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Cinema Therapy: An Idea for Recreational Therapists
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Introduction

In today's world, people are learning more and more that therapy doesn't have one specific definition and the whole concept of therapy is relative from one situation to the next. For that reason, more counselors, psychologists, and therapists are branching out to include unique and nontraditional methods of working with patients, whether those individuals have a diagnosed mental condition or simply may be going through a rough time in life.

One of these nontraditional methods, which is gaining more speed regularly due to its success in cinema therapy. The very idea of watching movies as a therapy session can be a hard concept to grasp for many and that is why we will explore cinema therapy in greater detail through this report.

You will learn how it can be used by therapists, how it can be used at home, and how it is similar to other types of therapy methods used more and more today.

To begin with, let's establish what exactly cinema therapy is.

Chapter 1:

What Is Cinema Therapy?

For many people, going to see a movie is a treat for the family or a romantic date. There's nothing quite like the experience of getting the ticket, sitting in a darkened theater with a big tub of popcorn and a soda, and watching a new show on a big screen. While many people know that going to the movies is a great time, quite a few do not realize that it can actually be a therapy as well.

It's called cinema therapy, and according to the publication, *Psychology Today*, "technically, it's the process or practice of therapists instructing their clients to watch film(s) that are relevant to issues of personal distress and dysfunction." (Clyman, 2013)

Essentially, the purpose of cinema therapy is to help patients overcome various issues that could be negatively affecting their lives. However, the definition itself doesn't stop here. Cinema therapy encompasses many other things. Let's review a few of the goals accomplished through this therapy method.

Sense of Accountability

Often, patients who have trouble with handling emotions and they develop improperly adapted patterns in their relationships with others. Often, this, in turn, leads to a lack of accountability in a person's social life. They don't thoroughly understand why they do things and the consequences of their actions.

By watching a movie in which the protagonist faces a similar situation and has to deal with the consequences, individuals may come to understand how they could be affecting their social life. In that sense, cinema therapy prompts a sense of accountability. In fact, this often occurs when a person has not even entered therapy. They may see a movie, recognize their own actions in the film, and discover that they need to consider seeking professional help on their own.

Stress Management

Movies and films offer a form of escapism. When viewers sit in that theater, they don't think about the problems of their own lives, the stress they may be dealing with, or the issues they are facing. Instead, they focus on the characters on the screen. As a result, a great impact of cinema therapy can come in the form of stress management because viewers are able to escape from their problems.

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This is not the only way cinema can help aid in management of stress. Think of this scenario:

Have you ever watched a movie in which the protagonist did something incredibly unwise or downright “stupid”? Have you watched those scenes and thought to yourself that the mistakes you have made simply don’t seem so bad anymore? When watching a movie, there are two different forms of stress management that come from connecting with characters on the screen. A person may feel better about themselves by seeing someone else going through something worse. Alternatively, a viewer may feel better about themselves after they see the protagonist of a movie get in and then climb out of a bad situation, leading to the “if they could do it, so can I” notion.

Profound Emotional Experiences

Patients who are facing conditions in which they disconnect from their emotions or have too strong of a connection at times may find help in the form of cinema therapy. For example, PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder is a condition spurred by a traumatic event in the past. Patients who have been diagnosed with PTSD often keep themselves at a distance from their emotions in fear of a “flashback” to their traumatic event. However, by repressing their emotional connections, they are actually forcing even stronger flashback events. Patients with these types of conditions may find their symptoms lessened by watching movies that include emotional experiences.

In a sense, by eliciting emotional responses in the patient in a way that doesn’t connect with them personally, this allows the patient to connect with their feelings without feeling that they are connecting with their trauma.

Media Response

Often, you will see in the media, most people only consider the negative effects of cinema and television. Numerous news outlets link violent movies with violent outbursts in people. For this reason, you may wonder how watching a film could actually have a positive effect. As you continue to read this report and explore the numerous groups of people who can benefit from cinema therapy, you will be better able to understand the benefits as opposed to any negatives.

Cinema therapy, like bibliotherapy (which we will discuss later in this book), actually helps patients in numerous different ways, and while the majority of films used are uplifting and encouraging, some of them have darker or more serious topics. That’s because the goal is to help the patient reflect on their lives, see others who are dealing with the same issues, and know that they are not alone. Despite media attention on movies for the negative, there is definitely a positive impact off film on patients who may need it for mental health issues or even for passing concerns in their lives.

As you can see, the exact definition of cinema therapy is rather broad. It exists as a way to help patients cope with various concerns and issues whether in their life or mentally through

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watching movies. Through the rest of this guide, we will discuss the therapy in greater detail, describing how it can help mental health patients as well as other individuals, why it is used specifically, and how it shares similarities with another therapeutic device called bibliotherapy.

Chapter 2:

Why Is It Used?

In some groups, cinema therapy is considered a type of alternative or holistic healing. However, it is growing in popularity throughout mainstream psychologist circles as well. In fact, it has garnered enough attention that groups like the American Mental Health Association and *Psychology Today* have taken notice. The concept is even being used by religious circles, such as the Catholic's Divorce Survival Guide, which encourages cinema watching as a method of therapy in the wake of a split with a partner.

Why is it used? Quite simply, there is plentiful evidence that it works. A website devoted wholly to cinema therapy explains this in greater detail:

“One aspect of most movies is that they serve as allegories, in much the same way as do stories, myths, jokes, fables, or dreams, which can all be utilized in therapy. The cognitive effect of cinema therapy can be explained through recent theories of learning and creativity, which suggests that we have seven ‘intelligences’.” (Why Cinema Therapy Works)

The seven intelligences is a concept developed by Howard Gardner, a well-known and accomplished psychologist. These seven include:

1. Visual/Spatial – People who have tapped into this part of their intelligences are commonly very in-tune with physical space and creativity. Commonly, this is an intelligence associated with architects, multimedia developers, those who regularly daydream, and artists. In watching movies, the pictures, colors, and symbols of the film are methods of tapping into this intelligence.
2. Body/Kinesthetic – This intelligence reflects people who are effectively in tune with their body. Examples of those who have tapped into this intelligence include dancers, surgeons, and professional sports players. Obviously, the movement of the film itself as well as movement within the film taps into this intelligence.
3. Musical – Obviously, a part of the brain is directly affected by music and finds emotion or therapy in tunes specifically. People who have tapped into this

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intelligence often perform better in school, work, or any situation when music is playing. Throughout movies, sounds and music are used to enhance the story, and this helps connect viewers with their musical intelligence.

4. Interpersonal – People who just seem to be able to “read” others based on body movements, facial reaction, and speech have tapped into their interpersonal intelligence. Often, those who have found this intelligence work as therapists, motivational speakers, and more. The whole storytelling concept and trying to determine what will happen next helps viewers connect with their interpersonal intelligence.
5. Intrapersonal – This is similar to the interpersonal intelligence, but it refers to people who are in tune with their own inner feelings, such as motivation, intuition, wisdom and conscience. The inner guidance shown in characters within the movie will help viewers find their own intrapersonal intelligence.
6. Linguistic – This intelligence refers to people who actually think in words or connect everything with words specifically. They are often very good at word games and writing. Obviously, the dialogs within the movie allow viewers to use their linguistic intelligence whether they are trying to glean what a character will do next or what is not being said in a conversation.
7. Logical-Mathematical – The final intelligence has to do with reasoning and calculations. People who have tapped into this intelligence are often very good at logic games, mysteries, and puzzles. The plot itself will tap into the logical intelligence. This is often seen when viewers feel that a plot doesn't make sense. That's because it is not connecting with their logical side.

(Multiple
Intelligences)

Essentially, many professionals have found that patients who are able to better connect with more of their multiple intelligences are also able to cope with situations in an easier manner.

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Because watching movies taps into these intelligences, it allows viewers to see and think of things on a wholly different level.

Positive Effects through Enjoyable Entertainment

Let's not discount the enjoyable experience that comes along with cinema therapy. Many people dread the concept of therapy, even if they have never been, and for that reason, they are resistant and they do not see progress in their lives as long as they fight against it.

Cinema therapy is different. People who use this method are actually connecting themselves with something enjoyable. Because they enjoy the film itself, they open themselves up to a greater impact from the therapy. This is one of the many reasons why the method is used – professionals have recognized that introducing an enjoyable experience can make a therapy session more productive.

The Importance of Processing the Movie

Of course, for cinema therapy to work, it is important that patients and individuals to actually process the movie. If they are fully focused on the storyline itself, they may miss what they could learn from the film or how they could relate. Actually walking through the movie and processing it allows people to connect on a different level.

This is why numerous psychologists and therapists have a specific way they use cinema therapy. This is usually not a method used in a one on one setting. Instead, therapists use cinema therapy in a group setting. Then, once the film or film clip has been viewed, the therapist opens up the group to discussion and processing. Often, this is easier for many patients since it keeps the focus off of them and on the movie itself. Additionally, the group discussion time may allow a patient to recognize something in the film they may not have seen otherwise.

So, whether a patient is a part of a cinema therapy process with their mental health professional or a person is trying to use cinema therapy on their own, the process can only work if the viewer actually takes the time to think about what they have watched and mentally process the film so that they can see how they actually do relate or they can glean what they can learn.

As more people within the field find that cinema therapy can work, it will likely grow in use throughout the country and world. Now, let's move on to how cinema therapy actually benefits mental health patients specifically.

NOTE: You can process movies with the use of Danny Pettry's Cinema Therapy Game!

For information, go here: www.DannyPettry.Com/game.html

Chapter 3:

How Cinema Therapy Benefits People

For patients receiving mental health services, there are things standing in the way of them truly getting the help they need from therapists. One of these things is a lack of communication. The patient may simply not know how to say what they are thinking, feeling, or experiencing.

This lack of words can cause a roadblock of sorts in therapy. An additional problem that can arise is in the form of focus. No one wants to be told there is something wrong with them, and even if the mental health patient has handled their diagnosis well, they may be uncomfortable having to address the fact that something is wrong with them over and over again.

These two very specific issues can be benefitted through cinema therapy.

Switch in Focus

Dr. Fuat Ulus is a consultant psychiatrist at St. Vincent Hospital in Erie, Pennsylvania. He used cinema therapy regularly in a group program and he points out that it can offer a change in focus for patients. (Ulus) Essentially, he believes that cinema therapy provides a change in focus that allows patients to see things in a different light.

When someone watches a movie or a clip of a movie and they are able to see a character with whom they connect, the focus is no longer on the patient and what is wrong with them. Instead, the focus is on the character in the movie.

This allows the patient to talk more freely about a certain issue or condition without feeling as if they are condemning themselves. Often times, when a person has a different avenue with which to talk, especially about a problem that relates especially to their own issues, they will be able to discuss things in a manner that they were never able to address.

Therapists and psychologists have seen this change in focus work for numerous different patients with mental conditions, such as anxiety disorders, narcissistic personality disorder, and PTSD.

New Vocabulary

When patients do not have the ability to specifically express how they are feeling or what they want to say, it could be that cinema therapy will be enormously useful.

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“One of the benefits of movie therapy is that it provides a shared vocabulary for the therapist and group members. Dr. Ulus believes that movies serve as powerful metaphors, and that the strength of people’s reactions to them makes films remarkably useful for getting patients to open up.” (Ulus)

Think about it this way. A patient may be feeling something particular, let’s say in this case, seasonal affective disorder. Let’s say that patient is having immense trouble explaining exactly how “down” they feel every fall and winter. Maybe they only keep saying they are sad, but sadness doesn’t explain everything. If that patient is watching a movie and a character in that movie is experiencing the exact same symptoms, then they can point this out to the therapist. Because the therapist has also watched the movie, it is easier to glean what is going on and what needs to be done about it.

This new vocabulary can open infinite realms for therapy on a variety of different mental disorder treatments.

According to Michael Lee Powell, some of the conditions that can be addressed with cinema therapy include:

- Major Depression
- Hopelessness
- Addiction
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Eating Disorders

Most professionals agree that if cinema therapy is used as a method in conjunction with standard therapy methods, this can be an excellent way to manage a variety of mental health conditions. It cannot be used as a main form of therapy, especially for those who have serious psychological disorders, but when used as a branch of the overall treatment program for a patient, it has had numerous positive results.

It is important for a therapist to evaluate each patient’s condition before determining if cinema therapy could be the right option. That’s because this is considered a supportive therapy to be used in conjunction with other methods. As numerous experts point out, watching film cannot resolve a serious mental health issue all on its own. However, it can help if the right films are chosen.

However, cinema therapy is not just limited to the realm of mental conditions. In fact, there are many websites and resources dedicated to how people in general can benefit from the therapy, whether they manage it on their own or they go to a professional. Even people who are “just going through something” can benefit from watching certain films. Let’s address this next.

Chapter 4:

Others Who Could Benefit from Cinema Therapy

Virtually anyone can benefit from using cinema therapy in a variety of different situations. It is not simply limited to patients of therapists and those who have mental conditions. For example, parents can use cinema to help explain important life concepts to their children. Additionally, men and women can use the therapy to overcome major changes in their life like a death in the family or divorce. Let's look at a few different categories of life issues that could be helped through cinema therapy.

Challenges

Challenges can come along in all shapes and forms throughout life, from a very difficult test in school to dealing with rough work or home situations. Those who wish to watch film and gain inspiration to overcome challenges can consider a variety of different movies.

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem can be an issue for children, teens, and adults. Cinema therapy can often benefit viewers because they will be able to see how someone else is going through the same issues. Some movies suggested include:

- Billy Elliot
- Erin Brockovich
- My Big Fat Greek Wedding
- The Other Sister

Children and Teen Issues

Children and teens go through numerous different issues that can be very difficult and often, the children don't talk to their parents about these problems. When parents watch movies with their

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children, they can use this as a way to open the door to communications. Examples of lessons that can be addressed include:

- Bullying – Ever After, Mean Girls, My Bodyguard
- Fears – The Brave Little Toaster and the Lion King
- Loss – Bridge to Terabithia, Fly Away Home, and Shadowlands
- Teens Searching for Their Identity – October Sky, Good Will Hunting, Stand By Me, The Graduate, and Ferris Bueller’s Day Off
- Becoming an Adult – Breaking Away, Father of the Bride, Little Women, and the Graduate

There are books written specifically about how cinema therapy can be used with children and teens so that you can learn more if you would like. Interestingly, a parent who uses this method with their child will likely find more than one benefit.

The child may be more willing to communicate their own problems or issues in their lives. Even if they do not directly say what is bothering them, the comments they make through the movie can help lead the parent in the right direction. Additionally, the parent will be able to encourage communication by asking the child questions about the movie or characters. In addition to these mental and emotional benefits, cinema therapy even gives parents a reason to spend more time with their children. This connection alone could be enough to help children be more willing to talk with their parents.

Essentially, the list of different ways that cinema therapy can help virtually anyone could go on for pages and pages. By looking into more extensive resources, you can find list of films that will help you or someone else cope with your situation. Be sure to consult with the resources in this book or from other reputable sources so that you do not get lead down the wrong path if you intend to use cinema therapy on your own.

Chapter 5:

How Is Cinema Therapy Like Bibliotherapy?

Another type of therapy method used in the modern world is bibliotherapy. This is a very similar concept, though it has been in use longer. Bibliotherapy is often simply called book therapy and it refers to the use of the written word to help people deal with mental conditions or to cope with problems that come and go in their lives.

Have you ever read a book and almost felt a cathartic response? That's because, like cinema therapy, bibliotherapy allows a patient to see things through another's eyes or to view a situation from the outside.

Both cinema therapy and bibliotherapy are forms of a method called "expressive therapy." Let's explore some of the many ways these two are similar.

Communication

Patients who find it hard to communicate with their therapist can benefit from either type of therapy. One of the main goals of both cinema therapy and bibliotherapy is to allow people to connect so that they can communicate their own concerns, thoughts, or feelings.

It is infinitely easier to reference a character on a television screen or point out a paragraph in a book and say "this is what I am feeling" Both types of therapies open more communication doors and this can be a very helpful aid for therapists who are trying to better understand their patient's needs.

Focus

We have already discussed how cinema therapy takes the focus off the patient so that they feel less like they are a bug pinned down under a magnifying glass. Bibliotherapy works in much the same way. Patients can connect to a character within the book and talk about that character instead of having to talk about themselves and what is viewed as wrong with them. This shift in focus makes it easier for patients to cope with their own situations.

Less Singling Out

One of the main concepts that both cinema therapy and bibliotherapy has in common is to help people feel less like they have been singled out. Instead of feeling as if the patient or individual is

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the only person experiencing their symptoms, this type of therapy allows the person to see that they are not the only one.

Essentially, the character in the film or the book is going through the same thing, and the author either saw this issue as important enough or experienced the issue enough to write about it. This tells the viewer or reader that even more people have experienced this issue.

Specific Problems

Both cinema therapy and bibliotherapy focus on helping patients and individuals with similar problems, including:

- Mental Health Issues, such as anxiety, depression, fears, and more
- Stress and chronic stress disorders
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness for children and adults
- Addictive behavior involving drugs, alcohol, and virtually anything else
- Self-esteem issues
- Learning disabilities
- Chronic physical health problems, such as illness, disability, and more
- Death and loss of a family member, pet, or other loved one
- Major life changes, such as abuse, divorce, adoption, loss of job, or loss from natural disasters

As you can see, there is a direct correlation between what cinema therapy and bibliotherapy can be used to treat.

Group Sessions

As mentioned previously, cinema therapy is often used in group therapy sessions so that patients feel less like they are the focus on the discussion and so that patients may learn from each other to recognize something in the film that they may not have seen on their own. Bibliotherapy is much the same.

Group sessions involve the patients either reading a book previous to the session or reading a section in the session itself and then discussing it. Again, this allows the patients to feel less like they are considering what is wrong with themselves and more like the focus is on the characters and plot of the book. Additionally, patients may take insight, cues to look into something more deeply, or thoughts they may not have otherwise had just by being a part of a group discussion.

Generally, the choice to use either cinema therapy or bibliotherapy will depend on the therapist as well as the patient. Since both can be used to treat similar conditions, the therapist will need to determine which method the patient will respond to the most. For example, a patient who is very visually oriented may benefit more from watching films. Additionally, cinema therapy and bibliotherapy are not necessarily exclusive. These two methods can be used in conjunction with each other if the therapist decides this would be a good option.

Both cinema therapy and bibliotherapy do not necessarily focus specifically on movies and books considered “classic” or “award winning”. That’s because several things have to be considered in the therapy choice, such as relevance to the viewer, accuracy to the situation, and more. That’s why many of the films and books used are considered pop culture or modern. It has less to do with how good the book or film is or how critically acclaimed it is. Instead, it matters that the book or movie will help the patient in some manner.

Additionally, both forms of therapy can be used on a professional manner as well as a personal manner. In other words, people could choose to watch movies or read books on a therapeutic method all on their own, especially if they are dealing with certain life or social situations. Alternatively, people can become a part of a therapy session through a professional counselor, therapist, or psychologist. This means that both methods are versatile in who they can help and how they can help.

Chapter 6:

Cinema Therapy Resources

There are numerous resources available that you could turn to in order to find out more about this therapy method. These include the following.

Books

Reel Therapy: How Movies Inspire You to Overcome Life's Problems, Gary Solomon

The Motion Picture Prescription: Watch This Movie and Call Me in the Morning, Gary Solomon

Cinema Therapy, Birgit Wolz

The Cinematic Mirror for Psychology and Life Coaching, Mary Banks Gregerson

Movie Therapy, Moving Therapy, Ulus Fuat

The Cinema Therapy Workbook, Brigit Wolz

Cinema Therapy: The Girl's Guide to Movies for Every Mood, Beverly West

The Healing Movie Book – Precious Images: The Healing Use of Cinema in Psychotherapy, Michael A. Kalm

Websites

www.dannypetry.com/cinematherapy.html

WebMD Movie Therapy, <http://www.webmd.com/mental-health/features/movie-therapy-using-movies-for-mental-health>

American Mental Health Foundation,
<http://americanmentalhealthfoundation.org/2012/03/cinematherapy/>

Cinema Therapy Review, <http://www.cinematherapyreview.com/film/resources.cfm>

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Bibliotherapy

Read Two Books and Let's Talk Next Week, Janice Maidman Joshua

The Novel Cure: From Abandonment to Zestlessness: 751 Books to Cure What Ails You, Susan Elderkin

Bibliotherapy: The Girl's Guide to Books for Every Phase of Our Lives, Beverly West

Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh,

<http://www.carnegielibrary.org/research/parentseducators/parents/bibliotherapy/>

Huffington Post,

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/21/bibliotherapy_n_1817968.html

Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, <http://www.goodtherapy.org/bibliotherapy.html>

American Library Association, <http://www.ala.org/tools/bibliotherapy>

You can also do your own research online to find even more resources. However, it is vital that anyone who is doing research pays enough attention to ensure they are looking into only reputable resources. The Internet is a vast and resourceful database, but it is also the source of “junk” materials. So, if you do research on cinema therapy or bibliotherapy, make sure you look into the author and other details of the source to ensure it is reputable.

Danny Pettry's Game

Get the Game **2 to 8 players**
45 minutes
Ages: 12+



The image shows the game box for 'Danny Pettry's Cinema Therapy Card Game'. The box is black with a yellow and red logo that says 'CINEMA THERAPY' and 'Card Game'. To the right of the box are two sample cards. The top card is titled 'Emotions' and has a yellow and orange gradient bar. It contains the text: 'Tell when a character appeared to be afraid. Personal: Give an example of what was going on when you have felt afraid in life.' The bottom card is titled 'Meaning in Life' and has a blue gradient bar. It contains the text: 'What was the moral of the story? What would you say is the moral of your own life?'. Both cards feature film-related icons like film reels and strips.

Go to this site:
www.DannyPettry.com/game.html

Click on this link:

www.DannyPettry.com/game.html

Conclusion

Therapy comes in many different forms, in the modern day more than ever. That's because professionals have begun to recognize more and more that methods different from the traditional ones used can be extremely helpful. This is why cinema therapy has become more common in modern therapy offices and settings.

The use of film as a form of therapy has shown to be very helpful for a variety of people, including those who are suffering from mental health conditions as well as those who are facing a specific life issue.

Because of the versatility behind cinema therapy, it can be used in a formal setting, such as the office of the therapist or psychologist or even in a person's own home.

If you are interested in learning more about cinema therapy, or bibliotherapy as it is mentioned in this book, then consider looking through the resources listed in the final chapter.

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