

5 Movies With Narcissistic Female Lead Characters



The five movies mentioned were all released in the past decade and have one thing in common: They feature a female narcissist as a lead character. The depictions of personality disorders in fictional media may not have increased in the past years, but many represent widely held misconceptions about profiles such as narcissism and psychopathy. Of course, this is not very helpful as it helps to perpetuate these wrong ideas and lead people to make lay diagnoses that are unsubstantiated and unhelpful.

Nowadays, it seems, diagnostic opinions are widely done to fit a personal narrative, such as to discredit or devalue a person, often for less reason than that he holds different values and beliefs. In a sense, labeling a person a psychopath or narcissist has become a national pastime, and the mainstream media and entertainment is jumping on the bandwagon to their advantage. Nevertheless, some movies make an honest effort to keep the depictions accurate.

As I wrote in a book chapter titled “Psychopaths in Film: Are Portrayals Realistic and Does It Matter?” (view/download the PDF [here](#)) in the book “[The Criminal Humanities](#)” edited by Michael Arntfield and Marcel Danesi, some producers recognize the need to act as a catalyst for insight and positive change rather than continued alienation, labeling, and misconceptions aimed at achieving a self-serving goal. Although many films and TV series still fall short in accurately depicting people with personality disorders, a few offer valuable perspectives.

#1: Notes on a Scandal (2006)

The [film](#) is based on Zoe Heller’s acclaimed novel, “[What Was She Thinking](#),” a tale about the relationship between an aging British schoolteacher, Barbara Covett (Judi Dench), and Sheba Hart (Cate Blanchett), the school’s beautiful and much younger new art teacher. Barbara, a closeted lesbian, immediately befriends Sheba, but their “friendship” becomes forced when the older woman discovers Sheba having an affair with a 15-year-old student and threatens to reveal all.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AruRpjQquQQ>

Barbara is cruel and needy in her obsessive yearning for Sheba, taking advantage of Sheba's vulnerability without guilt or remorse. She is looking at Sheba to fill a deep emotional void as she relentlessly stalks her. Although at least one critic pointed out the film's problematic portrait of a lesbian character, it highlighted narcissistic qualities in its larger-than-life, shocking, and wicked glory.

#2: August: Osage County (2013)

"[August: Osage County](#)" is a look at the lives of the strong-willed women of the Weston family. They have all gone their separate ways until a family crisis brought them back to their Oklahoma childhood home and the dysfunctional woman who raised them. Violet Weston (Meryl Streep) has cancer, abuses pills and alcohol, and her husband, who apparently wanted out, has gone missing. The film offers an insight into a narcissistic matriarch, the impact that it had on her children, and their attempts to escape this narcissistic legacy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Hd_uO72h1s

The film highlights the tendency of a narcissist to manipulate and twist her relationships to fit her delusional narrative and selfish needs. She uses several tactics like [gaslighting](#), manipulation, guilt trips, and stories about her being abused as a child to excuse and justify her toxic actions. Her eldest daughter, Barbara (Julia Roberts), especially, struggles with fears of becoming like her mother and repeating the cycle of abuse with her children.

#3: Black Swan (2010)

Another film with a narcissistic mother as a lead character is "[Black Swan](#)." Nina (Natalie Portman), who is a ballerina in a New York ballet company, lives with her obsessive and controlling mother, a former ballerina herself. When the artistic director of an upcoming Swan Lake concert pitches her against a competing dancer, Nina begins to get increasingly in touch with her dark side in an obsessively reckless way that threatens to destroy her.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ja1XOB-bs>

Her changed lifestyle creates tension with her mother, who has always pressured her daughter to live out her dreams and ambition. As a result, Nina battles to find her identity that is distinct and separate from her mother's expectations. With a life that used to be carefully orchestrated and protected by her mother, unraveling, Nina succumbs to depression, anxiety, and addictions, a fate that many children of narcissistic parents struggle with.

#4: Gone Girl (2014)

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Joan Swart, Psy.D. | Openforest.net | Eisner Institute for Professional Studies
<http://forensic-psychology.net>

This 2014 [film](#) based on the Gillian Flynn [novel](#) of the same title, is most often mentioned in the context of psychopathy. The lead female character, Amy Dunne (Rosamund Pike) is usually associated with a range of psychopathic traits, including lack of remorse and moral compass, pathological lying, a complete disregard for societal norms, and using a dramatic victim role to get what she craves, control and attention. However, dysfunctional personality traits are often not distinctly limited to one disorder and co-present in a constellation of symptoms.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ym3LB0IOJ0o>

[Research](#) suggests positive correlations between narcissism and psychopathy, as well as paranoid and borderline personality disorders. As John F. Edens, a psychology professor at Texas A&M University observed, “There is no bright line in the sand.” What is consistent with narcissism, is Amy’s desire for revenge and her passionate and all in pursuit of it when her husband cheated on her. She also desperately needs attention and is extremely arrogant and self-centered. Amy’s meticulous planning is a Machiavellian trait, which blends with narcissism and psychopathy to form the dark triad, a particularly toxic combination.

#5: The Devil Wears Prada (2006)

This [film](#) is about a smart and sensible new graduate, Andy Sachs (Anne Hathaway), who lands a job as an assistant to the demanding editor-in-chief of a high fashion magazine, Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep). Miranda is powerful and sophisticated, but also ruthless and merciless. As a portrayal of working with a narcissistic boss, “The Devil Wears Prada” illustrates the manipulation, fear, and intimidation that a typical narcissist employs in the workplace to further their goals, most often at the expense of others.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTDSwAxINhc>

Narcissists tend to micro-manage, need constant praise and admiration, creates insecurity and are demeaning to others at work. Using power differentials to their advantage, they tend to treat superiors better than subordinates, refuse to be blamed or share the credit, and have no regard for others’ wishes and needs. Narcissistic bosses are also adept in using their colleagues’ emotions as a sign of weakness and seeing it as an opportunity to pounce.