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## Bibliotherapy: An Expanded Role for Libraries And Librarians

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# **BIBLIOTHERAPY: AN EXPANDED ROLE FOR LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS**

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## **Abstract**

*A deep research into the concept of bibliotherapy revealed that it has been existence for a long time and rooted in ancient librarianship. However, the concept has moved from libraries to other corporations and organizations. This paper looks at the expanded role for libraries and librarians in bibliotherapy. Firstly, it discusses bibliotherapy or the combination of literature and healing which is designed to bring healings to library users through their interactions between relevant literature and their personalities as well as the etymology of the concept. Secondly, it expedites the types of bibliotherapy; relationship between bibliotherapy and library science; types of bibliotherapy that could be integrated into library services and principles of use that would promote effective use of the library. The result is creating a roadmap for understanding the need for integration of bibliotherapy in library services and providing an extension of the subject in clinics, hospitals, prisons and rehabilitation centres as well as systematic exploration in their own subject domains. This paper recommends that reading and developmental bibliotherapy in libraries is highly essential and should be effectively and efficiently practiced through proper training of staff, orientation and users' education; libraries should provide consultancy and referral services for users' who might need them and creating the right ambiance through beautiful designs and welcoming staff attitude.*

*Keywords: Bibliometrics; History; Types; Principles; Libraries; Literature*

## **Introduction**

Bibliotherapy is a concept as old as librarianship itself; even though its presence in the library is rarely felt unlike other technical concepts in the library e.g. cataloguing, classification, serials, references etc. Yusuf & Taharem (2008) described bibliotherapy as a technique for composing and constituting interaction between clients and therapists based on their mutual sharing of literature in fulfilling the client therapeutic needs. The ancient Greek referred to their library as the place for the healing soul. The role played by the priests in early libraries is to provide soothing for troubled souls through matchmaking clientele with relevant materials that would calm their confused spirit amidst rituals, sharing literatures on past kings, events, etc. Aristotle even introduced the concept of catharsis which depicts emotional release using literary texts and drama. The relationship between a reader and his book is extremely symbiotic. Perhaps, this is why the law of librarianship according to S.R. Ranganathan says “Every book its user” and “Every user his book”. One would have believed that with the benefits derived from bibliotherapy especially in the area of soul healing, emotional intelligence, behavioural modelling; its practice in librarianship would have been popular, solid, embracing and encompassing considering today’s world.

There are many troubled souls in the society today who need saving urgently before their cases escalate, these set of people can be groomed towards the right path through bibliotherapy. It is however saddening that this has not been the case. This begs for several questions. Are librarians scared of playing the role of a therapist? Are librarians fully aware of the potentiality of books and libraries? Do librarians know that they are change agents in the society? Are librarians incapable of having emotional impact on their users? This chapter however is an eye opener for librarians, library authorities, library bodies and associations on the urgent need to carve out bibliotherapy as an important concept in the profession and libraries especially in educational institutions.

## **Defining the term “Bibliotherapy”**

Bibliotherapy according to Russell&Shrodes (1950) is a process of dynamic interaction between the personality of the reader and literature, an interaction which may be used for personality assessment, adjustment and growth. In the clinical setting, the dynamics that promote change in a patient-reader can include identification, projection, introjection, catharsis, and insight. Other words used to connote bibliotherapy are biblioguidance, bibliocounselling, literatherapy,

bookmatching or reading therapy. Bibliotherapy involves the use of books and other media to facilitate both normal development and clinically significant problems. The mechanisms of change expand the patient-reader's awareness, unmask and offer insight into latent personal issues, and suggest solutions that have helped others cope with feelings and situations similar to their own including separation or loss caused by human interactions.

Short stories, drama, and prose excerpts have been used successfully to address topics such as adolescence, alcoholism, anger management, compassion, courtship, family, fear, self-identity, justice, life and death, loneliness, love, marriage, parent-child relationships, revenge, self-image, and sexuality.(Cuijper, 1997;McCarthy,1977).Children use stories, tales, and fables as a means of finding parallels to their problems and needs even before they can read.( Van, 1999; Amer, 1998; and Smith etal,1997). By using books as a point of entry to discussion, adults encourage intellectual and emotional contact with children and make important steps.

Today, most libraries do not perform bibliotherapy activities, with the exception of some hospital libraries. Researches done on bibliotherapy in the last decade have dealt mostly with the psychological aspect of the subject; only a few researchers have dealt with its application in librarianship. As Rubin (1978) explained the definition of therapy as cure, the interpersonal power structure of therapy and the exalted position of medical doctors in our society cause many librarians to fear any activity called therapy. In order to try to address this dilemma, Rubin suggested that librarians should approach bibliotherapy much as a recreational and occupational therapist view their work, as an activity that will encourage a possible path toward self-actualization.

### **Bibliotherapy: A Brief History**

As early as first-century Rome, reading and medicine were associated, but bibliotherapy as a treatment modality was unknown in the United States until the 19th century. In the mid-1800s, Benjamin Rush, MD, and John Minson Galt II, MD, recommended the act of reading in the hospital as a part of patients' therapy and treatment. Bibliotherapy was recognized as an aspect of librarianship within that discipline in 1904. In that year, a trained librarian became head of the library at McLean Hospital in Waverly, Mass. A program combining psychiatry and library science ensued. The Menningers, a family of renowned psychiatrists and authors used

bibliotherapy in their Topeka, Kan, clinic in the 1930s giving a librarian the role of bibliotherapist.

The literature on bibliotherapy began in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it was accepted in the library field. In this era, as a leading role, books were used as a therapy towards patients. It was in the year 1920s, Sadie Peterson-Delaney, also a librarian from Veteran's Hospital in Tuskegee, Alabama had success in the outstanding program that was related to bibliotherapy towards African – American war veterans. She then received world recognition because of the method she adopted to treat the psychological and physical needs of war victims. In fact a year before; in 1919 an article was written by a librarian about bibliotherapy (Tews, 1970). The librarian co-authored with a neurologist in the publication of 'The therapeutic use of hospital library' (Noordin, 2017). By 1939, the hospital division of the American Library Association (ALA) had established a bibliotherapy committee for the purpose of studying bibliotherapy. This was the turning point that gave bibliotherapy official status in the field of librarianship.

Bibliotherapy took a major step in 1941 when its definition appeared in the 11th edition of Dorland's Illustrated Medical Dictionary. In the following decades, though much was written on the topic, theories exceeded practical applications. During this time, psychiatrists and psychiatric social workers were the first to apply bibliotherapy in clinical settings. In the 1960s, with the flourishing of the social and behavioural sciences, the ability of the act of reading to produce a change in attitude and behaviour became widely recognized. (Calhoun, 1987).

### **Relationship between Bibliotherapy and Library and Information Science**

Libraries are in a unique position due to the resources and relationship with the community, an empowering place as a therapeutic landscape (Brewster, 2014). The existence of libraries is to support community and societal development by providing resources, services and facilities. (Lack, 1985). Instilling reading habits and creating a literacy society remain a focus for libraries. This creates avenue for users to explore and understand their feelings, environments, situations, community and societal expectations. Through bibliotherapy; the scale is tilted towards self-awareness, role modelling, inculcating reading skills, positive behavioural change. Library plays a role as a stress-reduction agency through their services and activities which culminated into bibliotherapy.

The art of bibliotherapy is when a professional either librarian or counsellor uses books to help their clients or patient solve a problem. This requires a person to be knowledgeable about books, a large collection of books and good rapport between the therapist and clients (Brown, 1975). The librarian's main task would be to create and manage self-help sections, classifying and cataloguing the literature according to social needs and displaying it in an attractive manner for the pupils (Baruchson-Arbib, 1996).

### **Types of Bibliotherapy**

When bibliotherapy is linked to librarianship, it immediately raises questions: Is the librarian qualified to practice therapy? In order to tackle the problem and to clarify the limited role of the librarian in the framework of bibliotherapy, it is essential to define categories of bibliotherapy:

- (a) Reading bibliotherapy
- (b) Developmental bibliotherapy
- (c) Institutional bibliotherapy
- (d) Clinical bibliotherapy

**A. Reading bibliotherapy:** The possibility to use bibliotherapy for library analysis can be through reading and discussion about texts. This implies that librarians, counsellor, social workers will be treating a work of reading materials such as fiction. Their role is to propose to a person in crisis by identifying the problem to read related books that have similar stories and allows them to grow emotionally. (Noordin,2017). The clients will gain new knowledge and insights when they finish reading a book, which makes them reflect on their personal situations and ways to handle them (Yusuf & Taharem,2008).

**B. Developmental bibliotherapy:** This category deals with normal developmental problems such as family conflicts, changes in function as a result of aging, career changes, and so on (Rubin, 1978). The function of the librarian in developmental bibliotherapy would be to recommend suitable books that shed light on those problems and sometimes to participate in joint sessions with teachers, psychologists, and educational counsellors. However, this would not address the problem because most users are not aware that they can go to the library in order to get supportive literature that will help them with their problems and lead them to new knowledge, support, insight, and possible solutions.

**C. Institutional Bibliography:** This category of bibliotherapy uses informative literature to educate such as a patient in the hospital learning about their illness or possible treatments. It is the use of books selected on the basis of content in a planned reading program designed to facilitate the recovery of patients suffering from mental illness or emotional disturbance. Ideally, the process occurs in three phases: personal identification of the reader with a particular character in the recommended work, resulting in psychological catharsis which leads to rational insight concerning the relevance of the solution suggested in the text to the reader's own experience (American Library Association).

**D. Clinical Bibliotherapy:** This involves using imaginative literature for the goal of changing behaviour or having insight into their behaviour. It is utilized by mental health practitioners, addresses emotional-behavioural problems to meet therapeutic goals.

### **Principles of Use for Bibliotherapy**

Zaccaria et al (1978) cited in Eich(1999) offered twelve principles that lay foundation of bibliotherapy use. These twelve principles relate to professionals on how to vaguely perform bibliotherapy. They also point out possible weaknesses.

**First Principle:** "Understand the nature and dynamics of bibliotherapy and incorporate the theoretical aspects of bibliotherapy into a functional theory". This principle states that the therapist/librarian must have working knowledge of research and theory in order to conduct bibliotherapy effectively.

**Second Principle:** "Possess at least a general familiarity with the literature which the student/clientele will use". The therapist/librarian needs knowledge of the student's/user's age, gender, problem (whether it is developmental or remedial), reading level, past experiences and reading preferences. Also within the literature, the therapist/librarian should consider the genre, the reading difficulty, characters in the book, the length and overall general appropriateness.

**Third Principle:** "Bibliotherapeutic reading can be encouraged and facilitated through the use of prompting techniques". In a classroom or library, having suggested booklists or attractive book display may help encourage reading of therapeutic books.

**Fourth Principle:** “Readiness is an important factor to be kept in mind when utilizing bibliotherapeutic techniques”. The therapist/librarian and clients need to think about and establish a good relationship with one another before bibliotherapeutic techniques should be implemented.

**Fifth Principle:** “Books should be suggested rather than prescribed”. The therapist/librarian should suggest several different titles that may be helpful and the client should have the ultimate choice of which books he or she would like to read.

**Sixth Principle:** “In general, reading materials that are concise and to the point are preferable to lengthy pieces of literature”. With shorter readings, it is more likely that the client will be able to accomplish the reading and the therapist/librarian will be able to pinpoint the main idea to the client easier if it is a shorter segment, sometimes reading few chapters in a book instead of the entire book is appropriate.

**Seventh Principle:** “The practitioner should be sensitive to physical handicaps of the individual which may dictate the necessity of using special reading materials”. For example, considerations such as largeness of type and darkness of print are important for those with sight difficulties.

**Eighth Principle:** “Bibliotherapy appears to be most effective with individuals of average and above-average reading”. The rationale for this principle is that individuals with reading books. They also have the ability to take the reading to higher level. It is important to note however, that bibliotherapy has been shown to be successful with low readers too.

**Ninth Principle:** “Several personality characteristics of the individual should be considered in the selection of materials to be read”. Factors such as the individual’s age, reading ability and reading preferences should be considered. Also, whether the problem is developmental or situational in nature could be helpful in book selection.

**Tenth Principle:** “The reading of the literature by the individual should accompanied and/or followed up by discussion and/or counselling”. The impact of bibliotherapy is enhanced with a follow-up discussion. Discussion helps to reorganize the reader’s thought patterns. In a discussion, the focus can be on the reaction to the reading, whether the reader agrees or disagrees

with the character's decisions, what insights the reader gained from the reading and the meaning of the reading to the individual.

**Eleventh Principle:** "Bibliotherapy is an adjunct to other types of helping relationships rather than an alternative or independent form of therapy". Bibliotherapy can be an adjunct to classroom procedures or library setting.

**Twelfth Principle:** "Although bibliotherapy is a useful technique, it is not a panacea". Librarians, teachers and counsellors agree on its usefulness and some researches concur but clients can still rationalize away their problems or try to avoid them completely.

### **Benefits of Bibliotherapy**

Bibliotherapy addresses numerous conditions including abuse, behavioural issues, chemical dependency, chronic illness, homelessness, self-destructive behaviours, and many more (Pehrsson & McMillen, 2005). Reported benefits as outlined by Pehrsson & McMillen (2007) include

- Reduction of negative emotions and symptoms with their replacement by more positive behaviours and feelings.
- Bibliotherapy is effective in promoting problem solving, increasing compassion, developing empathetic understanding and enhancing self-awareness.
- Bibliotherapy encourages effective social behaviour, clarifies values, and instils cultural identity and ethnic pride.
- Bibliotherapy is applicable to individuals and groups. Group benefits include feedback from others concerning interpretations and behaviours and opportunities for modelling and improving communication.

Although benefits may be derived just from reading helpful literature (Floyd et al., 2006), researchers found enhanced effects when counsellors/librarians help select material. Self-help books usually provide direct suggestions and strategies concerning specific subjects or conditions (e.g., anger management, depression, and anxiety). They very often provide helpful facts and simple exercises clients can learn and practice outside the library.

## **The Way forward**

Selecting the correct information resources is a major part of the bibliotherapeutic process. Library as an institution is designed for selecting, acquiring, processing, organizing, conserving, preserving and disseminating the right information at the right time and to the right clientele. The onus is now on libraries and librarians to select information resources that would not only be for general use of the library clienteles but such information materials that can prevent or solve users' problems as it affects their behavioural and mental health.

Matchmaking users with the appropriate information materials: For a long time, libraries have been on the forefront of matching information resources with their readers.(Ranganathan's law of library science emphasises on this). The concept of current awareness services and selective dissemination of information which brings to users' notice information resources that best suit their profiles and information needs have long been a norm in the library. Be that as it may, libraries should put in more efforts in this regard as well as provide consultancy and referral services for users' who might need them. The key word here is building users' confidence in whatever the library can offer them in any areas of their lives through relevant information materials and prompt interactions and services.

When carrying out bibliotherapy in the library, the bibliotherapist should motivate the client or group with the introductory activities. The purpose of this is to capture the readers' interest and create a positive atmosphere. The therapist/librarian should expect the user to enjoy the book and not see it as a chore. It is important to give the readers examples of questions to think about when they are reading the story. This makes discussion easy (Cornet&Corney,1980).

Creating the right ambiance through beautiful designs and staff attitude plays meaningful role in appreciating or depreciating a particular thing. A library atmosphere that is conducive, calm and attractive as well as librarians that are friendly create peace and trust in the mind of clients who patronize it. This makes it easier for clients to open up to the librarians and even makes it easier for the librarian to discover issues or problems affecting the clienteles. In addition, librarians should introduce introductory activities that stir clienteles' interest in the bibliotherapeutic process and carry out effective follow up.

Warner (1980) posited that librarians and educators are not either by training or often by temperament, prepared to be therapists. Despite their concern for their changes in the society,

they ought to tread softly. If they choose to see themselves as agent for social and personal change, they should examine their method and expectation carefully. This calls for training of librarians in order to carry out an effective bibliotherapeutic process as it applies to the librarianship. Bibliotherapy simply means healing through books. This the librarians can effectively do with their knowledge acquisition in bibliotherapy without using in totality the clinical or psychological methods.

All points discussed above are achievable in an environment that promotes bibliotherapeutic culture and supported by the library management, library staff and users of the library. Today, librarians are less passive gatekeepers to information and more active educators and participators, which can be applied to bibliotherapy especially with children. With the addition of programs, librarians could implement bibliotherapy to aid in sustaining and creating awareness of mental health, foreign concepts, and social issues (Husaini et al., 2015).

### **Conclusion**

Reading books is recognized as a means to help individuals deal with deep concerns and can offer strategies specific to developmental issues. Bibliotherapy provides a more organized way of matching a book with its specific user. This marriage is overly beneficial as it moulds the readers' behaviour, eliminates emotional stress; prepares well-rounded and positive minds for the society and creating a well constructive and organised society with intelligent minds. Bibliotherapy has its tentacles in several disciplines e.g. psychology, counselling, medicine, librarianship and as a result of that it is a larger framework. Yet, its application in the areas of reading and developmental bibliotherapy in libraries is more essential and should be effectively and efficiently done through proper training of staff, orientation and users' education.

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