

ROOM: Film Study

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Abstract

This report is a critical study of the film 'ROOM'. The movie is a contrast between two different perspectives of 'space' and the idea of 'world'. The movie has a strong focus on identity and a bit on feminism. The movie discusses strongly the concept of motherhood and teaches upbringing. This is a study of the film with a small summary of the movie and then a discussion of some of the scenes in the movie. The deep analysis of the movie covers the underlying ideas in the movie along the aspects of feminism and identity.

1. About the movie

'Room' is an independent movie directed by Lenny Abrahamson and written by Emma Donoghue. The movie came out in 2015 and was based on 2010 novel of the same name. The movie stars Brie Larson and Jacob Tremblay, as the mother and the son respectively who were held captive in a garden shed for 7 years. They both manage to escape which lets the boy experience the whole wide world and the enormous number of people in it. 'Room' received critical acclaim for acting performances by Brie and Jacob and grossed \$36.3 million on a \$13 million budget. The movie received numerous awards and nominations including 4 nominations in the 88th Academy Awards for Best Actress, Best Picture, Best Director and Best Writing Adapted Screenplay. Brie Larson won it for the Best Actress.

2. Key Scenes from the movie

This section is a selection of some key scenes from the movie. These scenes may not be pivotal to the plot or the storyline, but depict a very important aspect in the understanding of the movie. Each scene is described with a screenshot and a time-stamp of the rough occurrence in the movie.



Figure 1: Opening scene - 00:01:42

The opening scene of the movie introduces us to the room. The voiceover by Jacob, highlights his perception of the room and the world. The close-up shots of each accessory in the room is to dissolve the smallness of the room. These shots don't make us feel as if the room is very small. The subsequent scenes show us the different activities that they are able to do in the confined space of the room.



Figure 2: Jack rejects birthday cake - 00:06:35

This scene is not that important for the movie's story but depicts a very strong idea of perseverance and the hardships that Joy has been through all these years. The key here is the demeanour of Joy after Jack rejects the cake, she doesn't get mad, she doesn't scold her. She doesn't even exhibit the slightest of agitation. This is because she knows that it doesn't work, scolding her is no good. They are each other's support systems and they cannot fall apart.



Figure 3: Jack and Nick - 00:23:28

This scene depicts us to the extent to which Joy can go for Jack. She can't stand even a glaze of her son for Nick. This also represents her safeguard from the world, Joy wants her son to see and enjoy the outer world but also wants to protect him against the bad influences in the world.



Figure 4: Inspiration from Alice in Wonderland - 00:25:28

As Jack is reading out Alice in Wonderland, and Joy is correcting the mispronunciations, she suddenly realises that the story is quite similar to hers. She finds a new light of hope and comes out with a plan. The plan to act as sick goes in vain but the second plan of playing dead works. This part of the movie conveys the desperation with which Joy wants to get out of the room.



Figure 5: Acting sick - 00:37:56

Also, we get to see that Jack is not willing as badly as Joy. He is very agitated and very confused as well. When Joy introduced the reality of the world and breaks apart the lie, Jack is perplexed and is unable to grasp all of that. To Jack, room is enough, in fact, anywhere where ‘Ma’ is.



Figure 6: Play dead - 00:42:06

Comparing that to our own lives, though we love to travel and explore places, but the moment when we are separated from our loved ones, we get trapped. Confinement is not defined by the size of the trap, but the things and people we are deprived of does.



Figure 7: The world - 00:50:09

After the success of the plan, Jack unrolls in the truck and glares at the sky. This scene is filmed to perfection. Everything from the acting to cinematography and to the music, is spot on! The expressions on his face are very realistic and the music is on another level of inspiration. Camera movements are shaky to demonstrate the POV effect. Also, the timing of this kind of thing makes the audience stand in awe even at a sight of something as rudimentary as a blue sky and some trees. The words of Joy are still ringing in his ears as we see him escape the truck.



Figure 8: Cry - 00:58:48

As the policewomen helps Jack to find the location of Joy, we see the most emotional scene in the movie. The expressions on the face of Brie are a thing to behold. Her acting is so mature and full of the right amount of emotions. Till this point in the movie, we see her as a dull and very unexcited person, time made her unemotional. But the slight idea of her son made this transformation. You can't stop yourself from crying. If nothing else, the music does it coupled with the slow-motion shots.

When they both reach home and Joy sees her mom and dad, we see that we have some new problems. Jack adapting to the new environment and forming perceptions of the world is one of them. More than that, Joy feels that nobody seemed to care about her after she was lost. Her mom remarried and was living a normal life. She was unstable herself and was not giving Jack much time to adapt.



Figure 9: Be nice - 01:26:53

This scene shows the agitation building up inside Joy because Jack is not getting around with people. This one shows us how she eventually got tricked into the shed. We did have a brief overview earlier but that was a ‘sweeter’ version of the harsh truth. Joy’s mother always taught her to be nice to people which got her into the shed. This gives a strong feminist message to not only be nice to people but to look out for bad in people. As parents we cannot keep the children in a bubble of goodness.



Figure 10: The question - 01:30:48

After much controversies and stakes getting really high, Joy agrees to give an interview about the state of the child and the life inside the room. Her lawyer was not happy about this but she pushed for it. The interviewer asks her a very perplexing question about why she didn't leave the child in the hospital itself. The question leaves Joy really confused and pondering.



Figure 11: Suicide attempt - 01:33:14

She even decided to quit her life, when she thought of the possibility of a better life of her child. She thought that she maybe did all this for herself.



Figure 12: The room was infinite - 01:38:12

This scene is a remarkable eye-opener for everyone who still couldn't understand the kid's point of view. When Joy's mom asks Jack about the room, she thought that it was so small, but Jack's reply astonishes her. This is also the time when Jack gets to hang out without her mother and starts interacting with other people.



Figure 13: The hug - 01:44:27

I just love this scene.



Figure 14: Bye room - 01:51:38

Jack and Joy go for the last time to visit the room. Jack finds it really smaller this time. Joy doesn't enter the room. Her mind is scared with the fear that someone may still lock her up in that. Jack bids farewell to the room, asks Joy to do the same which she does silently. The ending pan of the camera and the slow-motion shot symbolises the new possibilities that wait for the both of them.

3. Biographical Aspect of Brie Larson

The splendid performance by Brie Larson in the movie was no fluke. She did really prepare hard for the role of a mother who has been captivated for 7 years in a garden shed. In an interview with ABC News [1], she described how the role reminded her of her own mother. She told that

her newly single mother and her sister used to stay in a single room in Los Angeles. Her mother used to sob at night when both the sisters were asleep. They didn't have much to eat or wear. The character was more of a homage to her mother. Moreover, as a child artist Brie experienced lack of identity and respect from the older co-stars. She made sure that Jacob Tremblay got the respect and creative freedom that he deserved.

4. Deep Analysis

After a brief overview and a selection of some of the important scenes from the movie, we now analyse the deep aspects of the movie which revolve around feminism and identity. As a nearly single mother with awfully low amount of resources, Joy manages to exhibit true sense of female strength and Jack finds himself and the world around him to make more sense.

4.1.Feminism

The movie gives a very strong, bold and sensible definition for the word 'feminism'. Some define it as the ability of women to be able to do what men can do already. In my opinion, that's still offensive. If a girl excels in something and you applaud it saying, "Too good, you pulled it off being a girl", is in many ways demeaning and an attempt to bring her efforts sound not that good.

Here we see how Joy manages to make the room a better place for her child by doing everything she can. She saved him from 'Old Nick' by sacrificing her body. Her entire life is now devoted to him. The self-belief and determination lead her to devise a plan to get out of the shed. She also makes mistakes and takes decisions instinctively but that doesn't stop her from trying. The other woman we see in the movie is Joy's mother, played by Joan Allen, who is depicted to be not that strong of a character and who believes in the old principles of womanhood. The film also challenges the idea of females. Girls are always supposed to be nice and helpful. People do take advantage of that as depicted in the movie. She was kidnapped by Nick because of that. Also, the question asked by the reporter turns out to have a very deep impact on the mother. Her depression and self-doubt are a testament to the love and affection a mother has for a child.

This motivating performance completely changed the actor's life and her perspective as well. She started actively participating in social causes and even expressed disregard when presenting the best actor Academy Award to Casey Affleck, who had allegations of sexual assault against him.

The movie is adapted from a bestselling 2010 novel by Emma Donoghue, who is also the screenwriter for the movie. In an interview [2] she described the film as 'deeply feminist' and a 'hymn to motherhood'. She has been calling herself a feminist since she was 16. She was inspired by Susan Brownmiller's classic book called 'Femininity', and since it has been a part of her mindset. She wants to tell stories about women in a way that is fearless. The character in the movie has been sexually abused for 7 years and yet she is courageous, fearless and optimistic. She doesn't have to prove herself as 'innocent' or 'pure', she has lived through so much but through motherhood she is able to channel her strength and passion.

The film stands as a strong motivation for all the rape victims and shines a ray of hope towards the world. The film concentrates on the strengths and normalcy of assault victims which makes it a deeply feminist movie.

4.2. Identity

The movie has a message for identity and individuality through both the lead characters, the mother and the son. Both of them go through a journey of a lifetime to understand themselves, the world and the people around them.

The character of the mother goes through a lot in the movie. Earlier she has an idea of being nice and of helping whoever she met. Learning from that experience she found that being nice won't suffice. Another thing the character learns is the actual correct decision, the correct answer to the interviewer's question is that she did the right thing. No matter what happens, at least she ensured the well-being of her child by keeping him close to her. She also learnt that everything has something to give to your life. The room may be a very bad experience, but Jack was a result of that 'room', just as Jack carries a part of her mom in the tooth, she also carries a part of that room with herself in the form of the kid. Then she understands that parenting is not the same in all the cases, she discovers herself in her son. She earlier gave Jack a false idea of the world, but decided to correct that eventually. She comes to know that she is not like the other girls that she used to be friends with. She is stronger than her and smarter. She discovers that things just need a bit more time to settle in and work properly. She also comes to know that this 'world' is also at the end just like the room.

As for Jack, we see a new world of experiences. Earlier he used to feel that only he and Ma are real and everyone else is 'TV' (fake). This is quickly challenged when he actually sees a person and asks for help. He then gets to understand how the world works and people are. Many voiceovers do this job for us to highlight his perspective of the world. Many of his findings are trivial and some are those that he has heard from others. The real transformation occurs in the absence of Ma. The period when Joy is in the hospital, Jack spends time with Legos, grandma, grandpa and the dog. He also befriends someone to play football with. This shows us that remaining in a safe environment has its advantages but getting out of that gives so much exposure and room to learn that it is necessary. The one thing that says common throughout the film is that for the kid, her Ma is his world.

5. Conclusion

Room is a very touching and a smart movie at the same time. It is an experience in itself. I would personally recommend to not to see the trailer and watch the movie straightaway. Splendid performances from the lead roles, especially by Jacob Tremblay as the son, give a deeper empathy to the characters of the story. Playing a mother's role at such a younger age, Brie Larson has been simply amazing in the movie. Clever writing made many really less relevant scenes more

meaningful, just like the scene where Jack sees the stairs for the first time, or when he hears the phone ring for the first time and gets shocked. Brilliant cinematography with a mix of close-up, slow-motion and POV shots make this a treat to watch.

References

- [1] Brie Larson Reveals How Her Role in 'Room' Hit Close to Home (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1m72OpOTVCA>)
- [2] Room author/screenwriter Emma Donoghue On Her Deeply Feminist Film and Industry Sexism (<https://www.indiewire.com/2015/10/room-authorscreenwriter-emma-donoghue-on-her-deeply-feminist-film-and-industry-sexism-213030/>)