

Movie: Little Shop of Horrors (1986)

Synopsis

Based on the off-Broadway musical, *Little Shop of Horrors* opens in 1960s NYC where the residents of run-down neighborhood, Skid Row, are desperate for an opportunity to follow their dreams downtown. Seymour, a lonely assistant at Mushnik's Flower Shop with a penchant for plants, is in love with the beautiful and tragic Audrey, who in spite of her simple hopes for a quiet life, finds herself repeatedly entangled with domineering, abusive men. The hapless Seymour finds a unique plant at another florist's during an eclipse, which he names Audrey II after his secret love. Despite his usually green thumb, Seymour finds that Audrey II is not responding to any of his remedies-- that is, until he cuts himself and finds that the plant has a taste for blood. Only then do we begin to scratch the surface of Audrey II's true motive.

How it relates to the field of psychiatry

Audrey II starts out a sickly plant, withering under the careful attention of Seymour. We eventually discover what heals her--human blood and flesh! Throughout the movie, the plant feigns illness and hunger, but for what motive?

And the plants proceeded to grow
And grow
And began what they came here to do
Which was essentially to
Eat Cleveland
And Des Moines
And Peoria
And New York
And where you live
They may offer you fortune and fame
Love and money and instant acclaim
But whatever they offer you
Don't feed the plants (1)

When its revealed that Audrey II feigns illness (malnutrition) in order to attain an external gain (eating Cleveland...New York), the DSM-5 "diagnosis" of malingering should be considered. Malingering is the falsification or profound exaggeration of (physical or mental) illness to gain external (conscious) benefits "such as avoiding work or responsibility, seeking drugs, avoiding trial (law), seeking attention, avoiding military services, leave from school, paid leave from a job, among others" (2)... or is in the case of Audrey II, world domination. While rare and difficult to definitively prove in clinical practice, Audrey II openly admits to her scheme and manipulates everyone around her for her own gain. The towering truffid's conscious motivation contrasts with another mental disorder in the Somatic Symptom and Related Disorder chapter of the DSM-5: Factitious Disorder; where patients create physical or psychological symptoms motivated by subconscious impulses such as to assume the "sick role."

Little Shop of Horrors relates to [another apparent children's film](#) with a dark plot that captures yet another variant of Somatic Symptom and Related Disorder: Factitious Disorder Imposed on Another (formerly known as Munchausen's by Proxy).

Key Words: Little Shop of Horrors, Coraline, Audrey II, Aliens, Malingering, Factitious Disorder, Factitious Disorder Imposed on Another, Munchausen's by Proxy, world domination

References

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