

Movie Review: A Beautiful Mind

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STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

[*A Beautiful Mind*](#) is a powerful account of the life of Nobel Prize winner and mathematician John Nash. The movie depicts Nash's journey through life with schizophrenia. Nash displays many characteristic symptoms of schizophrenia, including hallucinations, delusions, fear of persecution, and lack of interpersonal relationships. In the beginning of the movie, Nash is an introverted, focused young man searching for the perfect original idea as a graduate student at Princeton's competitive math department. Even then it is apparent that Nash is different from his colleagues; he does not follow social cues and therefore does not have many interpersonal relationships. His main social connection is his roommate, Charles, who becomes his best friend. He develops a "game theory," contradicting 150 years of economic theory. This theory gains him a position at MIT. Through this position he meets and marries, Alicia, a graduate student who falls for Nash despite his social ineptness. As time progresses, Alicia watches Nash slowly distance himself from the real world as he works with Agent Parcher from the CIA who has recruited him to break codes. Eventually it becomes apparent that Nash requires psychiatric care, and Alicia discovers that her husband suffers from paranoid schizophrenia. Nash learns that not only is Agent Parcher a hallucination, but Charles and Charles's niece, whom he has maintained a close relationship with, are also hallucinations. After his institutionalization, Nash becomes very withdrawn from society, not venturing outside his house and is cared for primarily by his wife. This movie does an excellent job in highlighting the burden a psychiatric illness can put on loved ones. Alicia feels a burden in having to care for Nash as well as their newborn son, and is understandably despondent over the fact that Nash is not the man she married anymore. Nash finds that he does not have his same thinking abilities with taking the medication, so he, like many other patients with schizophrenia, secretly stops taking his medication. The seriousness of the matter becomes apparent to his wife when she finds his

shed full of newspaper clippings after allowing Nash to give their son a bath. Nash believes that Charles is watching his son, and if it were not for his wife, his son would have drowned. Nash and his wife agree that they would try and work things out without the medication; that if Nash knew what was real and what wasn't, he could function in the real world. Nash slowly reintegrates himself into the academic community. He slowly returns to teaching and research and in 1994, he receives the Nobel Prize in economics.

FACULTY PERSPECTIVE

The film *A Beautiful Mind* is based on the life of American mathematician, John Nash. The film won four Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director (Ron Howard), Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Supporting Actress (Jennifer Connelly). John Nash was played by Russell Crowe who received a nomination for Best Actor. The movie focuses on Nash's struggle with paranoid schizophrenia during the 1940s and 1950s. While the movie takes a few dramatic liberties with its depiction of schizophrenia, it also provides a fairly accurate portrayal of the disease. For example, symptoms typically begin in early adulthood for males and often involve a significant stressor, such as beginning graduate courses at Princeton University. The film brings Nash's paranoid delusions to life through the character of William Parcher, a fictional agent for the United States Department of Defense. Nash becomes fixated on his missions, which ultimately leads to hospitalization and psychiatric treatment. The psychosocial consequences the illness has on Nash's career and family are also reality for many patients suffering from severe mental illness. The film highlights another important component of mental health treatment; medication adverse effects. Nash begins treatment with an antipsychotic medication and experiences sedation and sexual dysfunction. He complains he is unable to think clearly and develop new areas for research, which causes him to self-discontinue his medication. After some time off the antipsychotic, his delusions return and he decompensates. This scenario is

an excellent teaching opportunity for pharmacy students and conveys the realistic struggle with medication adherence in this patient population. While the film does an impressive job with communicating many common components of paranoid schizophrenia, there are a few inaccuracies or dramatizations. For example, the film depicts Nash's hallucinations as complex visual hallucinations, which is uncommon and most often reported as auditory hallucinations (hearing voices). When using *A Beautiful Mind* as an educational tool, it is important to identify how positive symptoms of schizophrenia typically present. Overall, this film is a worthy teaching strategy that will augment traditional methods of conveying the realities of severe mental illness to students.

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