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International Cinema: An abundant mental health resource of films for education, communication, and transformation

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“The language of film is universal.”

-Common expression

Introduction

I recall some of my first exposures to world cinema during undergraduate film studies courses. I was mesmerized by such films as the merging of identities in Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona* (1966, Sweden), the seemingly incomprehensible surrealism in Federico Fellini’s *8 1/2* (1963, Italy), the subtle use of two actresses to play the same character in Luis Bunuel’s *That Obscure Object of Desire* (1977, France/Spain), and the blending of beauty, an unrelenting score, and horrific violence in Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971, U.K.). The universality of the art of the cinema became clear to me. I realized that if viewers only view films from their own country they miss a significant number of important movies – opportunities for inspiration, connection, and the deepening of our cultural awareness and understanding of human nature.

The purpose of this chapter is to consider what films from various countries say about mental health, strengths and values; mental illness and psychopathology; and the portrayal of psychologists and psychotherapy. My hope is this will widen the reader’s perspective of what international cinema offers and begin the assembly of a non-exhaustive resource of potential films to be considered for personal use, for education, and for client interaction.

While some might consider it ethnocentric to call “international cinema” anything that is not United States-made, in fact, it is generally accepted that the generic terms “international cinema,” “world cinema,” and “foreign films” refer to movies from a country other than your own. The focus of this chapter is from a U.S. vantage point or as is frequently reflected in film circles, the U.S. “gaze.” Films from the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia are included in this distinction as foreign films (i.e., outside the U.S.) even though most Americans would not reference them as foreign since they are not “foreign language films.”

World cinema carries an implication of films that are artistic, independent, and stylistic. This is often true as these films are frequently character-driven and theme-driven which very much lends themselves to the psychology and spirituality of the

characters and drives home important messages related to mental health, positive psychology, and personal inspiration and transformation. This is, of course, not always the case; just as films from the U.S. can be monotonous, created for mass appeal, and lack any kind of depth, meaning or purpose, so can films from other countries. At the same time, films from non-U.S. countries can be both highly meaningful and commercial garnering mainstream appeal, such as *Amelie* (2001, France), *Life is Beautiful* (1997, Italy), and *Hero* (2002, Hong Kong/China), the latter film being the first Foreign Language film to ever top the American box office.

Most of the film examples in this chapter are foreign language films. I make three exceptions to this rule by occasionally including international directors making U.S. films (e.g., German director Wim Wenders and his direction of the U.S. film, *Don't Come Knocking*), U.S. films with predominant non-U.S. locations (e.g. *Babel*, *The Nativity Story*), and the inclusion of films from English-speaking countries (i.e. Canada, Australia, and United Kingdom). Nevertheless, the vast majority of the film examples included here are contemporary, non-U.S. produced films by non-U.S. directors in non-U.S. locations.

In most cases, I refer to the film's country/countries of origin as listed in the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com).

I recall a conversation I had many years ago with a film studies professor; he simplified the panoply of films and film genres into three categories: Hollywood, Third Cinema, and the auteur film.

The first refers to the blockbuster, special effects, happy-ending, simple plot stories that have become stereotypic from large production studios in Los Angeles. Action films and comedies are the genres that best fit this description. While we might not agree with the infamous film critic, Pauline Kael, when she said, "Kiss Kiss Bang Bang...movies are seldom more than that," it is an adequate description of how numerous people perceive Hollywood filmmaking today. This category also includes films from India's Bollywood (just as Hollywood does not nearly represent all of American cinema, Bollywood does not represent all of India's cinema, despite the stereotypes); Bollywood films tend to be melodramatic, with formulaic, predictable plots with an emphasis on song and dance. According to Wikipedia, they are exceedingly popular in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Pakistan, and are rising in popularity in Israel, Latin America, and much of the Arab World.

The Third Cinema category refers to films from developing (Third World) countries and often focus on and describe the cultural and social plight of a village, city, or nation. Films from developing African countries (e.g. Senegal) fall into this category. These films have the most limited release and pose a tremendous challenge for students interested in the topic to attain them.

The auteur (from the French word for author) film, refers to the film's director as the "author" and predominant force in the inception, creation, and final product of the film. American independent cinema and many international films fall into the auteur category. There is often a distinct narrative style that distinguishes a particular director's films, i.e. it is easily recognizable when "a Quentin Tarantino film" is playing or "an M. Night Shyamalan film," or international films by Zhang Yimou, Wim Wenders, Giuseppe Tornatore, or Jean Pierre-Jeunet. This perspective states it is the director, rather than the producers, who is mostly responsible for the final product. The bulk of this chapter refers to films that would be considered auteur cinema.

This chapter will first give a conceptual base, rationale, and relevant research for the use of films in counseling and education. This real-world usage of films in clinical and pedagogic settings leads into a discussion of international film examples of mental health and wellness. This will conclude with discussion and examples of how international cinema portrays the profession of psychology and the practice of psychotherapy.

Using movies for education

Cinemeducation – coined by Alexander, Hall, & Pettice (1994) – refers to the use of movies in the education setting. Movies provide a unique modality to educate students. A variety of student populations have benefited from the use of movies to facilitate learning about mental health and mental illness: Psychology students (Fleming, Piedmont, & Hiam, 1990; Nelson, 2002; Wedding, Boyd, & Niemiec, 2005), nursing programs (Raingruber, 2003), students in counselor education programs (Toman & Rak, 2000), and medical students (Alexander, 1995; Alexander & Waxman, 2000; Karlinsky, 2003). Mental health films have also been used for other professionals ranging from training clergy, police officers, pharmacy students, and occupational therapy. It seems that virtually any student group can potentially benefit from the use of films to accentuate the topics to be learned.

Teachers have taken advantage of the dynamism of cinema to teach a variety of specific topics, such as family systems theories (Alexander & Waxman, 2000; Hudock & Warden, 2001), psychodynamic psychotherapy with adolescents (Miller, 1999), group psychotherapy (Tyler & Reynolds, 1998; Brabender, 2006), personality theory (Paddock, Terranova, & Giles, 2001), marriage and family counseling skills (Higgins & Dermer, 2001), and teaching about countertransference to trainees and colleagues (Swift & Wonderlich, 1993).

While each of these programs is utilizing an innovative technique designed to reach a wider range of students, the majority of these programs only utilize American films in their curricula, occasionally including one or two token foreign films.

Due to the widespread use of films in the classroom it is not surprising that there are a number of benefits to using movies as an adjunct. Movies promote active learning, provide different points of view, apply complex concepts and theories directly to real-world situations, and illustrate psychological states not readily seen by students such as Dissociative Identity Disorder (Gregg, 1995).

In a phenomenological study, Raingruber (2003) examined eleven graduate level nursing students which revealed several common threads of meaning – that movies are effective in promoting reflection, are emotion arousing and empathy producing, and a good way to introduce ethical dilemmas.

Wilt, et al. (1995) conducted a study that found that the combination of movies with an instructor-led discussion significantly increased the empathy of nursing students compared to controls, however, the empathy scores had decreased to baseline by the end of the semester.

Some texts are geared toward helping the instructor select and utilize movie clips for educating students (see Alexander, Lenahan, & Pavlov, 2005; Engstrom, 2004) while others provide an adjunct resource for that can be used by both the student and teacher (see Wedding, Boyd, & Niemiec, 2005).

Cinematherapy

The term cinematherapy – the use of movies in psychotherapy – was coined by Berg-Cross, Jennings, and Baruch (1990). Cinematherapy by psychologists is actually quite common. In a survey of 827 practicing licensed psychologists, 67% reported that they use movies to promote therapy gains, while 88% stated movies were effective in promoting treatment outcome (1% reported movies as potentially harmful) (Lampropoulos, Kazantzis, & Dean, 2004).

Although the media plays a large role in shaping the public's perception of people with mental illness, mental health, and the role of psychotherapy and psychologists, health professionals appear to ultimately have a one-up on the media. For example, MacHaffie (2002) found that patients are impacted far more by health promotion information provided by health professionals than information provided by the media.

There is a significant amount of anecdotal and case report data indicating the benefits of cinematherapy however there is a paucity of controlled research studies indicating its effectiveness (Berg-Cross, Jennings, & Baruch, 1990; Hesley & Hesley, 1998; Schulenberg, 2003; Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002; Wedding & Niemiec, 2003). In addition to the obvious benefits of rapport building and increased homework compliance, movies tap into the emerging fields of mindfulness and acceptance therapy. Movies can increase a client's mindfulness of their thoughts, emotions, interpersonal conflicts, and problematic habits while also building in levels of acceptance (e.g., characters to identify with, universality of suffering, and role models of characters accepting, trusting, and letting go) and providing options for change.

Sometimes movies – if they are properly set up by the therapist – can immobilize a client's "stuck" patterns and address sensitive issues as it is less threatening if the client sees their issue on the screen at a distance. Due to the educational benefit of movies mentioned above, there is little doubt that movies can provide important mental health and mental illness education about a disorder for the client and their family and, therefore, help the client/family in their coping. Berg-Cross et al. (1990) add that films can build optimism, provide alternatives previously not considered by the client, facilitate family communication, break through resistance, and give clients a deeper understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses.

Hesley & Hesley (1998) explain that films aid treatment planning by offering hope and encouragement, reframing problems, providing role models, identifying and reinforcing internal strengths, potentiating emotion, improving communication, and helping client's prioritize values.

Using international films with international clients

For a psychologist practicing psychotherapy in the U.S., having experience with world cinema is a handy tool to have in the clinical armamentarium. The greater variety of international directors and assortment of films from different countries that a therapist is familiar with, the more likely the application. International clients are typically impressed that a therapist practicing in the U.S. knows about films outside the U.S.; this often leads to a healthy sense of openness, curiosity, and satisfaction that bodes well for the therapeutic encounter.

The use of films with international clients has several benefits: Provides a jump start in rapport building or a leap in the therapeutic relationship; breaks down cultural barriers; enhances the therapeutic relationship as a way of connecting with the client; increases therapist credibility as someone that can understand them; increases compliance with suggestions and interventions; allows the therapist to temporarily speak the client's "language"; and indicates the therapist's own creativity and flexibility to which some clients will see as an advantage in addressing their unique cultural issues.

Moreover, in conceptualizing and planning treatment with an international client, the benefits noted by Hesley & Hesley (1998) above become magnified; the offering of hope and reinforcement of strengths stand out as particularly significant. Wedding and Niemiec (2003) discuss success in using the films of legendary Swedish filmmaker, Ingmar Bergman, with a chronically depressed man, native to Sweden, and reflected therapeutic gains in rapport, insight, and a significant shift in perception.

In initiating any new intervention, a clinician should be aware of contraindications and potential negative consequences (see Hesley & Hesley, 1998; Schulenberg, 2003). A potential drawback for the international client is the misunderstanding of the intervention or its purpose, therefore, therapists must be very clear in their initial explanations and be sure to discuss the film with the client as closely as possible to the viewing time.

At its best, cinematherapy with international clients is a catalyst for change and at its least it is a fun, engaging tool that if done mindfully is unlikely to harm the client.

Portrayals of Mental Health (in international films)

Mental health can be conceptualized in a variety of ways – from the absence of disease to the presence of feelings of contentment and balance. Mental health is intricately connected with physical health and extends to one's personal and social environments, namely family, friends, and other important relationships. The field of positive psychology, initiated by Martin Seligman (1998), has flourished around the world in research and clinical settings (Joseph & Linley, 2006; Seligman, 2003; Snyder & Lopez, 2002; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Positive Psychology initiates a careful study of strengths and virtues that provides a helpful system making up many of the components of good mental health and wellness.

Positive Psychology: Virtues and Strengths

In their groundbreaking manual, *Character Strengths and Virtues*, Peterson and Seligman (2004) compiled a comprehensive system of Positive Psychology, delineating six human virtues that can be found (nearly) universally in over 200 virtue catalogues spanning over 3000 years across the globe ranging from the philosophy of Aristotle to Benjamin Franklin to the Boy Scouts to all the major religions; these six virtues are broken down into 24 core human strengths. This system has been referred to tongue-in-cheek as the anti-DSM or more accurately, "The Manual of the Sanities," due not only to its scope, systematized typology, and data-driven analysis but also because of its focus on the positives of the human experience rather than pathologies.

What follows is a brief description of a strength (according to the Peterson & Seligman text) followed by important international films that represent this strength. Since some readers may become lost in the shuffle of film examples below, Table 1 provides a list of outstanding international movies that should be considered essential

viewing for any clinician, teacher, or student interested in positive psychology, mental health, or wellness. For those not as familiar with world cinema, these forerunners provide an excellent starting point; viewers will likely find themselves getting immediately engrossed in the majority of these films. For an extensive list and discussion of American, independent, and international movies representing each of the 24 positive psychology strengths see *Positive Psychology at the Movies* (Niemic & Wedding, 2008).

<u>Film (Year)</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Virtue</u>	<u>Strength(s) Exhibited</u>
To Be and To Have (2002)	France	Wisdom	Creativity, Curiosity
The Chorus (2004)	France	Wisdom	Love of learning
Elling (2002)	Norway	Courage	Bravery, Integrity
To Live (1994)	China/HK	Courage	Persistence, Vitality
Yesterday (2004)	South Africa	Humanity	Love
Amelie (2001)	France	Humanity	Kindness/Generosity
Son of the Bride (2002)	Argentina	Humanity	Love, Social Intelligence
Cinema Paradiso (1988)	Italy	Justice	Citizenship/Loyalty
Gandhi (1982)	India/U.K.	Justice	Fairness, Leadership
The Motorcycle Diaries (2004)	Argentina	Justice	Fairness, Teamwork
No Man's Land (2001)	Bosnia/Herz.	Temperance	Forgiveness/Mercy
March of the Penguins (2005)	France	Temperance	Self-regulation
Wings of Desire (1987)	West Germany	Transcendence	Appreciation of beauty
Life is Beautiful (1997)	Italy	Transcendence	Humor/playfulness
Run Lola Run (1998)	Germany	Transcendence	Spirituality

Table 1: Fifteen Essential International Films and Accompanying Virtues and Strengths

The virtue of wisdom/knowledge consists of the cognitive strengths of creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective.

Creativity refers to the production of original ideas and behaviors that are adaptive in that they make a positive contribution to the individual's life and/or the lives

of others. *The Overture* (2004, Thailand) portrays the creativity of a musician expressing his talents in a solid path of dedication as an expression of emotion, control, pride, sacrifice, love, and competition. In the magically practical film, *To Be and to Have* (2002, France) a teacher finds creative ways to educate a variety of young students, each with unique needs; this is one of the most inspiring, meaningful films about the impact of teachers and their creativity that one can see. The use of creativity as a coping strategy to manage or triumph over challenging times is displayed in *Right Now* (2004, France) and *My Left Foot* (1989, Ireland/U.K.). Other films that demonstrate this strength include those portraying creative artists, such as that of Sylvia Plath in *Sylvia* (2003, U.K.) and Vincent Van Gogh in *Vincent* (1987, Australia) and *Vincent and Theo* (1990, The Netherlands). Legendary Japanese director Akira Kurosawa addresses creativity in *Dreams* (1990, Japan).

Curiosity means to take an interest in ongoing experience, often involving novelty seeking and an intrinsic desire for knowledge. One of the best films that taps into curiosity is *Mongolian Ping-Pong* (2005, China), a story about children who come across an object they have never seen before – a ping-pong ball floating in the river. They display what Buddhists call beginner’s mind – seeing things as if for the first time. They look at the ball from every angle, licking it, smelling it, shaking it, and then repeating the process. The boy most fascinated by the object sleeps next to it and examines it upon morning awakening. He curiously lifts the ball up to the moon to get a different look at it. His curiosity leads him to ask various people “What is this?” in his exploration. Other terrific portrayals of the curiosity strength include transcendent stories about angels who become human in the Wim Wenders classic, *Wings of Desire* (West Germany, 1987) and its follow-up *Faraway, So Close* (1993, Germany); the former angels overtly display curiosity as they explore their environment with fresh eyes, now able to experience all of their senses in ways they could not as angels. *Everything is Illuminated* (2005, filmed in Ukraine & Czech Republic) displays a young man who is highly curious about his family history and decides to travel to the Ukraine for further investigation. In *Swimming Pool* (2003, France/UK) – a writer begins to take a curious interest in a young provocative woman who is living with her; this transforms her perspective and inspires her writing. In *Secrets of the Heart* (1997, Spain), a young boy, Javi, living with his mother, grandfather, uncle, and brother curiously explores his surroundings and incessantly (but not obsessively) asks questions of each of his family members. He displays a patient observation asking about which candle is his at church, why his grandfather wears his slippers on the wrong feet, whether a bee will escape or become captured by a spider web, about family history and secrets, and sex and relationships. Javi’s curiosity and observation - visual and auditory - leads him to important conclusions that his family had been avoiding.

Open-mindedness means to examine things from all sides in a fair and balanced manner, especially the opposite view of one’s beliefs, plans, or goals. While *Water* (2006, India) probably taps into all six human virtues, the virtue of wisdom seems to be predominant, especially the strengths of open-mindedness and curiosity. Female widows are sent off to live a life ostracized from society after their husbands die. One widow is an eight-year-old, curious and clever girl. Three of the other widows in the isolated community insist on keeping an open mind seeing all perspectives despite extraordinary injustice, antiquated and harmful traditions, and immense social and economic

challenges; each woman and girl's wisdom helps the others to transcend their situation in a unique way. In *A Pure Formality* (1994, France), Roman Polanski portrays an investigator who must consider all angles in order to solve a complex mystery.

Love of learning means to cognitively engage in new information and skills, often referring to the process of mastering new topics or knowledge areas. In the beautiful film, *The Chorus* (2004, France), the teacher, Clement Mathieu, inspires this strength in his students despite overt adversity from the school administration and the students themselves. *Unknown White Male* (2005, U.K./U.S.) tells the true story of Doug Bruce who awakens one day to complete retrograde amnesia. His family and friends appear to be strangers to him; some question the legitimacy of the amnesia and fugue. Bruce shows a passion for self-expression and communication. He cries at his visit to the ocean. He displays a genuine eagerness to learn or re-learn everything. He attempts to not engage in clichés or stereotypes, and looks upon the world with originality as he views his new chance at life as an opportunity to re-invent himself and start afresh.

Perspective means a person has a high capacity of knowledge and ability to address challenging questions about the meaning of life to assist oneself or provide wisdom to others. *Antonia's Line* (1995, The Netherlands) portrays independent women who approach issues of life and death with perspective and wisdom. Antonia is a strong, assertive woman in this deeply integrated story of multiple generations of women. The strength of wisdom is clear when Antonia explains death to her granddaughter saying, "Nothing dies forever. Something always remains, from which something new grows. So life begins, without knowing where it came from or why it exists." "But why?," asks the inquisitive girl to which Antonia responds, "Because life wants to live." In the interesting, cinematically beautiful film, *Taste of Cherry* (1997, Iran), the protagonist, Mr. Badii, has decided to commit suicide and spends several hours attempting to track down one person who would be willing to help him in his quest. He eventually comes across a man who represents the "wise old man" archetype. The wisdom from this stranger seems to break through the rigid thinking and belief patterns of Mr. Badii who appears to have gained wisdom in the interaction. Although the ending is intentionally left ambiguous to allot for viewer interpretation, it can be argued that Mr. Badii has deepened his connection with the world around him and has reversed his decision. In the three films of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003, New Zealand), the Gandalf character is a wisdom figure providing perspective and good counsel to the hobbits along their tumultuous journey.

The virtue of courage refers to the emotional strengths of bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality.

Bravery or **valor** involves a voluntary action for what is perceived to be right despite the presence of opposition, danger, loss, or injury. *Hotel Rwanda* (2004, filmed in South Africa and Rwanda) portrays the heroic Paul Rusesabagina (Don Cheadle), a hotel manager who risked his life to save over a thousand Tutsi refugees from Hutu militia during the genocide of 1994. Rusesabagina represents all dimensions of courage, including physical, psychological, and moral courage. Other prominent themes of the film include unconditional love, sacrifice, resiliency, hope, and the representation of the human spirit to overcome evil. *Don't Tell* (2005, Italy), nominated for Best Foreign Film, displays the psychological courage of a woman who had previously repressed her sexual abuse to face her painful past. Her psychological journey is depicted: Everyday life in her

relationships, her descent (nightmares of her experiences), her healing (getting the truth), and the return to her daily life. In a similar display of psychological courage, a man in *The Celebration* (1998, Denmark) confronts his father in front of extended family and friends on his father's birthday for the sexual abuse he endured many years ago. The timing and modus are questionable, but the valor to take such an action is courageous. *Emmanuel's Gift* (2005, filmed in Ghana, West Africa) tells the story of a man born with a deformed leg in Ghana. While this typically leads to a fate of a lifetime of begging on the streets, Emmanuel displays tremendous courage to overcome the challenge by riding a bike across his country and ultimately competing in triathlons. He refuses to accept "no" or be brought down by the overwhelming odds. *The Constant Gardener* (2005, Germany/U.K.) portrays characters who display the courage and resiliency to battle the corruption of the pharmaceutical industry. The incredibly artistic, visually encapsulating films, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000, Taiwan), *Hero* (2002, Hong Kong/China), and *House of Flying Daggers* (2004, China/Hong Kong) portray the strength of bravery in an unforgettable way using breathtaking cinematography and extensive choreography as the characters fight with grace and intensity. *Babel* (2006, filmed in Morocco, Japan, Mexico, and U.S.) interweaves four poignant stories, each portraying the strength of valor at a time of crisis; the value of intimacy and touch as well as the problems of cross-cultural communication are prime motifs. It is clearly bravery depicted in the documentary *Seoul Train* (2004, filmed in North Korea, South Korea, China, Poland, Switzerland, and U.S.), about the life and death of North Koreans as they attempt to escape their homeland and the people who risk everything to help them. A classic film that addresses the strength of bravery is Robert Bresson's *A Man Escaped* (1956, France).

Persistence involves the continuation of a goal-directed action despite obstacles and challenges. Zhang Yimou is the best-known contemporary Chinese filmmaker and is particularly gifted at portraying the strength of persistence, often the determination of a low, poor peasant character breaking out of a hopeless situation (Lu, 2002). *Not One Less* (1999, China) is about a young, 13-year-old teacher who substitutes for a month in a classroom at a remote village. She finds creative ways to teach her students in a way that is applicable directly to life. She stands strong with her goal of "not one less," meaning that there not be any less students when the former teacher returns; she persists through numerous challenges to maintain her goal. Yimou addresses the persistence and sufferings of a family in *To Live* (1994, China/Hong Kong) as the couple overcomes a number of significant tragedies over the decades.

The shocking film *Nobody Knows* (2004, Japan), about a mother and her four children, each from a different father and living in a small apartment, is inspired by true events that occurred in Tokyo. The mother slowly abandons her four young children leaving them to figure out how to survive themselves. This is a challenge for the kids since they do not realize she has left them (she would routinely leave them for several days at a time) and they do not have any resources as the mother prevented them from attending school. The 12-year-old (the oldest of the four) is left to take responsibility for himself and his siblings. *Mountain Patrol: Kekexili* (2004, China/Hong Kong) portrays the perseverance of the Tibetan people in the Himalayas as they defend their land to save the antelope from poachers. *Peace One Day* (2004, U.K.) is a documentary about a young man who's a clear example of perseverance, ingenuity, and industriousness as he travels

around the world to lobby a cause of creating a cease-fire day of peace. He persists through various powerful obstacles and is a good example of how one man can make a difference. *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002, Australia) is based on the true story of the endurance of two young Aboriginal girls who escape from an official government camp that has been set up to integrate them into a White society. Sir Ernest Shackleton's incredible persistence and perseverance in his legendary expedition to Antarctica from 1914-1916 is portrayed in *The Endurance* (2000, Germany/U.S.). Persistence is also seen in a psychiatrist in *Equus* (1977, U.K./U.S.) and a Holocaust survivor in *The Pianist* (2002, France, Germany, U.K., Poland). A classic film depicting the strength of persistence in daily life is Vittorio De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1948, France).

Integrity means to speak the truth and to represent oneself in a genuine way that is consistent with one's values. In *Intimate Strangers* (2004, France) a woman intending to go to a psychiatrist goes to the wrong room and has sessions with a tax advisor. It is interesting to contrast the authenticity of the woman, honest and self-disclosing, with that of the tax advisor which, at first, is inauthentic, not revealing his true identity. He eventually learns to take responsibility for his actions, which she also learns through her sharing in "therapy" to become more authentic and integrated in her daily life. *Dirty, Filthy Love* (2004, U.K.) is an offbeat comedy that portrays the growing integrity of a man with OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder) and Tourette's Disorder who learns to take responsibility and face the reality of his OCD illness.

Vitality means to have a zest, energy, and enthusiasm for life in which one approaches life activities with vigor in body and mind. In *The World's Fastest Indian* (2005, New Zealand), an aging New Zealander (Anthony Hopkins) refuses to let anything get in the way of his passion for riding his Indian motorcycle. Whether he is riding his motorcycle, introducing himself to a stranger, or joking with his neighbor, he displays an ongoing quality of zest and love of life that is contagious. *Touching the Void* (2003, U.K.) depicts two mountain climbers who face incredible survival challenges and must make use of every morsel of energy in order to survive; in considering the challenges that one particular climber faces, it is the resiliency of his vitality that saves his life.

The virtue of humanity refers to the interpersonal strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence.

Love means to value close relationships with others, particularly those in which there belies mutual sharing, caring, and connecting. *2046* (2004, China/Hong Kong) is a story of romantic love in different time periods, directed by Wong Kar-Wai, who is known for his "cinema of poetry," his fragmented storylines, flamboyant color schemes, and manipulation of spatial and temporal relationships (Stringer, 2002). The lead character in *2046* summarizes a major theme in the film via his voice-over, "Love is all a matter of timing – it's no good meeting the right person too soon or too late." *Yesterday* (2004, South Africa) tells the story of a woman named Yesterday dying of AIDS whose final goal in life is to see her daughter, Beauty, attend her first day of school. Although *Yesterday* has many positive attributes, it is her love for her daughter that is most significant in the film. She also displays love in her care-taking of her dying, at times abusive, husband, and *philia* love for a teacher-friend in the local community. It is ironic that the protagonist's name is Yesterday since her strengths lie in how she treats people in the present and in her persistence and mind-set of setting forth her future. Powerful romantic love stories are portrayed in *The Postman/Il Postino* (1994, France), *Like Water*

for Chocolate (1992, Mexico), and *Moulin Rouge!* (2001, Australia/U.S.). In *Eros* (2004, Hong Kong/China/Italy/U.S.) three renowned directors give their perspective on love and lust in three short films connected by images of nude drawings in between. The first, "The Hand," directed by Wong Kar Wai, reflects the theme of eros in yearning and non-judgment. The second, "Equilibrium," directed by Steven Soderbergh, explores eros as fantasy. The third, "The Dangerous Thread of Things," directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, explores eros as letting go and being free.

The undying love of John Bayley for his wife, British novelist/philosopher, Iris Murdoch, who is dying of Alzheimer's disease, is movingly portrayed in *Iris* (2001, U.K.). *3-Iron* (2004, South Korea) is a highly unconventional love story about a man who breaks into houses while people are away vacationing and encounters a mute woman who is routinely abused by her husband. They fall in love, engage in the house-breaking together, and confront the abusive husband; the love clearly transforms both characters into a newfound happiness that seems impenetrable. Eventually, the man is killed, but their love continues on as he becomes a ghost continuing to love her. *Under The Sun* (1998, Sweden) is a slow moving love story drama about a lonely, avoidant farmer and a compassionate woman whom he hires as his housekeeper. The film addresses themes of secrecy, trust, and naivete in relationship to love. *Reconstruction* (2003, Denmark) is an artistic film about a man with a girlfriend who falls in love with a random woman and suddenly everyone he knows except this new woman begin to deny his existence. This story within a story addresses themes of being in love with being in love, love in the fleeting moment, and loving another person. Sibling love is portrayed between a 66-year old woman with an intellectual disability and her sister in *Pauline and Paulette* (2001, Belgium) and between fraternal twin sisters split apart in early childhood in *Twin Sisters* (2002, Netherlands). Love is also a major theme and strength expressed in *Heaven's Bookstore* (2005, Japan) and *The Road Home* (1999, China), the latter depicting a woman's dedicated love to maintain extensive rituals and tradition for her deceased husband.

Kindness means to care for others solely for the act of generosity, altruism, nurturance, or compassion in and of itself. In *Vera Drake* (2004, U.K.), a care-taking woman, who seems to care for everyone in her life – her family (homemaker), her ailing mother, her friends/neighbors, her position as housekeeper – takes on another task of helping women have abortions at a time and place in which it was outlawed and unacceptable. Regardless of one's stand on abortion, her intention of "I help out young girls" is one of compassion, nurturance, and ultimately self-sacrifice. *The Accidental Hero* (2002, France) portrays different types of care-giving, particularly the idiosyncratic but loving attempts of an awkward son for his head injured mother. *Tsotsi* (2005, South Africa) portrays an African gangster who kills and steals as needed until he discovers an infant in the backseat of a stolen car and reluctantly decides to care for it. Via flashbacks we learn of Tsotsi's painful past, longing for connections. Caring and nurturing the child helps Tsotsi make a connection with a care-taking mother, renew a friendship with the man he brutalized, and return the baby to its parents. *Manderlay* (2005, Denmark) addresses the themes of human compassion, taking action with compassion to help a community change and adapt, and the pros and cons of altruistic intentions despite the community not wanting a change. *Son of the Bride* (2001, Argentina) is a tremendously touching film about changing habitual patterns geared toward over-working and

neglecting those whom one loves and transforming to a perspective of nurturance. *Mostly Martha* (2001, Italy) displays a woman's patience, precision, creativity, and care for food that she learns to translate into her relationship with her sister's daughter. Nurturance and compassion expressed through food is expressed in ways to enhance community relationships in the award-winning films, *Chocolat* (2000, UK/US) and *Babette's Feast* (1987, Denmark). The impact of simple acts of kindness, generosity, and altruism is terrifically well-done in the short film, *Right Here, Right Now* (2003, India).

Social intelligence means to be aware of patterns, similarities, and differences in the motives and feelings of others and within oneself. This leads to the individual knowing what to do to fit into a variety of social situations. German director, Wim Wenders in another successful film, *Don't Come Knocking* (2005, Germany/U.S.) creates a character who seems to lack all virtues, yet as he persists in facing his past he begins to listen more; this leads to a deeper awareness of the feelings of those around him and the impact his actions have had upon others. *Japanese Story* (2003, Australia) depicts a Japanese businessman and a rustic Australian woman who have very low awareness of one another's feelings, motives, and perspective. As they overcome adversity in the dangerous outback they begin to connect on an interpersonal level and display significant changes in acceptance, patience, and love; these strengths are then immediately tested in the tragedy of a freak accident.

The virtue of justice refers to the civic strengths of citizenship, fairness, and leadership.

Citizenship or **social responsibility** refers to an individual's sense of duty, loyalty, teamwork, and obligation to a common good. Many international films will fall under the virtue of justice and fit under the strength of citizenship due to the frequent themes of nationalism, political and community activism, and the challenges, rigor, and at times, success of social and political change. A good example of a film that fits this rubric is the Oscar-winning political thriller, *Z* (1969, Algeria/France). *The Sea Inside* (2004, Spain) raises issues and a number of questions about justice and social responsibility, such as, what is the level of social justice or responsibility in situations of assisted suicide among the terminally ill or those almost completely immobile? This film advocates for the right of people to make their decision on this matter. The sense of duty, loyalty, and obligation of the North Korean people to their leader, Kim Jong Il could not be more clear in the propaganda film, *North Korea: A Day in the Life* (2004, North Korea). Dutch filmmaker, Pieter Fleury, was allowed by the North Korean government to shoot this film that gives a glimpse into the life of this culture and country. This frightening documentary short engenders provocative questions relating to the blurry boundaries between duty, obligation, and coercion and between healthy nationalism and unhealthy propaganda; this film should not be taken as a suggestion for how to build citizenship.

Fairness means to treat all people the same, in a non-discriminatory, respectful, moral manner. Mahatma Gandhi was an advocate and prototype for the strength of fairness; his activism, beliefs, and courageous actions are portrayed by Ben Kingsley in the eight-time Oscar winning, *Gandhi* (1982, India/U.K.). *V for Vendetta* (2005, U.K./U.S.) depicts a mysterious character acting as a vigilante and semi-superhero fighting against a corrupt system. *The Last Wave* (1977, Australia) addresses themes of fairness in this Peter Weir film about aboriginal integration in society, the maintenance of

their rituals and beliefs and secrets, and the breaking of tribal law. *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004, Argentina) is based on the journals and adventures of Ernesto “Che” Guevara, who later became the leader of the Cuban revolution, and his journey with his friend through Central America. Themes of inequality, fairness, integrity, and suffering abound in relation to encounters and observations of rich/poor, healthy/sick, and perseverant/deteriorating. In one scene, the asthmatic Guevara exerts himself heavily to do what no other had previously done and swim across a river (which divides the healthy caretakers and the sick); this is a powerful symbolic act representing fairness, equality, and crossing the divide. Che reflects that this infamous voyage changed him awakening a Latin American consciousness within him that contributed significantly to his later work.

Leadership refers to the ability to motivate, influence, and help others to achieve a common purpose or goal. The political leadership of Gandhi in *Gandhi* and religious leadership through the ascetic example of Siddhartha in *Little Buddha* (1993, Liechtenstein/U.K.) are good examples of positive leaders. Certainly, we can learn from dangerous leaders who have an ulterior or self-serving agenda that is not in the name of justice or the good of the people. Films portraying charismatic yet dangerous leaders include the character of Adolf Hitler in *Downfall* (2004, Germany) and the portrayal of Ugandan leader, Idi Amin, in *The Last King of Scotland* (2006, U.K.). Oscar-winner Forest Whitaker plays Amin as the “father” of Uganda – fun-loving, friendly, teasing, and highly engaging as well as ruthless, explosive, unpredictable, and paranoid. Amin murdered over 300,000 Ugandans during his reign.

The virtue of temperance refers to the moderation strengths of forgiveness, humility/modesty, prudence, and self-regulation.

Forgiveness or mercy refers to accepting the shortcomings of others and engaging in the internal, pro-social changes of extending mercy and giving others a second chance. *In My Country* (2004, South Africa/U.K.) is an emotional film that explicitly addresses forgiveness. In 1994, South Africa’s apartheid system was overthrown and the film tells us that President Nelson Mandela offered amnesty to those who committed human rights abuses, providing they told the whole truth and could prove they followed orders...the victims would have the chance to tell their stories and confront their persecutors; instances of these are reenacted in this film. The emphasis on perpetrators coming forth in honesty and telling the truth while the victims have an opportunity to tell their story, forgive, and bring healing to the deepest of pains; macro-cosmically this film is about a country healing itself through the forgiveness of one person at a time. Best foreign film Academy Award winner, *No Man’s Land* (2001, Bosnia-Herzegovina) displays the mutual mercies of a Bosnian and Serb who meet in the middle (“no man’s land”) of their enemy lines during wartime. The search for forgiveness and letting go is seen in a man dying of a brain tumor in *The City of No Limits* (2002, Spain).

Humility refers to maintaining a balanced view of one’s achievements, allowing one’s success to speak for itself while readily acknowledging one’s mistakes. In *Charisma* (1999, Japan), the protagonist displays humility and persistence in saving a peculiar tree. The man summarizes his non-grandiose, balanced approach in that “An average man can only do average things...I’m fine just as I am, an average man. That’s plenty.”

Prudence means to be practical, deliberate, and reflective with one's daily life choices while resisting impulses, and finding balance with one's goals. Helen Mirren's portrayal of Queen Elizabeth in *The Queen* (2006, U.K.) is a prototypical example of the strength of practical, non-reactive, prudence. *The Story of the Weeping Camel* (2003, Mongolia) is a fascinating story about a nomadic family in the middle of the Gobi desert in Mongolia with several camels, one of which has just given birth to an albino colt and is rejecting it, refusing to allow it to feed from her despite repeated human attempts. The two young boys of the family go on a journey in a desert to find a musician who will perform a ritual to attempt to re-connect the camel and her albino colt. Rather than reacting hastily, the family portrays careful prudence in their patience and strategy to influence the natural bonding process between the mother camel and her colt. *The Road Home* (1999, China) is a wonderful, simple film directed by Zhang Yimou with profound messages of love and dedication. Following the death of her husband, the wife is insistent on maintaining the cultural tradition of having her husband's body walked home so "he can find his way." The mother's prudence and patience are striking and are symbolized in many of her actions in the film. A delightful Yimou film that parallels *The Road Home* is *Not One Less* (1999, China), a simple but profound story that places emphasis on teaching, tradition, and carefully following what one believes in.

Self-regulation means to exert control and balance over one's thoughts, impulses, emotions, and behaviors, often in a disciplined, goal-oriented way. The troubled adolescent boys in *The Chorus* (2004, France) learn to regulate their emotions through their singing, which dampens much of their acting out behaviors. This film taps into many strengths and resources within the young student, such as creativity, love of learning, persistence, vitality, love, teamwork, appreciation of excellence, and hope. Films like the breathtaking documentaries, *Winged Migration* (2001, France) and *March of the Penguins* (2005, France) portray birds with incredible persistence and self-regulation abilities. Despite the anthropomorphism in making such comparisons, both films are incredible examples by which humans can learn an abundance of wisdom. *March of the Penguins* is specifically about the mating life of penguins in Antarctica. To not only survive minus 50-degree temperatures but to survive as a species, the penguins display the (human) strengths of patience, prudence, resiliency, sacrifice, and self-regulation. In the allegorical *Warm Water Under a Red Bridge* (2001, Japan), Shohei Imamura, tells the story of a woman who regularly experiences a build up of water in her body and the only way to release it is to exhibit an impulse such as sex or shoplifting, but mostly the former, to which the water then comes pouring out. With a plot like this, it would be easy to see this as ridiculous, but it is presented as an authentic struggle and challenging situation—not in a supernatural context other than via the film's score. This situation seems to represent one's vital essence, satisfying of one's desires, expression of free will, and the genuine struggle of self-regulation. In *The Queen* (2006), Queen Elizabeth's character is one of tremendous temperance – poise, order, and self-control. In both the public and private arena she handles situations with measured control. The Hindi-language film, *The Warrior* (2001, U.K.), tells the story of a ferocious warrior at the time of feudal India who renounces his sword to take up peace by practicing nonviolence; this, of course, requires the strength of self-regulation. In *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter...and Spring* (2003, South Korea), a teacher instructs a monk on self-control.

As the seasons turn, so does the landscape of the emotions and the challenges to self-control.

The virtue of transcendence refers to the meaning strengths of appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality.

Appreciation of beauty and excellence means to identify and take pleasure in the beauty of the visual environment or the skills or virtues of another; this often involves an active sense of awe and wonder. *Wings of Desire* (1987, West Germany) and *Faraway, So Close!* (1993, Germany) place emphasis on the beauty of each moment, love of life, and the desire to do good. The film's themes even characterize this strength in that it is about how our "seeing" transforms how we "look." *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999, Iran), directed by Abbas Kiarostami, exhibits one minor character, the village doctor, who is completely dedicated to the strength of the appreciation of beauty. He exclaims, "Death is the worst. When you close your eyes on this world, this beauty, the wonders of nature, and the generosity of God, it means you'll never be coming back." *Amelie* (2001, France) places significant emphasis on the appreciation of the little things in life – skipping stones, a garden gnome statue, photographs of strangers' faces, or a box of nostalgic items from childhood – essentially revealing that these aren't "little" things. The film, *After Life* (1998, Japan), an intermediary place where those who have died go to reflect on their life and discern one's memory that will then be recreated for them to experience throughout eternity. As each character considers their options, they are often driven to appreciate their lives and choose the best of the best memories; characters choose a range of experiences from one sensation (e.g., a taste) to a Disney World experience (most often chosen by children) to a participation in a loved one's happiness. This process, in turn, naturally brings the viewer to reflect on their own memories and deepen their appreciation of the beauty and positivity of their experiences. The well-known *And Your Mother, Too/Y Tu Mama Tambien* (2001, Mexico) addresses this strength in a dying woman who attempts to make the most of her final weeks by appreciating the beauty of nature and human beings around her.

Some films significantly engender appreciation of beauty within the viewer, such as the nonverbal film, *Baraka* (2001), a visual masterpiece filmed in 24 countries on six continents; "baraka" is a Sufi word translating to "a blessing" or the breath or essence of life from which the evolutionary process unfolds. Other films that build upon this strength in the viewer are the mesmerizing insect documentary, *Microcosmos* (1996, France), and *Genesis* (2004, France), a documentary that brings one to think about and care more deeply for the universe, animals, environment, and the elements of water, fire, and earth.

Gratitude is to be aware of and express thankfulness for the gifts, actions, or presence of another. *Rory O'Shea Was Here* (2004, U.K.) portrays two young men with physical disabilities befriending one another and finding ways to support one another. Rory, an angry rebellious man who has muscular dystrophy, cannot walk and has limited use of his hands while his speech is unaffected. Michael, a lonely man, often teased, has cerebral palsy and slurred speech yet maintains good control of his arms and hands. As the two befriend one another, Rory becomes Michael's voice while Michael becomes Rory's arms. They pursue independent living with one another and hire a caretaker. They begin to take the care-taking for granted as their expectations rise. They learn the strength of gratitude, in that they deepen their gratefulness for one another and for the efforts and

energy of the caretaker, hence transcending some of the challenges of their illnesses. Gratitude is well-represented throughout the film, *Amelie* (2001, France), in which characters express gratitude, verbally and nonverbally, to those who have done good deeds.

Hope and optimism mean to take a stance that the future will be positive and good; hope refers more to a positive feeling while optimism is positive thinking and expectations. *Cape of Good Hope* (2004, South Africa) reveals several intertwining stories revolving around a rescue shelter of a small town. Each of the main characters – a refugee from a war-torn Congo, a single mother/housekeeper battling an abusive, rapist employer, a young Muslim couple, a nice-guy veterinarian, and an emotionally guarded animal shelter founder – is a symbol of hope. The Oscar-winning, *Pelle the Conqueror* (1987, Denmark) begins with the high hopes of a man, Lasse, and his son, Pelle, as they leave Sweden with dreams of living a luxurious and happy life in Denmark. They quickly find a painful existence with great hardships. Pelle faces many challenges, environmental (stuck with poor living conditions in a fly-infested area), psychological (mother has died), emotional (abused by the staff and teased incessantly by classmates), and spiritual (hope of living a better life seems almost unreachable). Despite atrocious circumstances, Pelle keeps up hope for a better life. While the film has an ambiguous ending in which Pelle courageously leaves his father and his situation, the viewer sees that he is attempting to follow his dream for a better life, thus concluding with a message of hope. Jean Pierre-Jeunet's WWI film, *A Very Long Engagement* (2004, France), is an allegory of hope as a woman follows her feeling that her husband who has gone off to war is still alive, despite all accounts to the contrary.

Vodka Lemon (2003, Armenia) is a slow but engaging and interesting comedy of subtle vibrancy from exiled Iraqi Kurd director, Hiner Saleem. It is filmed completely in Armenia, post-USSR. A widowed man and woman romance after meeting along their daily trips to their spouses' gravesites. The man eventually has to sell all of his possessions due to poverty but his optimism and resiliency remain unaffected. Perhaps this film is an allegory on "attitude" since the viewer never gets a pessimistic feeling despite circumstances that would indicate this for most. This minimalist film exhibiting white vistas of beauty, pleasantly mixes diegetic (sound internal to the film) and non-diegetic (sound external to the film) music, and captures tragic experiences within the backdrop of beautiful landscape. *Lighthouse Hill* (2004, U.K.) and *Danny Deckchair* (2003, Australia) portray themes of hope and transformation following a character making a change in their environment. In both films, the lead character struggles with their current life in a number of ways, leaves the situation heading to a very different community and change of scenery (in the latter film, the man constructs a flying device of helium balloons attached to a deck chair and flies off), finds hope, healing, and connections in the new environment, and eventually must return to their past home to face the realities of their old life. While avoidance and escapism are clearly unhealthy and usually exacerbate current problems, there are redeeming values of these two films. *Blue Butterfly* (2004, Canada) is based on a true story in which a terminally ill boy and his idol (an entomologist) travel to a remote jungle in search of a rare, magical, blue butterfly. The boy's hope to find the butterfly parallels the hope in continuing to live his life and recover from his illness. A classic film that addresses the strength of hope is Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957, Sweden).

Humor refers to having a sense of playfulness and/or having the ability to make others laugh and see the lighter side of things. *Life Is Beautiful* (1997, Italy) portrays a compassionate father, Guido, who uses uncanny imagination, playfulness, and humor to help his son cope with conditions and avoid the realities of a concentration camp. *Marie Antoinette* (2006, France/U.S.) portrays Kirsten Dunst as Austrian royalty who marries into French royalty and becomes queen. Despite an uptight, high-brow society, Marie maintains a playfulness that is kept within reason; she gives hugs to nobility surprising the receiver, giggles frequently, is good-humored with her friends, and breaks trends when she is the only one clapping at operatic performances. *Ridicule* (1996, France) overtly addresses and applies different types of humor, particularly wit, as a poor French lord is challenged in building this strength within himself. *Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World* (2005, filmed in India and the U.S.), a pseudo-documentary depicting comedian, Albert Brooks, who portrays himself in that he is asked by the U.S. government to help them better understand the Muslim culture. His task is to go to India and Pakistan to ask people, “What makes you laugh?” and write an extensive report on his findings. The film speaks to themes on the psychology of humor and laughter and shows a rare depiction of “laughing clubs,” which have become widely popular in India; Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs are in attendance on yoga mats raising their hands and laughing for therapeutic benefits. *Nothing* (2003, Canada) is a transcendent comedy in its originality and message. The film itself is very playful in that each character can make various things they think about disappear, including themselves.

Spirituality refers to finding meaning and purpose in one’s life and in something greater – God, a divine force, Higher Power, or the sacred – that transcends reality. *Run Lola Run* (1998, Germany), an intense, fast-paced creative film that follows protagonist, Lola, on three fast-paced journeys controlled by time and fate, shows the significant difference of small and large decisions we make in life; the film acutely addresses themes of life purpose and interconnectedness. The spiritual journey is a common motif in world cinema; a character’s physical journey is often metaphoric for their psychological, emotional, and/or spiritual quest to face and overcome obstacles, find meaning and purpose in life, and transform that which is afflictive and limiting. *Travelers and Magicians* (2003, Bhutan), *James’ Journey to Jerusalem* (2003, Israel), and *Breakfast on Pluto* (2005, Ireland) emphasize the universal spiritual journey humans face in their quest to find meaning, purpose, and acceptance in life. The latter is a different type of film from Ireland in that it defies the stereotypes of bleak, depressive, Irish tales and instead remains positive and uplifting. In *Children of Men* (2006, U.K./U.S.), Mexican director, Alfonso Cuarón, addresses the role of faith and belief in miracles. One touching scene in this violent film depicts all sides of violence and warring in a cease-fire in which the protagonist (symbolized as a Jesus figure) helps guide a mother (symbolized as a Mary figure) and her infant out of a war-zone; the viewer no longer hears the incessant gunfire, rather operatic music resounds with white light glowing as soldiers pause, contemplate, or kneel down with the sign of the cross as the characters walk by. In the film, *God Is Great and I’m Not* (2001, France), a woman changes her faith each time she has a boyfriend with a different religion, readily shifting from Catholicism to Buddhism to Judaism. The film not only raises questions about identity but also what it means to be spiritual. *September 11* (2002, U.K./France/Egypt/Japan/Mexico/U.S./Iran) is a wonderful collection of eleven short films by eleven talented directors from around the world in a

tribute to the 9/11 tragedy. The films touch on a variety of human strengths, with perhaps “spirituality” as the most frequently occurring (and cinematically interconnecting) characteristic. One of the filmmakers, Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu, leaves the viewer with the resounding rhetorical question, “Does God’s light guide us or blind us?”

Films portraying the strength of spirituality can also be religious in that they portray a religious figure or a particular dogma or teaching that has important effects in the human experience. The spirituality of kindness and generosity via a path of Christianity is portrayed in *Mother Teresa* (2003, Spain), while the spirituality of non-violence is portrayed in *Gandhi* (1982, India/U.K.). Films depicting religious figures as having spiritual and faith strengths, however, also falling victim to faith crises and other problems include *Priest* (1994, U.K.), *The Crime of Father Amaro* (2002, Mexico), and *The Pact of Silence* (2002, France).

Themes related to Christianity are clear in *The Nativity Story* (2006, filmed in Italy and Morocco), *Jesus of Montreal* (1989, Canada/France), and *The Gospel According to Matthew* (1964, Italy). The latter is directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini, who is described as “contradictory, Marxist, mystic, Catholic, and atheist,” as he gives an interesting and unique depiction of the gospel; the portrayal remains reverent and dramatic as he makes good use of light and dark contrasts, vast landscapes, and close-ups on Jesus and his disciples. This can be contrasted with the word for word gospel depiction, *The Gospel of John* (2003, Canada/U.K.), a version that is likely to appeal more to those with more traditional religious beliefs. Buddhist themes are apparent in *Little Buddha* (1993, Liechtenstein/U.K.) while Islamic themes are prevalent in the striking *Paradise Now* (2005, Palestine), in which two Palestinian men prepare for a suicide mission in Israel that goes wrong. One of the men rationalizes his actions with, “I’d rather have paradise in my head than live in this hell. In this life, we’re dead anyway.”

The films listing the 24 strengths above can be utilized in the classroom or in the therapy room. After reviewing the film and assessing its appropriateness for a given student group or client, the teacher and clinician can maximize the benefits of this media. For example, a teacher might show the film, *Intimate Strangers*, to raise discussion about the therapeutic relationship and ethical issues or *Yesterday* to demonstrate different categories of love. A clinician might recommend a client, *My Left Foot*, to encourage the use of finding creative means to overcome significant challenges, *To Be and To Have* to a teacher who is suffering from job burnout, or *Wings of Desire* as an introduction to teaching mindfulness meditation.

Some international films utilize characters that are so dynamic that they represent several areas of mental wellness, exemplifying numerous strengths. Examples include Amelie who is a prototype for creativity, curiosity, persistence, vitality, kindness, prudence, gratitude, playfulness, and optimism in *Amelie* (2001, France); Guido in *Life is Beautiful* (1997, Italy) who masterfully exhibits humor, creativity, open-mindedness, bravery, persistence, love, citizenship, and hope; and the teacher, Clement Mathieu, who exemplifies humility, appreciation of beauty, creativity, love of learning, integrity, kindness, and social intelligence in *The Chorus* (2004, France). Such films can be particularly useful teaching tools for dynamic discussion in the classroom and the therapy office. Of course, these and many other examples are invaluable resources for instructors of Positive Psychology courses.

A couple of recent quality international documentaries directly address positive psychology themes: In *How Happy Can You Be?* (2005), European filmmaker Line Hatland, combines archival footage, scientific experiments, and interviews with leading figures in positive psychology to address the strengths, limitations, and profile of happiness. *Monte Grande: What is Life?* (2004) explores the key concepts and research of Chilean neurobiologist, Francisco Varela, namely spirituality, responsibility/autonomy, and the biology of the mind-body relationship.

Friendship

Friendship and relationship themes are prevalent in international cinema and vary by the culture. The exploration of unlikely friendships is a common theme. Two highly recommended films that reflect the development and mutual benefit of friendship between a man and a boy are *Monsieur Ibrahim* (2003, France) and the timeless classic, *Cinema Paradiso* (1988, Italy). In the former, an elderly, Turkish deli owner teaches the spiritual and moral principles of the Koran to a young Jewish boy. *Cinema Paradiso* explores the transformation of a projectionist and an eager young boy as they discuss life and movies, as its tag-line appropriately reads, “A celebration of youth, magic, and the everlasting magic of the movies.” Several lonely characters, each with different struggles and strengths converge in an Italian class that leads to friendship and transformation in *Italian for Beginners* (2000, Denmark). *Strawberry and Chocolate* (1994, Cuba) explores the friendship between a cultured homosexual and a prejudiced, communist heterosexual. A classic film that addresses the complexities of a multi-layered friendship is Krzysztof Kieslowski’s *Three Colors: Red* (1994, Poland/France).

Children and Mental Health

World cinema is replete with portrayals of the mental health and strengths of children. Children provide a wonderful avenue for the exploration of what Buddhists call “beginner’s mind,” which means to see things as if we are seeing them for the first time. Children tap into important strengths of playfulness, curiosity, creativity, and appreciation of beauty. *Born into Brothels* (2004, India) is a documentary about the impoverished children of prostitutes in Calcutta’s red light district. The film depicts the exuberance, hopefulness, creativity, and resiliency of children; they present as happy despite the dreadful circumstances that surround them. In *Ponette* (1996, France), a young girl bereaves the death of her mother in creative, touching, and spiritual ways. In the quirky yet brilliantly artistic and surreal sets of *The City of Lost Children* (1995, France), several children team up with a circus performer to defeat criminals who are kidnapping children to steal their dreams. Although the film is dark in its presentation, it portrays teamwork and facing one’s fears. The mythological *Pan’s Labyrinth* (2006, Mexico/Spain) portrays a young girl who must persevere through the challenges of her own fantasy. The realities and inherent resiliency of children in poverty is depicted in a number of films including *Ali Zoua: Prince of the Streets* (2000, Morocco), *City of God* (2002, Brazil), *Pixote* (1981, Brazil), and Mira Nair’s *Salaam Bombay!* (1988, India/U.K.).

A sweet, simple yet profound film, *Children of Heaven* (1997, Iran) depicts the challenges children face day-to-day in a beautiful way, highlighting the resiliency of the children. *Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity* (2002, Canada, 92 minutes) portrays a

young adolescent girl living with her single, overworked mother; the girl remains preoccupied and dedicated to helping her mother with magic, religion, and anything to bring happiness and contentment to the family. A film emphasizing the value of family and friends to children is *Eldra* (2002, Wales). The short film, *Little Daddy* (2003, Denmark) is a lighthearted story of a young girl staying with her father for the weekend and as he gets caught up in business she goes on her own adventures; much of the film reveals the world from her view through her thinking and taps into themes of childhood playfulness, sharing, independence, and discovery. A classic film about childhood is Francois Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959, France).

Adolescents and mental health

Adolescents are often portrayed in “coming of age” films in which the adolescent is finding one's way in life and learning to face challenges on one's own.

The Chorus (2004, France) is a terrific film that taps into how adolescents can access their strengths and come to terms with acceptance. *Whale Rider* (2002, New Zealand) depicts the great perseverance of an adolescent girl within the Maori culture standing up for herself and keeping focused on her faith in her destiny to have an impact on her future and the future of her community. *Not One Less* (China) depicts a 13-year-old teacher in a remote rural village going to extremes in her commitment and care for her students. *Pelle the Conqueror* (1987, Denmark) and *The Island on Bird Street* (1997, Denmark, filmed in Poland) portray young adolescent boys in highly challenging situations that force them to utilize their strengths of creativity and resiliency in order to survive. In *Maria, Full of Grace* (2004, Colombia), an adolescent, seeing her family's desperate financial situation, courageously sacrifices her pregnant body by becoming a drug mule, smuggling 62 pellets of cocaine in her stomach into the United States. Adolescent resiliency through abandonment, neglect, and abuse is depicted well in *The Return* (2003, Russia), *The Ratcatcher* (1999, Scotland), and the poignant *Lilja 4-ever* (2002, Sweden). *In Orange* (2004, Netherlands) explores an adolescent boy coming to terms with the reality of the loss of his father.

The short film, *Savior* (2003, Iceland), portrays the classic coming of age journey of an adolescent girl, Kaja, who is a latch-key girl with neglecting parents that gets sent off to a summer camp clearly not fit for her. She sneaks out of the camp one evening and attempts to find her way to her grandmother's home traversing the vast Icelandic landscape. She eventually makes it to her grandmother's home and is met with the exclamation, “I'll always be there for you, but I can't save you anymore.” This tough-love encourages deeper insights that culminate to her realization at the film's conclusion, “Now I know there is always someone there...me.”

Mental Health and Recovery:

Films that depict characters recovering from physical illness, addiction, mental disorders, or trauma are particularly inspiring. *Son of the Bride* (2002, Argentina) depicts a man who lives a life of work, and as a result has a heart attack; he then transforms his life and lifestyle by connecting more with those around him. A character with a severe anxiety disorder who appears shocked to see the real-world as he is released from a hospital slowly begins to confront his fears and triumph over his condition in the inspiring film, *Elling* (2002, Norway). *The Man Without a Past* (2002, Finland) portrays

a man, pronounced dead in the hospital room after suffering severe head trauma, suddenly getting up and walking out of the hospital. Despite his resulting amnesia, he is left to re-create his life (and re-discover what his life was) with his brain injury.

Portrayals of Mental Illness (in international cinema)

We can learn a lot about health by learning about what is not health. Pirkis et al. (2006) review the literature of the impact of mental illness portrayals and found that there are positive effects and opportunities that open up when people with mental illness appear on screen, namely the education of trainee mental health professionals, the motivation of people with mental illness to seek help, and the potential adjunct to conventional therapy for people with mental illness and their families.

I believe we can learn a lot about mental health and wellness by understanding both what “isn’t” mental health as well as the dimensions and dynamics of mental illness. This can help us recognize and appreciate mental health in a deeper way. Viewing movies that portray disorders can empower students and patients to a perspective or experience of health.

There certainly is not a paucity of examples of mental illness portrayals in international cinema. Some films provide stellar examples of the symptoms, course, functional impact, and even treatment of a psychological disorder, while other films do a great injustice perpetrating misconceptions and confusion for the viewer. In other instances, there are cinematic examples of characters overcoming or managing their mental illness in an admirable way. For an extensive list and discussion of American, independent, and international movies that portray each of the *DSM-IV*’s diagnostic categories see *Movies and Mental Illness: Using Films to Understand Psychopathology* (Wedding, Boyd, & Niemiec, 2005).

Anxiety disorders: *Elling* (2002, Norway) depicts a lead character with an anxiety disorder (unclear diagnostically whether it is agoraphobia or social phobia), while *Dirty Filthy Love* (2004, UK) is an exploration of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) in which a lead character learns how to manage and accept the symptoms and functional and interpersonal ramifications of OCD and Tourette’s Disorder. *Walking on Water* (2002, Australia) depicts Acute Stress Disorder.

Mood disorders: Depression is depicted in *Last Tango in Paris* (1972, Italy/France), *My First Wife* (1984, Australia), and *Rain* (2001, New Zealand). The phenomenon of suicide is depicted and explored in *Suicide Club* (2002, Japan), *The Hours* (2002, U.K./U.S.), and atrociously in *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (Scotland). In the latter, stereotypes and misconceptions abound as an angry and depressed character persistently attempts suicide in multiple ways. Once he finds love, the mood disorder and severe suicidality disappear, which perpetrates the common cinematic misconception that “love alone can conquer mental illness” (Wedding, Boyd, & Niemiec, 2005). It is possible that clients who have recovered from mood disorders and are stable might find the film’s dramatizations and exaggerations comical; however, it is not a good educational film.

Psychosis: Severe mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, delusional disorder) that is portrayed in movies presents a particularly wonderful opportunity for patient and family education. The tag-line for David Cronenberg’s slow moving yet striking film, *Spider* (2002, France/Canada) summarizes the implicit horror of the film – “The only thing

worse than losing your mind...is finding it again” – in which a man with schizophrenia slowly pieces together the realities of his past and the pain of his previous actions. Schizophrenia is portrayed in the character of brilliant pianist, David Helfgott in *Shine* (1996, Australia), patients at a psychiatrist hospital taken over by soldiers in *House of Fools* (2002, Russia), and in a disturbed adolescent boy in *The Butcher Boy* (1997, Ireland). *He Loves Me, He Loves Me Not* (France) engenders a brilliant cinematic technique to portray delusional disorder; the first half of the film depicts a high functioning woman in love which the viewer realizes later is a thick delusional framework with little reality base as the second half rewinds to the onset and unveils the perspective of the object of her affection. Psychoses can be seen in films by auteur directors, Peter Greenaway and Werner Herzog, in *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover* (1989, France/Netherlands/U.K.) and *Aguirre: The Wrath of God* (1972, West Germany), respectively.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse: In *16 Years of Alcohol* (2003, U.K.), an alcoholic becomes sober and faces tensions of hope, desire, and fear as he attempts to put his life back together; one quote from the film indicating the delicacy of his mental status is, “Hope is a strange thing. A currency for people who know they’re losing. The more familiar you are with hope, the less beautiful it becomes.” Alcoholism is also portrayed in films by auteur directors, Louis Malle and Wim Wenders, *The Fire Within* (1963, France) and *Paris, Texas* (1984, France/West Germany), respectively.

Drug addiction is depicted in several popular films including *Christiane F* (1981, West Germany), *The Last Emperor* (1987, Italy/Hong Kong/U.K.), *La Femme Nikita* (1990, France/Italy), and *Trainspotting* (1996, U.K.), while the brutal effects of withdrawal are exquisitely captured in *Quitting* (2001, China). Addiction to opioids can be seen in *Indochine* (1992, France), heroin abuse in *The Barbarian Invasions* (2003, Canada), and polysubstance abuse in *Naked Lunch* (1991, Canada). Drug addiction is also portrayed in films by legendary directors Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Bernardo Bertolucci in *Veronika Voss* (1982, West Germany) and *Luna* (1979, Italy), respectively.

Personality disorders: Personality disorders abound in international cinema, particularly the Cluster B disorders. See Table 2 for a list of each of the ten Axis II personality disorders and a film that contains a character that portrays each condition. Antisocial personality disorder is fairly common; consider such films as Alex and his droogs in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971, U.K.) and Johnny in Mike Leigh’s *Naked* (1993, UK). Narcissistic personality disorder can be found in Aaron Eckhart’s character in *In the Company of Men* (1997, U.K.) and John Turturro as an opera singer in *The Man Who Cried* (2000, U.K./France). Borderline personality can be found in *Swimming Pool* (2003, France/U.K.) and *Betty Blue* (1986, France).

<u>Film (Year)</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>Personality Disorder Portrayed</u>
<i>Last King of Scotland</i> (2006)	U.K.	Paranoid
<i>Bartleby</i> (1970)	U.K.	Schizoid
<i>Wise Blood</i> (1979)	U.S./West Germany	Schizotypal

<i>The Child</i> (2005)	France	Antisocial
<i>Betty Blue</i> (1986)	France	Borderline
<i>La Cage aux Folles/Birds of a Feather</i> (1978)	France	Histrionic
<i>The Barbarian Invasions</i> (2004)	Canada	Narcissistic
<i>I've Heard the Mermaids Singing</i> (1987)	Canada	Avoidant
<i>Mad Love</i> (2001)	Spain	Dependant
<i>Guy</i> (1997)	U.K.	Obsessive-compulsive

Table 3: International films portraying personality disorders

Adjustment disorders: These disorders do not typically stand out in films as their typically mild nature does not warrant exciting cinematic viewing; for this reason a multitude of films could qualify. A couple films that fall under this category are *Open Hearts* (2002, Denmark) and *The Eye* (2002, Hong Kong).

Portrayal of treatment

Role of the psychologist/psychiatrist

Movies and psychiatry have a rich, intertwining history, albeit often not positive. Gabbard and Gabbard (1999) estimated that through 1998, over 450 films dealing with psychiatry have been created.

Out of the mental health professionals portrayed in film, it is perhaps the field of social work that is the least bleak. Valentine and Freeman (2002) studied 27 movies that portray social workers – child welfare workers – in a variety of settings and found they are usually placed in one of three roles: advocate, supervisor, or clinician. The film, *Elling* (2002, Norway), portrays a social worker assisting two adults that have recently been released from a psychiatric hospital and are attempting to integrate into society. The social worker, while authoritarian at times, helps the two patients with community services, clinically (leading them in exposure techniques to face their anxiety), and motivationally.

This is more hopeful than the typologies offered regarding the portrayal of psychologists and psychiatrists (Schneider, 1977; Gabbard & Gabbard, 1992; Wedding & Niemiec, 2003). Schneider's typology notes psychiatrists can be represented as Dr. Dippy, Dr. Wonderful, and Dr. Evil; Gabbard & Gabbard's system includes the psychiatrist as The Libidinous Lecher, The Eccentric Buffoon, The Unempathic Cold Fish, The Rationalist Foil, The Repressive Agent of Society, The Unfulfilled Woman, The Evil Mind Doctor, The Vindictive Psychiatrist, The Omniscient Detective, and The Dramatic Healer; Wedding & Niemiec's thematic layout includes those cinematic psychologists who are Learned and Authoritative, Arrogant and Ineffectual, Seductive and Unethical, Cold-hearted and Authoritarian, Passive and Apathetic, Shrewd and

Manipulative, Dangerous and Omniscient, and Motivating and Well-Intentioned. Added together there are 21 categories with only five categories being positive; for those categories that are positive portrayals (e.g. The Dramatic Healer), this does not necessarily mean the depiction is accurate, realistic, and balanced.

“Cold-hearted and Authoritarian,” one of the most common international cinematic categories, can be seen in *Jesus of Montreal* (1989, Canada/France), Jane Campion’s *Sweetie* (1989, Australia), *An Angel at My Table* (1990, New Zealand), *Heavenly Creatures* (1994, New Zealand), *Vera Drake* (2004, U.K.), *The Chorus*, the group home leader in *Spider* (2002, France/Canada), and the psychometrist in *Noi the Albino* (2003, Iceland). The psychiatrist in *The Chorus* has a brief but memorable role as he administers psychological tests (e.g., Stanford-Binet, Rorschach) to troubled kids at a boarding school. He gives the testing feedback in front of the staff and the client/adolescent: “He isn’t actually mad, but I should warn you, according to his profile, he’s a gregarious pervert...a tendency to be cruel, parasitic, destructive and above all...above all, a mythomaniac.” There are also those portrayals that defy stereotypes and are in a category of their own as in the film, *Control* (2003, Hungary), in which the psychologist just sits there not saying a word – people dump their problems on him and he says nothing.

The Accidental Hero (2002, France), a well-acted film about a son who has to take care of his mother who has sustained a severe head injury and has subsequent retrograde amnesia, contrasts various types of care-giving, from a strict, forceful group home leader to an all-business social worker, to a compassionate, advocating neurologist. The film shows how the approach and style of the health-care professional can make a significant impact.

Niemiec and Wedding (2006) report seven common misconceptions of psychologists in movies – role confusion (films referring to “psychiatrist” when the role is that of a “psychologist”); psychoanalysis is the dominant practice in psychotherapy; psychotherapists are patently unethical; psychotherapists are cavalier about boundaries; almost all psychotherapists are men; almost all psychotherapists are white; research is of little value. Most of these remain prevalent with some progress being made in the inclusion of more female psychotherapists and other races.

Research psychologists are rarely portrayed; an exception occurred in *The Experiment* (2001, Germany), an attempt to re-create the landmark Zimbardo Prison Study which not only falls short in accuracy but it perpetrates negative stereotypes about psychologist researchers as unilaterally minded, self-serving, unethical, and dangerous.

The unethical psychologists in *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (Scotland) continuously cross boundaries as one licks a patient’s ear, cross sexual boundaries, and blatantly misinterprets and disregards rules of confidentiality while another therapist smokes during group, looks for ways to avoid performing his duties as a group clinician, and drinks Jack Daniels with his patients. Other boundary crossing, sexual and otherwise, psychotherapists can be seen in *Princess and the Warrior* (2000, Germany), *The Eye* (2002, Japan), and *Asylum* (2005, U.K./Ireland). It is important to remember that without proper education, viewing films depicting therapist-client boundary crossing behavior can lead to increased acceptance of sexual behavior between a therapist and patient (Schill, Harsch, & Ritter, 1990).

Balanced portrayals of psychiatrists and psychologists are hard to find in cinema. In terms of characters that play a major role in the film (e.g. lead actress, lead actor), I’ve

yet to come across a “perfect” portrayal of a psychologist. Therefore, at the present time, we must settle for “somewhat balanced” portrayals of flawed characters; these include *Elling*, *Lantana*, *Intimate Strangers*, *House of Fools*, and *Equus*.

Although in considering these examples the outlook appears bleak, there is an overall trend in international films toward more positive portrayals. European feature films that deal with mental health issues are portraying psychiatrists in a more positive light – caring and humane (Kelly, 2006). Rosen, Walter, Politis, and Shortland (1997) reported a shift in Australian and New Zealand films to messages of hope, resilience, and self-determination.

Theoretical orientation

The dominant portrayal remains psychoanalysis as can be seen in *Mortal Transfer* (2001, France) and *The Son's Room* (2001, Italy).

The interpersonal psychotherapy approach is portrayed in *Lantana* (2001, Australia). The psychologist is shown as supportive, nurturing, and giving help, although as the film progresses, her personal issues begin to have an impact on the therapeutic encounter.

A supportive psychotherapy approach is represented in *Intimate Strangers* (2003, France), although the hitch is that the therapist is not a therapist at all but is a tax advisor. The patient walks into the wrong office (the tax advisor and a psychiatrist work in the same corridor) and begins talking about her struggles to which the tax advisor initially believes are related to her financial struggles; when he figures out what has happened he has become too fascinated to explain the truth and instead offers his listening as support.

Interventions

A variety of therapeutic interventions are portrayed in international films. Common depictions include listening, social skills training, and advise giving. Two notorious interventions portrayed in films include hypnosis and ECT.

The portrayal of hypnosis in films has a history as long as movies themselves. Unfortunately, the portrayal is predominately a negative, stereotypic one. Barrett (2006) explores the role of hypnosis in over 230 films and finds the majority of the portrayals to be negative in which the application of hypnosis is to seduce the subject or to bring the subject to kill, to harm oneself, or to commit a crime. She reports very few realistic portrayals, two of particular relevance here are *Mesmer* (1994, Austria/Canada) and *Equus* (1977, U.K./U.S.), the latter of which includes an accurate explanation of hypnosis by the psychiatrist using the method.

The portrayal of electro-convulsive therapy in American and non-American films has been discussed in detail elsewhere (Walter, 1998; McDonald & Walter, 2001). ECT is usually portrayed in films as negative, harmful, and dangerous. This is true in *An Angel at My Table* (1990, New Zealand) and more subtly in *Shine* (1996, Australia). McDonald & Walter (2001) catalogue and examine the portrayal of ECT in movies from the middle of the 20th century to the onset of the 21st century and conclude that ECT was initially portrayed as a severe but helpful treatment but progressed to being represented as a cruel and negative treatment. All 22 film examples are American movies. The negative impact of ECT in movies is clear – after viewing ECT portrayed in movies, medical students

were more likely to talk family and friends out of receiving the treatment and one-third decreased their support for ECT (Walter et al., 2002).

International cinema resources:

Websites: The internet is a great resource to learn about world cinema. Two of the most comprehensive databases include The Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com) and The Movie Review Query Engine (www.mrqe.com).

Film festivals: These events are unique opportunities to see films from a variety of countries and occur throughout the year in most major cities in the United States and throughout the world.

Movie clubs: Movie clubs provide an opportunity to view and own international films. Typically, these are organizations you can join and pay a monthly fee to receive a DVD that contains three to five films on it; often these are films that would never be released in the theater and many can only be seen at certain film festivals. The Spiritual Cinema Circle (www.spiritualcinemacircle.org) is a movie club that addresses a variety of mental health themes such as love, hope, compassion, and life purpose/meaning. Ironweed Films (www.ironweedfilms.com) is a movie club whose films are likely to address mental health themes related to courage, tolerance, social justice, and resiliency.

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