Bibliotherapy as a way to cope with mental health disorders

"One sheds one's sickness in books - repeats and presents again one's emotions, to be master of them." D.H. Lawrence

DID YOU SAY BIBLIOTHERAPY?

"Bibliotherapy is the use of book in the treatment of mental or psychological disorders[1]." It is a secondary therapy that belongs to methods resorting to storytelling to have a therapeutic effect on people's mind. Though it is mainly prescribed to people who suffer from mental disorders, it can be useful to develop self-knowledge and to empower psychological resources.

How does it work?

Bibliotherapy **doesn't aim to replace an actual therapy** led by a professional, but it rather offers **an additional support** and, in some cases, an alternative to medication. Nonetheless, it's worth highlighting that it doesn't suit everyone and that it's more relevant for people who face depression, anxiety or also panic attacks.

Nowadays, bibliotherapy is particularly developed in the United Kingdom through the national project **Books on Prescription**. The program works on a **guided self-help** approach, in which the patients are followed by a professional but seek external support in books rather than in medication. Through a collaboration between therapists and librarians, the project, implemented in the UK since 2003, provides a list of books addressed to young people that have been selected for their topics and their potentials. The "patient" receives a prescription, goes to their local library, and borrows the books recommended.

Is it efficient?

As we've seen with Aristotle and his catharsis, narratives as therapeutical tools have a long tradition. The first concrete example of bibliotherapy occurred in 1930 with war veterans who were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
The psychiatrist William Menninger prescribed them books to cope with the reality. Since then, several research has been led to **show the benefits of storytelling** on subjects dealing with depression, anxiety, and other disorders.

Through identification, bibliotherapy targets two essential cognitive functions - mind reading and empathy that pave the way to introspection. **Introspection** enables to better understand the Self, which is crucial **to building one's identity** during adolescence - a period of personality shaping through comparison and social interactions with peers.

[1] *Reading Well. Books on prescription. How bibliotherapy can help your patients and save your practice time and money.* (2017). National Association of Primary Care. **https://napc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Reading-well.pdf**

Co-funded by the European Union

BREAKING TABOOS about MENTAL HEALTH

I want to try!

If you are interested in implementing bibliotherapy in your professional practice, you can start by looking at existing lists. They have been developed by mental health professionals, the Reading Agency, as well as young adults facing mental health disorders. The books are selected for their respect of clinical guidelines and quality standards for common mental health conditions. Ella Berthoud and Susan Elderkin (2013) created a whole manual gathering a wide selection of therapeutic novels and texts: The Novel Cure: an A to Z of Literary Remedies.

To go further, you can also invite teenagers to write about themselves, autobiographical writing being particularly beneficial for inner exploration of one's emotions. Adopting a writer's position is also beneficial to offer oneself a little introspection.

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