

Quarterlife Crisis: An Analysis Through the Movie Frances Ha

Çeyrek Yaşam Krizi: Frances Ha Filmi Üzerinden Bir İnceleme

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ABSTRACT

Quarterlife crisis is a concept used to describe the difficulties and indecision faced by individuals in their early twenties and mid-thirties regarding their careers, financial arrangements, where to live and relationships. During the quarterlife crisis, individuals experience mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. In this study, in order to understand characteristics of the quarterlife crisis the relationships between the discipline of psychology and the art of cinema have been acted upon. The aim of this study is to analyze the Frances Ha movie directed by Noah Baumbach in the context of the quarterlife crisis. Document analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. The results of the study revealed that Frances, the main character of the Frances ha movie, experienced many features of the quarterlife crisis. As a result, awareness of the quarterlife crisis by mental health professionals may enable them to intervene more accurately when working with clients who are experiencing difficulties during this crisis.

Keywords: Quarterlife crisis, cinema, Frances Ha

ÖZ

Çeyrek yaşam krizi yirmili yaşların başı ile otuzlu yaşların ortaları arasındaki bireylerin kariyerleri, finansal düzenlemeleri, yaşayacakları yerleri ve ilişkileri konusunda karşılaştıkları zorluk ve kararsızlıkları tanımlamak için kullanılan bir kavramdır. Çeyrek yaşam krizi esnasında bireyler depresyon, kaygı gibi ruh sağlığı bozuklukları yaşamaktadırlar. Bu çalışma da çeyrek yaşam krizi özelliklerinin anlaşılması için psikoloji disipliniyle sinema sanatının ilişkisi üzerinden hareket edilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amacı yönetmenliği Noah Baumbach tarafından yapılan Frances Ha filminin çeyrek yaşam krizi bağlamında incelenmesidir. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden biri olan doküman incelemesi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın sonuçları Frances Ha filminin ana karakteri olan Frances'in çeyrek yaşam krizinin pek çok özelliğini deneyimlediğini ortaya koymuştur. Sonuç olarak, çeyrek yaşam krizinin ruh sağlığı alanında çalışan uzmanlar tarafından bilinmesi, bu kriz esnasında zorluklar yaşayan danışanlarla çalışırken daha doğru müdahalelerde bulunmalarını sağlayabilir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Çeyrek yaşam krizi, sinema, Frances Ha

Introduction

In the life process from birth to death, people develop through certain life stages. Emerging adulthood and young adulthood stages, which appear as the stages of being prepared for transition to adult roles and transition to adulthood, have important place in the individuals' lives. There has been a great increase in studies focusing on adulthood in the last 20 years in developmental psychology literature. An important revision has been made to Erikson's (1968) view of the stages of adulthood with Arnett's (2000) seminal work on emerging adulthood. While Erikson (1968) examined adulthood in two stages (young and middle adulthood), Arnett (2000, 2004) proposed that adulthood should be addressed in three separate stages (emerging, young and middle adulthood). Arnett (2000, 2006, 2007) argued that with the economic, demographic and cultural changes, especially in industrialized societies, individuals can not move to adulthood immediately after adolescence, and that they experience a different life period between adolescence and young adulthood. Arnett (2000, 2004) states that there are five basic characteristics of emerging adulthood. A period of identity exploration in which individuals engage in intense search on who they are, a period of instability manifested by intense changes, a period of feeling in between in which individuals have difficulty defining themselves as neither adolescents nor adults, a period of self focus in which individuals focus more on their own lives, and finally it is a period of possibilities that indicates that they have many possibilities about their lives.

According to Erikson (1968) the young adulthood, which is the period that individuals experience after the emerging adulthood, is a period in which a conflict of intimacy versus isolation is experienced. In this stage,

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individuals might experience the process of self-exploration by dedicating themselves to someone else and leaving themselves as they are. Conversely, young adults may experience feelings of isolation because they are unable to develop relationships (Santrock 2014). In other words, individuals who experience a healthy exploration for who I am in emerging adulthood try to associate their identities with others in young adulthood and experience a sense of intimacy if they can achieve this.

There is another concept has been used to explain the features of emerging adulthood and young adulthood in the last two decades. The quarterlife crisis put forward by Robbins and Winer (2001) emerges an important concept in explaining the experiences of individuals between the early twenties and mid-thirties. Although the concept of crisis is frequently used in the developmental psychology literature, it can be said that it is a concept loved by popular culture (Robinson 2015). Crisis is considered as the most important dynamic of development in Erikson' (1968) lifespan psychosocial development theory. Erikson (1968) stated that identity development is shaped by crises in eight developmental stages. Caplan (1964) defined two types of crisis. The first is accidental crises (such as the loss of a loved one or job loss), and the second is developmental crises similar to Erikson's (1968) conceptualization. In this context, the quarterlife crisis can basically be considered as a developmental crisis.

Robbins and Wilner (2001) used the term quarterlife crisis to describe the difficulties and indecisions faced by individuals in their early twenties and mid-thirties regarding their careers, financial arrangements, where to live, and relationships. It is stated that individuals encounter many stress situations related to their lives, especially after graduating from university, and these cause indecision, helplessness and panic feelings in individuals (Robbins and Wilner 2001, Rosi and Mebert 2011). In other words, in this process, individuals experience identity crises related to different areas of their lives.

Robinson et al. (2013) revealed in their study that the quarterlife crisis is basically experienced in four phases. In the first stage, individuals have clear commitments to their profession, relationships, and places to live. In the second stage, individuals try to move into adult life with the commitments they have, but they fail. In this case, they give up their commitments, but this causes anxiety, uncertainty about the future and weakening of the sense of identity. In the third stage, they enter the process of identity exploration and search for their lives. If the third stage passes positively, individuals move on to the fourth stage, where there are commitments to new life roles. Robinson et al. (2013) stated that these stages occur in the age ranges of 20-24, 25-29, 30-34 and 35-39, respectively. Robinson (2015) then revised the four-stage model within the framework of research findings and proposed a model with two different quarter life crises. The first crisis type is the lock-out crisis, which includes the feeling that it is not possible to reach the desired adult roles. The second one is the lock-in crisis, which includes the feeling that individuals are not satisfied with their adult roles, and that they are hindering themselves. While in the lock-out crisis individuals experience the feeling that they will not be able to find a job, develop permanent relationships and gain economic independence, individuals in the lock-in crisis experience a sense of dissatisfaction arising from their existing role. In summary, in lock-out crisis, while individuals aim to transition from emerging adulthood to young adulthood in which adult roles are relatively more continuous, in lock-out crisis, there is a return to emerging adulthood, which appears as a reverse situation (Robinson 2015). The discipline of psychology, which focuses on human feelings, thoughts and behaviors, and cinema, which tries to transfer parts of human life to the screen, have been progressing in contact with each other for a long time (Gençöz 2009, Morsünbül 2015). Movies appears as an important tool by using them as a therapeutic material (Berg-Cross et al. 2008), in understanding developmental characteristics (Erikson 1976, Morsünbül 2015) and mental health disorders (Wedding and Niemiec 2016).

In this study, it is aimed to examine the concept of quarterlife crisis through a movie based on the cooperation between cinema and psychology. In more concrete terms, the aim of this study is to analyze the movie *Frances Ha*, directed by Noah Baumbach, in the context of quarterlife crisis.

Method

Document analysis, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. Document analysis includes the analysis of written and visual materials that provide information about the cases that are intended to be investigated (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2006). Document analysis consists of several stages. These are respectively (a) choosing the appropriate document to be analyzed, (b) developing the categories (c) determining the unit of analysis (Yıldırım and Şimşek 2006). The document analyzed in this study is the *Frances Ha* movie. The movie, within the scope of quarterlife literature, has been analyzed in the categories of lock-out crisis, lock-in crisis and career/occupation, economy, place to live and relationships, which are the living areas where these crises occur

to a large extent. Frances the main character of the movie, was chosen as the unit of analysis in the study. However, in order to make comparisons in certain sections, the character of Sophie is also focused. In the study, the opinions of two academics who are competent in psychology and cinema were consulted on how accurately the film was interpreted. The evaluation of the movie was rearranged in line with the verbal and written feedback received. In the following section, information about Frances Ha movie is given.

Frances Ha

Frances Ha movie starring Greta Gerwig (Frances), Mickey Sumner (Sophie), Adam Driver (Lev) and Michael Zegen (Benji) and written by Noah Baumbach and Greta Gervig, presents specific sections from the life of 27-year-old Frances Halladay. The movie is structured in sections showing the addresses of the places where Frances lived. Frances graduated from university and works as a dancer in a temporary position for a show business company. Frances' aim is to take a permanent position in this company. Frances lives in the same apartment with her best friend, Sophie, who understands her best. But when Sophie goes home with someone else, great changes begin to occur in Frances' life. The movie shows these changes that Frances goes through. The movie was released in 2012 and was nominated for awards in many important cinema festivals.

Results

In this section, the Frances Ha movie, within the scope of quarterlife literature, has been analyzed in the categories of lock-out crisis, lock-in crisis and career, economy, place to live and relationships, which are the living areas where these crises occur to a large extent.

Lock-Out Crisis and Lock-In Crisis

Robinson (2015) suggested that individuals will experience the quarter-life crisis in two ways during the emerging adulthood. Despite their efforts to reach their adult roles, emerging adults in lock-out crisis experience disappointment and intense uncertainty as a result of their negative experiences. In lock-in crisis, although the emerging adults have decisions about their lives and commitment, these are not satisfactory for transitioning to young adulthood. In this crisis situation, individuals return to the search period of emerging adulthood instead of passing through young adulthood. According to Robinson (2015), two life crises are shaped in the context of two variables. These are the commitment of individuals to the things related to life and independence, which refers to behaving autonomously. In lock-out crisis, individuals' current status is autonomy, but what they ideally want is commitment. In the lock-in crisis, the existing situation is commitment, while what individuals ideally want is autonomy.

Evaluating the two main characters of the movie Frances Ha in terms of two crises, it can be said that Frances Ha has experienced mostly lock-out crisis, while Sophie has experienced lock-in crisis although not with a crisis intensity. Considering the movie in terms of career, economy, place and relationships, it can be said that Frances does not have strong commitments in these areas. Throughout the film, Frances strives to create commitments in these areas. On the other hand, it can be said Sophie have strong commitments to her living spaces (not all of them) compared to Frances. In other words, the director seems to be trying to show the audience the two ends of life with the characters Frances and Sophie. Frances with her non-adult behavior on one side, and Sophie with her adult behavior on the other. This contrast is seen in many parts of the film as both the cinematic technique (the film is shot in black and white (old), the conversations about the computer and the phone (new), and the personality traits of the characters (Sophie, who is organized versus Frances, who is disorganized). These contrasts shown in the film seem to show that individuals in this period often experience the feeling in-between. According to Arnett (2001) feeling in-between is one of the most basic features of emerging adulthood. In this situation emerging adults stay between two opposite extremes. Am I an adult or not an adult? Studies (Arnett 2001, Atak 2011) show that emerging adults define themselves as adults in some ways, but not in others. We can say that both Frances and Sophie characters clearly experience the in-betweenness in the movie. In the following part, it will be tried to evaluate how the two characters of the movie Frances Ha experienced the crisis in the context of profession, economy, place and relationships.

Job

Frances works as a dancer in a temporary position at a show company. However, Frances has not had a successful career as a dancer. In the movie, when Frances is asked what she does at a dinner party she is invited to, she answers as follows; *"What do you do is a difficult question. It's not because I don't like the job, it's because I can't do it"*.

Professionally, Frances tries to develop a career as a dancer, but she is not very successful at it. Although her goal is to get a permanent position in the company where she works as a dancer, she cannot achieve it. Her adventure, which started as a backup dancer in terms of profession, continued as a waitress, then as a secretary in the company she danced, and ended with choreography at the end of the movie. From a professional perspective, Frances's adventure seems to indicate that she has experienced a lock-out crisis. As a dancer, she wants to devote her life to dance. In other words, she wants to answer the question "Who am I professionally, I am a dancer", but cannot do this in the context of an adult role.

Economy

Economic independence is considered as one of the most basic characteristics of adulthood in most cultures (Santröck 2014). Arnett (2001) states that economic reasons are an important factor in the emergence of emerging adulthood, similarly Robbins and Wilner (2001) states that economy is crucial in experiencing the quarterlife crisis. Over time, the changes in the economy in terms of production and the quality of employees have been a catalyst for the emergence of a period such as emerging adulthood on the one hand, and the emergence of a situation such as a quarterlife crisis on the other. Throughout the movie, it seems that the main dynamic of Frances' crisis is the economic difficulties she is experiencing. The economic difficulties Frances experienced caused her to try jobs other than dancing, to not be able to create a permanent living space, in other words, to discontinuity in her life. On the other hand, the relatively better economic conditions of the Sophie character seem to have ensured that she does not experience as much uncertainty in her life as Frances. At the end of the film, it is tried to show that Frances has a relatively stable economic income and as a result, she has transitioned to adulthood by keeping a single house.

Living Place

One of the key features of emerging adulthood is instability. According to Arnett (2000) instability occurs in many areas of life, but instability related to the place where one lives is clearly observed. Similarly, Robinsons (2015) states that one of the main areas where the quarterlife crisis emerges is the determination of where to live. The fiction of Frances Ha is about Frances' inability to decide where to live, or in other words, the difficulty of finding a place to live. The movie proceeds through the sections showing the addresses of the places where Frances lives. Each new address shows a different story about Frances' situation. The movie seems to reveal to the audience that finding a place to live or the continuity of a place to live is the most important crisis for Frances. Frances first shares a house with Sophie, and then with Sophie's departure, finding a place to live becomes a major crisis for Frances. After Sophie's departure, she shares the same house with two people, but because she cannot pay the rent, she leaves and moves in with her parents for a while. She then stays at the house of a friend who is a dancer in the company she works for, but there is no continuity there either. After that, we see that Frances starts to stay in the university dormitory. Finally, Frances is shown in the house where she lives alone in the movie. Finding a living space of its own is almost like the most important sign of transition to adulthood in the movie. When shown in her own home, Frances now appears to have stepped out of the messy (non-adult-like) clothes shown for most of the movie and dressed in adult clothes. Looking at the house, there seems to be a transition from Frances with a messy home life to an organized (adult-like) Frances.

Relationships

"It's that thing when you're with someone, and you love them and they know it, and they love you and you know it... but it's a party... and you're both talking to other people, and you're laughing and shining... and you look across the room and catch each other's eyes... but – but not because you're possessive, or it's precisely sexual... but because... that is your person in this life. And it's funny and sad, but only because this life will end, and it's this secret world that exists right there in public, unnoticed, that no one else knows about. It's sort of like how they say that other dimensions exist all around us, but we don't have the ability to perceive them. That's – That's what I want out of a relationship. Or just life, I guess. Love..."(49-51 min.)

The above quote summarizes how Francis views relationships and life. Although there may seem to be confusion in this speech of Frances, the most important feature that makes her strong in her life is the strong and close relationships with others. Although the places where Frances lives and the work she does change throughout the film, the only thing that does not change in Frances' life is perhaps her relationship with her friend Sophie. Her close relationship with Sophie is crucial to her well-being. However, it can be said that Frances easily establishes close relationships with other people who enter her life, and these relationships also contribute to her well-being.

Considering the attachment literature (Bowlby 1973, Morsünbül 2011), it can be said that Frances has secure attachment characteristics. The secure attachment pattern appears in her relationship with her parents, her relationship with her friends, and perhaps more prominently in her relationship with Sophie.

Considering Frances' relationships in the context of a quarterlife crisis, it can be said that she does not reflect the lock-out crisis features that can be seen clearly in other life areas. The most important thing that does not change in the life of Frances, who seems to have reached adult roles at the end of the movie, is the close relationships she has established with the people in her life

Discussion

In this study, the movie *Frances Ha* was analyzed in the context of quarterlife crisis. Quarterlife crisis is considered as a stressful period experienced by emerging adults in many areas of life such as profession, economy, place of residence or relationships. Emerging adults experience many psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety during the quarterlife crisis (Robinson 2015). Thus, knowing the quarter life crisis by mental health professionals may enable them to intervene more accurately when working with clients who are experiencing difficulties during this crisis.

We can say that the movie *Frances Ha* examined in this study successfully transferred the experiences of an emerging adult who experienced the quarterlife crisis to the screen, both in terms of cinematic technique and scenario. Although the main character of the movie, Frances, is not so prominent in the field of relationships, she clearly experiences the lock-out form of the quarterlife crisis in life areas such as the economy, place of residence and profession. As Robinson (2015) states, the emerging adults in this crisis have autonomy, but ideally what they want is to make commitments about their life areas. In this context, the main character of the movie, Frances, tries to make commitments about her life areas, but this process is not easy.

Although the quarterlife crisis is a widely used concept in popular culture, there is an ongoing debate in the psychology literature over whether it can be considered as a normative crisis. Just as the emerging adulthood period put forward by Arnett (2000, 2004) is not seen as a normative life period for all individuals between the ages of 18-29, it is not possible to say that the quarter-life crisis is experienced by all individuals. Emerging adulthood can be considered as a life period that can be observed mostly in industrialized societies. In addition, taking part in undergraduate and graduate education appears as an important variable in terms of experiencing the characteristics of emerging adulthood (Morsünbül 2015). Similarly, Hendr and Kloep (2010) found that most of the participants described themselves as adults in their study with participants who were mostly employed in a full-time job.

Conclusion

Although it is not considered a normative life crisis, understanding the characteristics of individuals affected by a quarterlife crisis can provide guidance on the right support. In this study, the basic features of the quarterlife crisis were tried to be conveyed through the movie *Frances Ha*. Considering the impact of cinema on our lives globally, the cooperation of cinema and psychology may make important contributions to understanding the characteristics of human development and the evaluation of mental health disorders.

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