
Quarantine Girl: Mental Distress and Trauma in the Times of Covid-19

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Abstract

Since the biblical times, the concept of quarantine has been implemented throughout the pages of history in several places whenever there was an existence of a threatening situation. Outbreak of plague or flu or diphtheria or smallpox relatively imposed restrictions on human beings and now in the times of Covid-19, an extensive quarantine procedure is applied throughout the globe since December 2019. On the outset, the process seems comparatively simple but the impact or the mental trauma bestowed upon the humans to be alone in a room, having to do anything is distressing and equally depressing. The 2020 film, *Quarantine Girl*, directed by Nichole D' Angelo and Gregory Hataka, has realistically portrayed how it feels to be in solitude during the pandemic. The heroine of the film, Ruby embarks on a tiresome journey of quarantine solely where she loses her “normal” self and tragically falls into the pit of mental disorder. The paper analyses how the heroine, Ruby has transformed from a vigorous personality to the ‘depressed’ mad woman at the end.

Keywords- Quarantine; Outbreak; Diphtheria; Covid-19; Trauma

Human beings are designed to be social and interactive from their birth and when the circle of nature restricts humans from such social interactions, the more active humans turn into introverts and develop suicidal thoughts. Across the world, the situation of lockdown and quarantine has really “locked” the hearts along with the bodies of everyone who have to endure the strains of isolation due to Covid-19. Isolation is painful and what is more fearful is the depression that

follows. Any person is bound to lose his or her balance and normalcy when they are all trapped by themselves. When the sensitivity to heat, light, touch, laughter are greatly limited and narrowed down, sluggishness sets in. The mental breakdown and trauma leads from the rupture of harmony with the living environment and also the feeling of isolation:

Trauma is the response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, causes feelings of helplessness, diminishes their sense of self and their ability to feel a full range of emotions and experiences.

Every person in this world has experienced the so-called streaks of depression during the lockdown and fourteen or twenty-eight days of quarantine. It is not surprising that people develop suicidal thoughts once they cannot handle the pressure on them. The heroine of the film, Ruby (Nicole D'Angelo) is a lady in her early 30s jovial, smart, funny and social. Even though not much is shown about her past life, just like every human being Ruby is interactive and maintains healthy relationships. The time before the pandemic stroke and after it is vividly shown in the film. The streets, metro, houses etc... which were filled with people were now empty towards the twenty minutes of the film. The film starts with a female reporter informing viewers of the pandemic outbreak. Sheer panic entails the news of COVID-19 outbreak as no one knows what to do or how to save their lives. At first, people were highly conscious and also reluctant to step out of their homes. The complete lockdown drew people crazy and they gathered all the items they could find in the supermarket. The groceries, everything became out of stock as people were thinking the lockdown would eventually last forever. People have gathered all necessary items to be inside their homes hoping for the best. When Ruby went to shop, she is shocked when she finds not even a toilet paper to buy. She talks on the phone to her friend Angie, expressing her disbelief at the rising panic of the people during lockdown. Not at all affected by the initial panic of the people, Ruby once went for jogging in the tracksuit and also in the midst of the virus infection, contemplating-"Let's believe during times like these? Are we over reacting? Am I not doing enough? I feel so confused alone with my thoughts. I just needed to know everything out to feel normal. I know this is all temporary I think."She allows

her old father to enter her house who is not concerned about the disease as he says that the old man cannot be defeated at all.

The film just emphasizes how life can be inside the houses and also how the streets are during the lockdown. People engage in their leisure at first but later the slow realization that there is nothing much to do inside their home dawns and they find it monotonous. This is when the brain tends to get weak and oppression sets in. Even if one is filled with perfect mental condition, the nature of lockdown and quarantine is depressing. Ruby's mental state deteriorates as she's in lockdown during the epidemic. The major focus of the film is on the heroine Ruby and other characters can be classified as minor ones:

The new indie film shot safely during the current pandemic. A woman's mental state deteriorates as she isolates herself during an epidemic...as she portrays a young woman who returns to America (after a lengthy European vacation) to remain at home while dealing with the Coronavirus (/COVID-19) situation that has strongly affected everyone while the self isolation keeps her heavily disturbed.

The tight and intense plot gives out strong vibes that Ruby will commit suicide at the end of the film because in the first scene itself an unconscious Ruby is shown lying in the floor with a razor sharp tool; implying her condition will ultimately lead her to commit suicide. The background reporting also adds tension as one as when one hears it, the confirmation of this is harrowing around the film:

Reporter: The virus has begun to spread out of East quickly making its way overseas. Scientists have confirmed human to human transmission they are unsure of the exact number of infections or if it is made its way American soil. The World Health Organisation is asking everyone to stay home as some people are concerned about loss of income many others are dealing with mental illness. The new study has warning that the next health crisis isolation and anxiety from the lockdown may actually be a wave of suicide.

The audience experiences a mutual feeling with Ruby as everyone has undergone the lockdown disheartened and with nothing to do. The repetitions in life bore everyone from head to

toe and even being with the family may test their patience sometimes. One can clearly imagine the trauma to strike lonely souls, alone and in solitude. Her isolation from the world is the situation that cannot be dealt with as she at first wants to go outside but as the tension rises, she starts herself indoors. Ruby also received strange packages from the unknown sender and was shocked to see the myriad things that come out from the Pandora box. The mutual feeling of doing nothing grips Ruby as she explores the gifts received and also forgets herself when she video calls the stripper who teaches her the bondage sensuality. At that time her father visits her, but she is totally out of her mind and neglects or is unconscious of his presence. At that point the viewers know Ruby has lost her sanity and she is losing her mental state:

Mental penalty of COVID-19 can be serious (Tang et al., 2020; Ripon et al., 2020b) for a quarantined population. It was expected that 30–50% of the people exaggerated by this disaster and suffered from a variety of emotional crises (Dutheil et al., 2020; Ripon et al., 2020b). Prominent crises included a variety of delirium, psychosis, and even suicide from anxiety, depression, panic attacks, somatic symptoms, and PTSD. Also, quarantined personnel may possibly be familiar with guilt, shame or stigma. Elevated levels of mental suffering amongst those who had endured extended periods of quarantine occasion were expected to be connected with an enlarged scenario of PTSD and connected to depressive symptoms (Ho et al., 2020; Ripon et al., 2020b).

An enemy in person can be somehow defeated but when a disease becomes contagious no one can defeat or devise a solution for that. Everyone has to endure the stress of COVID-19 pressures. But coping becomes difficult sometimes just like Ruby whose only pastime is talking to her friends-Angie and Nate. Unboxing the gifts can also be unnerving when there's nothing else to do and also the fear of disease during the delivery of goods also adds tension. Ruby sees someone in her courtyard and before that his presence makes her fearful. When Ruby is growing worried if she will get Corona, inside her house also she is not safe and she encounters the man, when she is dressed in the semi naked attire and is shocked. She threatens the man for interfering into her property. Ruby does not wear a mask at that time and she does not fear the spread of disease as she is in a trance state where she is unaffected by what is happening around her. She is

involved in different activities which make her active such as playing with guns and imaginary persons. She engages in activities which help to adjust herself at home but it is not at all helping because her condition weakens towards the end of the film where she wears the same pair of clothes for many days. At the end of the film she is the reckless introvert who lies down on the floor and ponders something. Her friend, Nate, keeps online watch on her and she behaves terribly along the different sections of the film. He is a scientist and he regularly keeps Ruby updated about what one has to do during the pandemic. He knows the psychic disturbances which a person will undergo during such isolation and depressions. That is why he continuously monitors Ruby through hacking her web camera. Ruby at first feels she's being watched and closes the web camera because it is not yet confirmed. The feeling of being watched or monitored continuously pops up during the latter half of the film. The up built tension of the pandemic adds to this and Ruby succumbs to the mounting circles of depression. The last scene of the film where Ruby tries to commit suicide is notable as the traumatic disorder has completely engulfed and there is no option left. There is no meaning to continue living a life in quarantine all by yourself not knowing when the quarantine will end or whether her life will be there to survive. Ruby lies, contemplates death because there was none to support her during the hard times. She talks to the stranger on the webcam spying about how he is enjoying watching her and how he's enjoying watching her struggle:

Ruby: What you want? Do you like what you see? Do you like watching me her crazy? Is it entertaining for you? You got nothing better to do with your time? Can I give you something better to watch? Would this make you happy? (begins to cut herself) Are you sitting there laughing? Is it funny to you that I'm struggling? Is this where I'm gonna be stuck? Is this where I'm gonna be now? That's what you want to see me struggle? Are you laughing?

The dialogue is significant as she goes to cut herself and ask the other person how he or she would like to watch the blade passing through her skin cutting her. She completely breaks down and could not handle herself that her friend asked her not to do it by phoning as he instantly tried ringing on her. Next scene shows that her friend comes to visit the traumatized Ruby and she

even goes to the extent of using a scale to measure five feet to ensure she does not get infected from him. He makes her step out of the home and in the process when sunlight hits her face; she's shocked and reluctant to leave the home. This shows that she has not been in contact with the outside world for a few days. She is afraid of the touch but her friend makes her alright in the end of the film. Interference of her friend saved Ruby's life or it would have been entered in a disaster.

Sixty minutes of rigorous packed action in the thriller film left everyone on suspense as the film is a real life mirror to the contemporary society where everyday reports arrive about the death of teenagers committing suicide during the lockdown. It is noted that teenagers undergo mental pressure on breakdown during the quarantine. Sheer support can help the others in times of distress. Just like Ruby, everyone may have experienced streaks and bounds of psychic disorder but true remedy comes only with opening up and sharing the problems to somebody.

Conclusion

A plot of suspense and extreme exhaustion which critically evaluates how the herculean task of quarantine engulfed the people both physically and mentally, *Quarantine Girl* shows how solitude and isolation drives the brain away from sanity and normal behaviour patterns. Any person trapped in such a situation will have only negative thoughts in mind and also develop unusual thinking patterns. The people moreover identified with the heroine's condition and literally everyone went through the same psychological disturbances just as Ruby. The clearly stated message of the film is that the interference of a family or friend in the times of distress is necessary to save a life. In conclusion, the film serves to open up the strongest outpour of crucial lesson that suicide in times of panic is not advised but careful and timely interpretation of someone can help him or her from the blunt mistake.

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