

Nina Sayers: A Psychological Case Study of Schizophrenia and OCD

PRECIOUS MARCUS

04/11/2025

Character Overview – Nina Sayers

- ▶ Main character in *Black Swan* (2010), directed by Darren Aronofsky
- ▶ Dedicated ballet dancer at a prestigious New York ballet company
- ▶ Lives with a controlling mother, a former ballerina
- ▶ Cast as the Swan Queen in *Swan Lake* – must portray both the innocent White Swan and the seductive Black Swan
- ▶ High expectations and pressure trigger mental health decline



Sociocultural Context



- ▶ Ballet culture emphasizes perfection, control, and endurance
- ▶ Highly competitive and appearance-focused environment
- ▶ Mother-daughter enmeshment restricts Nina's autonomy and emotional growth
- ▶ Isolated from peers; lacks healthy support systems
- ▶ Sexual repression and fear of failure influence her sense of identity

Symptomology – Schizophrenia

- ▶ Delusions: believes others (e.g., Lily) are trying to replace her
- ▶ Visual hallucinations: self-transformation into the Black Swan
- ▶ Auditory hallucinations: hears voices or imagined sounds
- ▶ Disorganized thoughts: blurring of fantasy and reality (Goff, 2021).
- ▶ Paranoia and social withdrawal



Symptomology – Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

- ▶ Obsessions: fear of imperfection, contamination, failure
- ▶ Compulsions: skin-picking, nail-biting, rehearsing routines repeatedly
- ▶ Perfectionism: obsessive pursuit of an ideal performance (Taylor et al., 2023).
- ▶ Ritualistic behavior: strict eating, grooming, and practice patterns
- ▶ High anxiety when routines are disrupted

Dual Diagnosis – Schizophrenia and OCD

- ▶ Co-occurrence is rare but possible (Singh et al., 2023).
- ▶ OCD may precede psychosis in some individuals
- ▶ Nina's compulsions likely developed before full psychotic symptoms
- ▶ Symptom overlap can complicate diagnosis and treatment planning
- ▶ Both disorders severely impair functioning and self-perception



Causes and Contributing Factors

- ▶ Biological: genetic predisposition, possible neurochemical imbalance
- ▶ Psychological: childhood trauma, repression, identity confusion (Taylor et al., 2023).
- ▶ Environmental: high-stress career, emotionally abusive home
- ▶ Social: isolation, peer competition, lack of emotional outlets
- ▶ Internalized pressure for perfection and control

Treatment Options – Schizophrenia

- ▶ Antipsychotic medication (e.g., risperidone, olanzapine)
- ▶ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Psychosis (CBTp)
- ▶ Family therapy and psychoeducation
- ▶ Supportive housing or structured routines
- ▶ Crisis intervention and relapse prevention plans



Treatment Options – OCD

- ▶ Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) such as fluoxetine
- ▶ Cognitive Behavioral Therapy with Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) (Singh et al., 2023).
- ▶ Mindfulness-based therapies to reduce compulsive urges
- ▶ Habit-reversal training for self-injurious behavior
- ▶ Lifestyle interventions: sleep, exercise, social reintegration

Proposed Treatment Plan for Nina

- ▶ Integrated approach addressing both disorders
- ▶ Psychiatric evaluation and medication for psychotic symptoms (Singh et al., 2023).
- ▶ ERP-focused CBT for obsessive-compulsive behaviors
- ▶ Family-based therapy to reduce toxic dependency
- ▶ Art/dance therapy to process trauma and rebuild identity
- ▶ Inpatient treatment during the acute crisis phase



Prognosis and Ethical Considerations

- ▶ Schizophrenia: long-term management, variable outcomes
- ▶ OCD: more treatable, especially with therapy and meds
- ▶ Early intervention is critical for both
- ▶ Ethical care: informed consent, autonomy, confidentiality
- ▶ Trauma-informed practice essential in recovery

References

- ▶ Singh, A., Anjankar, V. P., & Sapkale, B. (2023). Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD): a comprehensive review of diagnosis, comorbidities, and treatment approaches. *Cureus*, 15(11).
<https://www.cureus.com/articles/200641-obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd-a-comprehensive-review-of-diagnosis-comorbidities-and-treatment-approaches.pdf>
- ▶ Taylor, S., Abramowitz, J. S., McKay, D., & Minaya, C. (2023). 11 Cognitive Approaches to Understanding Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders. *The Oxford Handbook of Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders*, 279.
<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=-tXPEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA279&dq=Understanding+and+treating+OCD.&ots=QHtoYjbb4n&sig=SZf7I87PrVU96LI-NLvxNywgzUw>
- ▶ Vita, A., Fagiolini, A., Maina, G., Mencacci, C., Spina, E., & Galderisi, S. (2023). Achieving long-term goals through early personalized management of schizophrenia: expert opinion on the role of a new fast-onset long-acting injectable antipsychotic. *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 22(1), 1. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12991-022-00430-1>
- ▶ Goff, D. C. (2021). The pharmacologic treatment of schizophrenia—2021. *Jama*, 325(2), 175-176.
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2774656>