

Life with Emotions: A Review of the movie 'Inside Out'

Ishita Solanki

Bachelors of Education, University of Delhi



We all know that our brain carries out a staggering amount of processes at all times. Even when we're sleeping. We may have some idea of what is happening in the brain, but we don't know much about it. Inside Out is an imagination of how the head works. It is an oversimplified depiction of the creation and working of memory, personality, dreams, the unconscious, and especially, emotions. The movie is set inside the head of Riley, an 11 years' old girl. Starting from the first scene itself, wherein it is shown that her actions are controlled by five emotions (who are personified): Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust, the movie questions the general attitude of many people that emotions make a person weak. Rather, it signifies that emotions are responsible for the person's big and small actions, which are responsible for all kinds of memories, which are further responsible for the development of a person's personality. So, emotions here are shown as an indispensable part of functioning of humans. This is a message that psychologists put their weight behind. Many professionals have applauded this movie for this depiction of emotions. It is believed that rejection of our or others' emotions is a big contributor to mental illness and generally a

harmful practice from the mental hygiene point of view.

Mainly, this movie shows two important journeys: one of Riley growing up slowly, and learning to deal with issues that she is encountering for the first time. The second journey is of Joy realising the importance of Sadness. In the beginning, while introducing the other emotions, Joy seemed to know the "purpose" of every other emotion. In sync with the evolutionary understanding of emotions, Joy introduces Fear as the one responsible for keeping Riley safe; Disgust keeps Riley from being poisoned: physically and socially; Anger cares deeply about things being fair. But while describing Sadness, Joy says: She.. well she.. I'm actually not sure what she does. And, I've checked, there's no place for her to go, so, it's all good. Slowly, as Riley struggles with growing up, Joy struggles to keep things as "joyful" as they always have been. Sadness loses control of herself, and keeps "messing up." Joy, who is generally in charge of the "headquarters," struggles to keep Sadness in check. During one of their struggles, they make a big mistake, and end up displacing Riley's core memories, and ejecting themselves out of the headquarters. As they spend time together, trying to figure out a way to get back to the headquarters, Joy's perspective of Sadness is completely changed, as she realises her importance. Besides, it is also shown quite clearly that all the emotions: "positive" or "negative", love Riley, and care deeply about her. So, this movie also sends out the message that all emotions are useful and important, not just the "positive" ones.

While a big part of the movie is about acceptance of emotions, there are a lot of other exciting things this movie offers. There are a lot of little insightful moments which can be interpreted with respect to mental health. For instance, it also shows how conflict of emotions can be disastrous. It can, directly or indirectly, can go on to affect the personality of the person adversely. Or, how different emotions when in charge of the same situation, elicit different

responses. It also shows how suppression of certain emotions and forceful domination of others is harmful for a person. All this points to why it is important to be aware of one's emotions, so as to channel one's decisions better.

The way "maturity" or "development" has been shown in this movie is interesting. When Riley was born, there was only Joy. There was only one button on the console which controlled Riley's actions. Slowly, other emotions came into being. The console expanded. Personality islands were created. Another way that maturity was shown was in Riley's mom's head. All her emotions were working together, in harmony. Her head seemed very organised. Her console was also much bigger than Riley's. Then, as Riley matured, her console was shown to be "fixed", and was made much larger. It had space for all emotions to work together, much like her mom's. Also, new islands formed in Riley's head which symbolised the expansion of her personality. These are all interesting depictions of growth, and one can gain a lot of clarity about their own emotional development and maturity by looking at it in these terms.

Sadness is a very important character in this movie. She has been depicted as lethargic, sensitive, empathetic, and insightful. One is reminded of depressed people watching people on watching her. Despite the fact that she's always sad, she is a likeable character. It can be because she counters Joy's naivety. Joy is concerned with sweeping "sadness" of any sort under the rug. She does not see it through, she just tries to get rid of it in any way. Sadness is more mature in that sense. She knows sharing

and listening helps when one is upset. She does not suppress any other emotion. Besides, one feels sympathetic towards Sadness. She is considered to be useless by Joy and she is repeatedly dominated and ignored. She can not control her reactions and keeps "messing up," and we have all been there! We feel sympathetic to Sadness, and in a time when depression is so common, we feel uneasy on seeing Sadness treated like that. All this hints at the fact that acknowledging sadness and dealing with it adequately is a sign of emotional maturity.

While the main themes of the movie are quite important and seem to have done their job, this movie shines at other moments too. The depiction of other people's heads is entertaining and interesting. The way dreams, imagination, abstract thinking, train of thought, etc., are shown is enjoyable and thought provoking too. That being said, there are some aspects that are questionable. For instance, why were these five emotions chosen? While there is still no consensus on what are the official emotions, it seems weird for Love to not be there. One also feels curious as to if they were to make a sequel, what else would they tackle? How would they differentiate between instincts and emotions? Will they show a comparison of how a mentally healthy person operates versus how a mentally unhealthy person operated? What would happen if a core emotion gets stuck in abstract thinking or imagination land? Many such questions arise, pondering over which will perhaps enhance our understanding of our brain. Watch this movie if you'd like to go inside someone's head!