

Madness in the Movies: Self-directed Learning about Psychiatry from Movies Designed for Medical Students

This top 10 selection of commercial feature movies was systematically compiled for medical student training in psychiatry. Some movies are also relevant to learning in public health as well. We hope you find these movies interesting and look forward to any feedback on these. Please email any ideas for other such movies to either: Dr Mark Huthwaite, Department of Psychiatry, mark.huthwaite@otago.ac.nz; or Dr Peter Gallagher, (Medical Education), peter.gallagher@otago.ac.nz; or Assoc Prof Nick Wilson, Department of Public Health, nick.wilson@otago.ac.nz. An article on the selection process for these movies is being submitted to a journal (April 2014).

Table: Movies in major topic areas in psychiatry with reasonable artistic/entertainment value (released from 1960 onwards, a "Rotten Tomato" score of ≥ 7.5)

Movie title (Year)	Description / comments
<i>Depressive and anxiety disorders</i>	
Ordinary People (1980)	This movie covers "both major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder" (PTSD). The role played by the psychiatrist has been described as particularly positive. ¹ Praise for this movie has been noted in the literature. ²
Silver Linings Playbook (2012)	This movie is a romantic comedy but has quite detailed content around the lead character's bipolar disorder. The main female character has undefined mental health issues and the father has an obsessive compulsive disorder.
<i>Illicit drug use</i>	
Trainspotting (1996)	This movie provides insights in the various problems associated with heroin use. It shows the problems of crime, urban squalor, withdrawal experience, death from HIV/AIDS, and death from neglect (death of infant). One character (Begbie) shows extreme sociopathic tendencies (violent attacks on others – which is possibly one of the reasons for the R18 status of this movie in NZ). There is extensive poly-drug use: especially smoking and alcohol use. Various aspects of the movie are also considered in the literature. ^{3 4} Public health perspective: This movie has overlapping public health themes – the mix of drug culture with poverty, urban decay/squalor, and HIV/AIDS. The polydrug issues include tobacco and alcohol.
Winter's Bone (2010)	In this movie the lead character is shown to deal strongly with a very grim situation (a setting of poverty and the production and use of methamphetamine in the community). The mother's mental illness is unclear (possibly depression) and some of the other characters exhibit sociopathic and aggressive tendencies. Public health perspective: This movie has some public health themes – the mix of rural poverty, crime and how drug use/production can impact on a community.
Rachel Getting Married (2008)	This movie deals with drug dependency and recovery (the main character participates in a 12-step programme). Various forms of both family support and family dysfunction (e.g., the detached mother) are shown. At times the level of narcissism by the main character is quite marked – so a narcissistic personality disorder is also a possible additional diagnosis.

Movie title (Year)	Description / comments
Half Nelson (2006)	<p>This movie is about drug culture and drug addiction (the lead character is dependent on crack cocaine). A possible limitation from an educational perspective is that it is just too grim and no therapeutic interventions are involved (the main character says that rehabilitation has not worked in the past for him). The lead character's life seems to be a downward spiral of more dysfunctional relationships, episodes of violence and (apparently) losing his job. The student's life is also grim with her graduation into drug dealing. The teacher-student relationship portrayed has some unprofessional and inappropriate aspects.</p> <p>Public health perspective: This movie has overlapping public health themes – in terms of how drug culture around crack cocaine is embedded in this urban society.</p>
Alcohol use disorders	
Another Year (2010)	<p>This movie details heavy drinking by several of the characters and shows how deeply embedded the nature of alcohol use is in many people's lives. Depression and chronic unhappiness are also major themes. It shows various health professional activities (especially counselling) in a positive light and the character portrayals are particularly rich.</p> <p>Public health perspective: The embedded nature of alcohol in social activities is of note – and relevant to thinking about wider issues of alcohol control.</p>
Passion Fish (1992)	<p>This movie shows the alcoholism of the main character and the other major character has recently been in rehabilitation for cocaine dependency. A possible limitation from an educational perspective is that the "treatment" of the main character's alcoholism is fairly simplistic and somewhat unrealistic. The movie also shows some of the social problems arising from drug dependency (the daughter of the nurse Chantelle has been removed from her mother's care).</p>
Psychotic disorders	
The Devil and Daniel Johnston (2006)	<p>This movie is a documentary about the life of a musician/artist who is described as having a bipolar disorder (but which could be considered to be more the features of a schizoaffective disorder). It richly details many aspects of the impact of his illness on Daniel's life, including on his creativity and on his friends and family. Nevertheless, it does not deal with treatment aspects to any significant degree (i.e., no health professionals are interviewed). For some viewers the "outsider" and "lo-fi" music genre may have limited appeal.</p>
An Angel at My Table (1990)	<p>This movie covers the early life of a famous New Zealand writer (in real life – Janet Frame). There are aspects of the movie which support varying possible diagnoses e.g., schizophrenia (reflecting the thinking of the time). This movie is covered in the literature,⁵ along with discussions around her diagnosis (e.g., the alternative possibility of high functioning autism,⁶ with this debated in subsequent published letters responding to this journal article on the autism topic).</p>

References

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