

Preface

“Mental health movies are often like going to the zoo. They can be wonderful but you go with the normal person surrogate and together you view the person with mental illness. You see the disease from the outside in, and it does a disservice to our ability to empathize and understand. If we saw the world the way the people who suffer see it, we would understand them differently. The hope being that if one person came home from the movie theater, just one, and saw somebody screaming at empty air on the street corner and related to them differently with understanding, then we would have done our job.”

Akiva Goldsman, screenwriter of *A Beautiful Mind*, in the DVD’s section titled “Development of a Screenplay”

We wrote *Movies and Mental Illness* because of our conviction that films are a powerful medium for teaching students (in psychology, social work, medicine, nursing, and counseling), engaging patients, and educating the public about the fascinating world of psychopathology. In addition, we wrote the book because we genuinely love watching and talking about movies. It is important to understand that while this book’s title is *Movies and Mental Illness*, we also discuss serious problems that do not reflect mental illness per se, including mental retardation, physical or sexual abuse, and violence.

We have made numerous changes in this third edition. We have added hundreds of recent films to Appendix F, expanding this resource to well over 1,000 films that illustrate psychopathology. Although it is impossible to list every film depicting every disorder, we feel we have seen and critiqued the majority of important films that illustrate psychopathology. The reader will find a significant number of these new films discussed in relevant chapters. We have added a number of rarely depicted psychological disorders in films such as representations of shared psychotic disorder (*Folie a Deux*), compulsive hoarding, Asperger’s disorder, trichotillomania, body dysmorphic disorder, factitious disorder by proxy, and seasonal affective disorder.

We’ve added a new appendix containing a sample course syllabus with film examples, and we’ve shifted many of the “headline films” to offer new perspectives on the various disorders (e.g., reading the patient evaluation of Anton Chigurh from *No Country for Old Men* can help students better appreciate and understand the absence of remorse that characterizes antisocial personality disorder).

This new edition contains several other changes that we believe will enhance the book. Now

there is a comprehensive index that will allow the reader to quickly identify those sections of the book that discuss particular films of interest. One way to approach *Movies and Mental Illness* is to simply start with Appendix F and a highlighter, identifying interesting films and then seeing what we have to say about them in the book.

We have also added a list of our ten favorite films in each category (Authors’ Picks). The authors did not always agree about which films were most important for readers to see, but we negotiated and debated each list and eventually selected ten films that balanced artistic merit and pedagogical utility. This addition is in response to the frequent request for our recommendations for movies that are relevant to the training of psychologists, nurses, and other health professionals.

Finally, we have taken the audacious step of recommending a single book and a single article for “Future Exploration” at the end of each chapter. We envision that these additional readings will be used in honors courses or perhaps as supplemental readings to compensate for a missed class, exam or assignment. All students will benefit from taking time to read the recommended books and especially the key articles we identify.

We plan to maintain and expand our *Movies and Mental Illness* blog (moviesandmentalillness.blogspot.com); many of the films from Appendix F have been and will be discussed on this blog. We hope the blog continues to be a useful resource for students, teachers, lecturers, consumers, mental health professionals, and people simply interested in psychology and mental illness.

Due to numerous requests from readers, we have either expanded or added a section on international films to each chapter. Often these films are more powerful and accurate than anything the United States has produced. We hope this

will entice readers to watch more foreign films; we have found this an especially interesting and rewarding way to learn about other cultures.

In discussing psychopathology, we occasionally reveal endings or surprise twists to films, and we realize this may spoil these films for some readers. We apologize in advance if this occurs.

The book was originally designed to supplement core texts in abnormal psychology; if the book is being used in this way, the relevant core chapters in the primary text should be read before reviewing the corresponding chapter in *Movies and Mental Illness*. (However, it is usually helpful to review the “Questions to Consider” section that introduces each chapter on psychopathology before seeing the recommended film.) We will occasionally present detailed and specific information about mental illness, but these facts are almost incidental to the discussion of the films themselves, and we have tried to avoid redundancy with the many fine textbooks that already explain psychopathology in considerable detail. We assume the reader will look up unfamiliar terms or discuss them in class, and we have not always defined each new term.

Each chapter is introduced with a fabricated case history and Mini-Mental State Examination. We have developed composite presentations linked as closely as possible to the character being portrayed in the film being discussed. In every case, the diagnoses we present reflect hypotheses, not facts; the case studies are designed to generate ideas, enliven discussion, and stimulate learning. Our diagnoses and character descriptions are always derived from our own judgment and clinical experience, and our fabricated evaluations are anchored in the events portrayed on screen, even when films are based on actual figures (e.g., the characters of John Nash in *A Beautiful Mind*, Ray Charles in *Ray*, and Teena Brandon in *Boys Don't Cry*).

Although educated and trained in different disciplines (Clinical Psychology, DW and RMN; Nursing, MAB), we are all clinicians and educators who have found that the judicious use of films dramatically increases students' and patients' understanding of abnormal behavior. For example, when lecturing about alcoholism, we might supplement our lectures with a “demonstration” of delirium tremens using *The Lost Weekend*. Before a lecture on bipolar disorder, we'll ask our students to watch *Michael Clayton* or *Mr. Jones*. All three films offer a richness and an intensity that simply cannot be captured by a classroom lecture or the printed page. Likewise, when working with a patient going through a divorce who becomes incensed over the

behavior of his or her spouse, we might recommend watching *Kramer vs. Kramer* or a more recent film, *The Squid and the Whale*. We have found that the discussion of relevant films offers a wonderful way to open clinically relevant areas that have not previously been explored.

We discuss a variety of films throughout the book; however, we usually use one or two films as primary illustrations of each disorder. These “headline” films are movies we have watched repeatedly. In many cases, they are popular movies that students are likely to have already seen (e.g., *A Beautiful Mind*).

Usually the connection between the films being discussed and the chapter is immediate and direct, but we occasionally include obscure films when a small section relates in a meaningful way to the points made in the chapter. There are also some classic films such as *Psycho*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* that have tremendous pedagogical value, and we take great pleasure in introducing a new generation of students to these movies. In addition, films such as *Pelle the Conqueror* are occasionally included, even when there is no direct connection to psychopathology, because the films are provocative and moving and are good illustrations of various psychological phenomena, even when they do not address psychopathology per se.

Films can be integrated into courses in abnormal psychology and psychopathology in a variety of ways. The particular approach selected will vary from course to course, depending on the needs of the instructor and the interests of students.

First, students can be asked to take responsibility for seeing many of these films on their own. Because we have selected popular films as the exemplars for each clinical chapter, students can easily rent them from any number of commercial sources. Costs are minimized if students choose to see the films in small groups. This promotes the intellectual camaraderie, discussion, and debate that characterize effective learning. We recommend that whenever possible students see the films before coming to class to discuss the corresponding topic.

Second, we have used films in classes that meet twice weekly. The first class meeting is devoted to seeing the film; the second is spent discussing the content of the related textbook chapter and determining whether or not the film accurately represents the disorder being discussed. It is ideal when such courses can be team taught by a mental health professional and a literature/drama professor. Danny used this approach in the abnormal

psychology course he taught at Yonsei University in Seoul, Korea where he spent the 2008–2009 academic year as the Fulbright-Yonsei Distinguished Scholar.

Finally, most professors choose to use class time to show selected vignettes from pedagogically powerful films, and they encourage students to view the entire film and other related films on their own time. The goal with this approach is to augment lectures with relevant in-class discussion while minimizing the total amount of class time spent watching films. Using a film vignette that vividly depicts a psychiatric disorder circumvents the ethical issues (confidentiality, securing releases and permission, etc.) associated with using real cases and clients as illustrations in the classroom.

When films are used in the classroom, it may be necessary for the educational institution (or the professor teaching the class) to pay a fee for public usage. Most colleges and universities have audiovisual departments well equipped to handle such administrative details.

Many readers will disagree about the ratings we have assigned films included in Appendix F. However, it is important to remember that our ratings are based *primarily* on the utility of the film as a teaching tool and only secondarily on the film's artistic merit.

We are including our e-mail addresses below so we can get feedback about the book. We hope those readers who share our enthusiasm about movies as a teaching tool will recommend additional films that we can include in the next edition of *Movies and Mental Illness*.

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Rob Dimpleby at Hogrefe Publishing is an extraordinary publisher, a true visionary, and a valued friend. We appreciate his enthusiasm for publishing an expanded and enhanced edition of this book.

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Danny is the editor of *PsycCRITIQUES: Contemporary Psychology – APA Review of Books*, and Ryan is the Associate Editor for Films for this American Psychological Association publication. When Danny became editor, he reinstated the practice of reviewing psychologically relevant films in the journal, a practice first introduced by the journal's founding editor, E. G. Boring. Reading weekly film reviews written by psychologists has both sharpened and deepened our appreciation for the psychological relevance of films. Although the journal itself requires a subscription, interested readers can read and comment on selected film reviews at no cost by visiting psycritiquesblog.apa.org.

Special thanks goes to Ryan's wife, Rachele Plummer, who continues to support Ryan's compulsive need to watch movies; this often entails light-up pens in movie theaters, tolerating the ubiquitous laptop he keeps by his side while watching movies at home, and frequent interruptions from new alerts on recent movies on his i-Phone.

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We also appreciate the feedback from our colleagues, friends, family, and the many readers who have taken the time to share suggestions, opinions, and support for our work. We hope you will contribute to our blog at moviesandmentalillness.blogspot.com and let us know when you come across a great film that should be discussed in the next edition.