

Psychopathology and Diagnosis Midterm
Simulated Diagnosis and Case Conceptualization
Ferris Bueller's Day Off: Cameron Frye

Ferris Bueller's Day Off is a well-known and loved 1986 John Hughes teen comedy. In the film, high school senior and lead title character Ferris Bueller feigns sick to skip school on a beautiful spring day for a memorable ninth and final time before graduation. Ferris guilts his best friend and complete opposite, Cameron Frye (who is also home "sick" for the day, albeit in a different context), to take out his father's prized 1961 Ferrari 250 GT and join him on his adventure, despite his continuous anxiety-laden protests. The two get Ferris's girlfriend, Sloane Peterson, out of school by making a phony phone call to Ferris's archnemesis, Principal Edward Rooney, claiming that Sloane's grandmother has passed. The trio then takes off to nearby Chicago for the day—visiting Sears Tower, eating at a "snooty" French restaurant, attending a baseball game at Wrigley Field, absorbing the exhibits at the Art Institute of Chicago, watching brokers at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, and joining in on the Von Steuben Day parade. The whirlwind "sick day" is accented by near run-ins with Ferris's father, an underlying suburban chase from Mr. Rooney, and a high intensity race for home. Once the day is over, with Ferris's parents none the wiser, the film ends with Ferris (who breaks the fourth wall various times throughout) sagely reminding us all that, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

Despite the film's genre definition of teen comedy, there is one teen character in particular who instead creates an element of drama—Cameron Frye. Cameron is an 18-year-old, Caucasian male and high school senior of above average height and slim build, from an upper-middle class family. He lives with his parents in a large, "museum-like" home in a wooded area of suburban Chicago. Cameron's relationship with his parents seems to be of an absent and/or emotionally abusive nature. His parents reportedly fight often and are rarely home, either working or traveling, respectively. He says that "they hate each other." Mr. Frye has a prized car collection of which Cameron is not allowed to utilize or interact with, and of which he views to be more important to his father than he himself is. He also believes this to be true of his mother, stating, "he loves the car, he hates his wife."

In terms of friendships, Cameron seems to have one friend overall, Ferris Bueller. Ferris appears to be Cameron's exact opposite—popular and outgoing, positive and carefree, with happy, caring parents. Cameron often allows Ferris to take advantage of him in light of this friendship and due to an apparent inability to stand up for himself. Ferris has consistently threatened the friendship since fifth grade, and appears fed up with Cameron's ever-present state of high-strung actions and depression. Ferris, however, acknowledges Cameron as his "best friend" but also mentions that he does not see this lasting beyond high school, and expresses concern for what kind of relationship Cameron may end up in thereafter. This said, Ferris is the most consistent, present, and loyal relationship that Cameron has. Other than this friendship however, Cameron does not seem to have any other significant relationships in his life.

In consideration of the following material, I would diagnose Cameron Frye with 300.4 (F34.1) Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia), moderate to severe, with anxious distress, in partial remission, early onset, with persistent major depressive episode, moderate to severe (DSM-V); [Dysthymic disorder; dysthymia; including neurotic depression and persistent anxiety depression (ICD-10)]; comorbid with 300.02 (F.41.1) Generalized Anxiety Disorder (DSM-V, ICD-10).

DSM-V diagnostic criteria for Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia) requires: A. Depressed mood, most of the day, most days, indicated by subjective account and/or observable by others, for at least two years; B. Presence, while depressed, of at least two out of six symptoms; C. No lack of A or B criteria during the two years, for more than two months at a time; D. Criteria for a major depressive disorder continuously present for two years; E. No manic or hypomanic episodes, and cyclothymic disorder criteria unmet; F. Not better explained by another disorder; G. Not attributable to substances or medical conditions; H. Clinically significant distress or impairment in social or other important areas of functioning. ICD-10 requires a long-standing depression of mood, which lasts for at least several years. This is shown, specifically in Cameron, by being tired or depressed most of the time; everything requiring effort; nothing being enjoyed; brooding and complaining; feelings of inadequacy; and sometimes being either able or otherwise unable to cope with basic demands of daily life.

Cameron fits the above criteria in that he has had a depressed mood for most of the day, most days, for as long as we are able to have been aware, as described by personal subjective account as well as observed by others. He is seen to have four out of six B criterion symptoms: low energy, low self-esteem, difficulty making decisions, and feelings of hopelessness. Cameron has never, to our awareness, been without this mood and these symptoms for longer than two months at a time. Insofar as we are aware, the six B criterion symptoms previously listed as well as two other major depressive disorder qualifiers (A.2. Diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, most days; A.9. Recurrent thoughts of death; suicide attempts) have been present continuously for two years. Cameron has never experienced any manic or hypomanic episodes that we are aware of, nor are the criteria for cyclothymia met. His condition is not better explained by another disqualifying condition, and is not due to any substances or medical conditions. Cameron's symptoms cause marked impairment and distress in his ability to function normally as well as in social contexts.

In addition, to add the specifier "with anxious distress," the criterion requires the presence of at least two out of five listed symptoms during the majority of days, of which Cameron meets four (1. Feeling tense; 2. Difficulty concentrating because of worry; 4. Fear that something awful may happen; 5. Feeling that the individual might lose control of themselves.) The specifier "in partial remission" is required and fits best in that Cameron has experienced no periods in excess of two months without any significant symptoms of a major depressive episode. The specifier of severity is added due to the excess number of criterion symptoms, the severity of those symptoms, and the degree of functional disability; of which, the first and the last vary and differ, therefore qualifying a "moderate to severe" range.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is often comorbid with Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia) and requires: A. Excessive anxiety and worry, most days, for at least six months, about a number of events or activities; B. Difficulty controlling worry; C. Anxiety and worry are associated with at least three out of six listed symptoms (of which Cameron is seen to have four of: C.1. Restlessness, keyed up, on edge; C.2. Fatigued; C.3. Difficulty concentrating, mind going blank; C.4. Irritability) for most days, for at least six months; D. Anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social or other important areas of functioning; E. Not attributable to substances or medical conditions; F. Not better explained by another disorder. ICD-10 requires anxiety most days, for several months, including a. apprehension, b. motor tension, c. autonomic overactivity; and in children, frequently needing reassurance as well as possible recurrent somatic complaints. This is not restricted to any particular environmental situation, and is shown, specifically in Cameron, by depressive and obsessional symptoms, and even some elements of phobic anxiety.

Cameron shows criterion and symptoms for the diagnosis of Persistent Depressive Disorder throughout the film. He is visibly depressed, and sometimes even manifests this feeling of depression (as well as anxiety) physically, via somatic symptoms. Cameron often stays home when his parents are not around, stating that he is sick and feels like “complete shit.” He has been heard to say, “I’m dying,” in these moments, and cocoons himself in bed in his room in the dark, surrounded by medications, wishing to “rot in peace.” Ferris has also stated that Cameron is “the only guy I know who feels better when he’s sick,” and is admittedly aware of his friend’s generally depressed mood. Cameron’s lack of desire and inability to get out of bed without prodding also shows his low energy as well as a diminished interest in activities, despite the promise of a fun day ahead. Cameron’s low self-esteem is shown in that he never stands up to Ferris or his father, despite his feelings, fears, and anxieties; and he even at one point says, “I can’t handle anything.” He shows difficulty in making decisions by mentioning that while going to college post-high school is a given, he has no idea what he wants to do, as well as displaying a visible inner and outer struggle with whether or not to even spend the day with Ferris at all. In this moment, he lays in bed, gets out of bed, goes back and forth from his car to his home, sits in his car arguing with and convincing himself, gets out of his car, and finally, once more gets in his car and leaves. Cameron’s diminished interest or pleasure in activities is also shown when asked by Ferris what he has seen today, and he responds, “nothing,” despite actually having participated in a great many activities that day, as well as later being asked what he’s interested in by Sloane, and again responding, “nothing.” We see Cameron’s recurrent thoughts of death in comments like, “I’m dying,” and saying that at times he finds himself “wishing [he] was dead.” He also at one point appears to attempt suicide by falling into a pool and making no attempt to swim. He is saved by Ferris and claims that it was a joke, but we cannot be certain if it was truly a joke, or if he was testing his friend, himself, or, perhaps, all of the above. Finally, we are unaware of any of the disqualifying criteria being present and can see, as shown above, that the qualifying criteria are causing marked distress to Cameron personally as well as impairing his ability to successfully interact with others.

The addition of the specifier “with anxious distress” as well as the comorbid diagnosis and condition of Generalized Anxiety Disorder also have criterion displayed by Cameron throughout the film. Ferris describes Cameron as, “[wound] so tight, that if you stuck a lump coal up his ass, in two weeks you’d have a diamond.” Cameron is visibly tense and consistently irritable, especially with Ferris. He struggles to focus on the activities he is participating in due to his excessive worry, as well as fear that something awful might happen, and has an ever-present lack of control and fear of such. Cameron is constantly asking Ferris to go home, as well as worrying about getting home on time, getting caught, the car, his health, his father, and his future. When they go to park the car in a downtown garage, he stresses that “it could get wrecked, scratched, stolen, breathed on wrong.” When Ferris goes to take the Ferrari he worries and warns that “[his father] knows the mileage,” and later, when they look down at the city from the Sears Tower he’s concerned, “I think I see my dad...shit, the son of a bitch is down there somewhere.” When discussing their futures, he says, “I don’t know what I’m going to do.” We also see Cameron show an extreme display of his mind going blank. Following the discovery that his father’s car was taken out for a ride by some garage attendants, resulting in excessively high mileage, Cameron suffers an anxiety attack and appears catatonic for some time, staring off into the distance. Given his young age, we could also potentially include the displayed symptoms of somatic complaints, shown in his perceived but unproven physical illness, as well as his constant need for reassurance, shown in his consistent need for Ferris to be his friend and express care for him. Finally, we are unaware of any of the disqualifying criteria being present and can see, as shown above, that the qualifying criteria are causing marked distress to Cameron personally as well as impairing his ability to successfully interact with others.

At one point, while lying in bed, Cameron sings, “When Cameron was in Egypt’s land, let my Cameron go,” in reference to “Go Down Moses” from the Bible, signifying that he feels trapped by his condition and situation, and desires freedom. This shows a certain awareness. He even has a sort of epiphany towards the end of his adventurous day out, and says, “I’m the problem...I am not going to sit on my ass as the events that affect me unfold to determine the course of my life...I’m just tired of being afraid...It’s going to be good.” Cameron’s self-awareness that he has a problem and that he is the one that can do something about it shows a positive outlook for him, especially with applied therapeutic techniques. This perspective affects his treatment plan, which is laid out in the following recommendation.

Cameron should be referred for initial weekly individual therapy and, if accepted by his parents, monthly family therapy. Family therapy should focus on the family dynamic, assessing relationship strengths and weaknesses, and identifying ways to improve any weaknesses of or stressors on the relationships within. Individual therapy should focus on empowering Cameron and creating techniques for coping with moments of anxiety and depressive symptoms, perhaps including medication, meditation, journaling, and/or exploring activities. It is especially important for Cameron to continue therapy at least through his transition to college, as this can be an especially stressful life change, and may therefore exacerbate his current symptoms, despite any progress that may be made between then and now. Perhaps then, after time, work, and continued self-awareness, Cameron can fully embrace Ferris’s final quote that, “Life moves pretty fast [and] if you don’t stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.”