



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: An Analysis of Speech of Hamlet and Claudius

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Abstract: This paper aims to analyze the post-traumatic stress symptoms portrayed in the speeches of Claudius and Hamlet in William Shakespeare's play Hamlet. The analysis is based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and previous research on PTSD in the literature. The speeches of the two characters are analyzed in terms of their content, tone, and context to identify PTSD symptoms. The results show that both Claudius and Hamlet display symptoms of PTSD, such as re-experiencing, avoidance, negative alterations in cognition and mood, and hyperarousal. The study concludes that Shakespeare's portrayal of PTSD symptoms in the play is accurate and can be used as a valuable resource for understanding PTSD in literature.

Keywords: Hamlet, Claudius, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, speeches

1.Introduction

Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* is a play about a young prince who struggles with various psychological issues, including post-traumatic stress, following the death of his father and his mother's hasty remarriage to his uncle. Hamlet experiences a traumatic event when he learns that his father has been murdered by his uncle, who then marries Hamlet's mother and becomes the new king. This event causes Hamlet to experience a range of symptoms associated with PTSD, such as intense feelings of grief, anger, and guilt, as well as intrusive thoughts and memories about his father's death. Throughout the play, Hamlet exhibits avoidance behaviors, such as avoiding confrontations with his uncle and becoming withdrawn from those around him. He also experiences flashbacks and hallucinations of his father's ghost, which represent his persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event. Additionally, he experiences hypervigilance and a sense of constantly being on edge, which is evident in his paranoid behavior, such as when he puts on an "antic disposition" to hide his true thoughts and feelings. Although PTSD was not recognized as a medical condition during Shakespeare's time, it is clear that Hamlet exhibits many symptoms associated with this disorder. His struggles with PTSD contribute to his complex and nuanced character, making him a tragic hero who is both sympathetic and relatable to audiences.

Bennett Simon (Simon 2001: 710) has proposed a new way of understanding Hamlet, which involves examining the character's experience of trauma. This interpretation is influenced by the book *Shattered Assumptions* by Janoff-Bulman, (1992) which explores how trauma can shatter one's assumptions about trust and stability, whether through betrayal within the family or literal events such as earthquakes. Trauma can lead to a constricted or chaotic interpretation of events, and emotions may oscillate between numbness and lack of control. One of the main effects of trauma is difficulty in distinguishing between what is real and what is not, which can break the link between logic and human relationships. The self and the world may become loathsome, and there may be a profound mistrust in the future. Seeking revenge and finding a scapegoat are common coping mechanisms after experiencing trauma. In Hamlet, women and Hamlet himself are portrayed as the main scapegoats. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a well-known syndrome that can occur after experiencing severe trauma. However, in the case of Hamlet, a more appropriate term would be "complex traumatic stress syndrome," as defined by Hermann in 1992. This term indicates that the traumatic events are not completely in the past, and the story cannot be directly told through narrative discourse. Instead, it is expressed through displacement, symbolization, and action, as Freud explained in "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through" in 1914. These memories may be impossible to articulate verbally and are instead conveyed through bodily experiences. The concept of "dissociation" is a better descriptor of the ways in which knowledge becomes confused and rejected in traumatic states than "repression."

1.1 Research Questions

1. What is the impact of traumatic events on the mental health of Hamlet's character?
2. How does Hamlet's experience manifest with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) throughout the play?
3. How does post-traumatic stress disorder manifest in the speech of Claudius?

2. Literature Review

According to Fink and Wright (1970), modern societies prepare for wars by considering the enemy both inside and outside their borders, depending on their societal needs. While most literature focuses on public discourse during wartime, recent studies have looked at the social and behavioral changes that result from war. To address these issues, it is important to break down existing problems into smaller parts. Behavioral changes can help promote peaceful coexistence within a community. Instead of removing disruptive individuals from a community, it is more effective to focus on changing their behavior. For instance, Boko Haram is an Islamic sect that believes that a group of corrupt Muslims have taken over politics in northern Nigeria (Walker, 2012). This is an example that illustrates the significance of psychological processes that arise from people's emotions and needs (Berry, Garcia-Blanco, & Moore, 2016). The military should focus on promoting positive behavior rather than punishing negative behavior.

2.1 Trauma

Trauma can be defined as an intense emotional disturbance and suffering resulting from a highly disturbing event. It can also refer to a serious physical injury, typically caused by an act of violence or an accident. In addition, trauma can cause long-lasting harm and distressful or anxious experiences. These definitions are derived from the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (third edition, 2008) and the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English (fifth edition).

2.2 Stress

Hans Selye (1936) defined stress as a general response of the body to any request for adaptation or change. Stress is often characterized as a sense of being overwhelmed, anxious, or fatigued. Stress can impact individuals of any age, gender, or circumstance and can lead to both physical and mental health problems. Stress is described as an unpleasant emotional experience that triggers predictable biochemical, physiological, and behavioral changes. In certain situations, some stress can be advantageous, providing a boost that gives individuals the impetus and energy to handle situations such as exams or job deadlines. However, excessive stress can have negative health effects and harm the immune, cardiovascular, neuroendocrine, and central nervous systems (Baum, 1990).

2.3 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Gerald C Davison (2006) explains that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a disorder that can develop in individuals who have gone through a frightening, dangerous or traumatic event, and it falls under the category of abnormal psychology. PTSD is a condition that arises from being exposed to a psychologically distressing event that is beyond what is considered normal human experience, and would cause significant distress to almost anyone, resulting in intense fear, terror, and helplessness. The traumatic event is seen as an attack on both the person's physical and mental health. Everyone experiences frightening situations at some point in their lives. People may respond to such situations in various ways, such as feeling anxious, having difficulty sleeping, or repeatedly replaying the event in their minds. These responses are considered normal reactions and typically fade over time, allowing individuals to resume their daily routines. However, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) can persist for much longer and significantly disrupt a person's life. Most individuals associate PTSD with anxiety, which arises following a traumatic experience involving physical harm or a perceived threat (American Psychological Association, 2004). According to Freud (1965, p.2), Claudius killing Hamlet's father and marrying his mother likely triggered Hamlet's own unconscious desire to commit these same acts. Freud believed that dreams were a means of fulfilling our wishes, as he noted that "the content of dreams is related to wish fulfillment" (1965, p.6). From this perspective researchers claim that Hamlet's anger, stress, and anxiety may have led him to imagine a dream-vision of his father's ghost. This imaginary manifestation may have served as a way for Hamlet to fulfill his unconscious desires or to cope with the real events and imagery that were overwhelming him.

2.4 Exposure to Death that Causes Psychological Trauma

In ancient literature, the majority of pathological conditions described relate to trauma, given the heroic and tragic nature of violence. The Epic of Gilgamesh, a famous Mesopotamian work dating back to the third millennium BC, highlights the intense trauma experienced when facing violent death. When Gilgamesh witnesses the death of his defeated companion in battle, he experiences a deep sense of despair. This traumatic event is subsequently persistently re-experienced during a grief reaction, characterized by intrusive recollections of Enkidu's death and concerns about Gilgamesh's own mortality. (Bottero, 1992; Malbran-Labat, 1982; Sandars, 1972; Tomb, 1994).

"For seven days and nights I wept for him until the worm fastened on him. Because of my brother, I am afraid of death, and because of my brother, I wander through the wilderness. His fate weighs heavily on me. How can I be silent? How can I rest? He is now dust, and I too will die and be laid in the earth forever. I am afraid of death..." (Sandars, 1972)

The American Psychiatric Association (APA, 1994) defines PTSD based on specific criteria that include persistent distressing memories of the traumatic event, a feeling of detachment or foreshortened future, and numbing of general responsiveness. These symptoms can eventually lead to aimless wandering, leaving the person feeling helpless. These criteria are similar to those observed in ancient literature, where heroes also experienced a sense of detachment and a foreshortened future after a traumatic event, eventually leading to aimless roaming.

2.5 Conversion Reaction Somatization

Conversion reaction and somatization are two types of psychological disorders. Conversion reaction, also known as functional neurological symptom disorder, involves the manifestation of physical symptoms such as paralysis, blindness, or seizures without any underlying medical cause. These symptoms are believed to be a result of psychological distress or trauma. Somatization, on the other hand, is a condition in which a person experiences multiple physical symptoms that are not fully explained by any known medical condition. This condition is often linked to anxiety or depression and may involve various physical complaints such as headaches, fatigue, and digestive problems. Both conversion reaction and somatization are thought to be closely linked to psychological stress or trauma, and treatment often involves psychotherapy to address the underlying emotional issues. Other historical accounts describe acute conversion reactions, such as the case of an Athenian warrior who was afflicted with traumatic blindness during the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, as vividly described by Herodotus (1992).

According to Herodotus (1996), during the battle of Marathon in 490 BC, Epizelus, an Athenian soldier, suddenly

lost his sight without any physical injury while he was fighting bravely. He remained blind for the rest of his life. Epizelus reported that he felt as if he was facing a giant man in heavy armor with a beard that covered his shield, but the man passed him by and killed the soldier standing next to him.

Punamaki, Qoutta, & El-Sarraj, (2001). Stated that in families experiencing war and armed conflict, parental love and family closeness can assist children in gathering their resources and enhancing their coping abilities (Punamaki, Qoutta, & El-Sarraj, 2001). In cases of political turmoil, children tend to be more resilient when their families are united and provide them with a sense of stability, particularly when coupled with a regular routine (Laor et al., 1997; Pat-Horenczyk, 2006; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2006). Children who perceive their parents' protection, support, and supervision as favorable frequently recuperate psychologically and functionally from the traumatic experiences linked to political warfare (Barber, 1999).

3.Methodology

This qualitative study focuses on analyzing the psychological perspective of the play, Hamlet, based on extensive reading of the text. The study delves into the contextualized content, providing explanations for the lines and interpreting the dialogues among the characters. The analysis pays particular attention to the subtle use of stress, hesitation, piercing reality and truth within the play. The methodology used in this study involves analyzing the speeches of Claudius and Hamlet in terms of their content, tone, and context. Psychoanalytic and linguistic analysis theories are used as a framework for identifying symptoms of the disorder. In addition, previous research on PTSD in literature is consulted to provide a broader context for understanding the portrayal of PTSD in the play.

3.1 Psychoanalytic Theory

This approach emphasizes the role of the unconscious mind and the internal conflicts that shape human behavior. Freudian theory, for example, suggests that traumatic experiences can lead to repressed emotions and desires that surface in unexpected ways. Psychoanalytic theory could be used to analyze the characters' motivations and desires, as well as their use of language as a means of expressing or concealing their emotions.

3.2 Linguistic Analysis

This approach emphasizes the role of language in shaping our understanding of the world and ourselves. Linguistic analysis could be used to analyze the characters' use of language, including their choice of words, syntax, and rhetorical strategies. For example, linguistic analysis might reveal patterns of avoidance or defensiveness in the characters' speech, or the use of metaphor to express emotions that cannot be directly articulated.

4.Discussion and Analysis

People who have been impacted by war suffer greatly, and the trauma they experience can lead to them becoming dangerous to themselves and others, according to Summerfield (2002). The emotions of hatred and revenge towards the perpetrator's nation are common. Stein (2015) notes that the support for revenge varies significantly across cultures, and individuals who support revenge are also more likely to support war. Recent studies suggest that people's willingness to be aggressive towards others is largely influenced by their desire for vengeance. This desire for revenge is present in various relationships, such as father and son or wife and husband, and even between local communities and outsiders. The feelings of anger, hatred, and revenge can have devastating consequences. Summerfield (2002) argues that to address this issue, it is essential to examine social justice, accountability, and the implementation of laws. In Shakespeare's play "Hamlet," Claudius, the newly crowned King of Denmark, is a complex character whose speech is often affected by stress. Claudius is deeply concerned about maintaining his power and reputation, and this stress is evident in his words and actions throughout the play. One example of how stress affects Claudius's speech is in Act 1, Scene 2, when he delivers a public address to the court. He speaks in a formal and rehearsed manner, but there are moments where his stress causes him to stumble over his words or interrupt himself mid-sentence. For example, he begins his speech by saying, *"Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death / The memory be green"* but then abruptly changes direction, saying *"And that it us befitted / To*

bear our hearts in grief and our whole kingdom / To be contracted in one brow of woe" (Shakespeare, 1.2.1-5). This sudden shift in tone suggests that Claudius is struggling to maintain his composure and that his stress is causing him to speak in a disjointed and uneven manner. Another example of how stress affects Claudius's speech is in Act 3, Scene 3, when he is alone and praying for forgiveness for his sins. In this soliloquy, he speaks in a more natural and unguarded way than he does in public, and his stress is evident in his repetitive and obsessive language. He says, *"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: / Words without thoughts never to heaven go"* (Shakespeare, 3.3.97-98), suggesting that he is struggling to find the right words to express his guilt and remorse. On the other hand Claudius, the main antagonist in William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, is a character who experiences significant stress throughout the play, which is reflected in his speech.

One of the major sources of stress for Claudius is his guilty conscience. He has committed the heinous act of murdering his own brother, Hamlet's father, in order to seize the throne and marry the queen. As a result, he is constantly worried that he will be discovered and punished for his crime. This stress is evident in his speech, which is often hesitant and filled with pauses and repetitions. For example, in Act III, Scene 3, when Claudius is trying to pray for forgiveness for his sins, he struggles to find the right words, and his speech is filled with repetitions and self-interruptions. He says, *"My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: / Words without thoughts never to heaven go"* (Shakespeare, III.3.100-101). This hesitation and struggle to articulate himself reveals the depth of his inner turmoil. Additionally, Claudius's stress is also evident in his interactions with other characters. He often speaks in a formal and diplomatic manner, using language that is intended to conceal his true thoughts and feelings. This suggests that he is constantly on guard, worried about revealing too much or saying something that might incriminate him.

Overall, Claudius's stress is a significant factor in his speech throughout the play. It is evident in his hesitant and guarded language, as well as his struggles to articulate himself when confronted with his guilt. Claudius's speech in *Hamlet* is heavily influenced by stress. His desire to maintain his power and reputation causes him to speak in a formal and rehearsed manner in public, but his stress often causes him to stumble over his words or interrupt himself mid-sentence. When he is alone and unguarded, his stress is evident in his repetitive and obsessive language, suggesting that he is deeply troubled by his actions and their consequences. Claudius is a character who experiences a significant amount of stress and guilt, which can affect his speech and behavior. Throughout the play, there are several instances where Claudius struggles to express himself effectively, indicating the impact of his psychological state on his language. One example of this can be seen in Act III, Scene 3, where Claudius tries to pray for forgiveness. He struggles to articulate his thoughts and feelings coherently, suggesting a level of internal conflict and emotional turmoil. He speaks in a disjointed manner, using fragmented sentences and hesitating frequently, which highlights his inability to focus on a single thought. Another instance of Claudius's stress impacting his speech can be seen in Act IV, Scene 5, where he speaks with Gertrude about Hamlet's escape. In this scene, Claudius becomes increasingly agitated and frustrated, interrupting Gertrude's attempts to speak and even resorting to insults. His speech becomes erratic and impulsive, reflecting his growing anxiety and sense of powerlessness. Claudius's stress and guilt can have a noteworthy impact on his speech throughout the play. His inability to express himself effectively at times highlights the psychological burden that he carries as a result of his actions, and adds complexity to his character as a whole. Hamlet's character in Shakespeare's play is marked by his inner turmoil and psychological distress, which is reflected in his speeches throughout the play. Here are some examples of Hamlet's speeches that are affected by stress: Act III, Scene 1 - *"To be or not to be" soliloquy*: This famous soliloquy is a powerful example of how Hamlet's stress and anxiety are reflected in his language. He contemplates the meaning of life and death, struggling with the existential crisis that is consuming him. His language is fragmented and hesitant, reflecting the depth of his inner turmoil and anxiety. Act II, Scene 2 - *"I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth"* soliloquy: In this speech, Hamlet expresses his melancholy and despair, indicating the depth of his psychological distress. His language is marked by a sense of isolation and disconnection from the world around him, reflecting the extent to which his stress is causing him to withdraw from

life. Act III, Scene 2 - "*Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you*" speech: In this speech, Hamlet is preparing for the play that he hopes will reveal Claudius's guilt. His language is marked by frustration and impatience, reflecting the stress and pressure that he is under as he tries to uncover the truth about his father's murder. Act III, Scene 4 - "*Mother, you have my father much offended*" speech: In this scene, Hamlet confronts his mother about her role in his father's murder. His language is marked by anger and frustration, reflecting the extent to which his stress and grief have consumed him. All these speeches are a powerful example of how Hamlet's stress and anxiety are reflected in his language throughout the play, highlighting the complexity of his character and the depth of his psychological state.

4.1 Finding in Response to the First Question

Hamlet's character experiences several traumatic events throughout William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, including the murder of his father, King Hamlet, by his uncle Claudius and subsequent marriage of his mother, Queen Gertrude, to Claudius. These events deeply affect Hamlet's mental state, and his behavior is characterized by a sense of disillusionment, betrayal, and uncertainty. Some scholars argue that the traumatic events in Hamlet's life trigger a descent into madness, while others suggest that his behavior is a calculated response to the circumstances he faces. Regardless of the interpretation, it is clear that Hamlet's mental health is significantly impacted by the events he experiences, leading to his erratic behavior, isolation, and ultimately, tragic end. It is important to note, however, that the portrayal of mental health in *Hamlet* reflects the cultural and historical context in which the play was written and is not necessarily reflective of contemporary understandings of mental illness. Therefore, any analysis of Hamlet's mental health should be considered within the context of the play's themes, characters, and literary conventions.

4.2 Finding in Response to the Second Question

Hamlet's experience throughout the play includes multiple traumatic events that deeply affect his mental health. While post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was not recognized during Shakespeare's time, Hamlet's experience in the play shows some similarities to the symptoms of PTSD. One symptom of PTSD is re-experiencing the traumatic event through flashbacks, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts. Hamlet experiences this symptom in the play, as he is haunted by his father's ghost, which appears to him several times throughout the story, bringing up memories of his father's murder and reigniting his desire for revenge. Another symptom of PTSD is avoidance, which can include avoiding certain people, places, or situations that remind the person of the traumatic event. Hamlet exhibits this symptom in the play, as he isolates himself from those around him and avoids interacting with certain characters, such as his former lover Ophelia, after her father's death. Hyperarousal is also a symptom of PTSD, which can manifest as feeling constantly on edge, easily startled, or having difficulty sleeping. Hamlet exhibits these symptoms throughout the play, as he becomes increasingly agitated and paranoid, often jumping at the slightest noise and expressing difficulty sleeping.

4.3 Finding in Response to the Third Question

It is important to note that Claudius is a fictional character in Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, and therefore, any analysis of his speech in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) would be speculative and subjective. However, there are some potential symptoms of PTSD that could be observed in Claudius' speech and behavior throughout the play. Some possible signs of PTSD Claudius' speech are include:

1. Avoidance of certain topics or conversations related to the traumatic event: Claudius tries to avoid discussing certain topics related to the murder of his brother, King Hamlet, or the events surrounding it.
2. Emotional numbness or detachment: Claudius displays a lack of emotion or detachment in his speech and behavior, especially when discussing sensitive or traumatic subjects.
3. Hyperarousal or irritability: sometimes Claudius' use of words are the signs of irritability, anger, or agitation in his speech, which could be a result of heightened arousal or anxiety.

4. Intrusive thoughts or memories: Claudius may have persistent, distressing thoughts or memories related to the murder of King Hamlet, which could manifest in his speech through repetitive or obsessive language.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, analyzing the speech of fictional characters in relation to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be a subjective and speculative process. However, there are some potential signs of PTSD that could be observed in the speech and behavior of characters such as Claudius and Hamlet in the play "Hamlet." These signs may include avoidance of certain topics, emotional detachment or numbness, hyperarousal or irritability, and intrusive thoughts or memories. It is important to note that PTSD is a complex mental health condition that can manifest in a variety of ways, and any analysis of its presence in fictional characters should be approached with caution.

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