to sublimate the primary urge leads to various psychological deviances, primarily during the pre-puberty years (63-64).

According to Freud humans have a life instinct (Eros) and a death instinct, called Thanatos. This death instinct compels humans to engage in risky and destructive behaviors that could lead to death. (Adler University)

Freud referred to Eros as the life instinct, which includes sexual instincts, the drive to live and basic instinctual impulses. Thanatos, the death instinct includes negative feelings, like hate, anger and aggression. As the counterpart to Eros, it is associated with anti-social behaviors, such as sadism and violence. (Study.com)

The opposite factor of the Oedipus complex (68), the Electra complex posits that, because women have to double shift their primal erotic attachments, from the clitoris to vagina and from a female body, to a male body creates the potential for a lot of neurosis. Thereby causing the primary form of any female's sexual fantasy to be their father, which gets exemplified in their search for a mate who is equal to or better than their Father. *7 Khoon Maaf* primarily runs on this premise.

The experiences that one has in adolescence shape the psychological setup of the individual and can sometimes help in the detection of mental illnesses before they worsen. Self-images have certain dimensions like that of self-consciousness, self-image, self-esteem and perceived self, which play very important and empirical roles in the nurturing of good mental health of the individual. (Simmons et al 553-555)

Self-image inadequacy issues have to be dealt with at the earliest, when they are expressed by pre-pubescent children, because, if left unchecked they could lead to the development of severe depression at a very young age. (556)

In most cases, the lower impact of any sign of psychological deviance is seen in communities that are simplistic in the arrangement of work profiles and occupations. The simpler the way of life in a community, the lesser impact that mental illnesses have. Even though there may be no community fully free of mental illnesses, the nature oriented ones tend to come together to help each other more, in case of any such deviances in a family (Elliott 197)

People from higher status positions are reacted to with much severity, when they showcase deviances, when compared to that of people from lower status positions, as this is seen as a threat to the stability of a community's work dynamics. The patriarchy places itself as the higher status and slots women under the lower status category, but in reality, women face more severe reactions to even slight signs of deviance and are more prone to neurotic and different types of psychopathological maladies (Rosenfield 19)

Though both the sexes are severely reacted towards for deviant deviance, women are mostly left to bear the consequences and are mostly left untreated due to high rates of relapse and the high cost of procedures. The level of societal harshness varies on the level of gender constructed assumptions that are violated, as well as the status of the deviant person in the society. (23)

According to Gove and Tudor mental illnesses and deviances are fairly specific phenomena that involve personal discomfort and/or mental disorganization that aren't caused by organic or toxic conditions. The people who suffer from them are often forced into treatment with the overrated pretext of non-conformation to social norms and undue aggressive behavior. (812-813)

The role of women in certain religious patriarchal societies is majorly characterized by adjustment to situations and preparation for possible calamities, with no admittance to change of roles with the male counterpart. This leads to unclear and diffuse state of existence that leads to severe mental stress that eventually develops into suppressed deviances. (816)

Many societies have severe consequences for those who are mentally ill, especially if they are incompetent of the gender roles they should abide to. (Tudor and Gove 98)

The status and power they hold in the society is in direct proportion to the level of harshness they face, higher the stature, the more severe the consequence for deviance. (100)

The disorganization of perception of visual stimulants differs greatly among those with neurosis and psychosis. Those with neurotic tendencies were noted to have very premature and irrelevant understanding of what they just perceived, whereas those with psychotic tendencies had trouble processing the information as they could very rarely connect a meaning to what was being perceived at all. (Davis and Cullen 232-234)

Neurotics were most often noted trying to place an effort to derive something more out of a perceived stimulus after they had attached a meaning to it. (237)

The exposure to negative happenings in recovering neurotics, must be under constant supervision as any emotional stressor may lead them to a breakdown that may build-up to a relapse again. (Minski 164)

According to Wertham the true capacity of an individual, is something that connects a person to an incident. If a crime was the result of a psychotic symptom, the person wouldn't know the true quality of the deed he committed, especially if he were to differentiate between what was morally right or wrong (337). There should also be an equal sense of justice meted out, no matter the class or background the accused is from.

The ability of a woman to remain secretive, manipulative, incomprehensible and dangerous, even if she holds the position of a house-wife or mother, adds many masks to her personality that may become bitter and vengeful if mistreated. (Nugent 43)

The research hopes to bring about a better understanding of the psychological deviances portrayed in *Gone Girl* and *7 Khoon Maaf* by high-lighting and comparing specific instances which, add layers to the deviance portrayed by the main female characters

In *Gone Girl*, the antisocial behavior displayed by Amy is most often diagnosed very uncommonly in women. The persona Amy strives to portray contradicts the reality of who she really is. She goes to great lengths to appear delicate, while hiding her true psychotic tendencies. Given the way she gradually starts to take over the lives of the men she romantically associates herself with, it's no surprise that she is

the one with the upper hand in the relationships, even if there are dire and questionable consequences to be dealt with in the process of their break-ups.

Amy shows signs of histrionic personality disorder, when she needs to bend a situation to her convenience, showcasing a pervasive pattern of excessive emotionality and attention seeking, which are present in a variety of contexts like, considering relationships to be more intimate than they actually are, displaying rapidly shifting and shallow expression of emotions, showing self-dramatization, theatricality, and exaggerated expression of emotion.

She also showcases Munchausen syndrome, a psychiatric factitious disorder wherein those affected, use psychological trauma to draw attention, sympathy, or reassurance to themselves. If assessed thoroughly, Amy is a certified psychopath with both narcissism and severe attachment issues. But, the crux here is that psychopathy effects on majority male sexual offending criminals. The ratio between the two sexes in getting it, is an offshoot in the case of women and it is really hard to identify a 'functioning' psychopath. (Usnews/health)

The same partly plays havoc in the life of Sussanna from *7 Khoon Maaf*, as each of the men she meets end up pushing her further to express shallow emotions, while using physical appearance to draw attention. Though she does not embody histrionic personality disorder in a direct manner, there is a certainty of her having the Electra complex, as she seeks an embodiment of her sweet and caring father in the men she selects to spend her time with.

Gone Girl becomes exemplary for depicting archaic setups of failure, caused by Amy's parents coloring the void of her 'uninteresting' life by appropriating each of her supposed failures as achievements in the life of a character based off her. The perfect image of 'Amazing Amy' that could never be her becomes a mockery of sorts of her life as her parents dote more on the character than on their real daughter. Amy's histrionic tendencies take root and become much stronger due to this over appropriation of her every life event, so much so that, her marriage itself is the result of an image building engagement party, where a 'real' proposal just happened to pop up to her.

The reversal of roles towards the middle of the movie, where the financial crisis turns her parents into the dependent part of the relationship makes the illusion of harmony she maintains with Nick harder to keep afloat. The community they belonged to add to the painful realization of her inability to break away, as he had built a very special personal image that everyone in his hometown believed in, opposed to that of his opportunistic and bestial true self.

The community becomes the buffer for Amy's revenge plans, as she anticipates that the reactions that they would give will be more on the sympathetic side in response

to her parents plea for help to find their 'prodigal' daughter 'Amazing Amy' and not in actuality to her true being as a person. This not only cements her anti-social tendencies, but also drives her to masochism in order to play the part of the damsel in distress.

The appropriation that Amy's parents keep doing of her to her namesake character gives much to be despised as it not only becomes a misappropriation of all the failures or non-availed chances that she has ever faced, but also a bleak look at how uninvolved they were in her growing age and developmental stages.

In real world situations, borderline personality disorder is what is more common in women than uncommon clutches of psychopathy. Amy is believed to be in a limbo line on the personality clusters exam and would be driven more by her conscience than anything else that makes her the hero of her own world, however shady that might be. (Huffpost)

7 Khoon Maaf is one of the most modernist expressions of the 7 deadly sins in human form and showcases the angst Sussanna faces from the betrayal of her ever erring husbands, who find their end in the different ways of punishment she deals out to them. The morality that she slowly abandons, showcases itself in her apparent lack of emotions towards the killing of her fourth and fifth husbands. Sussanna, who wraps herself in ambiguous identities is truly a master manipulator, ruled by emotions and cut-throat in her plans of revenge.

The Electra complex that she has, is seen around the halfway mark of each of her relationships, where her cravings for care, love and affection are misled by each of the men, who use her either to get through their hapless condition in life or use her as both, a trophy to covet and a doll to abuse. Susanna's search for a companion to share her love with, on 'equal' terms becomes a tragic spiral of moral ambiguity (Filmgeek). The symbolic ringing of the bell portends a death, turning into a sign of psychological Janus confrontation of both the pain of betrayal and confliction for revenge.

The mask she takes upon herself shields her all too well, from communal censure as she easily sheds her identity and religion to marry her third husband. This ambiguous behavior and display of delicate pageantry adds to her 'petite' and proper demeanor, saving her from the gossip in the society she assimilates with and giving her the reins of her own life.

The despair in the outset of failure to find herself a good husband pushes Susanna to take drastic actions that lead her onto an experience of purifying retribution like a trial by fire that pushes her to the nunnery, dedication to Jesus Christ and to taking him as her 7th husband, as he had to go through much suffering, just like

that of what she had been through in the hands of carnal cravings of men out to just use her. (WordPress)

Narcissism underlines the lives of both Amy and Susanna. While Amy meticulously plots the execution of her plan to get back her husband by maligning his name, Susanna's approach is more on the emotional side, where the situation and consequence lead to the different ways in which each one of her husband's met their death differently.

Amy's narcissist tendencies grew from her fictitious blaming syndrome that she used, to put the blame of the breakup on her former boyfriends who planned on breaking up with her due to her very obsessive controlling tendencies. The blatantly abused psycho-authoritarianism suits her motive and drive to find and fine tune a person to 'belong' only to her.

Amy's role being reduced from that of a successful writer to a common housewife who is set on nagging her husband, who is already planning on leaving her for the girl he is secretly going out with, reiterates the invisibility a housewife lives in, giving her the time to brood over problems in her life, leading to neurotic tendencies. The characterization of housewives as adjusting and self-sacrificing goes for a total revamp here as Amy is shown to be more of a manipulative seductress, who uses her charms to get out of a tight situation by manipulating her obsessive ex-boyfriend into believing that she had escaped from an abusive Nick.

Susanna's role on the other hand takes on multiple layers of well-maintained ambiguous secrecy, as she dons a different mask to fit into the scenarios left behind by the unusual demise of her erring husbands, which make her free from both the emotional strain as well as the legal concerns. The psychotic breakdown she experiences after the fifth husband's death leading to her overdosing with drugs, shows how much depression factors into her unhappy life, pushing her to take the extreme step.

Both Amy and Susanna lack stable self-consciousness and search for that which seems hopelessly out of reach and try to gain it by any means. They have a very frail and under formed self-image owing to the non-existent guidance that is expected from their parents. While both of them have a very fragile self-esteem, they embark on different paths to help counter the pain of it being tarnished. Their self-perception is very poor and they both do not have anyone close enough to them, who can help them in self-validation and existential crisis management, thereby making both their personas highly trauma ridden while bound in an unpleasant set of life experiences.

The selected area of research falls prey to many subjective interpretations, on account of educational and cultural differences. It has not taken into account the

point of view of supporting characters and to do complete justice to the psychoanalysis applied to the primary texts would require a longer time frame and is beyond the scope of this short study.

The comparisons drawn from both the movies, depict how deep rooted psychological problems are made to look like discrepancies in behavior, due to the unforeseen changes in living situations.

The contemporary social environment, hence, functions as a regulatory apparatus for what is considered important to depict and what is not, thereby relegating psychosis to a mere social filter rather than a psychological one. The movies chosen reiterate the social bias that is present in the representation of purely academic spaces that deal in facts rather than interpretations, positing a subjective view towards the world. This view ultimately renders even the most established truths as prone to inspection, hence creating fluxes in society that lead to instability and irregular functioning. Thus, cinema must move towards realistic representations without the influence of external factors in order to maintain the tradition that underlies its very function in society.

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