

Entertainment

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Films fit variety of emotions

By Cassandra Braun
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

It's no mystery; we self-medicate with movies to fit our mood. But by applying the techniques of cinema therapy, psychologist Birgit Wolz says we can gain much more. And it's a lot cheaper than going to a therapist.

Here are a few quick ways to use movies as a catharsis.

A laughing matter

Modern research confirms what we already know: Laughing makes us feel better. If you're feeling depressed or anxious, choosing a comedy can be an emotional release.

Studies suggest laughing has physical benefits as well, like boosting the immune system and decreasing "stress" hormones. And if you're happy and you know it, Wolz says movies can enhance that feeling.

Some sunny films include "Groundhog Day," "Annie Hall," "Babe," "The Brothers McMullen," "Fried Green Tomatoes," "A Fish Called Wanda," and "Four Weddings and a Funeral."

Crying rivers

Sometimes the prescription calls for a "good cry." Watching a movie that make us weep, Wolz says, has a way of releasing repressed emotion, whether it's stress or sadness.

Again, recent science has a physiological explanation. Researchers found that when people cry they release two important neurotransmitters: leucine-enkephaline -- one of the brain's natural pain-relieving "opiates" -- and prolactin, which is released by the pituitary gland at the first sign of stress.

Some good "bawlers" include "An Affair to Remember," "Miracle on 34th Street," "The Color Purple," "Grand Canyon," "Terms of Endearment" and "Steel Magnolias."

Looking for hope

If you're feeling a little helpless or discouraged, don't take it out on your local drive-through cashier. Live vicariously through cinematic heroes who have fought the odds, or use their example to gain the courage to change your own life.

Again, Wolz says, different people will identify with different characters, so find one that fits you.

Some inspiring movies: "Forrest Gump," "Chariots of Fire," "Do the Right Thing," "Field of Dreams," "Gandhi," "The Shawshank Redemption" and "Erin Brockovich."

Half-empty thinking

Sometimes it's difficult to see the silver lining even if you're trapped in a silver-plated mine, as is the case of Bill Murray's character in "Groundhog Day." Or maybe you feel like Woody Allen, who "would never wanna belong to any club that would have someone like me for a member."

Wolz suggests watching films where characters overcome personal doubt and external obstacles to accomplish some goal.

Movies include: "Groundhog Day," "Dead Poets Society," "My Left Foot," "Erin Brockovich," "Philadelphia" and "Welcome to the Dollhouse."

Let's talk

Eh? Whad'ya say? Sometimes we think our mates or friends should be mind readers. Or, we figure

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we're talking about a concept unfamiliar to them. Or, in many cases, our egos block us from hearing what they say. In any case, Wolz says, many times the message breaks down most often with the ones we love.

She suggests watching these movies as a couple, to jump-start a conversation: "About Last Night," "The Accidental Tourist," "The Brothers McMullen," "The Doctor," "He Said, She Said," "Out of Africa" and "When a Man Loves a Woman."



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