
How Past Experiences Contribute To Present Day Behaviour

Introduction

In Todd Phillips 2019 film the Joker it touches upon a man named Arthur Fleck, an aspiring stand up comedian who is constantly mocked and made fun of by those around him. The film uses a past to present timeline as it shows how Fleck had already had poor mental health issues, therefore held a grudge on those who made him suffer as he wanted them to feel the same pain that he had gone through in his life. This then brings off the dark side of Arthur as he turns into a villainous criminal also known as the Joker as he hid himself behind clown makeup, but also used this as a stamp for people to refer to him as. Flecks character had turned bad in hopes to seek revenge on those who have previously hurt him such as the boys who jumped him, Murray from the Murray show, his parents who gave him up for adoption, his mother who did not think he was funny and never believed in him becoming a comedian, the boss who fired him, the therapist who never listened to him and his struggles and many more . This film was set in the past, and worked its way to Arthurs present. Through the use of this film's timeline one was able to gain background information about Flecks' past which made it easier to understand why he turned bad in the end. As Lao Tzu once stated " If you are depressed you are living in the past. If you are anxious you are living in the future. If you are at peace you are living in the present". This quote is very applicable in this film as the timeline and Flecks mentally show he is living in the past which affects his present harmful actions. Therefore this essay discusses the use of the past to present timeline in the film and how it pertains to the current issues in today's society including; bullying and abuse, mental illness and violence.

Abuse/Bullying

To begin, bullying is a big issue in today's society, although schools are making initiative to help stop it, it still goes on. According to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research that "At least 1 in 3 adolescent students in Canada have reported being bullied recently". When bullying happens it can affect a person's entire future and how they view themselves and how they view the world as a whole. Right from the start of the film right til the end of the film, Fleck was abused physically as well as verbally. At the start of the film Fleck was jumped by a group of teenagers who took his sign but further ended up violently beating him until he was on the ground unable to move. Even though one physically saw Fleck being abused in this scene one can also infer that there was pre existing abuse that Fleck had gone through as he held up a card to a lady on the bus that explained how he has a condition where he laughs uncontrollably because of a brain injury. In saying this and being aware that Fleck was adopted one can infer that he could have been abused as a child and since he was so little and does not remember being adopted he probably does not remember the past trauma however plays a role of his current mental state. Through being taken advantage of his entire life it had changed how Arthur had perceived the world, he viewed it as everyone was bad and needed to feel pain like he did. "Studies have demonstrated that the effects of bullying victimization go beyond the development of depression, anxiety and social exclusion. Problems experienced by victims are not merely minor diffi- culties but include severe problems such as psychotic symptoms and

suicidal ideations”(L. Arseneault et al.,2009,p.722). Therefore through being set in the past it is evident that his torturous past contributed to him turning into the Joker.

Mental Illness

Furthermore, mental illness is a very serious and very common issue that has arisen in contemporary society. In this film it uses the past to present timeline which demonstrates how poor Fleck's mental health was in the past in which turned him into his present state also known as the Joker. Throughout this film there are many indications that Fleck is mentally ill for example he was going to therapy, was put into a mental hospital, made jokes about his death, was on seven different medications and kept asking for more, he also tells his therapist he feels like she's not listening to her or that she would not get it. According to The Canadian Mental Health Association “Violent behaviours are often associated with life stressors, which are the events in a person’s life that bring about significant anxiety and stress. Stress is often related to major and everyday life events, such as life transitions, loss and grief, experiences of trauma or victimization, loss of a job or career changes, or changes to family structure or among friends. Diminished access to the social determinants of health, including income insecurity, unemployment, inadequate housing and food insecurity, can also cause life stress”.Through being set in the past it gave people Flecks back story and realize that a lot of the factor listed above such as trauma and a loss of job, contributed to Flecks mental illness which further snowballed into him being the Joker. In today's world since mental health has been a very big issue people are getting easier access to help such as therapy and counselling being instilled into schools, accessible hotlines, and over awareness to the issue in general. As Fleck for example did not have access to a hotline to call when his therapy ran out of funds and was no longer able to run. In society and in the film mental illness is a real issue that needs to be taken seriously and as was shown in the film if one does not receive the attention and tools to help their illness it will only continue to get worse and spiral into other issues that could either be harmful to themselves, other or both.

Violence

Lastly, violence is an ongoing world issue. In today's society violence is very common as the news constantly shows shootings, killings, wars and that is just to name a few of many violent cases one witnesses in contemporary society. Violence is a very prevalent action that the joker takes pride in. The Joker builds his persona on violence and making the lives of the others suffer just as he has. The joker uses violence for others to go through and feel the same pain that he has his entire life. For Arthur his violence came gradually. His passion for violence derived from as discussed previously his past experiences that affected his mental state which brought the dark side within himself. The Joker was mad at the world and wanted everyone to feel the pain he had suffered through his entire life whether it be a stranger or a loved one. For example the first people he had ever killed were the men on the train who he did not know or have any emotional attachment to. However he still felt ashamed and hid the fact from his mother that he had a gun and or was a murderer. However with his mental state worsening Arthur was even able to kill people in which he had an emotional connection with such as his mother or Murray. Fleck was able to kill his mother by strangling her with her pillow as he felt betrayed that he was adopted. As well as Murray the man he met several times and loved to watch with his mother on tv. At the end of the film he was able to kill Murray without hesitation as he felt hurt that Murray had made fun of his dream of becoming a stand up comedian.

Course Concepts

Throughout this film the use of the course concept of gender and essentialism is shown. As one is able to identify Arthur Fleck is a grown man, most grown men are thought to be as strong, providing for their families, independent etc. In which this film shows that Arthur is in fact none of those. Arthur lost his job, he is not strong due to him being both mentally and emotionally unstable, he is not independent as he still lives with his mother. This shows essentialism because in the world today people are categorised in a stereotypical type of way as in a way society thinks we should be. That is why Arthur was mocked and made fun of because he was different and society did not approve of him. However only when he had stopped caring about what society had thought of him he was confident enough to be unapologetically known as none other than the Joker.

Conclusion

In conclusion in the 2019 film the Joker directed by Todd Phillips used a past to present timeline. One was able to get Flecks entire backstory to understand why he was showing mental health issues. This led him to a dark place where he chose to seek revenge and make others suffer because he had suffered. Phillips used this method of film to demonstrate how the issues the joker had in his life intertwined with issues that are relevant in today's society. Firstly one got a glimpse into the abuse and bullying the joker constantly had to go through right from the opening scene when Fleck was jumped right until the end where they were mocking him on Murrays show. Secondly, this film touched upon mental health which is a big problem in today's society. These mental health issues are shown many times throughout the duration of the film as Fleck has been locked in the mental institutions in the hospital, goes to therapy and discusses his death. Through set in the past one was able to see all that the joker had gone through that contributed to his mental health problems in which enabled the audience to empathize more with this character. Lastly, the issue of violence is prevalent in both temporary society as well as in this film. Through the use of past to present time frame the audience was able to see how Arthur Fleck, an innocent man who would not take a gun for his own protection, had proceeded to be the Joker, a criminal who is easily able to kill a person and not feel guilty about it. Violence is very prevalent in this film as well as modern day society, with killings continuously happening. In which both scenarios connect the violence and killings to the mental state the criminal is in.

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