*Essay Number One: Which film shown in class “struck your visual nerve” and brought you the most knowledge about psychology?*

To be human is to be humane, to feel, and to readily engage ourselves when we are struck to the heart. Film is one area where one can observe this engagement happening. There is a simple process in which we take in information. We first gather information in our eyes. It then filters into our mind, and then once it has been processed it reaches our heart. This is why film has such a power affect on its observers. It captures the eye, draws us in, and then moves us. It causes what is called the “suspension of disbelief.” This is when an individual is truly engaged, as if it were real life, and starts to develop their own emotional and mental responses to the film. For me, the HBO TV series “In Treatment” we watched in class had the greatest over all affect on me because of “suspension of disbelief” and it also taught me the most about psychology, cognitive therapy, and helped me realize what aspect of psychology I’d like to specialize in.

As a class we watched several episodes of “In Treatment” following the sessions of Laura and Alex. The first thing the director did to draw us in was create a beautiful home environment where Paul conducted his sessions. The ultimate attention holder is the attractive main characters. Laura is probably in her late 20s, Caucasian, has long wavy brown hair, soft brown eyes, full lips, devious eyes and an overall high sex appeal. Alex is probably early 40s, black, tall strong stature, broad shoulders, deep voice, has a harming smile, and very handsome. However, they also look like people you would meet in real life. This is how we first get pulled into the lives and stories of Laura and Alex. Now that our eyes have been dialed in, our minds go to work.

While watching the sessions, you start to put yourself in Paul’s shoes as a therapist. You start to watch the body language of Alex and Laura very closely and remember their stories. The next step we took as a class was to separate what we know, from what we suspect is happening with the characters. For example, what we know about Laura is she’s a nurse, intuitive, a diver, likes to drink, she is manic and sexually deviant, needs a guardian, and is in love with Paul. However, there is not too much to suspect about Laura. With Alex on the other hand, it seemed the audience knew very little compared to what they suspected. We know that Alex was a fighter pilot for the Navy, has kids and a wife, and had a heart attack. We suspect that he was traumatized from a mission, he’s suppressing his feelings, punishing himself, lonely, perfectionist, has long set issues from his dad, and that he is gay. What I learned from doing this exercise is that even though we know more about Laura and suspect less, her situation is not any easier to help compared to Alex were you know less and suspect more. This is because no problem has an easy fix. The struggles they are facing are real and are no less difficult to handle just because their problems are of a different nature.

What I appreciated most about watching Laura and Alex is that I got to see elements of what I had learned in psychology 101. Some of these elements would be the psychodynamics of personality, handling stress, coping methods, self concept, communication types, friendship, love, marriage dynamics, gender role and behaviors, and sexual expression. I particularly noticed how transference becomes a very active role is therapy sessions, particularly with Laura. I learned from this how involved therapists become with their patients and how close they really get. This taught me how important doctor-patient ethics are. Being able to identify different psychological elements was very rewarding. Especially when what I suspected was confirmed as the season progressed.

As the suspension of disbelief took hold of me, I couldn’t help but take emotional sides with the plot of the story. I ended up wanting Paul and Laura to get together, even though Paul is still technically married. And I ended up being heart broken when Alex died in a training exercise when he went back to the Navy. Watching Laura was insightful but the death of Alex was particularly upsetting because in his final therapy session it becomes very clear Alex is gay. Shortly after Alex goes back to the military and stops his therapy sessions, he dies in a training accident that very well may have been suicide since Alex could have ejected from the cockpit. This has made me want to further study the cultural expectations on people and their link to clinical depression, namely in homosexuality. Not only did this film engage me in the cognitive therapy process, but it also made me want to study a specific aspect of psychology. I would really like to social research science on homosexuality by combining anthropology, psychology, and biology. In this way I hope to be able to help to prevent deaths like Alex’s.

*Essay Number Two: Using this definition and the knowledge that you have gained in this course, discuss the film that touched you most.*

Everyone one is in a race, an endurance race that tests even the strongest of character. Life is an endurance marathon that requires persistence without exception. Through all the struggles, pitfalls, and downs it is important that we have a resolve to continue in life. In current times, film and media are one of the best ways to instill positive messages. The film that touched me the most this semester and will stick with me the longest is “Persistence without Exception” by Andy Andrews.

Andy Andrews is the master mind behind the seven rules of decisions, the seventh one being “I will persist without exception.” In class we watched Andrews’ seminar on part seven of his book “Mastering the Seven Decisions.” Andrews explains that there is only reward for things that are tough. Great achievements are usually difficult and that's part of what makes them great. If it was easy, everyone would be doing it. This gives deserving ones the chance to rise above others and have an elevated state of being.

Andy Andrews also explains that you can persist and quit. This is where the “without exception” part comes into play. Most people decide to persist until things get difficult, which is not the same thing as persisting without exception. You have to make a firm resolve within yourself that you are going to achieve what you set out for. Your “I will” is more important than your IQ. If you feel there is no way to accomplish your goal, then ask yourself, “If I knew the way, what would I do?” The obvious answer is, “Well then I’d do it!” The real problem then, is that you are lacking an idea to accomplish your goal. To overcome this, you talk to as many people you can to brainstorm and also create a network of people who can possibly help you. It is necessary to create an idea and follow through with it. You follow your heart and you find a way to make it happen. However, you have to take control to make it happen.

In order to follow through with your goals, you need to TCB. You Take Care of Business by Taking Control Back. Make a plan immediately. Set a new year’s resolution; Let 2011 be the year you take control back. There are three things you can do to make your goals a reality: showing up on time to appointments (without exception), paying attention where ever you are (be here now), and do not be attached to outcomes (there is no such thing as failure). Here is another novel idea, act like you want to be wherever you are! Take control; do not let negative thoughts enter your mind. The truth of the matter is that you feel the way think. Even by putting on a fake smile, you will eventually feel happy yourself. You have the ability to control your environment. If you can control your environment you control the results you get. If you are not getting the results you want, then you need to get better or get busy.

I took Prof. Ray Rich Fall Semester of 2010 and now again in the Spring Semester of 2011. Every Friday morning for the past nine months has been a true blessing. I attribute my personal well being to his classes. The knowledge I have gained has been completely invaluable. His oral lectures as well as his use of applicable films have truly lived up to the expectations of a positive psychology course. “Persistence without Exception” by Andy Andrews and the accompanying instruction by Prof. Ray Rich has changed my life and it has strengthened my resolve to follow through with my dreams and aspirations.

*Essay Number Three: What have you learned about yourself from this course that you could share with other people?*

This class has been one of self reflection. It has helped my immensely in being able to know myself and then apply what I’ve learned to real life. For this essay, I have taken my class notes from the semester and will summarize the portions I found most helpful and have already shared with others in my life.

Hedonic adaptation was a concept that I learned that I found very interesting and have shared on several occasions since I learned it. Hedonic adaptation is the tendency to return to a normal level of happiness despite major positive or negative events or life changes. At every point in your life, you will return to your natural state of being. That is why being in love doesn’t last, or having a lot of money does not bring lasting happiness.

While watching the movie “Crash”, I learned that everyone is prejudiced.” A prejudice is a prejudgment, or an assumption about someone or something. The word prejudice can be used to refer to preconceived judgments about a person based off of race, social class, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or other personal characteristics. There is a difference however between being prejudiced, and being discriminatory. Discrimination is the actual behavior towards members of another group. It involves excluding or restricting members of one group from opportunities that are available to other groups. An individual does not need to actually be harmed in order to be discriminated against.

I also learned how to recognize an abusive relationship while watching the film “Once Were Warriors.” There are three stages in the cycle of violence within a relationship. The first is the “honey moon stage.” This is where the couple is very affectionate and intimate and all seems to be well. The next stage is “tension.” This is where things become strained. This can because be of small arguments, money problems, kids, or substance use. The next stage is “violence.” Abusive behaviors by either partner in an intimate relationship includes physical aggression like hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, throwing objects, or sexual abuse. Emotional abuse can be expressed as being controlling or domineering, or stalking. Being economically controlling is another way abuse can be expressed. After an out lash, the cycle starts over again at the “honey moon phase.”

One of the biggest things I’m taking away from this class is the CURET model. I started using it immediately in my life and also shared it with those close to me so that we can help overcome obstacles well. The CURET model creates a system in which one can evaluate love (not lust) in a relationship. Communication, understanding, respect, equality, and trust are the pieces of the love mosaic. All of these pieces are interdependent and are required to have a healthy love relationship. The order of the pieces is important as well. Each category is rated on a scale of 0-100 for each individual. No one can have a perfect score in any category however. Communication is the first element of the CURET model. Without a good rating in this category, none of the other categories can have high ratings. Understanding comes as a result of good communication. Respect follows the ability to deeply understand a person. Equality ties up the loose ends and makes the CURET model possible. Trust is the combining factor and result of satisfactory levels in the other categories. The CURET model helps you see and define your relationship with others.

Among other things, I have learned many useful quotes that I tell myself and others. They are as follows:

-A true friend can see through you and still enjoy the view.

-Get bitter or get better.

-FEAR: Future Expectations About Reality. False Evidence Appearing Real. Fuck Everything And Run. Family, Education, Authority, Religion.

-In a relationship, the person who cares the most pays the most. The person loves the least rules the most. That's why equity is so important.

-As the need to believe increases, the ability to tell truth from fiction decreases.

-Shall I postpone realization and acceptance and scream at my eyes?

-All problems cannot be solved to make everybody happy but all problems can be improved upon.

-Do I have the disease to please?

-Hey you know that thing going by? Yeah, it's your life. Do something about it. Stop waiting.

-Misery doesn’t enjoy company, it demands it.

-Begin with the end in mind.

-Hey, stop it! That will be five dollars.

These quotes serve as helpful reminder to myself and I plan on using them tactfully to help other. The information I have learned this semester will prove to be invaluable as I continue to better myself and help others around me.