

Psychological Issues In Film
Liberal Arts 211 / Psychology 211

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Hours: MW 1:00-1:45 pm
F 1:00 -- 3:00 pm

Course Description:

There are many commercial films that deal with psychological topics. Some accurately portray psychological conditions and some do not. Each week, we will explore a different psychological topic. We will watch a film with psychological content and -- in conjunction with the lecture, text and library readings, and related film clips -- we will explore whether or not the selected film and clips are accurate. Topics have been chosen as representative of three areas: portrayal of psychologists (researchers and therapists); development across the life span; and stereotyping/prejudice. We will discuss how popular culture portrays, and often distorts, these subjects. This is not a film course; the focus is on learning psychology through films, and exploring how popular culture can influence and mislead audiences. It is a call to take popular culture seriously.

Cross-listed as LIBA 211; only one of these courses may be counted for credit.

Course Grading:

You will be expected to actively participate in class discussions; attendance is required, and you will sign in each class period. One absence will be allowed without penalty. From there, the attendance grade will drop as follows:

- 2 absences: attendance grade drops to B
- 3 absences: attendance grade drops to C
- 4 absences: attendance grade drops to D
- 5 or more absences: attendance grade failure

Your first graded assignment will be a 3-4 page essay that you will write at home, typed and in APA format. You will watch a film of the professor's choosing which will include many of the topics discussed in class and included in your readings as they pertain to ethical issues in psychology and the portrayal of psychologists in film; you will discuss which aspects of the film portray a therapist

or research psychologist in an ethical manner and which do not. This task will be very similar to the midterm.

There will be an in-class essay midterm exam: you will watch a "surprise" movie on the day of the test. The film will relate to many of the topics previously discussed in the readings and in the classes. You will be required to analyze and critique that movie for accuracy of the issues presented in that film, justifying your opinions with lecture, text, and film clip examples.

The final exam will be a research paper (APA format, not MLA) of at least 15 typed pages. You will choose a psychological topic (approved by the professor) and some references will be provided along with individual consultations during office hours or after class. Your objective is to cite the research, then give examples from several films to illustrate whether or not that topic has been accurately portrayed in the films you choose. The paper is due on the last day of class, and each of you will present a 15 -20 minute overview of your paper to the class.

The essay will count 10%, the midterm will count 20% of the grade, attendance 20%, and the final paper 50%.

Required Reading :

Wedding, Danny & Boyd, Mary Ann. (1999) *Movies and Mental Illness*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Maeder, Thomas (1989). Wounded healers. *The Atlantic*, 263, 1, pp. 37-52.

Miller, Mark Crispin (1990). *Seeing Through Movies*. New York: Pantheon Books.

APA Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct

Several articles will be on library reserve for you each week.

Films :

Jan 28: *David and Lisa*

Therapists, diagnoses, and mental hospitals in film.

Feb 4: *Zelig*

Portrayal of research and science in film.

Feb 11: *Marnie*

Emotional healing in film.

Feb 18: Essay Due

- Small Change*
Depictions of childhood
- Feb 25:** *Rebel Without a Cause*
Depictions of adolescence
- Mar 4:** *I Never Sang For My Father*
Depictions of middle age
- Mar 11:** *The Gin Game*
Depictions of aging
- Mar 18:** **Midterm** (Bring one or two large bluebooks)
- Apr 8:** *Oleanna*
Sexual harassment
- Apr 15:** *Torch Song Trilogy*
Homosexuality and homophobia
- Apr 22:** *Exodus*
Jewish stereotypes in film
- Apr 29:** *Fool for Love*
Alcoholism and alcoholic families
- May 6:** to be announced
- May 13:** Discussions of your papers

Some Suggestions for Your Paper Topic:

- Rape/Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome
- Sexual dysfunctions
- Physical disability (blindness, deafness, deformity, etc)
- Stepfamilies
- Italian Americans; Native Americans; African Americans
- Interracial romances
- Suicide or depression

Mob mentality

Gangs

Homelessness

Child abuse

Substance abuse (cocaine, heroin, etc)

Motivation in learning

Serial killers

Euthanasia

Gifted children

Phobias