

Personal reflection on a film: awakenings



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Writing Assignment #1: *Awakening*

The film *Awakening* relates to the study of medical humanities we have learned about and provides numerous examples of how emerging different activities into the patients' lives to benefit the patient, family and Doctor. Therapeutic activities demonstrated in the film allow for reaction and response from the patients that is clear to the audience watching. I think this film can be beneficial to anyone who wants to learn more about medical humanities and the purpose behind the treatment. In our text "Health Humanities Readers" we read about the different types of therapy such as art, music and literature. We see the use of an intersection approach throughout the film in relation to the patients' health and health care as discussed in the first module of this course. *Awakening* shows through medical humanities the ability to communicate between non-responsive patients and the provider. Throughout the film we see the social interaction between the Doctor and his patients. We see the importance of a good professional patient and provider relationship. When the patient's family and the patient trust the Doctor, it allows for tests and different treatment plans to take place in the best interest of the patient. Using medical humanities allows for better care from the provider in result to a purpose for the patients. In this case, catatonic patients are benefiting from humanities.

This film was released in 1990 starring Robin Williams as Dr. Malcolm Sayer. Dr. Sayer discovers certain stimuli reactions beyond the catatonic states they appear to be in. Activities such as catching a ball and music start to

reveal the patient response. One patient Leonard Lowe learns to communicate through the Ouija board with Dr. Sayer. Dr. Sayer learns about the drug for Parkinson's disease called L-Dopa and believe there could be a breakthrough for his patients. He believed there could be a breakthrough for his patients to be recovered from their disease. Lowe is first in the trail run for this theory, which completely " awakens" him from his catatonic state. This inspired Dr. Sayer to seek out funding to help his other patients experience " awakenings" back to reality. The funding went through and soon all the catatonic patients woke up to a new reality. Lowe was the first to be on the drug, though the film we see him adjust to is new lifestyle. After being on the drug for a while side effects start to occur facial and body tics that are hard for him to control, shortly after the side effects occur Lowe returns to his catatonic state. Patients start to fear the side effects as they watch Lowe return to his disease. Shortly after all the patients start to go back to their original states regardless the increased dosages of L-Dopa. Although the " awakening" did not last there was an appreciation of the value of life. Dr. Sayer went right back to the Ouija board in communicating with Lowe.

The movie *Awakenings* shows a very committed, patient, caring bedside manor by Dr. Sayer. Dr. Sayer is very persistent and courageous, despite his criticism and put down he never gives up on his hypothesis. I think this is something we look past in today's culture. We live now in very fast past society where medical providers seem to be busy, moving from one patient to next. Working at a Doctors' office, I schedule patients, I see first-hand the intensity and fast pace our providers go through in order to meet their quote

of patients for the day. Someone like Dr. Sayer would be hard to come across in today's reality. Dr. Sayer never gives up on his patients and he fights for them when other Doctors disagree with his theory. His motivation is the success of treating his patients, not the social recognition. Dr. Sayer learned about his patients and their conditions before treating them. Human touch is so important throughout this film. This movie shows views a glimpse of mental health illness and inspirational insights on the human behavior. We see change in the behavior of the employees before the "awakening" happens and their behavior after. Prior to the "awakening", the workers were just going through their everyday motions without any emotions. However after it is clear they connect with the patients and are joyful.

Awakenings is a life-affirming movie that provokes deep thought into the value of our lives. This movie made me think about the important things I have in my life, my family, a good job and being able to attend college. Without a good health body, I would not be able to maintain a job or even be successful in school. Seeing in this film the patients in catatonic state of mind, they have restrictions like going on outside, even a set eating time. They will never be able to interact in a way that we can. Watching this movie really made me appreciate more my health and family. This movie has set me back to be more grateful for what I have and to appreciate the simple things like, work, my job and life. I notice today people do not know how to live and they struggle with appreciating the simple things. This movie was heart breaking when the side effects came Lowe returned to his catatonic state. We need to be grateful. I found the part of film when Lowe tries to gain

his freedom to inspiring. Lowe explains his feeling about the simple things in life like going for a walk most of us take for granted. Time is limited but we are infinite. Everything we do leads to our life we choose to live, and it is our choice to make our life meaningful.

Awakening was a great refresher to its audience that we are often too much caught up with negatives aspects in our life. We forget and take for granted the things we do have. Something as simple as brushing my hair, I am capable of doing, yet someone with catatonic or other unfortunates are struggling to just hold a brush. Things we consider normal like reading the newspaper, going for walks, even access to social media sites that we are blessed with, some people see those as a struggle. Watching this film, I can express my feelings of gratitude of just being thankful I am happy, healthy and alive. This film reminded me of the little things I need to stop and appreciate more often.

I watched this film with my little brother and it was interesting to see his reactions throughout. My little brother is 13 and can be found on his phone most of the time. By the end of this film, he was struggling to stay awake as it was a school night but asked me if I could leave it there so he could finish it the next day. He ended up staying up to watch it before going to bed and we talked about it the next day. I am glad I watched it with him to hear his take on the film giving me someone else to talk to about their reactions. I was honestly shocked as to how much information he picked up. He understood the different things the Doctor was doing to get a reaction from the patients like with the ball and music. I was surprised he noticed the clip where Dr. Sayer made the dose stronger as he kept upping and upping it.

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This was the first time my younger brother has been exposed to someone with such disability so he was asking my dad many questions. Questions like, how does someone get like that, are they born that way, do they have to stay in that hospital forever, can they understand people just not respond? Hearing the thoughts of a 13 year old throughout the movie I feel made it a better watch.

Watching this movie could not have come at a better time, and it is funny how I happened to choose this film over the other ones. I walked into the video store with the list and told the worker “ I need one of these films for a class, I don’t care which one.” *Awakening* caught his eye, as he knew they had it, so that is what I rented. This week was a rough week at work. Typically, boss issues and schedule not working out for fall class was having me stressed. I was struggling with the idea that my work may not work around classes and I could potentially lose my job. I kept thinking life is just not fair and that I do not have a backup plan I need to just figure it out. After watching *Awakening* I take back everything I said about my struggles. This movie made me take a step back and look at my life in a completely new perspective. I should be grateful for things I have and not take for granted my job. I am finding it so hard to explain this in this paper the importance it is to just be grateful for things we have, because some people are just struggling to make it to tomorrow. This movie has such a powerful impact on the appreciation of life and the value of meaning and purpose. When I was watching this film, I looked it up to read some information on it and found it to also be a novel. I do intend to purchase the novel and do some summer reading. I also learned that this movie is based on a true story! When I think

of watching a film or a class this is not what I had in mind. I will forever remember this movie and its impact it has left on me. When am struggling and having a bad day, I will appreciate what I have.