

## SCHIZOPHRENIA AND PSEUDOBULBAR AFFECT DISORDER IN THE FILM SCRIPT *JOKER*

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### Abstract

This study deals with schizophrenia, pseudobulbar affect (PBA) and negative responses of the community experienced by the main character of the *Joker* 2019 film, Arthur Fleck and the public's response to his illness. schizophrenia is a condition in which a person cannot distinguish between the real world and the world of fantasy or hallucination; while pseudobulbar affect (PBA) is a condition characterized by uncontrollable laughing or crying. Descriptive qualitative method to reveal the social features is applied to get relevant and precise data concerning the discussion based on the clinical psychology theory. Cinematography by listening to every scene in the film, showing Arthur Fleck's illness and the public's response to his illness is then used for the data collection procedures. The results show that the main character has got schizophrenia in the form of hallucination and pseudobulbar affect (PBA) in the form of inability to control his laughter and at the same time it is also found that the community gives negative responses upon the mental illness of the main character.

**Keywords:** *Mental Illness; Schizophrenia; Pseudobulbar Affect (PBA).*

### 1. Introduction

The issue of mental illness is often the subject of discussion because its existence is quite large and the emergence of several cases based on the perpetrators, the sufferers of mental illness rises to the surface. Mental illness can attack people of various social groups, ages, genders, religions, and occupations (Thompson, 2007). It means that mental illness can attack anyone. However, the highest risk of people with mental illness is those who come from the homeless, unemployed, victims of violence, children and adolescents, and neglected parents (WHO, 2003), and also refugees or immigrants (Lau et al., n.d. 2021).

Mental illness is not a disease that can be seen as tangible as a physical wound. Mental illness can occur due to biological, genetic, environmental factors, and a combination of all these factors (Thompson, 2007). Mental illness can indeed be said to be quite a severe disease. However, even so, many people tend to take things lightly and look down on people with mental illness. Some people with mental illness get unfair treatment, and experience rejection, discrimination, and denial of human rights.

Mental illness problems are considered quite serious. However, even so, many people choose not to care about this. People tend to take this issue lightly. Most people also think that mental illness is not considered as important as the physical illness. Not a few of them treat people with mental illness unfairly, look down on them, think they are low, or the like. In some areas of the world, people with mental illness must face unfair rejection of

opportunities in work or education, discrimination, and denial of human rights. In addition, in some countries, people with mental disorders have limited access to help and care (WHO, 2003). This makes people with mental illness choose to be silent rather than talk about their illness. In fact, if people with mental illness continue to hide their illness, they will become increasingly depressed. From the peaked depression, it eventually causes big problems that may have an impact on the lives of the surrounding community.

The rise of mental illness cases gives an idea for several people to create a work about this issue. One of the works created is movie, such as a movie, entitled *Joker*, directed by Todd Philips and aired in August 2019. The movie, played by Joaquin Phoenix, has succeeded in capturing the attention of film lovers. This is evidenced by the many awards received. *Joker* won the Golden Lion at the 76th Venice International Film Festival at its premiere and became the highest-grossing and most famous movie.

In addition, Joaquin Phoenix also received several big awards for his acting as the main actor in the *Joker* movie. *Joker* is a movie of psychological genre that tells the story of the main character, Arthur Fleck, an entertainer clown who lives in Gotham. He works to support himself and his mother. He has a dream to become a famous comedian, but life is not fair and he has to accept it; this is caused by the mental illness he suffers and owing to this he has to accept unfair treatment, bullying, betrayal, and many other things, all of which make him even more depressed. The public response that tends to be wrong makes Arthur Fleck a scary person and does not hesitate to kill anyone who threatens his life.

This study is written to provide information about schizophrenia and pseudobulbar affect (PBA) disorders whose symptoms can be seen and analyzed through several scenes in the *Joker* film.

## 2. Literature Review

The issue of mental illness in literary works has previously been discussed in several studies. The first one is written by Wijaya (2013) discussing the mental illness condition of the character Nina Sayers in the *Black Swan* film. In her study, the results showed the impacts of mental illness on the psychological and social conditions of the character of Nina Sayers.

The next study was written by Fitriani (2019) discussing the id, ego, and Superego of the main character in the *Joker* film revealed through the sequence of scenes in the *Joker* film. The last one was a study by Putri, et al. (2020) discussing the psychological analysis of Arthur Fleck in the *Joker* film.

This current study discusses Arthur Fleck's mental illness depicted in several scenes showing that Arthur Fleck suffers from schizophrenia and pseudobulbar affect (PBA) seen from his very aggressive behavior. This study also deals with the responses of the people surrounding him toward his aggressive behavior.

### 2.1 Clinical Psychology

This study is based on psychological theory, especially clinical psychology. According to American Psychological Association (2018), clinical psychology is a specialty of psychology that provides continuous and comprehensive mental and behavioral health care to individuals and families. The scope of clinical psychology with various systems includes all age groups. Clinical psychology is a psychological science that focuses on the mental health condition of a person, dealing with matters of mental health, emotional changes, or changes

in an individual's behavior, also covering an individual's mental health problems that range from short-term to chronic conditions such as schizophrenia (American Psychological Association, 2011).

Clinical psychology involves research, teaching, and relevant services using the application of principles, methods, and procedures aimed at understanding, predicting, and reducing intellectual, emotional, social-psychological, and behavioral discrepancies of an individual (American Psychological Association, 2016). Clinical psychology is also specialized in diagnosing and treating mental and emotional disorders (Sam, 2018).

## **2.2 Mental Illness Theory**

Mental illness is a condition characterized by emotional, behavioral, abnormal, impaired function, or a combination of all of them (VandenBos, 2013). This is due to several factors from within or family, as well as from the surrounding environment. The existence of unfair treatment that a person receives can cause a person to experience depression and suffer mental illness. Mental illness attacks anyone with a variety of life backgrounds. Mental illness cannot be detected through blood tests, virus tests through a microscope, or through biological tests (Thompson, 2007).

Mental illness can be caused by several things, such as "psychological, biological, genetic, or environmental factors, or from several combinations of these factors." (Thompson, 2007). In addition, there is no community group that can avoid mental illness.

## **2.3 Schizophrenia**

Schizophrenia is a condition in which a person cannot distinguish between the real world and the world which is only a fantasy or hallucination. Schizophrenia is classified as a serious mental illness. This condition can affect the way a person thinks and behaves. (National Institute of Mental Health, 2021).

People with schizophrenia are usually diagnosed between the ages of 16 and 30. The symptoms of schizophrenia consist of several parts. Positive symptoms include hallucinations and delusions, cognitive symptoms include disturbances in decision-making and attention, and negative symptoms, including low life motivation, apathy, and lack of interest in social relationships (Noosha, et al., 2013).

## **2.4 Pseudobulbar Affect (PBA)**

Pseudobulbar affect (PBA) is a condition characterized by uncontrollable laughing or crying. Patients with pseudobulbar affect (PBA) will experience unintentional attacks of crying or laughter and sometimes tend to be excessive (American Stroke Association, 2018).

Pseudobulbar affect can be caused due to interference or damage to the brain such as blockage of blood vessels in the brain and brain tumors that cause problems so that the brain cannot work properly.

## **2.5 Cinematography**

The term cinematography comes from the Greek word meaning "writing with motion" (Brown, 2016). Cinematography is the art of visual storytelling (Heiderich, 2012). As an applied science, cinematography is a field of science that discusses what techniques are needed in taking pictures and combining them so that they become a series of images that can convey ideas. Cinematography is presented to provide techniques in the process of

taking pictures in a film. Cinematography will set the layout of the object, the lighting used, the resolution of the frame to be used. Everything is arranged into one in the cinematography. The existence of cinematography is very important for the presentation of the film.

Film making is a work that results from taking pictures, but cinematography is more than that. Cinematography is the process of taking ideas, words, actions, tones, and all other forms of non-verbal communication and translating them into visual terms (Brown, 2016). With the cinematography technique, it will be easier for the audience to catch the message conveyed through a series of images arranged into a video clip.

According to some of the explanations above, it can be seen that taking pictures in the film-making process is very important. Indeed, the message conveyed in a film is not only found in the dialogue between the actors, but also in the scene from the players. Therefore, it is important to understand how good shooting techniques are, such as understanding the layout of the camera, the lighting used, the distance of the camera, the height, and much more. The cinematographer (the person in charge of cinematography) will work closely with the director, the art department, and the visual effects team to get the film right (Nevill, 2019).

### 3. Research Method

This study used clinical psychology theory by Sam (2018), conducted by paying attention to each scene in the film and collecting appropriate data for the discussion of the study, which is then analyzed with theories that are in accordance with the objectives of the study. For data collection procedures, the cinematography is applied by watching every scene in film showing the symptoms of schizophrenia and *pseudobulbar affect (PBA)* in Arthur Fleck's, as well as people's responses to Arthur Fleck's behavior caused by his illness. These scenes are then captured on the screen to provide information in the form of duration in the discussion which then makes it easier for the researchers to explain schizophrenia, *pseudobulbar affect* and people's responses.

In data analysis, mental illness theory is applied toward the obtained data that is, the symptoms or characteristics of schizophrenia and pseudobulbar affect.

### 4. Result and Discussion

This study is related to Arthur Fleck's mental illness through schizophrenia and pseudobulbar affect (PBA).

#### 4.1 Schizophrenia

In *Joker*, Arthur Fleck, the main character, is identified suffering from schizophrenia. *Schizophrenia* is a condition in which a person cannot distinguish between the natural world and the world, which is only a fantasy or hallucination. Several scenes show that Arthur Fleck has schizophrenia.

The first scene which shows that Arthur has schizophrenia is at 00:27:08,495 minute.



Picture 1. Arthur Fleck thinks he is talking to Sophie

This scene shows that one of Arthur Fleck's female neighbours, Sophie, is visiting him. They talk a few things about stand-up comedy shows. In this scene, Arthur asks Sophie if she would like to attend his stand-up comedy show, and Sophie agrees to come. Arthur, who likes Sophie, must be pleased because Sophie says she would attend his stand-up comedy. In this scene, the shooting process is done in close-up, showing Sophie's face, who looks excited when talking to Arthur. This makes the audience feel sure that Sophie really visits Arthur at that time.

Unfortunately, in reality, Sophie's presence at Arthur's house is only Arthur's hallucination. What happens is Arthur is talking to himself without anyone at the door. This is seen in the scene at minute 1:18:38,295.



Picture 2. The actual state is Arthur speaks alone.

This scene is taken with an eye-level angle, and the size of the image is taken using a long shot, which shows the condition of the place around Arthur Fleck. It is clear that Arthur is standing in front of the door as if he is talking to someone, although it could be seen that no one is facing and talking to him.

The next scene which shows Arthur Fleck is suffering from schizophrenia is at minute 00:45:39,187.



Picture 3. Arthur feels Sophie talking beside him

The scene is shot with a medium close-up and focused on Arthur watching Sophie speak. From the expression shown, Arthur seems to be listening intently to Sophie, who is talking. This scene takes place after Arthur appears in a stand-up comedy show. It shows that Sophie is standing beside Arthur. Arthur feels he has spent time with Sophie after she appears on a stand-up comedy show. The scene in this minute shows Arthur and Sophie walking together, talking, joking, and having dinner together. Unfortunately, in reality, this is nothing but Arthur's hallucination.

The scene that proves that Arthur is dreaming is shown at minute 01:18:41,328.



Picture 4. Arthur is standing alone, without Sophie by his side.

The scene uses a medium shot to show the conditions around Arthur Fleck's standing. Many people are walking around, but sadly Sophie is nowhere to be seen beside Arthur or around Arthur. Arthur's face shows a happy expression because he feels he is with Sophie, even though the actual condition is he is alone; having fun with Sophie is only a hallucination.

Another scene that shows Arthur's hallucinations is at minute 1:18:42,837.



Picture 5. Arthur cares of his mother in the hospital, with Sophie by his side.

This scene is shot in the hospital while Arthur wisas caring of his mother. Beside him, Sophie id sitting and comforting Arthur. The scene is shot with a medium shot to show Sophie is beside Arthur. Arthur looks sad because he is worried about his mother's condition. Meanwhile, beside him is Sophie, who seems to calm Arthur.

It would be a great pleasure for Arthur if this happens, unfortunately, again, this is just Arthur's hallucination. This is evidence at minute 01:18:42,837.



Picture 6. Arthur cares of his mother alone, without Sophie.

The scene uses the long shot method to show the surrounding environmental conditions. Only Arthur is shown sitting alone, looking at his mother with a sad expression. Indeed Sophie is not seen in this scene because Sophie's presence is only Arthur's fantasy.

Arthur Fleck does not realize at first that what he has been going through with Sophie all this time is not real. He realizes things are not real when he finishes reading his mother's medical records. He comes to Sophie's apartment and intends to tell her what has happened. However, Sophie's response makes him realize that his relationship with Sophie is a hallucination. Minutes 01:18:06,335 to 01:18:14,318 show a scene of a conversation between Arthur and Sophie.



Picture 7. Arthur visits Sophie's house to tell her about his condition

Sophie, surprised by Arthur's presence in her apartment tells him about his bad day, and this makes Arthur realize that they are not lovers. Arthur realizes he has been dreaming spending much time with Sophie. Then the next scene displays the actual conditions one by one.

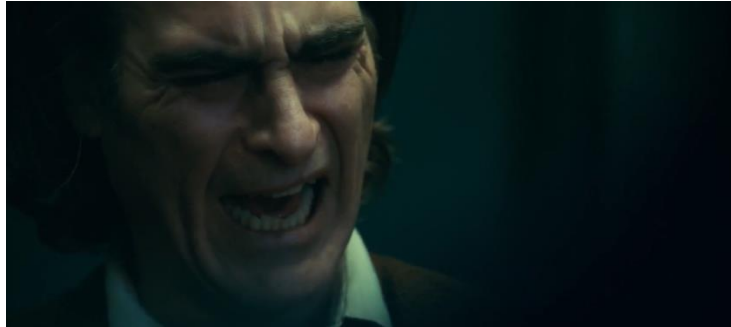
Some of the scenes above prove that Arthur Fleck has schizophrenia. Schizophrenia has several symptoms: positive symptoms include hallucinations and delusions, cognitive symptoms include disturbances in decision-making and attention; and negative symptoms include low life motivation, apathy, and lack of interest in social relationships. Arthur's symptoms are hallucinations. He hallucinates being the lover of Sophie, a neighbour of his apartment. He hallucinates, often chatting, joking, and spending time with Sophie though everything is not real. Thus, it is true that Arthur has schizophrenia, characterized by hallucination.



#### 4.2 Pseudobulbar Affect (PBA)

Besides having schizophrenia, Arthur Fleck is also identified having Pseudobulbar affect (PBA) disease. Pseudobulbar affect (PBA) is a condition in which people cannot control their laughter or cry. In this case, Arthur has a symptom where he could not control his laughter. The condition of Arthur Fleck, who suffers from pseudobulbar affect (PBA), is evidenced by several scenes in the film.

The first scene showing Arthur Fleck suffering from the pseudobulbar affect is shown at 00:03:43,667.



Picture 8. Arthur Fleck cannot control his laughter while visiting his psychiatrist.

This scene takes place when Arthur visits his psychiatrist. He could not stop laughing even though his expression is the opposite. It is shown in the scene that he tries to stop himself from laughing several times, but the more he holds back, the more his laughter gets uncontrollable. The scene is shot close-up to show Arthur Fleck's expression. His face shows sadness, but he could not express his sadness. He laughs heartily with a pained expression instead.

Another scene that proves that Arthur suffers from the pseudobulbar affect (PBA) is shown at minute 00:08:28,522.



Picture 9. Arthur cannot control his laughter on the bus

This scene takes place inside the bus. Arthur Fleck tries to play with the little boy sitting in the chair in front of him. The boy is amused by the playful expression on Arthur's face. However, it seems the mother does not like it. Arthur, who receives the rebuke, suddenly starts laughing non-stop. He gives the child's mother a small piece of paper containing a note about his illness.

Another scene showing Arthur suffering from the pseudobulbar affect is at minute 00:30:37,357.





Picture 10. Arthur cannot stop his laughter in the train.

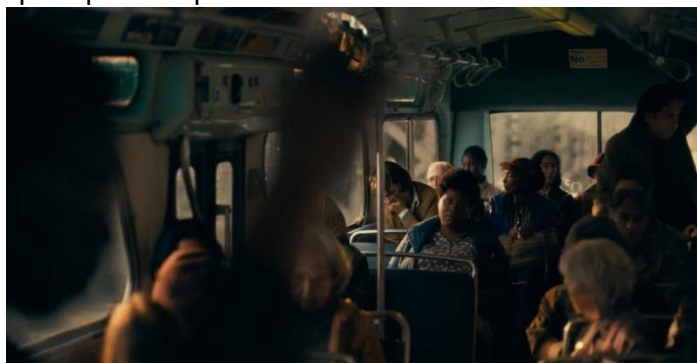
This scene takes place inside the carriage. Arthur sees a group of boys flirting with a girl. When the group of men laugh, it is unexpected that Arthur laughs too. The men do not understand Arthur's condition, they assume that Arthur has made fun of them. This infuriates the group of boys, causing Arthur to be beaten relentlessly. The scene is shot with a medium close-up method and shows Arthur in costume and dressed like a clown laughing non-stop.

Here it is seen that pseudobulbar affect (PBA) is a condition where a person experiences an attack of crying or laughter that is not intentional and sometimes tends to be excessive. From the situation Arthur Fleck is in, he tends to be unable to control his laughter. He often laughs unnaturally, even though his emotions or moods indicate otherwise. This condition has even made him take dangerous actions against people he thinks to threaten his life.

#### **4.3 People's Reaction to Arthur Fleck's Mental Illness**

Arthur Fleck's condition certainly does not always get a good response from the surrounding environment. Not everyone can understand and tolerate Arthur Fleck's attitude caused of the illness he is suffering from. Few people think Arthur Fleck's behaviour is strange and some feel annoyed. This unfavourable public response makes Arthur feel like he is not accepted and even more depressed.

Several scenes in the film show bad responses from the surrounding community. The first evidence of people's poor response to Arthur Fleck is at minute 00:09:14,894.



Picture 11. The responses of the passengers on the bus that look uncomfortable with Arthur.

The scene takes place when Arthur is on the bus. After he is reprimanded by a woman who is was the mother's of the boy, Arthur suddenly could not control his laughter and hands the woman a piece of paper with his illness written on it. Instead of apologizing,

the woman does not care, and her reaction shows a somewhat uncomfortable expression, as do the other passengers who seem disturbed by Arthur's laughter.

The scene is taken with the long-shot method to show the conditions inside the bus. Arthur Fleck is seen trying to stop his laughter but could not. Meanwhile, some people look at him with disapproving and uncomfortable looks.

The next scene about the poor public response is shown at minute 00:32:29,823.



*Picture 12. Several men beat Arthur in the carriage.*

This horrific scene takes place inside the carriage. Arthur sits in the same aisle with several men and a woman. He suddenly could not control his laughter when the men tease the woman. The men feel that Arthur is mocking at them. Without thinking, the men beat Arthur without giving Arthur the slightest chance to explain his illness.

The scene is shot using the long-shot method to show the condition of the train carriages which are only filled by Arthur and a few men. It can be seen that Arthur Fleck experienced physical violence due to his pseudobulbar affect (PBA) disease.

The several scenes above show that the attitudes of the people around Arthur are unfair. They do not give Arthur the slightest sympathy. This shows that there are still many people who do not care and underestimate mental illness. Although it cannot be seen as a physical wound, mental illness is not a disease that can be taken lightly.

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis results, there are conclusions taken. The first is Arthur Fleck's Mental suffers from schizophrenia and pseudobulbar affect (PBA). The symptom of schizophrenia is hallucination in which he feels he is spending time with the woman he likes, Sophie. Meanwhile, Arthur Fleck's pseudobulbar affect is in the form of an uncontrollable laughter that often occurs suddenly and at uncertain times. The second conclusion is that Arthur Fleck's aggressive behaviour gets a bad reaction from people around him. The reaction is seen in the form of displeasure and this makes Arthur suffer mentally and physically.

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