



# FILM ANALYSIS

## ESSAY

Peanut Butter Falcon

“When you judge someone based on a diagnosis, you miss out on their abilities, beauty, and uniqueness.”

Thea Benefield

Abnormal Psychology

Thea Maxim

PSYC&220

November 8, 2020

### Peanut Butter Falcon

The Peanut Butter Falcon is heralded as a modern day, film version of the American classic Huckleberry Finn. The film depicts a young man with Down syndrome named Zak. Zak is a 22-year-old who has been committed to an assisted living facility by the state, after being abandoned by his family. Zak dislikes the confines of his living environment and dreams of becoming a professional wrestler. After habitual viewing of a recording of his favorite, fictional, wrestler, Saltwater Redneck, Zak is inspired by an advertisement at the end of the show. The advertisement invites viewers to come attend a local wrestling school instructed by his idolized hero. Zak conspires a plan to escape from the nursing home, and the adventure of his lifetime ensues. Embarking on his “fugitive” journey, Zak encounters a man who is running from his own painful past. Together, Zak and Tyler will discover the healing power of the human bond. Their friendship is solidified as they both search for individual purpose in life, and the viewing audience is invited to cheer them on as they chase their dreams.

The following essay intends to evaluate and assess Zak for any existing mental health disorders. The client (Zak “Doe”) will be observed by the independent evaluator (myself) using the naturalistic and analog observation techniques. (Comer, 2014). All attempts to avoid overload, observer drift, and observer bias will be made over the course of evaluating the client. Furthermore, the client’s medical records and resident files from Richmond’s Assisted Living (RAS) will be consulted as supporting documentation for diagnosis and treatment. The client’s

diagnosis and prescribed treatment, will be used to supplement the states determination in the client's petition for emancipation.

Upon review of Zak's medical records, the evaluator would like to make note that the client was diagnosed at 17 weeks gestation, via amniocentesis with the chromosomal disorder Down syndrome. Additional genetic, and early-developmental-stage testing confirms diagnosis, and indicates the client has an IQ score of 57. (Comer, 2014).

Further analysis of the client's residential files reveals the client was committed to the facility at the age of 17, by the state of Virginia. The parental rights of the client's parents were terminated after a thorough investigation determined they were unable to provide adequate medical support and supervision. Upon which time, the state of Virginia assumed power of attorney over the client and had him committed to RAS. The facility's files go on to indicate the client has been labeled a "flight risk", as he has escaped twice from a secured ward within the complex.

The subsequent naturalistic observations were transcribed from the client's RAS residential files. They were originally recorded by Eleanor "Doe", the client's state appointed social work and case manager. The consequential excerpts have been deemed pertinent to the client's current mental health assessment. They will be used as supplemental information to my own analog observations of the client, that will be detailed postliminary.

*Eleanor D. 10/23/15: Zak Doe was admitted to the facility today as a long-term client. I have been assigned as his state appointed case manager. Initial intelligence assessments indicate Zak has significant deficits in writing and reading skills. He displays persistent deficiencies in acquiring and using written language, preferring a depiction style of*

*communication. His speech is confined to short, simple, sentences. (Comer, 2014). Zak suffers with a lisp and inconsistencies in the fluency and timing of his speech. The muscles he uses for speech are observed having too much tension and he often prolongs his speech or pauses before completion of his words.*

*Eleanor D. 10/31/15: Observation during Zak's first week here at RAS reflects minimally impaired social and "play" skills. Additionally, Zak demonstrates typical personal independence skills in the areas of dressing and eating. Zak requires structure and supervision. He thrives in an environment where meal and bedtimes are scheduled, and meals are prepared for him. He is capable of personal hygiene and maintains a clean, living space under supervised guidance.*

*Eleanor D. 1/11/16: Zak has taken an obsession towards a video tape he found in the facility library. The recording is of a WWF wrestling match in which "Saltwater Redneck" defeats his opponent and wins the WWF championship belt. The video advertises a local wrestling school that "Saltwater Redneck" instructs. Zak is neurotically obsessive about the wrestling character and expresses intense desire to attend the wrestling school. Upon my explanation that the "Saltwater Redneck" is an alter ego or "make believe" character, Zak displays a lack of comprehension of the concept of a fictional character. (Diagnostic Criteria, 2015).*

*Eleanor D. 1/29/16: Zak exhibited high levels of critical thinking and problem-solving skills today when he escaped from the secured unit. He demonstrated competency in his judgement, decision making, and ability to plan when he orchestrated his exodus. Zak colluded with a fellow resident, whom he bribed to create a diversion for the staff, while he egressed from*

*the building. The escape plan entailed significant forethought, collaboration, and precise timing.* End of the transcription.

Over the course of a week, I have had the opportunity to observe the client (Zak Doe) in an institutional setting (the nursing home), as well as in an unstructured and unrestricted environment (in the community without appointed supervision). My observations and report ensue:

Zak is a bright, outgoing, witty, individual. He is adept at socialization and forms intimate bonds easily. He is authentic and transparent. These qualities that make him so unique and likeable also leave him vulnerable and easily manipulated by those that look to take advantage of others. Zak demonstrates decreased functioning in judgement, especially in gauging situations and people, but compensates for this deficit by learning from his experiences. (Committee to Evaluate, 2015). In some areas of adaptive functioning Zak operates at a level typical of those from a similar background. Likewise, he has extreme difficulty coping in most aspects of his life.

Zak exhibits significant impairment in short term memory and following sequential instructions. However, he can attend to directions if they are given to him a single step at a time. He is slower at conceptual development, contends with most social situations, and struggles with daily living skills.

Conversely, Zak displays ability to think abstractly, with logic and reason. He can make connections between a given analogy and his own life, using it to provide clarity and deeper understanding. Zak shows a capacity and desire for self-determination, he expresses when he is hungry and when he wants to eat.

He indicates logical thinking through his understanding of actions and consequences. This was illustrated clearly when I observed him throwing the car keys into the ocean so that it would be impossible for Eleanor to drive him back to the nursing home. On another occasion, Tyler asks him if he has any money, to which he replies: he has no pockets. Zak is wearing only underwear.

After careful consideration of the observed symptoms displayed by the client and the review of his medical records, it is my (un)professional opinion that the client suffers from mild to moderate Intellectual Development Disorder, IDD. (Committee to Evaluate, 2015). The client demonstrates mild to moderate intellectual impairment but can learn practical life skills. The client has learned daily routines and participates in self-care. He can learn basic safety skills and live in the community with minimal to moderate levels of support.

It is my recommendation that the court grant the client emancipation and appoint a conservator unless a guardian is available. The client would benefit from a psychosocial intervention whose focus is to improve function and well-being. I suggest a treatment program that is driven by self-determination. The client should receive special education and vocational training that suit his physical and intellectual abilities. The client should be assisted in finding employment and residence in a group home, or with his guardian who can provide daily support. The client can set goals and support himself and should be encouraged to do so in the least restrictive environment. (Committee to Evaluate, 2015).

## References

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In-Text Citations

(Berger, et al., 2019)

(Comer, 2014)

(Committee to Evaluate, 2015)

(Diagnostic Criteria, 2015)