

Cinema in the Training of Forensic Psychiatry

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Dear Editor

The use of artistic and humanistic resources has increasingly been recognized as valuable in medical and psychiatric education. Among these resources, cinema stands out as a powerful tool for exploring themes related to human behavior, violence, mental disorders, and moral conflict. In the field of forensic psychiatry, films can help stimulate reflection on the psychological, social, and legal dimensions involved in criminal behavior and mental illness [1, 2].

A classic example is the film *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), directed by Jonathan Demme. The film presents the character Hannibal Lecter, often associated in popular culture with the figure of the psychopath. Although the film employs elements of dramatization, it allows discussion of relevant aspects of psychopathy, such as emotional coldness, interpersonal manipulation, lack of empathy, and predatory behavior. In the scientific literature, psychopathy is frequently associated with traits such as deficits in empathy, impulsivity, and persistent antisocial behavior, and it has been widely investigated in forensic psychiatry and criminology [3, 4].

The film *Run*, directed by Aneesh Chaganty and featuring performances by Sarah Paulson and Kiera Allen, provides a useful cinematic illustration of psychological dynamics that are often discussed in clinical and forensic psychiatry. In particular, the narrative can be interpreted in light of factitious disorder imposed on another, a condition previously referred to as Munchausen syndrome by proxy.

The plot centers on Chloe, a teenager who has grown up believing that she suffers from multiple serious medical conditions and

physical disabilities. She lives with her mother, Diane, whose protective and controlling behavior initially appears to be motivated by concern for her daughter's fragile health. As the story develops, however, Chloe becomes increasingly suspicious about her illnesses and begins to question the medications and treatments she receives. Her investigation gradually reveals that her mother has been manipulating medical information and administering substances that maintain the appearance of illness, thereby ensuring Chloe's continued dependence [5].

The film *Joker* (2019), directed by Todd Phillips, also raises important discussions about psychological suffering, social exclusion, and violence. The character Arthur Fleck is portrayed as an individual experiencing significant emotional difficulties and profound social marginalization. Although the film does not present a clear psychiatric diagnosis, the narrative allows discussion of the complex relationship between mental disorders, social vulnerability, and violent behavior. Epidemiological studies indicate that most individuals with mental disorders do not exhibit violent behavior; however, certain factors—such as substance abuse, a history of violence, and adverse social contexts—may increase the risk of aggression [6, 7].

Another recent example is the series *Baby Reindeer* (2024), which addresses the phenomenon of stalking, characterized by persistent pursuit, invasion of privacy, and obsessive behavior directed toward a specific victim. Stalking has been widely studied in forensic psychiatry and criminology and is defined as a pattern of repeated behavior involving surveillance, harassment, or unwanted communication that causes fear or significant distress to the victim^{7,8}. Studies suggest that this type of behavior may be associated with personality disorders, difficulties in emo-

tional regulation, and cognitive distortions related to interpersonal relationships [8, 9].

Thus, beyond providing cultural enrichment, cinema may function as a valuable pedagogical resource for forensic psychiatry. By portraying situations involving violence, psychological manipulation, mental disorders, and moral conflicts, films enable discussion of clinical and legal concepts in an accessible and interdisciplinary way. Although cinema cannot replace clinical evaluation or forensic expertise, it can broaden the understanding of the moral, psychological, and social complexities that often surround criminal behavior and judicial processes.

Pedagogical Contribution and Proposed Framework

To address the pedagogical applicability of cinema in forensic education, this article proposes a structured framework for its integration into teaching activities. Rather than using films merely as illustrative examples, they may be incorporated into a guided educational model with clearly defined learning objectives.

The proposed framework includes: (1) selection of films aligned with specific forensic themes (e.g., psychopathy, factitious disorder, violence risk, stalking); (2) definition of learning objectives prior to viewing; (3) guided discussion using structured clinical and legal questions; and (4) reflective assessment to consolidate knowledge. This approach encourages active learning, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary reasoning.

Within this model, learners are prompted to analyze diagnostic hypotheses, risk factors, ethical dilemmas, criminal responsibility, victim impact, and legal implications. By integrating cinema into a structured pedagogical sequence, the educational process moves beyond passive observation and becomes an interactive tool for developing competencies relevant to forensic psychiatric practice.

Thus, cinema may function not only as cultural enrichment but also as a structured pedagogical resource in forensic psychia-

try education. Although it cannot replace clinical evaluation or forensic expertise, it can broaden understanding of the moral, psychological, and social complexities surrounding criminal behavior and judicial processes.

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