
Rain Man

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Rain Man is a motion picture that after being released in 1988 and having won four Academy awards has long since become a classic. It is a realistic and sentimental portrayal of the relationship between two brothers. The story is so touching for viewers of all ages that it leaves no one indifferent because the directors' goal of "maintaining an authenticity and believability of the storyline" was achieved (Treffert, n.d.).

Rain Man tells the story of brothers Charlie (Tom Cruise) and Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) Babbitt. Charlie is a self-centered young man who after the death of his father finds out that everything but his father's old car and rose bushes was left in a trust fund for Raymond, an autistic brother with savant syndrome that Charlie has never known about (Brooks, 2013). As the amount of the fund is \$3 million, Charlie decides that he needs and deserves the money much more than his 'retarded' brother. He kidnaps Raymond from the institution called Wallbrook, where the latter has spent most of his life. Charlie's idea is to get his brother from Cincinnati to Los Angeles, where he expects to dispute his custody in court and get the money.

However, the plan goes wrong. Raymond is terrified of flying, so instead of taking a plane Charlie has to drive all the way to Los Angeles. Instead of just three hours, the trip takes six days. During all the time

spend together Charlie's attitude to Raymond changes first from irritation to anger then to understanding and even affection. The trip allows brothers to help each other in their own way. Charlie sees how different and difficult life is for Raymond, how his whole existence is turning around entirely different things. Charlie finally finds a family that he has been longing for his whole life. Raymond, in his turn, establishes a certain connection with his brother. He manages to communicate with him and learn new skills, for example, dancing.

Finally arriving at Los Angeles, Charlie realizes that he does not need the money anymore. He declines an offer of \$250,000 for walking away and leaving Raymond in Wallbrook. He realizes his affection for his brother and decides to try and get custody of him. Although this attempt fails, the connection, established between the brothers, does not break. Raymond returns to the institution, but Charlie promises to visit him.

Although presenting a powerful family story of two brothers finding each other after years spent apart, Rain Man is also a vivid portrayal of an autistic individual. Even those critics, who believe that "there is not much serious knowledge of the autism spectrum to be gained from this entertainment" acknowledge that the movie allowed to draw much public attention to the problems and often inadequate reactions of people that patients with autism spectrum disorders have to face (Lomke, 2013). In order to determine whether or not Dustin Hoffman's acting was believable in terms of psychology, it is necessary to analyze

the characteristic feature of the disorder that were shown in the film.

Autism spectrum disorder is generally characterized by “severely impaired social communication” (Barlow & Durand, 2015, p. 541). This pattern can be seen throughout the movie. Raymond is often unable to adequately answer a simple question. Instead, he either says “I do not know” or cite something unrelated to the topic in question. He also has difficulties understanding questions. For example, when asked whether he wants to stay with his brother or go back to Wallbrook, Raymond chooses both options, not seeing the mutually exclusive nature of these options.

Another characteristic feature of autism spectrum disorder is restrictive and repetitive nature of habits, activities and daily life in general (Bowler, 2007, p. 36). This pattern occurred in many episodes in different spheres of Raymond’s life. For instance, Raymond tends to have the same daily routine subordinate to the schedule of TV programs. He gets anxious if he is unable to watch some program the way he is used to. He also has a habit of eating particular meals on particular days, even controlling the number of pieces of food that he gets, like the twelve cheese balls that he makes Charlie bring. Furthermore, Raymond always wants the furniture in his room, wherever the room is, to be arranged in the same way, for example, the bed should always be by the window.

Finally, Raymond has difficulties acquiring some basic everyday skills,

which is also characteristic of autism spectrum disorder (Silverman, 2012, p. 57). Although because of the savant syndrome he can multiply any numbers easily, Raymond is unable to understand the concepts of money and prices. He finds it hard to turn on the stove, almost causing a fire in Charlie's apartment. He does not know how to dance or kiss. Furthermore, even for eating his meals, Raymond uses toothpicks instead of a fork.

All in all, it can be concluded that Dustin Hoffman succeeded in portraying an autistic person. His behavior, speech and attitudes are characteristic of a high-functioning patient suffering from this disorder. Even the way the directors end the film is believable. Although the brothers manage to find a certain connection, and Charlie really wants to make a difference in Raymond's life, he is not able to change the situation much. It is consistent with the fact that autistic patients can be helped to adapt and acquire the necessary communicative and living skills, but not cured or changed in a week.

Rain Man and similar motion pictures that in a realistic, yet touching way depict mental illnesses play a very important social role. They help to inform people about the existence of such disabilities and promote a more responsible and sympathetic attitude in the society to people suffering from them.