

The character of nina sayers and her psychological disorders (the black swan)

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Introduction – Summary

The movie BLACK SWAN shows the story of Nina Sayers played by Natalie Portman who is a young ballerina in her mid-twenties. A ballerina in New York City for a ballet company whose life, like everyone else in the profession, has been consumed completely with her dances. Nina lives with her retired ballerina mother Erica Sayers played by Barbara Hershey who jealously supports her daughter's ambition after quitting ballet to have her daughter instead. When the director of the ballet company show has decided to replace prima ballerina Beth MacIntyre for the opening production of their new season, Swan Lake, Nina is his first choice. Nina soon realizes she has 'competition' with a new dancer who is Lily played by Mila Kunis. Lily impresses Thomas LeRoy also. The production of Swan Lake required a dancer to play both the White Swan with innocence and grace, and the Black Swan, which represents guile and sensuality. Nina fits the White Swan role perfectly but Lily is the personification of the Black Swan. As the movie continues, Nina starts to rival against the dancers and her only friend at the moment who was Lily, into a twisted friendship. Nina starts to get more in touch with her dark side that has a huge amount of recklessness that could be a threat to destroy her own self for the production of Black Swan and its perfections when performing.

Character

Nina Sayers played by Natalie Portman is portrayed as a fragile and repressed ballerina who is being controlled by her mother. She strives to take the lead in Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake" (James, 2010). It is a famous

role that will need her to play both a gentle, innocent, and pure white swan along with the seductive, eager, and confident in herself to be the woman she wants to be. Nina goes through many characters who try to stop her from becoming a dark figure from the rich innocence she still holds as a woman. She finds her strengths, needs, and desires, throughout the movie to convince everyone around her and herself that she is capable of playing the role of Black Swan for her ballet company production.

Biography

In the beginning of the film, Nina is a talented dancer who has much potential to be a rising star. Other characters tell her she is good at what she does but she wants to be much more than just 'good' to everyone else; she wants to be perfect. When she notices her chance to be the company's prima ballerina due to the company's prima ballerina being too old, she steps in and tries out for the part of the Swan Queen. When auditioning, she is interrupted by the entrance of Lily who is another very talented dancer and Nina sees her as a rival for the role. Thomas, the director, stated Nina was ideal for the White Swan role but soon upsets Nina when she is told she cannot be considered for the role of the Black Swan because she doesn't have the passion and inner darkness required to play the Black Swan. Nina is seen as the vision of innocence; a woman or lady who still lives with her mother who babies her. The walls of her room are painted pink and her bed is covered in stuffed animals. As an adult woman, she is portrayed she is still being coddled like a child. After all, Nina is given the part of the Swan Queen by Thomas but still can't find her inner Black Swan. She is then advised to “

lose herself” by Thomas and that she was too “ frigid”. Thomas forces himself onto Nina on and on, attempting to rouse the Black Swan that he ‘ knows’ lives inside her. Nina then discovers that she isn’t a little girl anymore and has her own adult needs such as her own sexual desires and needs. Thomas suggests to her to masturbate to get a better understanding of herself. When Nina tries, it is cut short as her mother interrupts her, showing she is still taking over her life but by then it is too late and the Black Swan inside her is starting to develop. Lily, befriends Nina and invites her to come out and by doing so, Nina is rebelling against her mother by ignoring her phone calls while she is out. She then tries ecstasy with Lily, which allows Nina to lose control. When Nina gets back home, she fights once more with her mother and defies her wishes by taking “ Lily” to her room and barricading the door. Nina makes love to Lily all night only to find out it was a hallucination she was having. It was then that Nina has allowed the Black Swan to take over, giving into her desires. Odile, known as the Black Swan within is fully awakened when Nina has increasingly erratic behavior in which Nina smashes her mother’s hand in the door, breaking it, before having a violent hallucination and knocking herself out. When she woke up her mother had kept her in Nina’s own room, called the ballet company to advise them that Nina wasn’t feeling well but the Black Swan in Nina wouldn’t let her mother steal her big night and fought back, grabbing her mother’s broken hand to force her out. Nina was now complete and her transfiguration had already begun. Throughout the movie, Nina has had persistent hallucinations. Delusions of scales rippling across her body, like the skin of a swan. Another hallucination was of her plucking a black feather from the

scratches and rashes on her back. The most violent hallucination she has was her being physically transformed into a swan, her knees inverting, and her eyes turning red. Lastly, on opening night Nina was replaced by Lily, but Nina was showing the confidence the Black Swan has given her, and convinces Thomas to give her back the stage. Unfortunately, she ruins parts of the opening act which then causes “Lily” who really is Nina hallucinating it is Lily, to go into her room and taunt her and fight. Lily morphs into a double of Nina, who Nina ends up stabbing with a broken shard of a mirror and this struggle was the final step of Nina’s transfiguration claiming the title of Black Swan. Finally, onstage, Nina dances she has never danced before and captivates the audience. Once she has finished her Black Swan performance, she realizes when she goes back to the changing room she stabbed herself not Lily during her hallucination. The sacrifice within herself was to kill the old Nina and now be a new Nina, thus, transforming from White to Black Swan. Nina Sayers sacrificed her own innocence to achieve perfection in her dance. This cost her sanity and her life as she ended it bleeding on stage laying stating, “Perfect – It was perfect”.

Psychological Disorder & Examples

The psychological disorder portrayed in this film were Bulimia Nervosa and Chronic Hallucinations. It is seen throughout the movie Nina looking at certain foods, denying food, and throwing up in bathroom locations.

Hallucinating in many scenes can be seen, which vary from light to heavy and dark hallucinations. Bulimia Nervosa played a role toward the end of the movie the most where repeated vomiting and weight loss in the days leading

up to her final performance occurred and in the specific scene of the bathroom in a facility, she is seen from the outside of the stall with her feet facing the toilet and noises of vomiting occur. Following this scenario, she sees writing on the bathroom mirror written in lipstick that she cannot seem to wipe off, with writing such as, "WHORE". Nina doesn't often eat much in front of people and if so, very small amounts to not gain any weight. Nina Also sees her evil confident self in various locations with one being in either public or not mirrors. In a particular scene, she is being fitted, while the lady who is measuring her makes a statement that she has lost weight, while she goes back and forth writing and taking the measures down. While the lady taking measures is doing all so, Nina is between two mirrors that keep going into a long loop that gets lost in them; she sees herself with an evil face, scratching her back violently which scares her to turn around when she is advised that she is almost done with her measures and to turn back. She then has a shocked facial expression where it shows she cannot seem to interpret what she just witnessed. Another interesting scene in the movie is when she is 'transforming' into the Black Swan and defies her mother, by bringing her friend "Lily" into her room and having a sexual encounter with her. This whole encounter ended up being a hallucination that she had after ignoring her mother all night, taking drugs like ecstasy with Lily, and partying all night. When she awoke she noticed she was alone and when confronted Lily about not waking her up for practice, Lily was surprised to be asked such a question which then led to Nina to think back if it was all real or a dream. One last important hallucination that stood out to me apart the other twenty-two hallucinations shown in the movie, were of her picking at

her skin in a scene of the movie where she normally scratches herself when stressed out. It is the left back shoulder she notices scale like skin and picks from underneath her skin a small, black, swan like, feather from her back. This demonstrated to me that she was having chronic hallucinations and was deeply into her role of portraying the Black Swan when production was going to come alive in performances. This specific scene seemed to be like metamorphosis of her own such as a swan.

Assessment

Assessing Nina Sayers in Black Swan, was not too difficult as many of her hallucinations were shown right from the beginning of her story. Bulimia Nervosa is characterized by binge eating and inappropriate compensatory behaviors, such as vomiting, fasting, excessive exercise and the misuse of diuretics, laxatives, or enemas (McGilley, Pryor, 1998). If I were Nina's therapist, I would ask her a set of questions that revolve around eating disorders and hallucinations or "dreams" she may be having. I would then diagnose or assess what is going on in her life to ensure I am giving a proper assessment at the time. It is known that Bulimia Nervosa is ten times more common in females than in males and affects up to three percent of young women (McGilley, Pryor, 1998). Thus, in the movie, being a ballerina has its perks but also its flaws as one has to have the perfect posture, movement, weight, and more when performing. Nina cared very much for her weight and often looked like she felt better when told she had lost some weight. It was like an accomplishment for her. As for her chronic hallucinations, It is seen that hallucinations are sensory perceptions that are present, in the absence

of any stimuli (Cowan, Murphy, Sederer). Since Nina thought she was having bad dreams, they were not dreams in fact. The perceptions she had included objects, people, and other things around revolving in her transforming world from White Swan to Black Swan. Since these hallucinations are different from dreams, they are experienced while a person is awoken and are very vivid and seemingly real for the person perceiving them. They are different from illusions as well which is actually a distorted view of reality and imagery which is actually under voluntary control. It is under my belief, that Nina had many Visual and Auditory, with some Command Hallucinations (Cowan, Murphy, Sederer). She had many visual hallucinations in her work, public transportations, home, and any other public place possible within the film. Along with her visual hallucinations, they were auditory because she felt it was really happening and she was being talked to when she heard voices during her visual hallucinations. Command hallucinations was brought in because it was seen she was often told what to do in the movie. Her production employer, her mother, her friends, would advise what to do, how to do it, when to do anything, or any such possible item. She often either hallucinated being told what to take or do and would perform her actions for her well-being in the film. These hallucinations are experience in the form of a person or persons giving commands. These types can be dangerous as the commands may range from random actions to actual self-harm commands to commands that dictate the harm of others (Cowan, Murphy, Sederer).

Treatments

In the state of Nina Sayers, I would suggest treatment of Psychotherapy treatment including or not, medications, if they help speed the process of healing Nina Sayers back to her normal state of being of a woman who is in control of herself in a healthy state of mind. Within Psychotherapy I would introduce Cognitive behavioral therapy because it can help one identify unhealthy, negative beliefs and behaviors and replace them with healthy, positive ones that come from one's own thoughts. It helps them realize their wrongs and want to better themselves in order to live a healthier lifestyle. This talk therapy or psychological counseling will help involve discussing your related issues with a mental health provider (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2017) Within medications, antidepressants can help with bulimia when it is used with psychotherapy. At the time, the only antidepressant specifically approved by the FDA to treat bulimia is Prozac (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2017). Within hallucinations, Psychotherapy and medications both also play a large role for the person to improve themselves. When hallucinations are first experienced, a person becomes confused and seeks an explanation for them. Anti-psychotic medicines and atypical anti-psychotic medicines may help treat severe symptoms that are causing significant distress to the patient. It can however, be treated without the use of anti-psychotic drugs (Cowan, Murphy, Sederer). I think the character would be responsive in the end when she realizes that she has stabbed herself and may need medical attention in various ways. Not only for her wound. She has hurt herself and would probably not want to lose her part in the production thus leading her to cooperate and be responsive to treatments.

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