THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY MOVIE AWARDS FOR 2012

written by Ryan Niemiec
April 18, 2013

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Articles by Ryan are here.

Editor’s Note: You might also be interested in earlier positive psychology movie awards:

- The Positive Psychology Movie Awards of 2011: Character Strengths and Best Picture
- The Positive Psychology Movie Awards of 2010
- The Positive Psychology Movie Awards for 2009: Countdown
- The Positive Psychology Movie Awards for 2009: Honorable Mention
I have several hopes in maintaining this annual PPND tradition of giving Positive Psychology Awards to movies made the previous year:

1. That you will consider taking a different approach to viewing movies, an approach that involves consciously looking for strengths (strengths-spotting) and watching for other positive phenomena being modeled, such as mindfulness, resilience, and PERMA.

2. That when you watch a movie you will experience more of the trifecta of authentic happiness, greater pleasure, engagement, and meaning, both because of the movie itself and because of your approach to watching it.

3. That you will add to your film library as well as build a good set of resources to recommend to your clients or family and friends.

Here are some of the best films that offer substance and meaning from 2012.

**Life of Pi: Award for Best Positive Psychology Film**

This film marks one of those rare instances in which the film is probably better than the book. While it might be unfair to compare media, the public does this routinely and films almost always are inferior to books. *Life of Pi*, the film, is a visual feast in which virtually any theory, strength, or topic in positive psychology can be found. Viewers who have appreciation of beauty/excellence as a signature strength are destined to love this film. The film is a parable on goodness, spirituality, and meaning.

**Argo: Award for Achievement**

There can be a fine line between achievement and tragedy. Without the full expression of the strengths constellation of creativity, bravery, and perseverance, the CIA operation to create a “fake movie” in order to help hostages escape from Iran decades ago would have ended horribly for the hostages.

**The Perks of Being a Wallflower: Award for Acceptance**

If you are looking for themes of self-acceptance (being true to oneself), being and feeling accepted by others, or compassion/self-compassion, check out this heartfelt film.

**The Sessions: Award for Vulnerability**

Vulnerability and transparency are key factors in healing and in the therapeutic and coaching relationship. See the qualitative research of Brene Brown on the benefits of being vulnerable. Helen Hunt is not only nakedly vulnerable but her character and a man living in an iron lung take enormous risks, emotionally and psychologically.

**Hope Springs: Award for Best Practitioner**

There is a dearth of healthy portrayals of mental health professionals in films because the cinema loves to accentuate stereotypes of psychologists and psychotherapy. It’s no exaggeration to note that Steve Carell’s character is one of the best, most balanced portrayals of a psychologist, in this case a marital therapist, in film history.

**Silver Linings Playbook: Award for Transformation**

Change is difficult, especially for Pat Solitano (Bradley Cooper), who attempts to adjust to his new life after being released from a psychiatric hospital and must cope with his bipolar illness, unemployment, medication regimen, and the reality that his ex-wife will not take him back. This is a recipe for either another deteriorating mishap or a personal transformation.

**Beasts of the Southern Wild: Award for Resilience**
Hushpuppy, a six-year-old girl, faces enormous obstacles: the loss of her mother, the abuse and alcoholism of her medically ill father, extreme poverty, a lack of resources, food, clothes, and quality housing, and living in an environment suffering from post-Hurricane Katrina. Nevertheless, Hushpuppy is a survivor, coping with these beastly conditions and facing all the “beasts” around her.

**The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel: Award for Strengths-Spotting.**

This film offers a breadth of opportunities for those who want to practice the skill of strengths-spotting. All 24 character strengths can be spotted in this hodge-podge of interesting characters who travel to India to escape, find themselves, find someone else, rekindle a marriage, or rekindle their purpose in life.

**Moonrise Kingdom: Award for Positive Relationships (adolescents)**

In this whimsical Wes Anderson film, two adolescents form a close relationship despite their quirky, isolative tendencies. They express love, creativity, and bravery as their new bond melts the suffering of years of being the outcast.

**The Intouchables: Award for Positive Relationships (adults)**

A wealthy paralyzed man and a thief form an unlikely friendship as the former expresses perspective, love of learning, and perseverance while the latter exudes humor, honesty, and creativity. The result of this strengths concoction is love.

**Holy Motors: Award for Mindfulness**

This refers not to the depiction of mindfulness or meditation but to how the film keeps the viewer on his or her toes; the viewer is always present that he or she is watching a film which is at times mysterious and surreal, touching and empathic, and disturbing and disgusting. This interesting film helps the viewer practice mindfulness of personal emotions.

**Honorable mention:**

- **Amour** for positive coping
- **Zero Dark Thirty** for exemplary strength use
- **Act of Valor** also for exemplary strengths use
- **Safe House** for integrity – adult
- **Brave** for integrity – children
- **The Master** for character strengths misuse
- **Searching for Sugar Man** for perseverance
- **The Avengers** for teamwork – adults
- **The Hunger Games** for teamwork – adolescents
- **The Dark Knight Rises** for psycho-spiritual recovery
- **Lincoln** for signature strengths use
References:


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JUDY KRINGS

April 19, 2013 - 10:09 am

This is wonderful, Ryan! Just to have seen all these movies in one year must have stoked your every value and character strength. Having been in MX and unable to see most of these movies, your blog sent a "EUREKA!" to my heart. Watch out Netflix, as we will be coming back to the States soon. I now how even more fun to look forward to.

I did get to “The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel” and loved it so much I watched it twice. Getting up into age, whatever that really means, this movie put a huge smile on my face. Wisdom, courage, tenacity, etc. It is fun to spot all 24 strengths in action. Thanks for your diligence and love and kindness, and on and on for enlightening us with your talents and movie passion. I am committed to joyfully watch every one of these movies!

STEVEN | THE EMOTION MACHINE

April 19, 2013 - 10:53 am

The most interesting thing is that it seems like we can take something positive from any movie if we have the right perspective.

SUZANNE

April 19, 2013 - 3:36 pm

Cool awards. I especially liked Silver Linings Playbook and Argo. As a university professor, I used those films as examples to illustrate elements of positive psychology. Films are such amazing teaching tools!

I noticed you did not include Django Unchained in the list. Too dark? Too violent? What do you think?

RYAN M. NIEMIEC

April 20, 2013 - 1:49 pm

Thanks Judy and Suzanne. Glad to contribute to some of your movie lists!

Dark films can absolutely be positive psychology movies, especially those that speak to the human condition (e.g., The Hours; House of Sand and Fog). Such movies are riveting and we can learn a lot of what it means to be human attempting to tackle the trials and tribulations of life from them.

In terms of Django Unchained, I’m a big fan of Tarantino and always find his films entertaining. Thus, they are pleasurable and engaging (for me) to watch. I typically, however, do not find his films as high on the meaning-enhancement level. This is not to say that a viewer cannot find them meaningful, but when a director gives first priority to stylized violence, they tend to have a different agenda. In Django, one can find themes of fairness, freedom, resilience, and creativity, to name a few positive psychology elements.
JUDY KRINGS

April 20, 2013 - 1:59 pm

Thanks, again, Ryan. Now why not YOU on TV doing the PP slant to movies?

BASIC PSYCHOLOGY COURSES

April 25, 2013 - 9:00 pm

Thanks Ryan for sharing your post.

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. Learn how your comment data is processed.
John: You support a completely discredited hypothesis (Losada Line)?

Youshaman: Thank you Elaine. your review very great

Rebecca: This article really resonates with my personal journey of understanding my own cycles. Thank you for further...

David: As a man, I can say you nailed everything there is to know about men in relationships. In 2 lines! Secret #1:...

robinhoodi: Yeah! Very true, actually I heard about Carin Rockind even in the past that she has taught thousands of...

Lisa Buksbaum: You are both talented and wise.... think of all the lives you’ve enhanced. Twice graced with...

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Movies are a powerful and enjoyable medium for learning. This book shows exactly how to use film to learn about the concepts and the real-life benefits of positive psychology, both for self-improvement and in classes or seminars. Content Type: Book Summary. Coaching Specialty: Positive Psychology. Resource Topics: Character Strengths, Well-Being. JOEL SIEGEL AWARD Awarded to: Sean Penn. MUSIC + FILM AWARD Awarded to: Martin Scorsese. ← 15th Annual Critics’ Choice Movie Awards (2010) – Best Picture: The Hurt Locker. Sean Penn to receive Joel Siegel Award at 2012 CCMA’s →. Critics’ Choice Awards. BFCA.