



The Role of Unifying-Experiential Cinematherapy (U.e.ct.) in Developing Creativity and Reducing Depressive Symptoms in Young People

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ABSTRACT

Unifying-experiential cinematherapy (U.E.C.T.) is an attractive technique that implies using motion pictures as a support in the process of personal development and as a catalyst for a creative and harmonious manifestation in order to ensure wellness, inner and external balance.

The main goal of the paper is to build, implement and identify the effects of a cinematherapy-centered personal development program adapted to young participants' development needs and directed towards the behavioral optimization related to the enhancement of creativity and reduction of depressive tendencies. Methods used: Creativity Test, Beck Depression Inventory, Cinematherapy-centered personal development program. Our research hypothesis, according to which there are statistically significant differences regarding the creativity parameter and the depressive symptoms parameter as an effect of applying a cinematherapy-centered experiential personal development program, is confirmed. Cinematherapy helps the participants to discover themselves and the world, as well as to identify creative resources, overcome blockages and create healthy coping strategies by means of therapeutic guidance.

KEYWORDS : creativity, depressive tendencies, cinematherapy, unifying experiential psychotherapy

INTRODUCTION

People of all ages use movies as a form of relaxation and entertainment. However, according to Rusu, E.C. (2008), the movie fulfills many other functions besides relaxation, such as the social-cultural function; the function of evading the day-to-day life; the emotional reward/cathartic function; the function of producing the altered states of the consciousness; the function of reaffirming the accepted social values; the socialization function; the demythologization function; the mythological function; the function of meeting the public's expectations; the voyeuristic function; the ritual function; the social criticism function; the propaganda function; the esthetics function; the educational function; the psychotherapeutic function.

As the abovementioned author stressed, the movie offers important resources in the process of education, personal development and psychotherapy. Movies can be used in the field of education for teaching, learning, evaluating, in the training of specialists in various domains (e.g. social assistance, psychology, psychotherapy, human resources, management etc.), in career and vocational counseling, in personal development, psychological counseling and individual psychotherapy, in group psychotherapy (children, adolescents, adults and seniors), in couple and family counseling and psychotherapy.

The movie, used in personal development and psychotherapy, stimulates the **exploration, self-knowledge, awakening and inner becoming** processes. Cinematherapy represents **"a unique excursion into the film environment, as a space of interconnections between the cinematographic art, the fictional world and our real day-to-day life"**. This is a space of reflections of our own beliefs, thoughts, feelings, emotions, experiences, needs, which supports the processes of seeking, knowing, meeting ourselves (in front of the screen and beyond it), of discovering some unsuspected resources, of growth and personal development" (Dumitrache, S.D., 2015a, p. 63).

The **Unification Therapy (U.T.)** is a method of individual and group experiential psychotherapy, counseling and personal development, created by PhD Iolanda Mitrofan (Mitrofan I., 2004) and developed within the Romanian cultural environment. Its **objectives** are the creative restructuring of the personality, spiritual maturing, the optimization of the adaptive personal efficiency and expression, the extended self-consciousness, which, by integrating the polarities, enables the individual's creative evolution. The Unification Therapy proposes a holistic approach, *"the simultaneity of the diagnostic and therapeutic intercession, the clients' careful, conscious and highly personalized participation, by using «pretexts», exploratory exercises and challenging projective situations"* (Mitrofan I., 2004, p. 32).

Starting from the unification therapy, we developed a unique work method, namely the unifying-experiential cinematherapy (U.E.C.T.). This method is different from other types of movie uses in the therapeutic process because in U.E.C.T., the meditative support is used, which takes the shape of the unifying-creative meditation. Therefore, the cinematic material is primarily corroborated with creative meditation and secondarily with other work techniques, specific to the unifying-experiential psychotherapy (work with the personal, family and trans-generational shadow, with polarities, meta-positions, the activation of the witness state), which renders both uniqueness and real therapeutic valences to this work method (Dumitrache S.D., 2015a).

The crucial element of the unifying-experiential cinematherapy (U.E.C.T.) is the activation of the witness state, of enhanced consciousness and mindfulness, which represents the essential premise for discovering personal resources and for the activation of the healing and development potential. The witness state is the key to an evolved and mature Self and to a clear and healthy perspective on things and life. The witness state is stimulated and challenged in the case of the beneficiaries of the unifying-experiential psychological services through both unifying-creative meditation and the aforementioned experiential techniques.

Cinematherapy is a work technique that lends allurements to any therapeutic endeavor, irrespective of beneficiaries' affiliation and it is a warrant for the individual's positive adaptation and healthy transformation. This implies using the movie as a therapeutic pretext during the individual's development, personal and interpersonal maturing process, with the facilitator's guidance, a specialist, counselor or psychotherapist with the necessary competences to use this technique.

The relationship between creativity and depressive tendencies or other mental disorders has been long debated. Despite all prejudices and social or cultural stereotypes regarding the connection between creativity and mental disorders, we state that creative thinking is the ability to generate new thoughts, emotional and social experiences, to transform the negative thoughts and feelings into positive ones, which means that, by **stimulating and developing creativity, the stress level and the depressive tendencies are reduced**. In an article regarding the analysis of the relationship between creativity and mental disorders, other authors, Paul J. Silvia and Nathan A. Kimbrel highlighted the same thing, namely the fact that there is a negative relationship between the **dimensions of the anxiety and depression symptomatology and the facets of creativity** (Silvia, P.J. and Kimbrel, N.A., 2012).

U.E.C.T. offers the proper framework to its beneficiaries in order for them to overcome the self-imposed personal barriers or the ones assimilated from the outside, to allow themselves to self-articulate ac-

cording to their own wishes and to enrich and express their personalities in a creative, harmonious and desirable manner.

In specialized literature, there are studies showing the effects of cinematherapy, with positive results, correlated with the diminishing of the anxiety level (Bierman și Krieger, 2003, apud Fredricks, A., 2011; Dumitrache, S.D., 2014a; Dumitrache, S.D., Mitrofan, L., 2015c), with self-esteem melioration (Le Powell, M., Newgent, R.A., Min Lee, S., 2006, Dumitrache, S.D., Mitrofan, L., 2015c) and with the aggressiveness level diminution (Heewon, Y., Younghkhill, L, 2005; Dumitrache, S.D., Mitrofan, L., 2015b). However, no studies were found to show the implications of cinematherapy as far as depressive tendencies and creativity are concerned.

THE MAIN OBJECTIVE

The central goal of this paper is to identify the effects of a cinematherapy personal development program adapted to meet the young persons' development needs, aiming to optimize their behavior in order to increase creativity level and diminish depressive tendencies.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

General hypothesis:

The general hypothesis of this paper is that the unifying experiential cinematherapy method is a determinant agent for the young persons' psychological optimization, which materializes in the creativity enhancement counterbalanced by the depressive tendencies attenuation.

Specific hypotheses:

The work hypotheses considered for investigation in the studies presented in this paper are the following:

There are statistically significant differences regarding the *creativity* parameter, after implementing a unifying-experiential cinematherapy-centered personal development program.

There are statistically significant differences regarding the *depressive tendencies* parameter, after implementing a unifying-experiential cinematherapy-centered personal development program.

A lower level of *depressive tendencies* correlates with an increased *creativity* level after implementing a unifying-experiential, cinematherapy-centered personal development program.

RESEARCH VARIABLES

The independent variable: young persons' participation/nonparticipation in a cinematherapy-centered personal development program.

The effect variable quantified within our study: **creativity, depression.**

PARTICIPANTS

In the present study, we included 120 subjects, students of social and humanistic sciences faculties, distributed as follows: an experimental group made of 60 subjects (aged 18 to 23, 51 subjects were females and 9 subjects were males), who were included in the cinematherapy-centered personal development program and a control group made of 60 subjects (18 to 23, 53 females and 7 males), who did not benefit from any type of personal development program and who only participated in their daily academic activities.

INSTRUMENTS

In order to test the abovementioned hypotheses, the following testing procedures were used:

Creativity test (M. Roco, 2001, adapted from Torrance, E.P., Osborn, A.I., Guilford, J.P., Wallach, N.A. and Kogan, N., Meunier, G.).

The test combines methods of quantitative and qualitative measurements. These are based on an open and projective gathering of data and responses from the person evaluated in the field of creativity and they are found in four forms: The Figural Forms A and B and the Verbal Forms A and B. The test contains 7 tasks: 5 verbal and 2 figural (Roco, M., 2001).

The Beck Depression Inventory

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) was developed by Beck and col-

lab. (1961) as a questionnaire designed to evaluate the severity of the depressive symptoms. The BDI consists in a series of questions, created in order to measure the depression intensity and severity in patients with psychiatric symptomatology (Beck, A.T., R.A., Steer, 1984).

The reliability of the Beck Depression Inventory was also checked. The internal consistency exceeded the necessary thresholds in more than 25 studies applied to several populations of subjects. The internal consistency of this instrument is 0.862, with a confidence interval [0.834 – 0.896]. This test proved to have satisfactory validity and reliability coefficients, with successes in the field of clinical diagnosis in over 90% of cases (Beck, A.T., R.A., Steer, 1984).

PROCEDURE

We will outline the plan of the **unifying-experiential cinematherapy-centered personal development** below.

The experiment was conducted over a period of three years. **The experimental group consisted of 6 groups of 10 persons.** In the case of each group, the program lasted 3 months, 12 sessions (**the first and the last being exclusively dedicated to testing. The unifying-experiential cinematherapy program had 10 sessions, each of them of 4 hours, one meeting per week.**

In the case of the **control group**, they did not participate in any unifying-experiential cinematherapy-centered personal development program or in other personal development training. They were only tested at the beginning of the program and at the end of the program, after three months.

THE UNIFYING-EXPERIENTIAL CINEMATHERAPY-CENTERED PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The unifying-experiential cinematherapy program implies getting through 4 stages.

In the first stage, the most important thing is to create group cohesion and to develop a secure emotional environment.

In the second stage, after experiencing inter-knowledge and after establishing a positive group connection, they can identify, analyze and decrypt personal symbolic dynamics and their aggressive impulses, anxiety and depressive tendencies, fears, creativity blockages and self-esteem related problems emerged after watching the movie, with the help of self-exploration and therapeutic attendance.

In the third stage, due to the healthy contact with the other members of the group and to the cinematographic experience within the unifying-experiential psychotherapeutic framework, the participants benefit from a profound restructuring experience. They record multiple benefits, including an increase in the self-esteem, emotional intelligence and creativity levels, counterbalanced by the decrease in the self and hetero-aggressive tendencies and in the anxious-depressive tendencies.

In the fourth stage, by developing new sanogenous communication and coping strategies, applicable to all areas of their existence, the subjects are invited to implement in their lives what they have learned within the program, in order to develop some healthy relationships within the intimate, personal, family and social-professional dimension.

We will emphasize the lucrative journey of the unifying-experiential cinematherapy technique below. Since it was a group experience, the subjects were seated on chairs, in semi-circle, each of them having a comfortable visual access to a silver screen on which the movie was played.

Each cinematherapy session started with the therapist's briefing, which took the shape of a creative meditation that focused the participants' attention on their own inwardness in order to prepare them for watching the movie. The film triggers thoughts or blocked emotions of which they may have been less aware until that moment. The movie also works as an evocation tool, an instrument that enables them to access their own axiological, emotional and motivational contents. After the therapist's briefing, the movie was played in an optimal framework both from a technical-methodological and psychological point of view. Afterwards, the therapist's discourse took again the shape of a creative meditation, but this time it was a customized meditation in accordance with each cinematographic theme and symbolic content.

Towards the end of each session, the participants would become an active part of an analysis process centered on self and others, by developing empathy and by connecting their own emotions to the group's emotions. Moreover, encouraged by the personal development program facilitator and by the group dynamics and climate, the group participants had the opportunity to come up with creative solutions to various dilemmas, existential and socio-relational issues that seemed unsolvable (suggestions that were the result of the contact with themselves and with the others).

In cinematherapy, the trainer's guidance is essential and, together with the questions addressed to the participants, he plays a crucial role in the process of analysis and personal development. This process can be centered on the entire movie, on a sequence or a movie scene or on one of the movie characters that the participants love or despise. Considering the fact that the movie represents a pretext for analysis, personal development and psychotherapy, the emphasis is laid on exploring the participants' feelings and thoughts during and after watching the movie.

Below, we will present the meditative guidance, developed and used by us within the conducted researches. It can be used as such or it can be adapted or enriched.

The therapist's briefing before watching the movie
Before watching the movie, the guidance will be the following:

I will invite you to sit down comfortably on the armchair. I will ask you to close your eyes for a few moments and get in touch with your body, your states, and then, slowly, focus your attention on your breathing. Breathe in and out easily and naturally. Watch your breathing and, at the same time, notice if there are areas in which you feel tension or discomfort. With every inhalation, you become more and more aware of your state and with every exhalation, you feel like releasing tension and stress. You are lighter and lighter, more and more relaxed. With every breath, you leave aside the worries and concerns. Their place is taken by wellbeing and relaxation.

You are more and more present and balanced. As you feel you are more and more in touch with yourselves, I will ask you to prepare for watching the movie, in a state of enhanced consciousness from the perspective of the active spectator, of the witness to your own feelings, generated by the content of the audio-visual material. Notice what happens to you while watching the movie and pay attention to your feelings and sensations. Allow yourself to feel and be aware of your feelings and thoughts that precede, accompany or succeed certain movie scenes and sequences. Notice what you enjoy, what makes you glad, what makes you startle, what makes you anxious or scared, what makes you vibrate... and, regardless of your thoughts, emotions and states... be aware of them... I breathe in and out deeply and relaxed... I allow myself, through the movie, to access my inner world, my inner movie.

Now you can open your eyes and we can play the movie.

The therapist's briefing after watching the movie

Now I will ask you to remember, for a few moments, the movie scenes that caught your attention the most, whether it is about pleasant or less pleasant scenes, sequences that made you glad, or, on the contrary, that seemed harder or impossible to watch. Notice what scene comes to your mind and if there is a connection between it and your life. Or maybe a movie character comes to your mind, one that you loved or, on the contrary, one that you deeply disliked. Notice what that character communicates to you and if it has a relevant message for your present life.

Table 2. The t test for the initial equality of means between the experimental group and the control group for the creativity test.

Independent Samples Test										
F		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
TC	Equal variances assumed	2.750	.100	1.836	118	.069	22.583	12.302	-1.777	46.944

Stay in touch with yourselves and pay attention to your breathing, to your bodily sensations, to the thoughts that are going through your mind right now, when you relive the contact with the movie world. What do I feel? What goes through my mind? What do I want to do?

Let your own, inner movie play, guided by the artistic movie that was projected right in front

of you and be aware of the feelings activated by the cinematic experience and of the profoundness of your choices.

What connection is there between the movie and my real life? What does that scene stir within me? What about the character? What do I like about it? How can the character be a source of inspiration or a role-model for me? How would I do differently? What message does this movie have for me?

I will ask you to give a meaning to your experience and keep it in your mind exactly the way you are living it right now.

Throughout the cinematherapy program, ten movies were played; they tackled different issues, thus covering a wide range of self-discovery, self-exploration, personal and group development pretexts.

The themes of the movies included: family and childhood universe; relationship with the self (personal development themes, self-knowledge, spiritual endeavor, natural/artificial balance, fiction, existential bearing and death issues); family and couple relationships (conflicts, communication barriers, assertiveness and empathy, love); socio-professional relationships (adjustment, maladaptation, exclusion, social stigma, discrimination, justice, equity, morality, responsibility).

By watching certain symbolically invested sequences or images in unifying-experiential group settings, participants have the opportunity to access certain unconscious contents and to become aware of them. Thus, cognitive and emotional blockages diminish and the individual is capable of giving other meanings to his past experiences and to create other strategies for a better social adaptation.

The unifying-experiential cinematherapy technique generates and sustains a major restructuring process and prepares the subjects for new nascent life experiences.

RESULTS
THE CREATIVITY DYNAMICS IN THE CINEMATHERAPY CONTEXT

Initial differences between the two sample groups

Table 1. The data outline for the initial means of the two sample groups after creativity testing

Group Statistics					
	1=experimental1, 2=control1	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TC	1.00	60	214.58	72.804	9.399
	2.00	60	192.00	61.475	7.936

As revealed in the table above, for the two groups of 60 subjects each, with a 72.80 standard deviation for the first sample group and 61.47 for the second sample group, we point out a 214.58 mean for the experimental group compared to a 192.00 mean for the control group.

The t test for the two independent groups' means difference does not highlight any significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. This analysis is meant to underline the effects of the cinematherapy personal development module regardless of other variables such as a series of inter-individual differences found among the tested subjects. The data presented above support this statement ($m_1=214.58$, $m_2=192.00$, inf. lim. 95%=-1.77, sup. lim. 95%=46.94, $t=1.83$, $df=118$, $p<0.05$; $d=0.34$).

Differences between the two sample groups after applying the cinematherapeutic module

Table 4. The t test for the equality of means between the experimental group and the control group for the creativity test after participating in the cinematherapy module.

Independent Samples Test										
F		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
TC	Equal variances assumed	2.666	.105	8.951	118	.000	115.967	12.956	90.310	141.623

The t test for the two independent groups' means difference highlights a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. The data presented in the table above lead us to accepting the hypothesis according to which there are significant differences between the subjects belonging to the experimental group (the participants in the cinematherapy-centered personal development program) and the subjects who participated in the control group ($m_1=305.15$, $m_2=189.18$, inf. lim. 95%=90.31, sup. lim. 95%=141.23, $t=8.95$, $df=118$, $p<0.05$; $d=1.63$).

THE DEPRESSION DYNAMICS IN THE CINEMATHERAPY CONTEXT

Initial differences between the two sample groups

Table 6. The t test for the initial equality of means between the experimental group and the control group for depression test.

Independent Samples Test										
F		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
Beck	Equal variances assumed	1.296	.257	-3.491	118	.001	-1.367	.392	-2.142	-.591

The t test for the two independent groups' means difference does not highlight any significant difference between the experimental group and the control group ($m_1=9.15$, $m_2=10.52$, inf. lim. 95%=-2.14, sup. lim. 95%=-0.59, $t=3.49$, $df=118$, $p<0.05$; $d=-0.64$).

Differences between the two groups after participating in the cinematherapeutic module

Table 7. The data outline for the two groups' depression test means after implementing the cinematherapy program

Group Statistics					
	1=experimental2, 2=control2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Beck	1.00	60	6.15	2.517	.325
	2.00	60	10.32	2.554	.330

Table 8. The t test for equality of means between the experimental and the control group for the depression test taken after participating in the cinematherapy module

Independent Samples Test										
F		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
Beck	Equal variances assumed	.496	.483	-9.001	118	.000	-4.167	.463	-5.083	-3.250

Table 3. The data outline for the means of the two sample groups after applying the creativity test at the end of the cinematherapy personal development program

Group Statistics					
	1=experimental2, 2=control2	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TC	1.00	60	305.15	79.447	10.257
	2.00	60	189.18	61.317	7.916

As revealed in the table above, for the two sample groups ($N=60$) with a 79.44 standard deviation for the first sample group and 61.31 for the second sample group, we point out a 305.15 mean for the experimental group compared to a 189.18 mean for the control group.

Table 5. The data outline for the initial means of the two sample groups after depression testing

Group Statistics					
	1=experimental1, 2=control1	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Beck	1.00	60	9.15	2.032	.262
	2.00	60	10.52	2.251	.291

As revealed in the table above, for the two groups of 60 subjects each, with a 2.03 standard deviation for the first sample group and 2.25 for the second sample group, we point out a 9.15 mean for the experimental group compared to a 10.52 mean for the control group.

By analyzing the table above, we find out the following: for the two groups of 60 subjects each, with a 2.51 standard deviation for the first sample group and 2.55 for the second sample group, we point out a 6.15 mean for the experimental group compared to a 10.32 mean for the control group.

The t test for the means difference between the two independent sample groups does not reveal any significant difference between the experimental and the control group after participating in the cinematherapy module. The data presented in the table above lead us to accepting the hypotheses according to which there are significant differences between the experimental group members (participants in the cinematherapy-centered personal development program) and the control group members: $m_1=6.15$, $m_2=10.32$, inf. lim. 95%=-05.08, sup. lim. 95%=-3.25, $t=9.00$, $df=118$, $p<0.05$; $d=-1.65$).

A negative correlation ($r=-.41$) was found between creativity and depression in the experimental group.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering our research results, we can state that creativity is sensitive to the applied method (unifying-experiential cinematherapy), and has a quantifiable and significant development. Although the difference between the two testing moments is not spectacular for the experimental group, we can state that the unifying-experiential cinematherapy technique supports creativity stimulation, boost and practice. This statement is supported both by the significant results confirmation within the experimental group in-between the testing moments, and by double checking with the control group within which the parametric data did not suffer any significant alteration.

These results support the role and the important implications of the cinematherapy module in enhancing creativity. Our goal is to highlight that the participants in such a program are the beneficiaries of a complex process meant to enlarge their own perceptive, cognitive and emotional spectrum and to offer the possibility to identify, analyze and introject new resources, to assimilate new coping mechanisms or new life perspectives, which would serve them in their personal accommodation effort to the actual reality.

Bearing in mind that we did not find any studies in this area, in specialized literature, our analysis lends extra originality to the present paper.

By participating in this kind of program, one ensures the individual's adequate efficiency by confronting him/her with multiple attitudes, values and representations, which are analyzed and compared, then introjected or accounted for as stimuli in the individual's drawing up of his/her own axiological and value sets.

Bearing in mind the abovementioned statistical results, we find an improvement of this parameter within the experimental group, both as compared to the control group and as a result of the cinematherapy personal development program.

As we mentioned before, the psychological parameters investigated in this paper depict a series of the psychological life's dimensions that are very important for the individual's adequate efficiency and adaptation to his/her personal, interpersonal, and social-professional life context, so that he/she should activate viable resources, used as an alternative to depressive moods, in order to avoid depression and the subject's vitiation in any of his/her existence plans.

The efficiency of the unifying cinematherapy module is supported by statistical results, which confirm the existence of significant differences within the experimental group, both between the two testing moments and when comparing the two groups included in the research. This confirms that the beneficiaries of the cinematherapy module identify and understand their depressive moods, introjecting and developing existential coping strategies, as well as developing palliative and preventive strategies to rebut emotionally negative inner states.

We did not find any other studies in specialized literature showing the implications of this therapeutic technique on depressive tendencies. Therefore, our contribution to this area is one of a kind.

There is a negative correlation between **depression** as an invalidating agent for the individual and **creativity** as a generator of meaning, adaptation and positive integration. Although there were discussions about the anxious-depressive tendencies in highly creative individuals, there are studies that rescind this idea (Silvia, P. J. & Kimbrel, N.A., 2012; Tabrizi, E. A., Mansor, A. T., Yaacob, S.N., 2011; Harpreet K., 2012). Therefore, these conclusions are consonant with the present study results.

Considering the importance of creativity and absence of the depressive tendencies in the individual's life, we highlight the fact that by participating in personal development programs, like the cinematherapy program, young people are given an easy access to a creative, secure, pressure-free environment, in order for them to have multiple chances to develop and express their creativity, to explore their own personal resources for a better adjustment both to the academic, formative environment and to the family and social-professional one.

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