Mental Illness portrayed in 'the Master' and 'Silver Linings Playbook'

by Cynthia Gomez - Feb 20, 2013

We often wish we could be like the fictional characters in films. Maybe they represent something magical that allows our imagination to expand vividly so we can relate to them or they can be someone so real but still far from the truth. There are some films with personalities that are so intense that they leave a viewer wondering if this is ultimately true.

In our lifetime, we may go through a horrible break-up that might leave us traumatized like Pat in "Silver Linings Playbook." Some of us might experience or witness someone with post-traumatic stress disorder due to war like Freddie in "the Master."

Both films follow characters with mental disorders and have received great criticism for portraying such illnesses. So the question arises, why are we interested in watching these broken characters? Both these movies might not suggest that we should view it as therapeutic, but maybe that we love watching crazy people unravel.

Like any piece of fiction "Silver Linings Playbook" should be viewed as a movie and nothing taken too seriously. The movie shows the complexity of manic disorders and how it can affect the people around the individual. But the movie overall didn't genuinely portray such illness.

"I felt from a cinema perspective the characters of 'Silver Linings' with the manic problems seemed very inconsistent throughout the film," film alumnus Jordan Allender said. "I'm not sure if that is a factor of the filmmaking or the illness but I just overall felt the main protagonist played by Bradley Cooper might not have been portrayed that well as someone with mental illness because he wasn't as crazy as one would imagined someone to be," Allender said.

That character, Pat, played by Cooper carried the bipolar disorder. The flashbacks in the movie show Pat snapping and beating a man after catching his wife in the shower with that man. This scene emphasizes the trauma that Pat suffered. The movie overall is about Pat as a complex

character and traumatized by an experience but eventually moving on by starting a new relationship with Tiffany, played by Jennifer Lawrence.

In "The Master" we are presented with a film that varies between elegance and brutality. Much can be said because it is amazingly shot and the stress disorder is evident. Freddie Quell, played by Joaquin Phoenix, carries a violent anger that can be compared to ravishing dog in a fight. His PTSD leaves him completely inhumane and dependent on toxic potions that take him to another world.

"The idea in "The Master" is of this man who suffers from an illness after the war and to have it be so sexually related was so interesting to watch. It is something not usually portrayed on the screen and it made it even more captivating," Allender added.

"You have a very skilled director who can give you a very eerie mood and actor who is willing to sacrifice anything. It made me really believe this man is slipping into deeper and deeper delusions and a higher state of crazy."

Deidra Sandoval,a graduate student studying family therapy, said she would never recommend for patients to see these movies as references because they are not typical people with disorders even if it's great to witness fictional characters with such disorders.

"Both PTSD and bipolar disorders are way more extreme than people can ever portray fictionally. It's ridiculous for people to come out of a theater believing that they know how people with these disorders truly act. However, people are attracted to seeing people with problem because more often than usual we like to wonder if this is how we would act with such disorders," Sandoval said.

"Silver Linings Playbook" and "The Master" are nonetheless inquisitive films in similar yet different ways. If they are efforts forced to play with our minds and make us believe that certain disorders are the way the films carry them it's to one's own interpretation. Still both films are great and are nominees for the highest honor in film for a reason.