Chapter 3

Mental Illness and Women in Cinema: “Beautiful and Troubled Women”

Dilan Tüysüz
Adnan Menderes University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The representation of mental illness and individuals suffering from a specific mental illness in films is a phenomenon encountered since the first years of cinema. Mental diseases in many film genres such as horror, science fiction, comedy, and crime are used as scary, laughing, or drama elements. The representations of various psychopathologies in the films give an idea about these disorders to the ordinary viewer. However, these representations can accurately describe the reality and also have the risk of being defective and incomplete. It is seen that people who have mental disorders in cinema are generally presented in the way that ‘dangerous, violent, unpredictable characters’ within the frame of limited and distorted patterns. It is possible to say that these cliché representations differ according to gender. Female characters with mental disorders are described as ‘beautiful and troubled women’ in cinema. Related films were taken as an example in this study and it is aimed examine the representation of female characters with mental disorders in these films.

INTRODUCTION

From primitive times until the modern era, all societies have been required to establish certain systems of norms in order to prevent chaos and disorder. In general terms, these terms regulating and controlling the social life by defining good and
bad, and right and wrong, consist of religious rules, manners and customs, moral rules and laws. Even though these laws’ prohibitions and degrees of sanction, and the penalties and awards prescribed by them may be different from each other, the common point of all of them is that they determine the boundaries of the ‘acceptable’ and the ‘unacceptable’. Therefore, while the behaviours approved and abided by general society are seen ‘normal’, all actions that contradict with the ‘normal’ are considered as out-of-norm or in other words as ‘deviation’.

In all societies, it is inevitable that there are individuals compliant and incompliant (or failing to be compliant) with the system of norms established. According to this, “a person getting away from the models and norms that determines the group that he/she belongs with his/her behaviours, attitudes and opinions, and thus that he/she will be judged by” is defined as ‘deviant’ (Picca, 1995: 15). ‘Deviation’, which generally has negative connotations, may be associated with the person’s behaviours chosen consciously, as well as due to some physical properties owned against their free will. Joseph Ficther made a classification as follows of the persons described as deviant (2009: 190-191):

1. Psychological deviants: Morons, idiots, retarded persons and persons who have neurotic disorders
2. Physical deviants: The deaf-mute, crippled and chronic patients
3. Addicted deviants: Beggars, exiles and outcasts
4. Criminal deviants: Murderers, thieves, fraudulent, etc.

The point to be considered in this classification is that deviation and the deviant is not universal and constant, but artificial, vague and relative. Because, the norms referred to characterise any behaviour as deviation are devised by people who have the power of establishing, changing or regulating such norms. The power firstly identifies what is ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, then sorts the ‘abnormal’ within itself. The underlying factor in all these efforts is the will to control the social deviation. Prisons, sanatoriums, rehabilitation centres, asylums and educational institutions are control and supervision institutions established specific to any kinds of deviations.

As seen, one of the categories of deviation intended to be taken under control is the mental diseases. Insanity has been a phenomenon that has always been positioned against what is considered as the ‘normal’ and that is marginalised and excluded in society. In pre-modern times, madness was thought to emerge as the result of the rage of gods or under the effect of supernatural powers such as the devil, malign spirits and magic. This situation has brought the general point of view that the mad people should be kept away from general society and thus ‘social exclusion’ together. Mad people being seemingly chained, segregated and being kept under surveillance for rehabilitative purposes is for the sake of the welfare and safety of
Invisible Injustice: Higher Education Boards and Issues of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity
www.igi-global.com/chapter/invisible-injustice/213431?camid=4v1a

Democracy as Othering Within Finnish Education
www.igi-global.com/article/democracy-as-othering-within-finnish-education/204616?camid=4v1a