

Mental Health Concerns of the Adolescents: An Insight from ‘The Edge of Seventeen’ Movie

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Mental Health refers to an individual's ability to negotiate the daily challenges and social interactions of life without experiencing undue emotional or behavioral incapacity. I will be discussing the mental health concerns of adolescents by analyzing the movie, *The Edge of Seventeen*.

The Edge of Seventeen is a coming-of-age movie about a girl named Nadine from childhood till adolescence. It captures the struggles of a child/adolescent who is supposedly a misfit in the social world. The movie starts with a scene where the adolescent Nadine approaches her teacher in fury and tells him that she is going to kill herself. To which the teacher responds in a similar sarcastic fashion that he's also just finished writing his suicide note. This scene is representative of the peak moment of not being able to handle one's life and also echoes the existential view of life with a rather comically induced tone of the teacher.

The movie goes back to the childhood days where the parents are dropping off Nadine and her brother, Darian, to school. Darian is presented as the star child who's confident and out-going, opposition to Nadine who abhors social spaces where one has to be a "winner" for survival. Her hatred for Darian (to whom she is compared in school and at home) being the perfect figure is quite evident from the start.

As a seven years' old, she describes two types of people, in her internal monologue. The first ones who are radiant, confident and naturally excel at life like Darian and the other ones like her hope that the first type die in a big explosion. Darian is happy to go to school but Nadine gives her mother a tough time when she's asked to move out of the car. Her father comes to rescue as a loving, comic and understanding figure who tells her that kids can be really mean at times but you can always find ways to tackle them. She is bullied and pushed by girls at school and has no friends at all though her brother is quite popular among his mates. She is finally befriended by a kind girl named Krista at school who remains a constant companion and confidante throughout growing years.

At age thirteen, she's conscious of the way she looks. With her new haircut she hates to look at herself in the mirror and is also jealous of her brother who's grown up into a handsome young man. While she and her father are out on a long drive, her father dies of a heart-attack on their way back home. After her father's death she becomes lonely and even more cynical of the outside world. Her basic need to survive the social world through acceptance, respect and affection is looked after by her friend Krista who's always there for her. She has a distant relationship with the mother for not being able to live up to her standards. Her mother has already idealized the brother as the responsible child and she can never fit into her brother's position. She is aware of her awkwardness around people. She hardly understands social spaces where her honest responses are considered mean and rude whereas the pretentious mediocre compliments by others are valued.

At age seventeen, when her mother goes out on a date with a dentist she drinks and has a really good time at home with Krista. In drunkenness her heightened sense of dissatisfaction with her Body Image and Identity comes to the forefront. She constantly tells her that I don't even like me, how "ugly" my voice sounds like as I heard it in voice mail, I hate the way I "look" when I talk or

when I chew gum. She goes on and on saying I will have to spend my life alone. All these reasons reflect how the self concept is an important aspect in one's life. Due to this lacking sense of self, she is uncomfortable being around people who seem to naturally inhabit the social code of conduct. She isn't accepted the way she is and is left out at parties. The only ones who valued her also left her for her incompetency to make social adjustments and relationships. When she gets to know that her brother is dating Krista, she feels repudiated and betrayed by the only person she was close to. This event further deepens the sense of meaninglessness for Nadine's existence. Her only friend also left her for her popular brother feels like another tragedy which she cannot bear anymore. She feels as if she is invisible and is overshadowed by the charming personality of her brother.

She starts hanging out with a batch mate named Erwin who also tends to be awkward at social settings like her. But over time she realizes how talented he is other than his usual under-confident awkward self. In a scene where she tries hard to imitate other people in social settings, she ends up saying things that sound more like racist remarks (all the popular notions about Asians) to Erwin. She hates herself for having dragged herself into embarrassing situations and pushing people away by being insensitive. She throws tantrums like making her mother take an extra round around the school road so as not to face Krista to whom she is not talking even though the mother is getting late for her job. The mother ensures to teach her a lesson on accountability and takes her along to answer the boss on her behalf for being late to the office. The mother-daughter duo ends up in a fight at the office where Nadine mimics every word her mother is about to say and tells her how tired she is of her 'advices.' She walks out of the office angrily and drives insanely on roads without a driving license almost getting caught by the cops. She feels not being understood or cared for by anyone.

Then she texts a school senior on whom she has a huge crush. Out of desperation or in dire need of companionship she ends up sending him a sexual invite. She shares this embarrassing incident with the teacher in order to seek help but is left with no solution to the problem she has herself incurred. She's in high spirits after receiving a reply from the senior she is attracted

to and feels a sense of self-worth by seeking validation for her otherwise neglected existence. The encounter with the senior brings her to the realization that she was stupid to think of the response to sexually charged messages as a possibility of having an intimate relationship with him. Though she was seeking a relationship with him but for him it was just a casual sexual encounter. She reaches her teacher's home as she feels she cannot go back home after all that has happened. Later, her brother and Krista take her home.

The three scenes in the movie gives Nadine the inner view in the lives of the adult helping her realize how one has to be accountable for one's actions. In a conversation with her mother in the car while heading to school she gets to know how her mother keeps up appearances of being strong amidst all the problems. Since, one cannot change the course of life one can definitely act confident while dealing with it. Her mother chooses to challenge the hardships instead of constantly complaining about them like a victim as is the case with Nadine. Her teacher whom she assumed to be a pathetic loner with nothing good on his plate turns out to be a pretty much loving and caring family man. Here, she realizes the importance of family as the only space where one is welcomed and valued without any judgments. When she's back home with the teacher, Darian gives her the reality check that he too has a life of his own but being the "responsible" one he has to compromise on his personal wishes. He doesn't enjoy playing the role of a perfect son, or brother but that he genuinely cares for her and their mother. Nadine feels loved and valued at the end. She moves away from her usual self-centredness and starts appreciating things around by accepting her friend's relationship with the brother.

The movie ends with Nadine attending the screening of Erwin's animation movie where she thinks that the protagonist of the movie was her to which Erwin replies that it is not really the case. She mocks herself by saying, "I'm one of those people that thinks everything's about them." This line pretty much sums up her journey of growing up from being the centre of everything to an appreciation of people and things around her. This shift helps her in adjusting and making relationships in the social world. The bond formation at home paves the way for her to create meaningful relationships in

the outside world. She becomes more tolerant and patient by realizing that the world is not always picking up on her weaknesses. Everyone out there is as miserable as her in a myriad of ways and yet they all manage to pass through life without invoking self-pity and still being responsible for how they act.