

- ▶ News
- ▶ Sports
- ▶ Entertainment
- ▶ Lifestyle
- ▶ Editorial
  
- ▶ Contact
- ▶ About
- ▶ JNM Assistant

## Therapy and the Cinema

*Therapists are now turning to film as a way of helping people work through their problems.*

By: Cara Loverock

They make us laugh, they make us cry, but can they help us work out psychological problems? Movies have been a major source of entertainment for decades, but some in the medical field say that, when watched with a conscious eye, films can help us deal with deeper problems in our lives.

Cinema therapy is a new form of treatment that is gaining ground and becoming a more common practice by many psychiatrists. Watching a film certainly can be cathartic for some, and doctors have realized the possible benefits to our mental health. Many believe film has the power to help people deal with the ups and downs of their real lives.



With cinema therapy, psychiatrists use films to help the patient understand their own feelings or situation by watching a movie that they can relate to. The patient can get a better understanding by watching characters they identify with or situations that mirror their own and will be able to get a better perspective on their own life.

Movie therapy is being practiced in many countries, including Britain where this form of treatment is approved by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. There are also plenty of self-help books available on the topic, like *The Motion Picture Prescription* by Gary Solomon, PhD.

Many websites have also popped up including, [cinematherapy.com](http://cinematherapy.com), which is maintained by Oakland-based cinema therapist Birgit Wolz, PhD, author of *The Cinema Therapy Workbook: A Self-Help Guide to Using Movies for Healing and Growth*.

This form of treatment started being widely used in the mid-1990's, Wolz believes therapists have been using films to help their patients, "as long as movies have existed".

Cinema therapy is a less researched method of treatment as it has only recently come to be widely recognized. Although it can be used with almost anyone, Wolz says, "I would not use movies exclusively with someone who is seriously ill".

Wolz says movies can be used and discussed by a patient "like a dream". When choosing a film for therapeutic purposes it is best to use a film that has a similar theme; Wolz suggests, for example, *Under the Tuscan Sun* for someone experiencing divorce.

This new form of therapy has been taken a step further by the Chicago Institute for the Moving Image. Films aren't just watched by individuals seeking help for mental disorders, they are now creating their own. The institute assists the patient in the writing, producing and directing of their own movie.

The idea behind allowing those with mental illness to make their own film is two-fold. One reason is the work involved in making a movie entails a lot of order and organization which people with these kinds of illness, like clinical depression and schizophrenia, need. Also, by creating their own movie, they allow others to see the world as they do and

possibly create a greater understanding of their condition.

While cinema can act as a great tool in helping people deal with their problems, one should not cancel their next therapy session and head to the theater. Experts caution that, like music or dance therapy, art can be worked into traditional forms of therapy, but not as a sole means of treatment.

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