

Dostoevsky: psychiatric genius?

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The book *Crime and Punishment* and its author, Fyodor Dostoevsky, both came many years before their time. In the book, Dostoevsky clearly describes the medical disorders we now know today as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and dissociative identity disorder which is also known as multiple personality disorder. The book was first published in 1866, however, schizophrenia was first described officially in 1887 by Dr.

Emile Kraepelin and not given the name “schizophrenia” until Eugene Bleuler coined the term in 1911 (*The History of Schizophrenia*). And it was not until the late 19th and early 20th century that Pierre Janet coined the term dissociative identity (Pendergrast). Bipolar Disorder was also a relatively new disorder being that it was officially described in 1854 (“A Brief History of Bipolar Disorder”).

The character of Raskolnikov is a good example of these three disorders because of the way he acts towards others or towards himself and then suddenly has a change of feelings or mindset. Schizophrenia is defined as a common type of psychosis, characterized by abnormalities in perception, content of thought, and thought processes (hallucinations and delusions) and by extensive withdrawal of interest from other people and the outside world, with excessive focusing on one's own mental life (WebMD LLC).

In the beginning of the book, the narrator talks about how Raskolnikov has “become so completely absorbed in himself, and isolated from his fellows that he dreaded meeting, not only his landlady, but anyone at all” (Dostoevsky 1). This is the first sign of schizophrenia that Dostoevsky shows in Raskolnikov, it is obvious that Raskolnikov has become isolated and does not

want to be around any other people. Next, Raskolnikov's illness is almost completely caused by his hallucinations, delusions, and dreams.

This is seen in part two, chapter one after Raskolnikov has committed the murders " He sat down on the sofa in exhaustion and was at once shaken by another unbearable fit of shivering...he covered himself up with his winter coat and once more sank into drowsiness and delirium. " (92). This is also seen in chapter three after he returns to his room and has a dream about his landlady being beaten, " He was not completely unconscious, however, all the time he was ill; he was in a feverish state, sometimes delirious, sometimes half conscious. " (120).

Raskolnikov continues to focus on his own mental state throughout the novel and he does not truly become well until the end of the story when he confesses, suffers, and becomes educated. Raskolnikov also has many symptoms of dissociative identity disorder, which is defined as a severe form of dissociation, a mental process, which produces a lack of connection in a person's thoughts, memories, feelings, actions, or sense of identity. Dissociative identity disorder is thought to stem from trauma experienced by the person with the disorder (WebMD LLC).

Raskolnikov's condition has obviously stemmed from the trauma Raskolnikov experienced after having committed the murders which is a major sign of dissociative identity disorder, and there are instances where Raskolnikov will do something and immediately completely regret his decision such as when he gives money to Marmeladov and then wants to go up to the room to take his money back " Raskolnikov had time to put his hand into his pocket, to

snatch up the coppers he had received in exchange for his rouble in the tavern and to lay them unnoticed on the window.

Afterwards, on the stairs he changed his mind and would have gone back” (Dostoevsky 26-27). Raskolnikov also has a form of dissociation because he gets into moods when he is thinking about certain things but disregarding other important details such as closing the door at the pawnbroker’s, locking his own door the night of the murder, and checking his clothes for blood. A third disorder that Dostoevsky describes through the character of Raskolnikov is bipolar disorder.

Bipolar disorder is a major affective disorder, or mood disorder, characterized by dramatic mood swings. Bipolar disorder is a serious condition, when mania causes sleeplessness, sometimes for days, along with hallucinations, psychosis, grandiose delusions, and/or paranoid rage (WebMD LLC). Raskolnikov has many mood swings throughout the story. One of the first examples is when he is debating whether he should go talk to his friend Razumikhin, he changes his mind several times and then decides not to see him.

Raskolnikov also switches moods about his “ act” that he is planning to commit which we come to know is the murder of Alonya Ivanova. He switches his decision several times and finally commits to killing her when he finds out that she will be alone at seven o’ clock, “ he felt suddenly in his whole being that he had no more freedom of thought, no will, and that everything was suddenly and irrevocable decided” (Dostoevsky 65). We also know that Raskolnikov suffered from hallucinations, delusions, and paranoid rage that he used to kill Alonya.

These hallucinations included the dream of the horse getting beaten, the dream that his landlady was being beaten, and the nightmare when Raskolnikov is trying to kill the pawnbroker but she does not die, she only laughs. Dostoevsky helped to pave the way for other doctors and scientists to discover all of the symptoms of these mental illnesses we now know as schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder, and bipolar disorder. This shows how much Dostoevsky knew about human nature. He was able to pick out tendencies that many mentally ill people have.

Not only did he describe these three, he also described alcoholism very accurately by using the character Marmeladov to show that alcoholism only leads to suffering and the more one continues to drink, the more suffering they endure, ““ the more I drink, the more I feel it. That’s why I drink too. I try to find sympathy and feeling in drink.... I drink so that I may suffer twice as much! ” And as though in despair he laid his head down on the table” (14). Dostoevsky was a very extraordinary man and he gave mankind many contributions.

Psychology was an important part of Crime and Punishment, but it is also clear that Dostoevsky is a very intelligent writer and incorporates many different themes into his works. ? Works Cited “ A Brief History of Bipolar Disorder. ” Today’s Caregiver. 2009. http://www.caregiver.com/channels/bipolar/articles/brief_history.htm. Dostoevsky, Fyodor. Crime and Punishment. Ed. Bantam Classic Reissue. New York: Bantam Dell, 2003. “ The History of Schizophrenia. ” Schizophrenia. com. 2004. <http://www.schizophrenia.com/history.htm> .

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