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- CELEBRITY
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- RELATIONSHIPS
- FAMILY
- LIFESTYLE
- HOROSCOPES
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Movie Therapy

by Natalie Hunt

Some therapists are now using films in their sessions as a way of helping patients identify with emotions and relationship problems. Find out how your favourite flick could help you...

Rustle up some popcorn, dim the lights and make yourself comfortable on the couch. The therapists couch that is, because movie therapy is coming soon to a psychotherapist near you. Let Orlando Bloom guide you through bereavement in Elizabethtown. Or maybe Pride and Prejudice could help sort out your complicated love-life. Whatever the dilemma, the power of the silver screen could be the solution.



According to Birgit Wolz, a psychotherapist based in California, there are many ways a movie can shed new light on a problem. 'The right film can help the patient gain awareness of their situation and look at it more objectively,' she explains. 'The fact that a character or a scene moved someone might indicate their subconscious mind is revealing information that might guide them toward healing.'

Wolz offers examples of how films can be used to counter negative beliefs in her book, E-Motion Picture Magic. She explains how couples could use When Harry Met Sally to sort out a rocky relationship. 'Notice how they experience many different kinds of emotions and are able to forgive each other for their mistakes,' she says. 'Are you willing to tolerate the different kinds of emotions that often change relationships?'

The UK's leading movie therapist Bernie Wooder agrees film can help people see their problems from a new perspective. 'My clients have been able to capture something through films they haven't been able to give words to,' he insists. Wooder's first breakthrough using film was when his patient's predicament reminded him of a scene in On the Waterfront where Marlon Brando feels betrayed by his brother. 'I showed the scene to the client and they really reacted strongly to it. From then on I started to use film.'

Of course no one should skip their next session to settle down with a rom-com. Both



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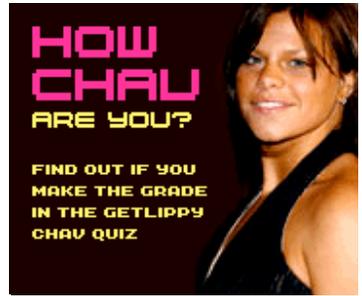
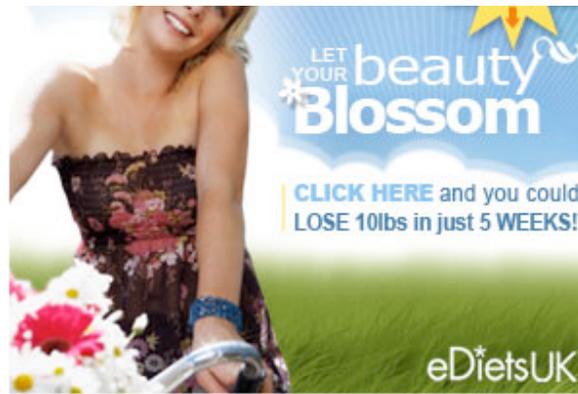
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Wolz and Wooder stress film should only be used as a tool in therapy, not as a therapy in itself. And as Phillip Hodson of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy explains, using films as part of treatment is not as unusual as it sounds.



'In therapy anything that brings out a strong reaction in the patient can help to reveal something about their emotional circumstances,' he explains. 'I have a clock on my wall. If a patient is disturbed by its ticking then it could reveal their anxieties. Equally, if a patient comes in and says he strongly identified with Bill Murray's character in Lost in Translation, I might start wondering - not just whether he was depressed - but by how much.'

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And with another glitzy awards season underway, it turns out this year's nominees could include a few winners for film therapy too. Walk the Line, North Country and Good Night and Good Luck all feature characters that have to fight to overcome their challenges. Wolz hopes viewers will identify with this and 'gain strength and courage themselves'. Just remember to thank the academy when you're on the road to recovery.

'Ever tried psychosexual therapy?'
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