

Foreword to the Third Edition

You know a book is valuable when it enters multiple editions in tumultuous economic times. Such is certainly the case for *Movies and Mental Illness*, now entering its third edition as a classic resource and an authoritative guide.

Movies play a powerful and pervasive role in our culture and, increasingly, in our classrooms. Psychologist Ken Gergen (*The Saturated Self*, 1991, pp. 56–57) opined that movies have become one of the most influential rhetorical devices in the world: “Films can catapult us rapidly and effectively into states of fear, anger, sadness, romance, lust, and aesthetic ecstasy – often within the same two-hour period. It is undoubtedly true that for many people film relationships provide the most emotionally wrenching experiences of the average week.”

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then a movie is worth tens of thousands of words in even the most engaging of textbooks. My students – all students – clamor for immediate, personal, and riveting examples of mental disorders and their treatment.

Movies can easily be integrated into education to illustrate psychopathology, but can also be used for clinical purposes. The use of films for treatment can be traced back to the 1930s, but more professionals are recommending or prescribing specific

films. Whether it’s called cinematherapy, movie treatment, or reel therapy, the goal is to enhance health and happiness.

Many of the movies featured in these pages portray healing stories. The best of them typically increase awareness about a disorder or treatment; *As Good as It Gets* springs to mind for its accurate and humorous depiction of obsessive-compulsive disorder. The best movies also show flawed, yet effective role models struggling realistically with problems and ultimately triumphing; a case in point is the inspiring film *The Soloist* about living well with psychosis. Such films literally stir the soul as they generate hope and offer a fresh perspective on ourselves and our relationships.

Like the very movies it recommends, *Movies and Mental Illness* is a powerful medium for teaching students, engaging patients, and educating the public. Wedding, Boyd, and Niemiec have produced an invaluable guide for all those committed to understanding the human experience.

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Foreword to the Second Edition

John Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, tells us that we must “strike the visual nerve, for we have much to see.” So, too, in this present work, do Wedding, Boyd, and Niemiec admonish us that there is much to learn by seeing with the mind’s eye what these well-chosen films, by turns sad and silly, offer us in illuminating the psychopathologies set forth in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association.

Ranging from such classics as the depiction of alcoholism in *The Lost Weekend*, to relatively obscure films perhaps known only to the aficionado of foreign films, Wedding, Boyd, and Niemiec have achieved a work which may itself become a classic in this genre, particularly with respect to its intended purpose of teaching how the various psychopathologies might play themselves out in an approximation of real-life, real-world situations of which these films are a simulacrum.

Wedding, Boyd, and Niemiec provide a brief synopsis of the particular film in relation to the major category of psychopathology being covered in a chapter, and they relate the manifest and latent content of the film to the various diagnostic symptoms within a category, such as childhood disorders, and further provide an illustrative case study to assist in the process of generalizing from the film to actual diagnostic work.

As a didactic tool, the work by Wedding, Boyd, and Niemiec should have a salutary effect in engaging the attention of the student, as well as in engaging the affective response of the student to the vicarious identification with the film characters portrayed and, hopefully, enhancing the learning process of what otherwise tends to be a rather tedious pedagogical adventure for most students.

The authors provide a lively expository style, and the use of epigraphs for each chapter is a particularly happy device for setting a tone for each chapter and for capturing a pithy bit of dialogue that may cause the reader to engage in some cognitive restructuring, as when one of the characters says, “I recall every fall, every hook, every jab” in the chapter on the dementias, a quote which instantly evokes an image of the prizefighter with organic brain damage. Other such examples abound and contribute significantly to the teaching potential of the work.

On balance, this is a work that is likely to become a classic of its type and a particularly useful teaching tool for the diagnosis and understanding of the various psychopathologies for students of the helping professions. I commend it to the reader, be the reader student or professor.

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