

## **Movie Monday Works...**

### **BECAUSE IT USES MOVIES TO EDUCATE**

In a sense Movie Monday and the Reel Madness Film Festival are reclaiming movies about madness. People's perceptions of mental illnesses are greatly formed through films. Consider the stereotypes and stigmatization that millions of people encounter in classic films such as *The Shining*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Exorcist*, *Psycho*, and *Dressed to Kill*. Compare these films to more insightful and constructive portrayals of mental illnesses in films such as *Shine*, *Awakenings*, *The Madness of King George*, *Don Juan deMarco*, *Ordinary People*, *Mr. Jones*, *What About Bob*, *Prince of Tides*, *Secrets and Lies*, *The Hanging Garden* and even *The Full Monty*.

The power of these images on people's perceptions of mental illnesses has been as underestimated as has the use of films to support accurate depictions of mental illnesses. Bruce Saunders has proven that even the notorious movie *One Flew Over The Cuckoos Nest*, with its negative portrayals of treatment and abuses in psychiatric facilities, can be presented in a positive and constructive way when done with the right resources. Movie Monday has shown over 100 films about mental illness over the last six years, and there are many more to come. Just recently, we have noticed others who are seeing the unique value of movies to educate about mental illnesses.

- NAMI's Campaign to End Discrimination is focusing on Hollywood to "change the way people with brain disorders are portrayed on the big screen". NAMI will aggressively confront "tinsel-town depictions that are based on negative stereotypes of people with mental illness as untreatable, dangerous, and subhuman".
- Psychiatrists recognize the power of movies to educate. At the 1998 Annual Meeting of the APA (American Psychiatric Association) movies were used to "inspire, illuminate, educate, and entertain those who attend". Films such as *Shine*, *Pennies From Heaven* and *Beautiful Dreamers* were viewed and discussed. The conference even included a workshop for psychiatrists interested in using films entitled "Film Clubs: How To Have Fun While Learning Psychiatry".
- Academics use movies to educate about mental illnesses. Stephen Safran, a professor of education at Ohio University studied Academy Award winning films and discovered a "dramatic increase in what I call disability movies", with psychiatric disturbances being the most common type of disability portrayed. And while Safran asserts that these award winning films have little reality base he still uses them in class as a tool for examining real issues facing people. "We are a society of film viewers, and special education professionals can use movies to promote critical viewing skills and an understanding of people with special needs", says Safran.
- Three psychiatrists at the 1989 APA annual meeting present a paper entitled "Homicidal Maniacs and Narcissistic Parasites: Stigmatization of Mentally Ill Persons in the Movies. Their conclusion was "mental health professionals can fight this source of stigma by increasing their collaboration with patient advocacy groups in monitoring negative portrayals of mentally ill people, using campaigns such as Mental Illness Awareness Week to call attention to the process of stigmatization, and supporting accurate dramatic and documentary depictions of mental illnesses".