

Bibliotherapy and Maternal Guilt - Does Bibliotherapy Help Transform 'forbidden emotions' into Legitimate Ones?

By: Ronit Meshulam, MA, School of Bibliotherapy, Department of Counseling and Human Development, Faculty of Education, University of Haifa.

Supervised by: Prof. Shechtman Zipora, Group Consulting, Department of Consulting and Human Development, University of Haifa.

Dr. Dana Amir, Department of Consulting and Human Development, University of Haifa.

The purpose of this study was to examine the efficiency of bibliotherapy in revealing unspoken feelings in mother's discourse.

The assumption of the study is that Bibliotherapy, as being an indirect method of treatment, encourages emotional expressions and thus helps mothers share their conflicting feelings regarding motherhood.

In theory, the concept 'maternal guilt' which is associated with anger, aggression and hate, does not fit with the common cultural thinking of 'good mothering' (Palgi-Hecker, 2005; Parker, 1996). Moreover, in daily mother's conversations these feeling are rarely spoken because they are suppressed and cause anxiety.

In this study we compared mothers of young children in two experimental conditions: Bibliotherapy in conjunction with group therapy verses group therapy (without Bibliotherapy). The main conditional variables that were tested include guilt, anxiety, emotional exploration and insight.

The general findings suggest that within the bibliotherapy group there are a greater number of expressions of guilt and anxiety as early as the first meeting. Moreover, there was a statistical significance in the variables insight and emotional exploration, suggesting that participants in group bibliotherapy were able to gain more insights at the first meeting and the degree of their emotional exploration was higher over time compared to those participants in group therapy. It may be suggested that in this case it is possible that bibliotherapy provided a 'safe haven' in which the mothers could bear the anxiety (existing usually under 'motherly guilt'), express it, explore it emotionally, and even develop insights to it.

References:

Palgi-Hecker, A. (2005). *Mother in Psychoanalysis: A Feminist View*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers Ltd.

Parker, R. (1996). *Torn In Two*. London: Virago.

Keywords: Bibliotherapy, maternal guilt, guilt, anxiety, group.

Corresponding author: Ronit Meshulam, Email: ronamesh@gmail.com