

21 movies to watch that accurately portray mental illness

About the Author Paul D. Dail received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in English with a creative writing emphasis from the University of Montana, Missoula. In addition to his contributions to St. George News, he enjoys writing both creative nonfiction and fiction (with a penchant for the darker side of the page). Paul's first novel, a supernatural thriller entitled "The Imaginings," is available wherever ebooks are sold, and his collection of flash fiction, "Free Five," has spent over three years in the top 50 Kindle Horror Short Stories since its publication in 2012.



Theatrical release posters, composite image, St. George News

ST. GEORGE — Whether it's "The Shining" or "Shutter Island," horror and thriller movie fans are drawn by fascination — or fear — to watch real people doing horrible things. The Southwest Utah affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness believes that many of these films do more harm to the mental health movement than good.

Pam Connors, program director for [NAMI Southwest Utah](#), cited an article in Psychiatric Times by Dr. Steven H. Hyler that discusses how these cinematic portrayals can have negative effects on anyone ranging from the people suffering with mental illness and their families all the way to legislators.

In [the article](#), Hyler said:

In actuality (with certain exceptions, e.g., substance-induced psychoses), individuals with mental disorders are not more likely to commit violent crimes than is the general population.

Connors went on to say that the situation is often even reversed, and that these violent films perpetuate a negative stigma.

| *people with mental illnesses are more often victims of violent crimes than perpetrators*

“This is what we teach in our classes,” she said, “that people with mental illnesses are more often victims of violent crimes than perpetrators.”

With May being National Mental Health Awareness Month, in addition to NAMI Southwest Utah’s [regularly scheduled support groups](#), the organization is recommending several films that accurately — and constructively — portray various mental illnesses for people who are struggling themselves or for friends and family members trying to empathize.

Connors believes the best movies to recommend are those about people who have a mental illness but are just trying to get through life. One of her personal favorites is the 2013 made-for-television film “Call Me Crazy: A Five Film,” a series of five vignettes of different people living with mental illness.

Dixie State University NAMI on Campus students screened the film as part of the university’s health expo in 2014, Connors said. It is very realistic in its depiction of characters with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder – some of the main issues NAMI Southwest Utah helps families deal with.

Connors also likes the 2012 film “Silver Linings Playbook.”

“It shows that people with mental illness can have good relationships,” she said, “but it just takes a little work.”

Not all of the films are uplifting, but they still help viewers understand the difficult situations that many people struggle with, Connors said. One such film is “Blue Jasmine.”

“The reason I liked it,” she said, “is it took a very well-to-do woman and showed how mental illness can bring people down no matter what their status.”

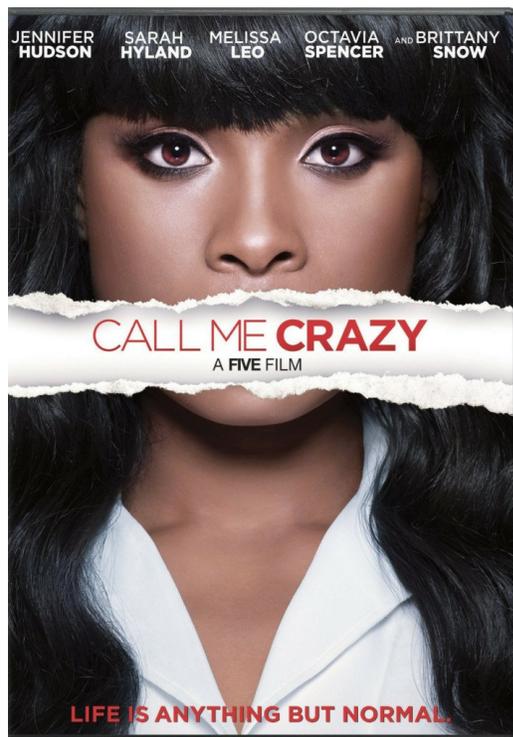
But it doesn’t have to be all serious. Other movies on Connors’ list have strong elements of humor, including “As Good as It Gets” in the area of obsessive-compulsive disorder and “What About Bob?” dealing with anxiety.

Humor can be a very effective tool as long as it isn’t used to humiliate.

| *Humor is meant to show the humanity of the ill person*

“Their perception of life can sometimes be humorous to us,” she said. “Humor is meant to show the humanity of the ill person, not to degrade them or humiliate them. It’s to show that they are people too.”

Recommended films related to particular conditions



- Anxiety: [“What About Bob?”](#) (1991)
- Bipolar: [“Silver Linings Playbook”](#) (2012), [“Rocks in my Pockets”](#) (2014)
- Borderline Personality Disorder: [“Single White Female”](#) (1992), [“Girl, Interrupted”](#) (1999), [“Blue Jasmine”](#) (2013), [“Infinitely Polar Bear”](#) (2015)
- Depression: [“Leaving Las Vegas”](#) (1995), [“The Skeleton Twins”](#) (2014), [“Winter’s Bone”](#) (2010), [“Lincoln”](#) (2012)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder: [“As Good as It Gets”](#) (1997)
- Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: [“Coming Home”](#) (1978), [“Born on the Fourth of July”](#) (1989), [“Good Will Hunting”](#) (1997), [“Room”](#) (2015)
- Schizophrenia: [“A Beautiful Mind”](#) (2001), [“Benny & Joon”](#) (1993), [“The Soloist”](#) (2009), [“Love and Mercy”](#) (2014)
- Mental illness generally: [“Call Me Crazy: A Five Film”](#) (2013)

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NAMI Southwest Utah – resources

The mission of NAMI Southwest Utah is “to ensure the dignity and improve the lives of those who live with mental illness and their families through support, education and advocacy.” The organization holds regularly scheduled support groups at the St. George Library, 88 W. 100 South, St. George.

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