

The Impact of Inside Out on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents

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Abstract: This paper examines the impact of the film *Inside Out* on enhancing emotional self-awareness among children and adolescents. The research background highlights the current challenges young people face in recognizing and managing their emotions, exacerbated by social media and modern life pressures. The paper identifies a specific problem: the difficulty children and adolescents encounter in understanding their emotions amidst high stress and unrealistic online comparisons. *Inside Out* is proposed as a solution, offering a clear framework by personifying emotions-Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust-as characters to simplify complex emotional processes. The research findings demonstrate that *Inside Out* significantly aids in emotional self-awareness by illustrating the value of all emotions and their roles in personal development. Key scenes in the film, such as the conflict between Joy and Sadness and the depiction of core memories shaping personality traits, provide concrete examples of how emotions influence behavior and decision-making. These visual representations help children understand that experiencing a range of emotions is natural and necessary for emotional balance. The paper concludes that *Inside Out* effectively reduces emotional confusion and enhances self-awareness by portraying emotions as integral and purposeful components of mental processes. This research is significant as it underscores the educational value of media in emotional learning and suggests that *Inside Out* serves as a powerful tool for improving emotional cognition and mental health among young audiences.

Keywords: *Inside Out*, mental health, children, adolescents.

1. Introduction

Children and adolescents today often experience heightened confusion about their emotions and have trouble recognizing their emotions rationally. As is known to all, social media platforms expose young people to constant comparisons and idealized portrayals of others' lives. This can create a sense of inadequacy or confusion about their own feelings, as they may struggle to reconcile their authentic emotions with the often-unrealistic standards they see online. Besides, modern life often involves high levels of stress due to academic pressures, extracurricular commitments, and social expectations, which will blur the emotional awareness, making it more difficult for young people to clearly reflect on and understand their emotions. For this phenomenon, the author thinks of a film *Inside Out* a few years ago. This paper mainly discusses the positive impact of *Inside Out* on the mental health of children and adolescents. The hypothesis is that *Inside Out* improves emotional

self-awareness among children and adolescents by providing a clear, relatable framework for understanding and categorizing different emotions, which can lead to increased self-awareness and reduced emotional confusion.

2. Brief Introduction of the Film *Inside Out*

Inside Out is really fascinating and unique because it does something that most films don't—it shows what's happening inside our heads with emotions as characters. Instead of just talking about feelings, it actually brings to life with Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust. This makes it super easy to understand how emotions work and how they can mix together. One of the key things about this film is that it shows that every emotion matters. For example, Joy might seem like the best emotion because she wants Riley to be happy all the time, but Sadness also plays a big role in helping Riley deal with tough situations. This can help children and adolescents realize that sadness or anger is not something to be avoided; it is just a part of being human that helps people deal with life better. More importantly, it also makes people think about how they can become more aware of our emotions. Sometimes it's hard for young people to figure out why they feel a certain way, but *Inside Out* teaches people that all emotions have a purpose and that it is just fine and even necessary to experience each of them.

To begin with, the understanding of emotional self-awareness is introduced. According to the Dutch psychologist Frijda, emotional self-awareness refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions [1]. It encompasses an awareness of one's emotional states, their causes, and their impacts on thoughts and behaviors. This skill is crucial in both childhood and adolescence as it lays the foundation for emotional regulation, social interactions, and overall psychological well-being. During childhood, emotional awareness helps children navigate social relationships, understand their feelings, and communicate effectively. It supports their ability to empathize with others and manage their emotions in a constructive manner. As children grow into adolescents, the complexities of their emotional experiences increase, since adolescents face heightened emotional sensitivity and more intense feelings, which makes self-awareness even more vital. At this stage, it helps them to make informed decisions, handle stress, and develop a strong sense of identity. In essence, emotional self-awareness is quite essential for the mental health of children and adolescents, for it can facilitate our emotional regulation, enhance our social skills, help us achieve academic and personal success, promote a healthy self-concept, and reduce the risk of mental health issues.

Secondly, a clear introduction of the film *Inside Out* is given. The story opens with Riley, an 11-year-old girl who lives a happy life in Minnesota with her parents. Her world is turned upside down when her family moves to San Francisco due to her father's new job. Inside Riley's head, five primary emotions—Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust—are depicted as characters who manage her emotional responses. Joy, the most dominant and optimistic of the emotions, strives to keep Riley happy despite the upheaval of the move. Sadness, on the other hand, is more introspective and prone to making things melancholic, while Anger, Fear, and Disgust each handle specific emotional responses. As Riley struggles to adapt to her new life in San Francisco, the emotions inside her mind grapple with how to best support her. Joy, determined to ensure Riley's happiness, inadvertently sidelines Sadness, leading to tension between them. The conflict escalates when, during a chaotic moment, Joy and Sadness are accidentally swept away from the headquarters and find themselves lost in the vast landscape of Riley's mind. As Joy and Sadness navigate their way back to the headquarters, they travel through various regions of Riley's mental landscape, including Long-Term Memory, Imagination Land, and Personality Islands. All of these constitutes Riley's spiritual world. During their journey, Joy and Sadness encounter various obstacles and learn more about each other's roles. Joy begins to understand the importance of Sadness in helping Riley process her emotions and cope

with difficult situations. Meanwhile, Sadness learns how crucial Joy's role is in bringing positivity and motivation to Riley's life. After a series of trials and emotional revelations, Joy and Sadness finally return to the headquarters. They help Riley express her feelings about the move and her new life, enabling her to reconcile her emotions and adapt to her new environment more effectively. The relevance of *Inside Out* to emotional understanding lies in its ability to simplify and visually represent complex emotional processes. By giving personality and distinct traits to different emotions, the film provides a clear and relatable framework for children and adolescents to recognize and categorize their own feelings. The portrayal of these emotions as characters helps viewers to understand that emotions are not only natural but also integral to navigating life's challenges. Furthermore, the film's focus on the interplay between these emotions and their impact on Riley's behavior and decisions underscores the importance of emotional awareness and balance. In a nutshell, because it offers valuable insights into how emotions influence our actions and interactions, *Inside Out* is a powerful tool for fostering emotional self-awareness among young audiences.

3. The Impact of *Inside Out* on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents

This part mainly elaborates some significant evidences to the opinion that *Inside Out* improves emotional self-awareness among children and adolescents.

Firstly, there are some examples from the film that help explain the opinion. When Riley's family moves to a new city, the emotions inside her mind are thrown into disarray. Joy's attempts to maintain a positive outlook clash with Sadness's tendency to focus on the negative aspects of the move. This conflict highlights the internal struggle between different emotions and their influence on Riley's behavior. The scene where Joy and Sadness are lost in the vast regions of Riley's mind shows how overwhelming and confusing it can be when emotions are not in harmony. This illustrates to children that it is normal to experience a range of emotions during significant life changes and that it is okay to feel sad even when trying to stay positive. In addition, the scene where Riley's core memories—those tied to fundamental experiences of happiness, sadness, fear, and more—are examined shows how these memories shape her personality islands. This visual representation of how core memories influence Riley's personality traits and emotional responses provides a concrete way for children to understand how their own experiences shape their feelings and behaviors. It helps in recognizing that emotions are interconnected with personal experiences and that understanding this connection can lead to better self-awareness. What's more, the climax of the film occurs when Joy and Sadness work together to restore Riley's emotional balance, leading to a more nuanced understanding of how emotions interact. The resolution demonstrates the integration of Joy and Sadness in Riley's emotional life, reflecting the film's overarching message that emotional balance is achieved through the acceptance and cooperation of all feelings. This teaches children that it is beneficial to embrace and understand their entire emotional spectrum rather than trying to suppress or ignore any part of it. This can lead to reduced emotional confusion and a more holistic approach to managing feelings. In a word, *Inside Out* helps young people recognize their own emotions through the details.

Secondly, some relevant studies and research findings that align with the film's educational impact are discussed. In *Children's Learning from Educational Television: Sesame Street and Beyond*, Fisch examines how educational television programs, like "sesame street", positively impact children's learning and cognitive development [2]. The findings suggest that media can be an effective tool for teaching complex concepts in an engaging and understandable manner. Similarly, *Inside Out* utilizes a narrative approach to teach emotional concepts, leveraging the power of media to make abstract ideas more accessible to children. In *The Nature of Emotions: Clinical implications*, Plutchik supports the idea that understanding emotions involves recognizing their different types and functions [3]. *Inside Out* uses personified emotions to visually and contextually differentiate them, helping children grasp complex emotional concepts and their interactions, which conforms to

Plutchik's theories. In *The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience*, Mar and Oatley suggest that fiction, including films, helps individuals simulate and understand social experiences and emotions [4]. Likewise, *Inside Out* employs narrative techniques to simulate emotional experiences, which can help children better understand and process their own emotions through relatable characters and storylines. In *Convergence Culture: where old and new media collide*, Jenkins and Plasencia explore how modern media, including films, can be utilized effectively for educational purposes by blending entertainment with learning [5]. *Inside Out* aligns with this concept by providing educational content about emotions within an engaging and entertaining framework, thus taking advantage of media's potential to enhance learning. In short, all of these findings suggest that *Inside Out* has a very good educational meaning in emotional cognition, indicating that it can effectively improve emotional self-awareness among children and adolescents and help them reduce emotional confusion.

Thirdly, some interesting articles about the sequel of *Inside Out* in NPR was published recently. One of them, titled *The Inside Out movies give kids an "emotional vocabulary"*. Therapists love that notes that *Inside Out 2* maintains the clear and relatable framework for understanding emotions, which was a defining feature of the first film [6]. This speaks volumes about the success of the first film in this regard. Besides, the article also mentions that educators and therapists have used the film to support emotional learning. Damour, a psychologist who consulted on both *Inside Out* movies, said she believes that "the *Inside Out* movies help kids-and parents-validate emotions, including the painful ones, and show us that feeling those emotions can even make us better humans" [6]. This practical application demonstrates the film's effectiveness in reducing emotional confusion and fostering self-awareness. By using the film as a tool in these settings, professionals help children and adolescents navigate their emotions more effectively. Overall, the constantly updated positive reviews about *Inside Out* series on social media undoubtedly reflect its profound and successful educational impact on the emotional development of children and adolescents.

4. Conclusion

This paper examines the positive impact of the film *Inside Out* on the emotional self-awareness of children and adolescents. By personifying emotions as distinct characters-Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust-the film provides a unique and engaging framework for understanding and categorizing emotions. This visual and narrative approach simplifies complex emotional processes, helping young audiences recognize, accept, and balance their feelings more effectively. The portrayal of emotions as integral and interrelated components of Riley's mental landscape fosters a deeper understanding of how emotions influence behavior and decision-making. This, in turn, can reduce emotional confusion and enhance emotional self-awareness, promoting healthier emotional development. The analysis underscores *Inside Out*'s effectiveness in addressing emotional confusion, particularly during significant life changes and personal challenges. The film's ability to illustrate the necessity of all emotions, including those that are often seen as negative, helps children and adolescents accept and integrate their feelings into a coherent emotional framework. This contributes to improved emotional regulation and resilience. However, the paper has certain limitations. It primarily relies on qualitative observations from the film and does not incorporate quantitative data or empirical studies that directly measure the film's impact on viewers' emotional self-awareness. Future research could address this gap by conducting studies that evaluate the effectiveness of *Inside Out* in real-world educational and therapeutic settings. Additionally, exploring how cultural and demographic factors influence the film's impact could provide a more comprehensive understanding of its educational value. Future research might also investigate how *Inside Out* and similar media can be integrated into educational curricula and therapeutic practices to enhance emotional literacy. Longitudinal studies could examine the long-term effects of such media on emotional development and well-being. Additionally,

expanding research to assess the impact of *Inside Out*'s sequel and other related media could further illuminate their role in fostering emotional intelligence among young audiences. Overall, *Inside Out* exemplifies the potential of media to support emotional learning and development, and its approach offers valuable insights for future educational and therapeutic interventions.

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