

From Fiction to Practice: 'Rain Man' and Effective Autism Management

Rainman is a movie that revolves around two characters, the Babbitt brothers. The older of the two, Raymond, has both autism and savant syndrome. The story discusses not just the struggles of autism and the way that people with autism interact with the world, but questions of family, identity, and the relationship of those with disabilities. By looking at both sides of the interaction, the story portrays the sacrifice of the younger brother, Charlie, and the growth of his understanding of what autism is. Throughout the movie, we see the growth of the characters who did not know each other while their father was alive, then the relationship grows stronger as they spend time with each other. Originally, Charlie seeks out Raymond for the inheritance that his father left, but as the story goes on, Charlie begins to see Raymond not just as a means to the inheritance, but as a person and brother who sees the world uniquely and has his quirks. For most of the film, Charlie does not even know that Raymond has autism and is just aware that Raymond has an intellectual disability that caused him to be institutionalized for most of his life.

Autism is diagnosed by a set of criteria that revolve around communication skills, behavior patterns, and being present since early childhood. As far as communication skills are concerned, what is looked for are deficits in non-verbal communication, social-emotional reciprocity, and developing/managing relationships. One scene that characterizes this deficit well is a scene where the brothers are arguing, and Charlie yells at Raymond, who covers his ears and turns away from the conversation. Then, Charlie tries to calm down Raymond with a hug, but it is seen that Raymond does not want the physical touch. This scene hits all the criteria for deficits in communication skills. For behavior patterns, the focus is on highly repetitive motor movements, insistence on sameness and inflexibility to change, and highly restricted/fixated interests. One of the scenes that characterize this criterion is when Raymond is insistent on

watching a certain show at a certain time and refusing to do any other activity without watching the show. This shows the inflexibility and the hyperfocus on interests.

As far as treatment planning goes, most of the living requirements for Raymond are met by the facility where he is living. Therefore, while assistance in learning how to be self-sufficient could be used as a therapy modality, it seems less realistic or necessary to do so given the current age and situation. One form of therapy that could be helpful is social skills training. This type of therapy can be used to teach individuals how to navigate social interactions. This could be useful now that Raymond and Charlie have become united as brothers, and by teaching Raymond skills that allow for better communication or interactions, a bond can be built between the brothers. Another therapy that can be used is cognitive-behavioral therapy as a means of working through some of the different forms of OCD-like behaviors that Raymond exhibits. Finally, applied behavioral analysis is another modality that can be used to help Raymond in working through problematic behavior, the reasoning being using this modality is that it focuses on behaviorism techniques that revolve around positive reinforcement and task analysis to learn to behaviors. These therapy modalities and treatment plans revolve around two main aspects of autism: first, increasing communication skills, and second, reducing problematic behavior. The two main long-term goals are attempting to remove or partially remove the fixation on a certain schedule without change, thus reducing inflexibility, and generally increasing conversational ability. As far as short-term goals are concerned, slowly changing the order of some of the routines or changing the timing and participating in activities, such as teaching Raymond how to read social cues or how to act when physical touch is initiated. In conclusion, CBT can help reduce negative behaviors while ABA promotes positive behaviors, and social skills training can be used to promote social skills, conversational abilities, and contextual cues.