



Balanced Living

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Cinema Therapy: The Power of Film

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Movies often have the uncanny ability to temporarily deliver our minds to a place where we can express a wide range of emotions in a way that connects us with the main characters or movie theme without the concreteness of our own life dilemmas. "Cinema therapy is the process of using movies made for the big screen or television for therapeutic purposes," says Gary Solomon, PhD, MPH, MSW, author of *The Motion Picture Prescription* and *Reel Therapy*.

"It can have a positive effect on most people except those suffering from psychotic disorders. In fact, Solomon often lectures at prisons to help inmates learn to use movies as therapy to see what they have done to get them into their current predicament and, hopefully, to learn from it.

The idea is to choose movies with themes that mirror your current problem or situation. For example, if you or a loved one has a substance abuse problem, Solomon suggests *Clean and Sober* or *When*

a Man Loves a Woman, or if you are coping with the loss -- or serious illness -- of a loved one, he may suggest *Steel Magnolias* or *Beaches*.

When watching such movies as a form of therapy, he says to look for the therapeutic context such as addiction, death/dying, abandonment or abuse, the ability to reach out and touch the viewer, and the overall content or subject matter.

Many Faces and Forms of Cinema Therapy

"There's not one definition of cinema therapy," says Oakland, Calif.-based cinema therapist Birgit Wolz, PhD, author of *The Cinema Therapy Workbook: A Self-Help Guide to Using Movies for Healing and Growth*.

There's "popcorn cinema therapy," which can include watching a movie for a needed emotional release. According to Wolz, popcorn cinema therapy is rather heavy on cinema and rather light on therapy.



“Be the
hero of
your own
life
story”

-Nim’s Island 2008

In what she dubs as "evocative cinema therapy," Wolz prefers to use movies as therapy to help others learn about themselves in more profound ways based on how they respond to different characters and scenes.

When watching movies, Wolz recommends sitting comfortably and among other things, noticing what you liked and didn't like about the movie and which characters or actions seemed especially attractive or unattractive.

She also suggests asking yourself whether there were any characters in the movie who modeled behavior that you would like to emulate.

A Word of Caution

People who are in therapy should not cancel their next therapy session to catch a matinee. Like art therapy, dance therapy, and music, you can bring it into a traditional form of therapy, and **as an accessory** it can be very useful.

Also be aware that some movies are not totally correct in their portrayal of all symptoms. The media can contribute to or helps eradicate inappropriate, outdated and unrealistic views of mental illness and chemical dependency.



Life in 3D

Wear 3D glasses everywhere for a week, it's an easy filter that we can remove - yet it reminds us of all the other filters that remain.

From birth, our brain starts to form filters to sort through the billions of pieces of



information that we receive on a regular basis. As an example of a filter, drive a new car sometime. You will be amazed at how many similar cars (same color or same model) you will see on the roads that you never noticed before. In truth, the number of cars of that type on the road has not changed, but your perception and focus has.

Every experience we have since birth creates, enhances, confirms, or removes a filter. That's a LOT of filters (perceptions) we have stacking up! And each of these perceptions has altered our experience of the world around us. Perhaps subconsciously we have a filter that modifies how we feel about people in brown suits. When we met a person in a brown suit, we will automatically expect something (good or bad) from them. This isn't based on reality, it's just a filter that we don't even know we have.

Your uncle always gave you candy, and he always wore a brown suit. You never really paid attention to his suit, but your mind did. It created a filter called "Brown Suit Man," and now filters everything you see through this filter.

If your boss wears a brown suit and gives you a compliment, you take the compliment as a GREAT compliment, because your mind was looking for the reward (the candy). This type of filter isn't bad at all, it makes you feel good.

Your aunt, however, wasn't so nice. She smelled funny, was

kind of rude to you, and always wore green glasses. When you were 7, you created the "Green glasses on the mean lady" filter. You don't know about this filter, but it's still there after all this time. Now, after years and years of green glasses being out of style, you have the unfortunate incident of walking into the hair salon to get your hair done, by a very nice stylist with green glasses.

By the time the appointment is over, you will be unhappy. The hair won't be just right, or you will feel she was rude. It's not reality, but it is still real to you. Your mind decided that you were going to be unhappy, so you were - and you will hyper focus on ANYTHING negative you can to achieve that hidden goal.

By knowing everything we see, hear, touch, taste, and feel is filtered many times over as we process it - we have the opportunity to stop and question our perceptions and look beyond our own reality to see the truth.

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If your life were a movie, what genre would it be – a comedy? a tragedy? a melodrama? Would you want to watch this movie? Would you recommend it to your friends? If the story of your life were made into a book, where would you find it in the bookstore – with the romance novels? the success stories? science fiction? Would you want to read this book?

Every moment of every day **you are writing the script for the movie of your life.** Every moment of every day **you are composing your autobiography.**

You are choosing many things about your life – the location, the cast of characters, the joy, the sorrow – and much more. You're the writer, the director, and the star of this wonderful production.

Do you allow yourself to dream big or do you keep your circumstances safe and predictable? Do you dare to believe that

you can really and truly have whatever you desire or do you find yourself settling, compromising and doing without? Want a better life? Write a bigger and better script. **As you change your script, you change the direction of your life.**

With scripting, you experience what you want as if it's happening NOW rather than some time in some possible future. With scripting, you see and feel yourself living in accordance with a script that is custom made for you by you. The more you feel it, the more real it becomes, and the more powerfully you are attracting it. Scripting helps you get clarity about what you truly desire, which keeps you focused on (and, therefore, attracting) what you want rather than what you don't want.

Life scripting has been used in therapy for many years. Life coaching is another "angle" that may help you clarify your goals and direct you to your ideal life.

Mike is a Licensed Professional Counselor in Northwest Metro Atlanta, Georgia. He has been in the mental health profession for 20 years and provides psychotherapy for children, adult individuals and couples. Mike is also a Certified Life Coach and assists others to discover their true potential.

Please feel free to contact him with comments on topics in this newsletter or suggestions for future articles.