

We need to talk about postpartum depression

Valeria Almendares

Lake Forest College
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

Are we born evil? Or are we turned evil? Are parents fully responsible for their children's outcomes? Ramsay's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2011) is a film that explores the complexity of a flawed mother-child relationship. Eva is a renowned travel writer who enjoys festivals, freedom, and the city life. She meets Franklin, gets pregnant and is convinced to move outside of the city to raise their child. Eva is clearly not ready to turn her life upside down and starts to develop depression. Once Kevin is born, she does not bond successfully with him, and consequently, he grows up feeling disdain for his mother. Kevin turns into a troubled teenager that displays psychopathic behavior and is sent to prison because he committed mass murder at his high school. This essay will not address the portrayal of psychopathy in the film, but rather on postpartum depression and the consequences it can have on mother-child bonding.

Postpartum depression refers to depression that occurs to a mother after her child is born. The day Kevin is born, Eva does not hold him, she does not even look at him. During his first months, Kevin cries incessantly when he is held by his mother. The exhaustion and incapability to bond with or soothe her baby makes Eva increasingly frustrated and causes her to decrease her interactions with him. In return, Kevin internalizes his mother's rejection, which grows his hostility towards her. This vicious cycle could have been interrupted or even treated if it was recognized.

Eva's husband, Franklin, failed to recognize the deeper problem in her relationship with their child. When Kevin cried and Eva could not calm him, Franklin gave advice like "you just need to rock him." Kevin did not cry around Franklin and formed a somewhat healthier relationship with him throughout his life. Franklin attributed Eva's detachment from Kevin to her not trying to bond with him.. Brummelte and Galea mention that children of depressed mothers are less likely to feel securely attached; "mother-infant attachment is defined as the infant using the mother as a source of safety, security and protection" (157). Insecure attachment is related to maternal insensitivity and a lack of responsiveness to the children's cues, which has negative consequences for child development.

When Kevin was around 8 years old, Eva told him that a new baby was on the way and that babies came from implanted seeds. He interrupted her by saying that he knew what sex is. Eva wanted to make sure that he was fine with the idea of a new member in the family. He told her "Just because you're used to something doesn't mean you like it. You're used to me" which evidences that he understood and felt his mother rejection and had a distorted view of what love meant.

When Celia was born, Kevin felt jealous because he saw his mother bonding with her in a way he had never experienced. One time, while he was taking care of Celia, she was hurt by drain cleaner and had to go to the emergency room. Although Eva had left the drain cleaner outside, she was convinced that Kevin was responsible for Celia's visual impairment. Franklin told her she was crazy for even suggesting something like that. He was always oblivious to Kevin's weird attitudes and gaslighted Eva to his death.

Despite the unusual ending of this movie, it is not too far-fetched. According to Brummelte and Galea, some studies have suggested that "boys of mothers with postpartum depression may have a greater risk of antisocial disorders and impaired cognitive and motor development than girls" (158). Kevin had a high understanding of adult topics, such as the meaning of love, sex, and mischief from a very young age. Additionally, he showed a high capability to lie, deceive, intimidate, and retaliate that he perfected as he grew. Ultimately, he orchestrated a vendetta against his mother; he killed Franklin and Celia but left his mother alive.

After Kevin is convicted for his crimes, Eva becomes the target of hatred. The parents of those who were Kevin's victims begin to harass her and call her names. Is it her bad parenting to blame for his son's crimes? Or is she just the scapegoat in this situation? Eva hides and does not fight with them, because somehow, she also blames herself for how her child turned out. She felt responsible for not having a bond with Kevin, for never fixing their relationship, and not being a mother to him.

Throughout the film, we see Kevin and Eva standing far away from each other, there is a clear distance between them. The movie ends with Eva giving him a hug. Although we know that a hug is not the solution, it is symbolic of what Kevin always wanted from her: acceptance, closeness, and a bond.

Ultimately, one of the main takeaways I got from this movie is that we need to pay more attention to postpartum depression because it is detrimental for child development. We need to conduct more research to both reduce social stigma and pressure to feel a "maternal instinct" Most importantly, research can improve our current intervention methods and treatments, thus improving the quality of life for many mothers and children in the future..

References

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