

Movie Review

Speak (2004)

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Speak is one of the first films to portray a person whose a happy and a normal fourteen year old life falls apart due to an occurrence of a traumatic event thus suffers from Acute Stress Disorder PTSD & Selective Mutism. Directed by Jessica Sharzer and is based on Printz Honour winning novel of the same name by Laurie Halse Anderson.

The movie portrays Melinda Sordino (Played by Kristen Stewart) is living a normal life, who is looking forward to a wonderful four years at high school with her best friend. Her world falls apart when she gets raped at a house party which she attends with her friends that summer. Traumatized, she calls the police but she's unable to say anything to anyone. That is, to the Police, Friends and Family members. Since no one knows the truth about what happened and all her best friends and classmates ostracize her and give her the name tags. The film uses a lot of symbolism and metaphor to explain the Protagonist suffering, pain and more importantly the feeling of helplessness where in, the Protagonist is unaware to ways of dealing situations in daily life this leading to malfunctioning of daily life.

Acute Stress Disorder is defined as anxiety disorder that develops post experiencing, witnessing, or being confronted with one or more traumatic events which lasts upto a month. Symptoms: Depersonalization, Dissociative amnesia, intense anxiety experiences several distressing symptoms for more than a month following a traumatic event, such as re-experiencing the traumatic event, an avoidance of reminders of the trauma, a number of general responsiveness and increased arousal.

The events that causes Acute Stress Disorder may lead to long lasting disorder i.e. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is defined as an Anxiety Disorder in which the individual re symptoms. In the movie Melinda goes through hell every single day because every time she tries to tell anyone, her tongue freezes up. She finds solace is in Art class which is taught by the friendly, rebellious and a typical idealistic art teacher Mr. Freeman. Who is more free spirit than a systematic teacher? He is the only one who gets through to Melinda. She immerses herself into her art, turning an abandoned closet into her studio and "escape room". She slowly becomes accustomed to her death-like existence, expressing herself only through her art. However things take a turn for the worse when Melinda's ex-best friend starts dating the boy who raped her. Thus, Melinda comes to a point where she has no other choice but to fight her fear and speak up. Slowly, the girl comes out of her shell and learns to accept what happened and move on, rather than try to pretend it never happened and suffer the mental trauma alone, every single day.

The most effective therapy used for PTSD is Cognitive- Behavioural Therapy with relaxation. In the movie, the Protagonist friend David Petrakis makes her realise that if she wants to achieve something or put forward her view point she needs to take a stand, speak up and stick to it till the end i.e. till the time she does not achieve her goal. This makes Melinda think about the situation. Though she is very hesitant to move forward but later she does tell her Ex-best friend about the summer incident.

Selective Mutism is observed as the by-product of the PTSD in this movie. The opening of the movie is a symbolic representation to selective Mutism i.e. The very first scene when Melinda draws stitches across her mouth and then erases it. The self voiceover where Melinda voiceover says “All that crap you hear on TV about communication and expressing feelings is a lie. No one really cares what you have to say.” Selective Mutism is defined as a disorder where in the individual refuses to talk. The movie elaborately displays how Victims of rape are often too scared and ashamed to talk to anyone about what really happened. As a result, all this pain gets trapped up inside and leads to depression. In Melinda’s case, depression led to her becoming mute. Narrated in first person, it is a story told by Melinda herself, who doesn’t say much but thinks a lot. Her blunt remarks and sarcastic comments are rife with dark humour.

Speak is not an average teen movie, it handles the sensitive issue of rape in a very moving manner. The Protagonist is not a fighter but it is a very true interpretation of what really happens to young people who are faced with a terrible situation, early in their lives. The film sheds light on the adolescent need to be accepted by their peers. This compulsive need leads people to become manipulative and gamble away years of friendship. Speak is a well produced and well acted, powerful and inspiring movie.

Speak is a 2004 American independent drama based on the award-winning novel of the same name by Laurie Halse Anderson. It stars Kristen Stewart as Melinda Sordino, a high school freshman who practically stops talking after being raped by a senior student. The film is told through Melinda's eyes and is wrought with her sardonic humor and blunt honesty. It was broadcast on Showtime and Lifetime in 2005 after premiering at the Sundance Film Festival in 2004.

DIFFERENCES FROM THE NOVEL

- In the novel, Melinda meets Heather when Heather finds a seat in the auditorium. In the film, they meet on the bus. The auditorium scene is cut altogether.
- In the novel, Melinda is raped in the woods behind the location of the party. In the film, she is raped in Andy's car.
- In the novel, Melinda writes on the bathroom stall, "Guys to stay away from: Andy Evans". She returns later to find that other people have added incidents of victimization. This was cut altogether.
- At the end of the novel, Melinda speaks to Mr. Freeman about being violated, but in the movie, she tells everything to her mother in the car.
- In the novel, Rachel breaks up with Andy at the prom, but in the movie, she breaks up with him in Andy's car.
- In the novel, Melinda receives extra credit after biting into an apple during her science class. In the film, however, she does not.
- In the novel, Mr. Neck gives the extra credit assignment as an option for the whole class, but in the film, Mr. Neck gives the assignment to Melinda only.
- In the novel, there is a scene in which Andy is seen in the doughnut shop's parking lot and he confronts Melinda. In the movie, this scene is cut out.
- In the novel, there is a scene in which the dead tree branches are cut and a talk that reflects how Melinda is changing while in the film, the part is acknowledged but the conversation is cut.