Movie Review Analysis

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Abstract

*The Big Chill* is a film about a middle-aged group of old college friends who have been brought back together for a funeral after one of their own commits suicide. Ferrans’ conceptual model of quality of life can be applied to Alex, the character who committed suicide. Role theory can also apply to Alex. He did not meet age norms which indicates poor adjustment to aging. Finally, when the characters spoke on their feelings about their own aging, ageist attitudes were expressed.

Movie Review Analysis

After viewing the movie that I chose for this assignment I instantly regretted my choice. *The Big Chill* is a film about a group of old college friends that have been brought back together for the funeral of one of their own. I found myself wondering how in the world I would relate the premature death-by-suicide that the film centered on to concepts of aging. After shelving the paper for a couple of days I came to the realization that concepts of aging apply across the lifespan not just to old age.

**Quality of Life**

Ferrans’ conceptual model of quality of life makes a really interesting point that applies quite well to the film. The model states that “quality of life depends on the unique experience of life for each person. Individuals are the only proper judge of their quality of life” (Peterson & Bredow, 2004). This relates to the film because Alex, the character who committed suicide, had serious quality of life deficits. Alex was not financially independent, did not have a stable home, and also suffered from psychological and spiritual issues. These quality of life issues certainly contributed to his ultimate decision that suicide was his only option.

**Role Theory**

Role theory provides an explanation for how an individual adjusts to aging. “Role theory proposes that the ability of an individual to adapt to changing roles over the life course is a predictor of adjustment to personal aging” (Ebersole, Hess, Touhy, & Jett, 2012, p. 37). Alex was not able to adapt. He was stuck in a period of “arrested development”. He was dating a much younger woman with little substance. He was also living a transient life without a stable home or occupation despite having an education from a prestigious university. “Resistance to role changes or failure to assume new roles indicates poor adjustment to one’s own aging” (Ebersole, Hess, Touhy, & Jett, 2012, p. 37).

It is important to think about age norms when considering the role theory. “Age norms are socially and culturally constructed expectations of what is deemed as acceptable behavior” (Ebersole, Hess, Touhy, & Jett, 2012, p. 37). Thinking about age norms help us to understand if someone is adjusting well to their changing roles as they age. In the film, you can use Alex’s friends to construct age norms. They were all entering middle-age with similar education levels. The members of the group had established families and careers. Alex had not adapted to new roles along with his peers. This would indicate that he was poorly adjusted to his aging.

**Ageism**

Hints of ageism could be detected amongst Alex’s friends when they were brought together at his funeral. According to an online dictionary, ageism is “prejudice or discrimination against a particular age-group” (Merriam-Webster, 2014). In the film Alex’s peers had ageist attitudes towards their own aging. They expressed feelings of discontent with their current selves along with an aching to return to their youth. They also spoke of anxiety about moving forward in their lives and becoming more like their parents. “In the United States aging is viewed with depression, fear, and anxiety” (Ebersole, Hess, Touhy, & Jett, 2012, p. 82). This type of view of aging certainly can be seen as having an ageist attitude despite whether or not it is deliberate.

There are many factors that contribute to the healthy or unhealthy aging of an individual. One fact that I did find to be really interesting from the text is “holding a positive self-perception of aging can contribute to a longer life span. The survival advantage of a more positive self-perception of aging can add 7.5 years to the life span” (Ebersole, Hess, Touhy, & Jett, 2012, p. 82). This incredible fact is a testament to the power of positive thinking. Unfortunately for Alex he seemed to have the odds against him. Quality of life issues, poor role adjustment, and poor self-concept contributed to his untimely death.

References

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