Himizu - Movie Analysis

Part A - Description of the Movie

Meaning of the Movie

The title, "Himizu," translates to "mole" in English. Just like a mole burrows in the darkness, the characters in the film navigate through shadows of despair. Sion Sono uses the mole metaphor to convey the idea of searching for hope and purpose in dire circumstances.

Plot/Theme

"Himizu" is a Japanese film directed by Sion Sono, released in 2011. The movie is a dark drama about the lives of two teenagers, Sumida and Keiko. They deal with the challenging aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

Sumida, a 14-year-old high school student, grapples with trauma from a natural disaster and dysfunction in his family. Living in a log cabin by a lake on the city outskirts, he runs a small family-owned boat rental business. Enduring relentless abuse from his alcoholic father, who blames him for his own unhappiness, and abandonment by his troubled mother, Sumida's life takes a grim turn.

Amid these emotional themes, the search for his life's purpose and identity complicates Sumida's subjective construction. The film explores themes of survival, despair, and the impact of societal breakdown on the lives of young people. Against the backdrop of a post-disaster Japan, "Himizu " paints a bleak yet compelling picture of the human spirit's resilience in the face of adversity.

Character Sketch

Yuichi Sumida

Yuichi, a fifteen-year-old introverted and fragile boy, harbors intense anger and frustration. Despite his tough circumstances and a broken, dysfunctional family—his alcoholic, abusive father (regularly physically abuses him) and absent mother (abandons him early in the film) —he shows resilience and resolves to survive the challenges. Supported by Keiko, he learns to confront and express his emotions, seeks forgiveness, and builds a path towards self-redemption.

Keiko Chazawa

Keiko, a strong-willed and compassionate young girl, provides unwavering support and guidance to Yuichi. Despite her own personal traumas, she stands against injustice and protects others. Through her friendship, she helps Yuichi process his emotions and find a sense of purpose amidst chaos around them.

Director’s Vision

"Himizu" is a 2011 Japanese film directed by Sion Sono, based on Minoru Furuya's manga.

Sono's vision for "Himizu" is a dark exploration of the human psyche following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami.Sono's vision is to create a powerful narrative that reflects the emotional turmoil and societal breakdown resulting from the disaster. It's a character-driven narrative showcasing the psychological impact of tragedy and the resilience of the human spirit amidst adversity, while also revealing darker aspects of human nature under extreme circumstances.

Sono envisions Sumida as a symbol of the younger generation coping with the aftermath of a disaster beyond their control. Through Sumida's journey, the film explores existentialism, isolation, and the quest for meaning in a seemingly senseless world.

Part B - Description of Disorder

Explain the Psychological Condition

The movie heavily suggests that the character suffers from PTSD. Sumida's family and other victims experience painful flashbacks of the Tohoku Earthquake. His father, overwhelmed by emotional distress, directs it towards Sumida. Sumida's recurring nightmares, intense emotional reactions, and relationship struggles reflect PTSD symptoms.

Though the main protagonist isn't diagnosed in the movie, several characters, including Keiko and his assumed grandfather Shozo, urge him to seek help.

The character exhibits symptoms of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), including unstable relationships, identity disturbance, and impulsive behaviour. Sumida's struggles to find his identity and place in the world are evident throughout the movie. After being abandoned by his parents and killing his father, he experiences profound emotional distress. This causes impulsive anger outbursts and difficulty understanding himself and others' affection. He isolates himself from society, avoiding interaction at school and feeling disconnected from the crowd.

"Himizu" is a deeply intricate film exploring various mental and emotional struggles. Attempting to distil its nuanced narrative into just one or two mental disorders oversimplifies its depth and complexity.

Facts and Myths

Despite facing harmful misconceptions, Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a real and treatable mental health disorder. While commonly associated with women, it affects both genders, with men making up about 25% of diagnosed individuals. Childhood trauma can be a contributing factor, BPD has multiple causes, including genetics and environment. Contrary to popular belief, BPD is not rare, affecting millions worldwide.

While facing trauma is never easy, the misconception that it automatically leads to C-PTSD is misleading. Though early support is crucial, many individuals cope effectively and overcome the initial shock without developing the disorder. The misconception that C-PTSD solely affects soldiers also falls short, as anyone, regardless of profession, can be susceptible. Trauma reactions are not a reflection of mental strength, and seeking help is not a sign of weakness. With proper support and understanding, healing is possible.

Falling in line with DSM?

Symptom criteria for Complex-PTSD

The characters' symptoms in the movie are seen in alignment with Complex-PTSD in International Classification of Diseases - 11th version criteria under the Disorder specifically associated with Stress Section.

I) Enduring prolonged and threatening events, such as torture, concentration camps, slavery, and domestic violence, can lead to trauma. This includes organised violence and repeated childhood abuse.

II) After a traumatic event, lasting for weeks, individuals may experience:

- Re-experiencing the trauma through vivid memories, flashbacks, or nightmares, often triggered by reminders, accompanied by intense emotions and physical sensations.
- Deliberate avoidance of reminders, involving internal avoidance of thoughts or external avoidance of people and situations reminiscent of the event, sometimes leading to major life changes.
- Persistent heightened perceptions of current threat, expressed as hypervigilance or an enhanced startle reaction, with individuals adopting safety behaviours.
- In Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, startle reactions may be diminished instead of enhanced.[Emotional numbness]

III) Severe affect regulation issues involve heightened emotional reactivity, violent outbursts, self-destructive behaviour, and emotional numbing, including the inability to experience pleasure.

IV) Persistent negative self-beliefs involve feeling diminished, defeated, or worthless, accompanied by deep shame, guilt, or failure related to the traumatic event. This may include guilt for not escaping the adverse circumstance or preventing the suffering of others.

V) Persistent relationship challenges include consistent avoidance, derision, or minimal interest in social engagement. Occasional intense relationships are hindered by difficulty in sustaining them.

VI) The disturbance results in significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning. If functioning is maintained, it is only through significant additional effort.

Concluding that the main protagonist, Sumida's and the earthquake survivors including his parents and Keiko's psychological symptoms related to PTSD, is in alignment with the IDC-11 criteria.

Symptom criteria for Borderline Personality Disorder

The symptom criteria for BPD in DSM-V remains the same as in DSM-IV.

A pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following:

I) Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment.

II) A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterised by alternating between extremes of idealisation and devaluation.

III) Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self.

IV) Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating).

V) Recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behavior.

VI) Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days).

VII) Chronic feelings of emptiness.

VIII) Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights).

IX) Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms.

Concluding that the main protagonist, Sumida's psychological symptoms related to borderline personality disorder, is in alignment with the DSM-V criteria.

Etiology and Treatment

Etiology of Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

External Events. C-PTSD can develop after a single stressful, frightening or distressing event or prolonged exposure to trauma. Those with depression, anxiety, or inadequate social support are at a comparatively higher risk.

High Adrenaline Levels. Studies indicate that individuals with C-PTSD exhibit abnormal stress hormone levels. Instead of the body's normal response to danger, (where stress hormones like adrenaline are released), those with C-PTSD continue to produce these hormones excessively even in non-threatening situations. This overproduction may contribute to the emotional numbness and hyperarousal often seen in C-PTSD.

Brain Changes. Brain scans of PTSD sufferers reveal a smaller hippocampus, which affects emotional processing. This change is linked to fear, anxiety, memory issues, and flashbacks. A defective hippocampus can hinder proper processing of memories and nightmares, prolonging anxiety symptoms.

Treatment for Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Trauma Focused Talk Therapies. Studies indicate that Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Prolonged Exposure (PE) are the most effective talk therapies for PTSD.

Medication. Medications like paroxetine, sertraline, and venlafaxine, particularly SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, antidepressant) , are commonly prescribed for PTSD. Their benefits may take time to work and end once treatment is stopped. Medicines such as paroxetine, sertraline and venlafaxine are prescribed. The benefits of medications take time to work and end after you stop taking them.

Etiology of Borderline Personality Disorder

Childhood Abuse and Trauma. Up to 70% of people with BPD experienced abuse as children. Separation from the mother, low attachment to the mother, poor family boundaries, and parental substance use disorders are also associated with BPD.

Genetics. Borderline personality disorder often has a familial link, meaning those with a family history are at higher risk of developing the disorder.

Brain Changes. People with BPD, the parts of the brain that control emotions and behaviour do not communicate properly. These problems affect brain function.

Treatment for Borderline Personality Disorder

Dialectical Behavior Therapy. DBT, designed for individuals with BPD, aims to help you accept the reality of your life and behaviour. It imparts skills for emotion regulation, reducing self-destructive tendencies, and enhancing relationships.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. CBT is a structured treatment that focuses on goals, helping individuals examine and adjust their thoughts and emotions. Through CBT, one can learn to release negative patterns and embrace healthier thinking and behaviours.

Group Therapy. Group therapy involves individuals meeting under therapist supervision to discuss and address their issues collectively. It fosters positive interactions and effective self-expression, particularly beneficial for those with BPD.

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Part C - Your Evaluation of the Movie

Merits and Demerits

Sion Sono's "Himizu" portrayal of mental illness and the intricacies linked with them offers the reality of humans and society and how societal upheaval and indifference affect humans. Sono employs a raw and gritty visual style to enhance the film's impact. The cinematography, characterised by handheld camera work and stark compositions, reflects the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the characters' lives. The director's use of intense close-ups and long takes intensifies the emotional connection between the audience and the characters. “Himizu” presents an honest representation of the present's brokenness without aestheticizing or mystifying tragedy and death.

The movie deals with intense and dark themes such as trauma, abuse, and emotional distress. It contains scenes with explicit content and violence, which may be disturbing or uncomfortable for the sensitive. The film has an open-ended conclusion, which might leave some viewers wanting more closure or a clearer resolution to the characters' stories.
The pacing of the movie is slow and the complex narrative and intricate storyline needs careful attention to fully understand and convey the message.

Relevance in the Indian Context

"Himizu" (even though its specific cultural context is Japanese) resonates with various social issues in India, such as the complex caste system, economic inequalities, patriarchal norms, rapid urbanisation, pollution, and the struggles of marginalised communities. In a tough future, young people like Sumida and Keiko face harsh challenges. Adults constantly judge and advise them, including strangers like a loan shark. This pressure makes it hard for them to imagine a better future or change their lives. Instead, they're expected to accept their situation and work hard to succeed. Also, the strained relationship between Sumida and his father can resonate with the challenges faced by families in Indian society due to traditional family structures and expectations.

How differently would you have directed the movie?

The movie is a near perfect creation owing to the fact that it perfectly represents the subject and matter it explores and screens. But it fails to do justice to every aspect of the movie.

Shozo, a former company president, is shown to be very pathetic, from his stature. He now has no connections or any assets left. We could evolve the situation of this character to a more powerful figure.

There is a shocking absence of government aid after an almost 3.11 struck earthquake and tsunami in the region. Even the school portrayed in the film, doesn't seem to have any support system for its students; we are shown a teacher being overly sensitive about people losing homes and performs a poor job at lifting up students' spirits. School counsellors were

integrated into high schools in Japan back in 1995 before the film was shot, yet there is no scene of any mental health professional or treatment.

During Sumida carrying out a knife fiasco, there was no presence of government officials such as policemen on patrol throughout, leaving room for improvement.

Your Rating (Out of 10) and Explain Why?

We would rate the movie 8 out of 10. "Himizu" is a movie with intense scenes reflecting tough economic conditions. Surprisingly, the movie brings a sweet touch, exploring hope amid hopelessness. It challenges the concept of "the good life," implying that violence is inherent in everyday living. Rather than perceiving violence merely as a destructive force, the film emphasises its reparative potential by acknowledging and adapting to the everyday. The film explores the topic of taking responsibility, suggesting a path to understanding oneself and creating conditions for a more hopeful future.

The movie doesn't just focus on individual psychological issues; it covers broader themes like depression, suicide, abuse, and the effects of societal trauma. This helps us better understand the characters' mental challenges in a bigger picture. The film leaves the question of taking responsibility and finding purpose open-ended

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