

**Case Study: Dr. John Nash in *A Beautiful Mind***

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"On my honor as a USCA student, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment/exam. To the best of my knowledge, I am not in violation of academic honesty."

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The movie *A Beautiful Mind* looks at the life of Dr. John Forbes Nash Jr. The movie was inspired in part by a biography written by Sylvia Nasar. Nash was a brilliant mathematician at Princeton University and his mathematic formulas would become the underpinning of many of our economic systems around the world. Nash is also a Nobel laureate in the field of economics. Despite all his successes, Nash exhibited and was treated for schizophrenia with paranoid features. In the movie, Nash was played by actor Russell Crowe.

Nash began to exhibit symptoms of schizophrenia in his early 20's while in college. The symptoms began to manifest with both auditory and visual hallucinations. His first experience with hallucinations began with his "roommate" in college. This "roommate" was played by Paul Bettany. We would learn through the movie that his roommate and two other characters were hallucinations. The movie would lead us to believe they were real people until it was revealed that Dr. Nash was suffering from schizophrenia. His "roommate" would routinely be the voice of disorder and chaos. The roommate would usually bother and pester Nash until he experienced an outburst in a very public or destructive way.

One of the three hallucinations was one of a little girl. This hallucination was played by Vivien Cardone. She tended to bring out the protective nature in Nash. She was also known to be able to get him to do things others might not be able to. Her voice was one of guilt and defiance. I suspect this character was tied to some childhood trauma that Nash had experienced in his early life. If that is not it, it is likely someone that Nash let down or felt he let down as a child that needed his help.

The third hallucination shown in the movie was a men-in-black type of character. This was a CIA or NSA-type agent who enlisted Nash to be a code breaker for the United States

government. This hallucination was played by Ed Harris. These codes were supposedly put in modern publications, magazines, and newspapers as a way of instructing or directing operatives to perform certain acts or missions. It was up to Dr. Nash to crack these codes or bad things would happen to those he loved. This character demanded that Dr. Nash did not reveal to anyone the nature of his work with the US government or he would be killed and it would put his family in danger. This hallucination was one that Nash feared most. The hallucination would routinely spout doomsday statements and threats against those people Nash cared about.

“According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-5th Edition (APA, 2013), or DSM–5, the main criteria for schizophrenia include at least two of the following: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, disorganized motor behaviors, and negative symptoms such as anhedonia (lack of interest) or avolition (lack of motivation) (Boxell & Marquis, 2022).” It can be accompanied by functioning at work, self-care, and relationships declined. These symptoms have to last at least 6 months or more to be diagnosed as schizophrenic (Hurley, 2021).

In the case of Dr. Nash, he suffered from delusions which were apparent in his work with the US government to help with code-breaking that was only in his mind. It was discovered that code-breaking packages he delivered to the US government, were taken by him to an abandoned house where they remained. His code-breaking lab was an abandoned shed in the woods behind his house. His disorganized thoughts and behavior were evidenced in the walls of the shed and his office at the university being covered with clippings from newspapers and magazines he insisted contained coded messages from the Russians. Much of this made no sense to anyone but Dr. Nash. His self-care declined as he did not take time to shower or shave and his sleep pattern was very erratic. At various times, when the symptoms of schizophrenia were most pronounced,

Nash would begin to speak in a very disorganized way. Much of what he would say was not understandable to those around him.

The movie also shows Nash's interactions with his wife, friends, and colleagues at the university. They were friendly and accepting of Nash during the very early stages of schizophrenia. However, after learning that Nash had the disease, his friends and colleagues became aloof and distant. In a 2022 study by McKendree University, four members of their psychology department looked at how people with schizophrenia were treated by their family, friends, and co-workers. "When encountering a member of a group stereotyped as threatening, people monitor them, exhibit negative emotions, and engage in discriminatory behaviors. Conversely, social groups stereotyped as irrelevant to goals are ignored and neglected. Perceptions of a group as threatening or irrelevant varies across fundamental goals. To illustrate, people are highly likely to reject someone with schizophrenia as a long-term mate but unlikely to reject them as a friend...(Boysen et al., 2022)" In the movie, a lot of marital strife and distance were shown, however, his wife remained with him. This is not always the case in schizophrenic patients.

While the movie is not completely accurate, I believe that it captures a glimpse into the struggle Nash experienced living with schizophrenia. He was portrayed and lived a very high functioning life with the disease. However, his case is not normal. Rather, most patients with schizophrenia do not experience the level of day-to-day functioning that he did.

## References

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