

PSY 456

Psychology of Movies

Summer 2026 - 10-Week Term

Online Asynchronous | 3 Credits

Course Number	PSY 456
Course Title	Psychology of Movies
School	School of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Term	Summer 2026
Length	10 weeks
Credits	3
Location	Online
Canvas	https://chaminade.instructure.com

Instructor Information

Instructor	Abby Halston, Ed.D., NCC, LMFT
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Phone	808-739-4641
Office Location	Behavioral Sciences 111A
Office Hours	Mondays, 8:00-10:00 a.m., and by virtual appointment; email for a Google Meet link
Communication	Email responses are generally provided within 24 hours. Canvas assignment comments may require up to 48 hours.

Course Description and Materials

Catalog Course Description

This course examines how motion pictures depict mental illness, relationships, and other psychologically relevant issues, as well as how films portray the field of psychology. Topics include universal themes, the psychological value of filmmaking and viewing, application of psychological

theories and concepts, accuracy in the depiction of psychological variables, and the psychological impact of popular film. Character analyses address personality, mental illness, developmental issues, conflict, and motivation.

Required Text

Wedding, D., Boyd, M. A., & Niemiec, R. M. (2024). *Movies and Mental Illness*. Hogrefe. ISBN-13: 978-0889375536.

Required Films

- Temple Grandin (2010)
- A Beautiful Mind (2001)
- The Beaver (2011)
- The Aviator (2004)
- Fearless (1993)
- Psycho (1960)
- Insomnia (2002)
- Boys Don't Cry (1999)
- We Need to Talk About Kevin (2012)
- Flight (2012)
- Raging Bull (1980)
- No Country for Old Men (2007)
- Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (2003)
- One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975)

Final project film choice: *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *The Prince of Tides* (1991), or *Thelma & Louise* (1991).

Learning Outcomes

Psychology Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs)

1. Identify key concepts, principles, and overarching themes in psychology.
2. Demonstrate adaptation and change through critical interpretation, design, and evaluation of psychological research.
3. Demonstrate effective written and oral communication within the field of psychology.
4. Explain the dynamic interaction among mind, body, and social influences as part of educating the whole person.

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

Upon successful completion of PSY 456, students will be able to:

1. Apply basic psychological principles and theories to the analysis of human behavior depicted in film. (PLO 1)
2. Evaluate the accuracy of film portrayals of psychological topics, diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes. (PLO 1)

3. Identify film techniques used to communicate psychological concepts and influence audience interpretation. (PLO 4)
4. Analyze ethical and social issues related to the psychological impact of popular film. (PLO 2)

Assessment and Grading

Assessment Summary

Assessment	Quantity / Value	Points
Online Discussions	6 discussions x 6 points	36
Movie Reflection Questions	14 reflections x 20 points	280
Final Movie Review	1 project x 40 points	40
Total Possible Points		356

Assignment Descriptions

Online Discussions (CLOs 1-4)

Students will participate in six online discussions examining how films portray mental illness, relationships, treatment, stereotypes, emotion, personality, violence, and psychotherapy. Contributions should demonstrate engagement with the readings, assigned films, and classmates' ideas.

Movie Reflection Questions (CLOs 1-4)

Students will complete fourteen movie-reflection assignments. Each reflection requires students to read the corresponding chapter, view the assigned film, and respond to questions about psychological concepts, diagnosis, treatment, film technique, ethics, and social impact.

Final Movie Review (CLOs 1-3)

Students will select one approved final-project film and apply psychological theory to the film's depiction of psychological variables. The review will evaluate psychological impact and include a character analysis focused on personality, motivation, development, conflict, and/or mental health concerns.

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

Course Policies

Due Dates and Late Work

All assignments are due in Canvas by 11:59 p.m. on the posted due date. Online discussion responses may be submitted up to one week late with a 50% point deduction. Because discussions depend on timely peer interaction, discussion participation replies will not be accepted after the posted deadline. Movie reflections and the Final Movie Review may be submitted through the final day of the course with a 50% point deduction when late.

Attendance and Participation

In an online course, attendance is demonstrated through regular Canvas activity, timely submission of assignments, and participation in discussions. Students should contact the instructor promptly when illness or other extenuating circumstances interfere with course participation.

Academic Conduct

Students are expected to follow the standards of academic honesty and conduct described in the Chaminade University Student Handbook. Plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, or unauthorized collaboration may result in academic and disciplinary consequences.

Disability Access

Students seeking accommodations should contact Kōkua 'Ike: Center for Student Learning. For information, email ada@chaminade.edu or call 808-739-8305.

Title IX Compliance

Chaminade University is committed to a safe and respectful learning environment. Faculty members are required to report disclosures that fall under University Title IX reporting obligations. Current policies and support resources are available through the University's Title IX and compliance offices.

Changes to the Syllabus

The instructor may revise the course schedule or requirements when necessary. Changes will be communicated through Canvas or Chaminade email.

Credit Hour Policy

Each Chaminade University credit hour represents 45 hours of student engagement. This three-credit course therefore requires a minimum of 135 hours of engagement during the 10-week term. Engagement includes assigned reading, film viewing, online discussions, movie reflections, instructor interaction, research, and preparation of the final movie review.

Course Activity	Estimated Hours
Textbook reading and supplemental course materials	30
Viewing assigned films	32
Movie reflection questions	42

Online discussions and peer interaction	12
Final movie review research and writing	15
Canvas activities and instructor interaction	4
Total	135

Mission and Values

Marianist Values

1. Education for formation in faith.
2. Provide an integral, quality education.
3. Educate in family spirit.
4. Educate for service, justice, and peace.
5. Educate for adaptation and change.

PSY 456 is especially guided by Educate for Adaptation and Change. The course develops flexible thinking, respect for differences, critical analysis, and open-mindedness as students evaluate changing cultural portrayals of psychology and mental health.

Student Support

Canvas and Technical Support: Canvas Support Hotline: 1-833-209-6111. Chaminade IT Help Desk: helpdesk@chaminade.edu or 808-735-4855.

Tutoring and Writing Services: Kōkua 'Ike provides free tutoring and writing assistance. Contact tutoring@chaminade.edu or 808-739-8305.

10-Week Course Schedule

All work is due by 11:59 p.m. on the dates posted in Canvas. The instructor may adjust the order of activities when needed.

Week	Topic	Readings and Viewing	Assignments Due
1	Foundations: Film and Psychopathology	Read Chapter 1; Online Discussion 1: Films and Psychopathology. Read Chapter 2; watch Temple Grandin (2010).	Temple Grandin Movie Reflection
2	Psychosis and Emotion	Read Chapter 3; watch A Beautiful Mind (2001). Online Discussion 2: Film and Emotion.	A Beautiful Mind Movie Reflection

3	Mood and Anxiety-Related Portrayals	Read Chapter 4; watch The Beaver (2011). Read Chapter 5; watch The Aviator (2004).	The Beaver and The Aviator Movie Reflections
4	Trauma, Dissociation, and Somatic Experience	Read Chapter 6; watch Fearless (1993). Online Discussion 3: Films and Dissociative/Somatic Links.	Fearless Movie Reflection
5	Personality, Sleep, and Identity	Read Chapter 7; watch Psycho (1960). Read Chapter 8; watch Insomnia (2002).	Psycho and Insomnia Movie Reflections
6	Gender, Identity, and Stereotypes	Read Chapter 9; watch Boys Don't Cry (1999). Online Discussion 4: Film and Stereotypes.	Boys Don't Cry Movie Reflection
7	Youth, Substance Use, and Social Context	Read Chapter 10; watch We Need to Talk About Kevin (2012). Read Chapter 11; watch Flight (2012).	We Need to Talk About Kevin and Flight Movie Reflections
8	Personality and Violence	Read Chapter 12; watch Raging Bull (1980). Online Discussion 5: Film, Personality, and Violence.	Raging Bull Movie Reflection
9	Antisocial Behavior and Violence	Read Chapter 13; watch No Country for Old Men (2007). Read Chapter 15; watch Kill Bill: Vol. 1 (2003).	No Country for Old Men and Kill Bill: Vol. 1 Movie Reflections
10	Psychotherapy, Institutions, and Course Integration	Read Chapter 16; watch One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975). Online Discussion 6: Film and Psychotherapy. View one approved final-project film.	One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest Movie Reflection; Final Movie Review