

From Passive Patient to Active Narrator: A Foucauldian Reading of David Adam's *The Man Who Couldn't Stop*

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Abstract

Throughout the twentieth century, there was a growing resistance against medical authorities' control of illness stories so they could claim power to shape their illness accounts through personal writings. This paper examines David Adam's *The Man Who Couldn't Stop* through which the medical field's traditional system of knowledge comes under scrutiny because it focuses on the personal experience of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Through power-knowledge theory Foucault reveals how medical institutions have dominated clinical speech over patient accounts. David Adam uses his memoir to provide deep insights into OCD while criticising the clinical community's usual treatment approach to the condition. Doctors maintain an unbalanced power dynamics with their patients that promotes a treatment system which keeps patients unaware about real facts. Adam develops an opposing perspective which eliminates medical control over the patient story through his courageous recovery of personal voice. Through Foucault's theoretical framework this study demonstrates that his memoir transform mental illness knowledge boundaries as well as reveal medical knowledge constraints. It fights metaphorically to establish a revolutionary change which establishes balanced empathetic and fair partnerships between medical staff and patients in mental health care systems.

Keywords: Michael Foucault, Power-Knowledge, Mental Illness, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Introduction

The medical field maintains dominance over illness descriptions while doctors obtain final word authority as medical experts. The discipline of mental health medicine has frequently undergone medicalization procedures which decrease patient-reported symptoms to maintain clinical diagnosis methods and universal therapeutic standards. Throughout the twentieth century a growing number of people started to challenge medical authority when they turned to autobiographical writing. Through memoirs patients have developed a new way to regain control of their lives while directly confronting

medical model practices that minimize human experience in mental health care. David Adam narrates Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) through his personal account in *The Man Who Couldn't Stop* that provides readers with an authentic insight into the disorder. Through his narrative Adam presents both the psychological processes of OCD while critiquing how medical institutions handle mental health by treating it as symptomatic data rather than seeing it as an immersive daily experience. This paper analyses the effects of Michel Foucault's power-knowledge concept on David Adam's memoir while establishing how it attacks medical discourse through OCD self-expression along with doctor/patient power dynamics and mental health care relationship reforms. Through this approach *The Man Who Couldn't Stop* presents a systemic challenge to medical dominance and promotes patient voices for changing mental health discourse.

Foucault's Power-Knowledge and the Medical Gaze

Michel Foucault outlines in his major works *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish* how systems of power constantly work together with systems of knowledge. Medical authority has traditionally operated as a potent force in clinical medicine by marginalizing what patients want to express. Doctors practice the medical gaze which Foucault dubbed as the method through which they observe patients to create diagnostic knowable facts from their clinical examination. When healthcare professionals use this method, they focus on medical facts of illness but they fail to understand what patients experience with their diseases. Medical practice produces patients who receive information passively since the medical professional maintains full control over diagnostic procedures.

Adam uses *The Man Who Couldn't Stop* to highlight the problems with medical assessments of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder through his personal encounter with this disorder. The doctor-patient relationship according to Foucault functions by holding medical knowledge and diagnostic authority which subordinates personal patient experiences. In his memoir, Adam interrupts established relationships by presenting a firsthand perspective about the life experiences of living with obsessive-compulsive disorder. According to his narrative the clinical approach of medical diagnostic methods suffers dismantlement due to his revelation about emotional aspects and psychological elements of this condition that medical scientists usually neglect.

The Existential Dimensions of OCD: Reclaiming Agency and Challenging Medical Epistemology

Medical literature reduces OCD diagnosis to obsessive thoughts along with compulsive behaviours when those symptoms cross boundaries of irrationality and excessiveness. Some OCD patients find relief from their symptoms through cognitive-behavioural therapy and medication yet these treatments do not provide effective solutions for addressing self-identity alterations caused by psychiatric disorder manifestations. Through his book *The Man Who Couldn't Stop* David Adam investigates how OCD involves more than medical definitions due to its existential elements.

Adam demonstrates how OCD controls all aspects of mental functioning and simultaneously generates overwhelming fear together with anxiety symptoms. The internal psychological experience of OCD lacks symmetrical matching with the medical diagnosis approach which maintains OCD symptoms as management targets. Through his narrative Adam challenges established psychiatric treatments about their failure to recognize psychological distress which impacts patients beyond simple symptom management while ignoring their core emotional and existential distress from mental disorders.

Through his memoir Adam explores the doctor-patient relationship which typically creates a situation where patients must follow medical directives without participating. Such marginalization occurs when the patient's personal experience is erased under Foucault's power-knowledge theory framework.

The narrative emphasis on his first-hand experiences enables Adam to present a framework which repositions patients to be equal members in their healthcare journey. Through his memoir Adam challenges clinical knowledge which fails to recognize mental illness complexities by promoting better empathetic mental health approach between patients and healthcare providers. Through his narrative Adam demands an essential change toward patient and professional collaboration that should lead to fair treatment and complete care.

Conclusion

Michel Foucault's concept of power-knowledge serves as the analytical framework to explore in this paper how Adam's memoir changes both doctor-patient power imbalances and medical industry's simplistic view of mental disorders. The detailed depiction of his OCD journey by Adam gives patients an active role within their own medical narrative which displaces dominant medical control. Adam uses his memoir to redefine OCD while he advocates for mental health care that combines empathy with partnership between health practitioners and patients to provide better patient-centred care. The Man Who Couldn't Stop plays an essential role within the attempt to restore patient autonomy alongside a confrontation against medical establishment's power.

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