

John forbes nash jr.

Psychology, Motivation



John Forbes Nash Jr. is a math prodigy and one of the recipients of the prestigious Carnegie Prize for Mathematics at Princeton University. While taking his graduate studies, he met his roommate Charles Herman, a literature student who became his best friend. His eccentric behavior made it difficult for other people to understand and relate to him. Nash's obsession in searching for an original idea for his thesis and a place in the student social hierarchy led him to skip classes which nearly cost his failure.

Fortunately, he was saved by his original research study where he was able to formulate a theory in mathematical economics known as the concept of governing dynamics. After his graduate studies, he worked at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and selected his friends Sol and Bender to work with him.

While teaching a class on Calculus, he met Alicia, a student who later became his wife. While at Princeton, Nash behaved erratically and became paranoid. This compelled Alicia to call a psychiatrist who forcibly took him to a psychiatric facility. While confined in the facility, Alicia showed Nash the unopened classified documents that he delivered in a drop box. This convinced Nash that he has been hallucinating and his classified work to decode Soviet messages was a delusion.

William Parcher, a mysterious Department of Defense agent, Charles and Charles' niece, Marcee were products of his mind. Nash was diagnosed to have paranoid schizophrenia and was treated with a series of insulin shock therapy for ten weeks. He was given daily antipsychotic medications that affected his intellect and his relationship with Alicia. Nash became frustrated and secretly discontinued his medications. This triggered a relapse but he

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came to realize his psychosis when he saw that Marcee remained at the same age for many years.

Nash learned to live with his schizophrenia and ignored his hallucinations. With the permission of Martin Hansen, his old friend and intellectual rival who became the head of mathematics department in Princeton, Nash was given a space in the library to talk to students and audit classes. Eventually, he was able to teach again and was honored in a pen ceremony by his colleagues for his achievement and contribution in the field of Mathematics. He was also awarded the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics in Stockholm for his work on game theory.

1. Why did you pick this film?

I chose the film “ A Beautiful Mind” not on the basis of knowing anyone who has a similar problem or on my capacity to relate to the psychological issues on a personal experience. I chose this movie because there are some scenes in the film which I find very intriguing and influential. First, there was no family involvement and presence in his wedding, academic achievements and illness of John Nash. Second, persons with mental disorder endure a stigma during the early years but John Nash’s struggle to be reintegrated in Princeton and in his community was remarkable. Third, his superior achievement despite his mental illness is inspiring. Lastly, the movie was powerful enough to awaken the consciousness of people towards understanding the plight of people living schizophrenia.

2. What psychological issues are portrayed in this film?

The story showed the eccentric behavior of John Nash. He was unconcerned by society's disapproval of his awkward habits and behavior. His manner of walking and his constant habit of touching his forehead became the focus of attention by some students in Princeton.

Nash was obsessed with his research work and his standing in the student social hierarchy. He brings his books and paper work while he was at a local bar with his friends. Although he has few friends at Princeton, he has a strong preference to be alone and often preoccupied with his own thoughts which is a personality trait of an introvert. Nash also exhibited a type A personality pattern by being achievement oriented, over involved with work, having a sense of time urgency, being impatient and angry when confronted with delays or with people whom they view as incompetent.

In the movie, Nash manifested visual and auditory hallucinations and paranoia which frightened his wife and affected his function at work. He thinks that he is working for the US National Defense Department and there are Russian spies following him. He interacts with people who only exist in his mind such as his roommate and best friend Charles Herman, US Department of Defense agent William Parcher and Charles' young niece Marcee.

3. What diagnosis (if any) does the main character portray?

Dr. Rosen diagnosed John Nash to be afflicted with paranoid schizophrenia due to his visual and auditory hallucinations, delusion and paranoia. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR defined schizophrenia as a disorder that lasts for at least 6 months and includes at

least 1 month of active-phase symptoms, i. e. two or more of the following: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, grossly disorganized or catatonic behavior, and negative symptoms (American Psychological Association, 2000).

Only one symptom in Criterion A is required if delusions are bizarre or hallucinations consist of two or more voices conversing with one another or voices maintaining a running commentary on the person's behavior or thoughts (ibid.). The continuous signs of his disturbance persisted since he took his Masters degree and it continued until he worked at MIT.

4. What psychological theory best explains the behavior of the major characters in the film?

Incentives are environmental factors such as external stimuli or rewards which motivate our behavior (Skinner, 1953). The theory of motivation, specifically the incentive theory best describe the behavior of John Nash (Westmont College, 2008). Nash was highly motivated by the incentive of occupying a place in the student social hierarchy in Princeton University. He was intellectually competitive and the academic incentive pulled him to write an original research paper that would defeat his rival Martin Hansen. His achievements and recognition also led to the satisfaction of his need for self esteem. His careergrowth and advancement is a realization of his need for self actualization. These needs partly comprise Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954)

Alicia Nash has an extrovert personality trait. In the movie, she was able to talk to the construction workers to work in another area so they could have

good ventilation and a noise-free classroom environment. This indicates that she interacts well with people and she has the tendency to direct her personality outward the self.

Her determination to uncover the truth and help her husband John prove that he is working for the National Defense Department shows that she is a woman of action, whose motives are conditioned by external events. Accepting John's situation and guiding him towards reintegration manifest that she accommodates readily to new situations. Alicia's extrovert personality trait is part of the personality type theory developed by Carl Jung (Jung, 1933).

5. Based on what you have learned from the movie would you say the film portrays the psychological issue accurately or not? Why?

The movie did not portray the psychological issues accurately. Although John Nash manifested two of the characteristic symptoms such as delusions and hallucinations as indicated in Criterion A of DSM IV-TR, his hallucinations were not limited to auditory. He has both the visual and auditory hallucinations which are uncommon for schizophrenia.

The film showed that the onset of his mental disorder started during his graduate studies, a period wherein Nash had a high level of academic and occupational achievement. He may not be sociable but his interpersonal skill is acceptable; otherwise, he would have difficulties in developing friendships with some students at Princeton and would not have a relationship with Alicia. Therefore, he has not also met the symptoms for schizophrenia such as social and occupational dysfunction as indicated in Criterion B.

Two thoughts came to mind when John Nash said that he is taking a new medication. First, does this mean that he was on continuous medication since his relapse or has he discontinued taking his medication for many years and decided to try the newly discovered pill? Second, Nash daily antipsychotic medication affected his intellectual ability and his relationship with Alicia. He was not also able to engage in any occupation. One can only come up with a conjecture that since Nash was able to teach at Princeton University means that he discontinued his medication and learned to live with his hallucinations.

References

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