

Cinematherapy's Impact on Mental Health: A Study of *The Therapist* and *Flaws*
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Abstract

*Cinematherapy has emerged as a powerful psychotherapeutic approach that harnesses the emotional and narrative potency of film to promote healing and mental well-being. This study explores the therapeutic potential of two Nigerian films; Eze-Odometa's *The Therapist* and Diana Child's *Flaws*, which poignantly engage with trauma, domestic abuse, and emotional recovery. Despite the increasing awareness of mental health challenges in Nigeria, there remains limited scholarly engagement with film as a therapeutic medium. The problem therefore lies in the underexploration of how Nigerian cinematic narratives can serve as tools for psychological healing and mental health advocacy. The study evaluates how *The Therapist* and *Flaws* exemplify cinematherapy by facilitating emotional resonance, self-reflection, and catharsis among viewers, thereby contributing to mental wellness and societal awareness. The research focuses on Nigerian films that thematically address trauma and recovery, examining how indigenous storytelling practices intersect with therapeutic principles to promote emotional resilience. Guided by Narrative Therapy Theory, the study interprets filmic storytelling as a process through which individuals can externalise pain, reconstruct meaning, and re-author their emotional experiences. A qualitative content analysis and interpretive approach are employed, analysing characterisation, dialogue, and visual motifs that evoke psychological healing. The study concludes that Nigerian cinema, through its rich emotional narratives, functions as a potent medium for psychosocial recovery, resilience, and mental health advocacy, reinforcing the transformative power of storytelling.*

Keywords: Cinematherapy, Mental Health, Emotional Well-Being Nigerian Cinema, Trauma, Healing.

Introduction

Film has long been recognised as a powerful medium for entertainment and education, but in recent years, it has also gained recognition as a therapeutic tool. Cinematherapy; a form of therapy that uses films as a tool to facilitate emotional and psychological healing, has become increasingly relevant in the discussion of mental health and emotional well-being. Through the careful selection of films, viewers can confront personal issues, gain insight, and find solace in the narratives and characters they see on screen. This paper examines the role of cinematographic techniques in addressing mental health concerns, with a particular focus on Eze Odometa's *The Therapist* (2021) and Diana Child's *Flaws* (2020); two Nigerian films that delve deeply into the themes of trauma, healing, and emotional recovery.

Both films explore the devastating effects of abuse and the journey of healing, making those ideal case studies for examining the efficacy of cinematherapy in improving mental health and emotional well-being. *The Therapist* chronicles the journey of a woman who, after suffering emotional and physical abuse at the hands of her husband, embarks on a path of self-discovery and healing by helping others in similar

situations. On the other hand, *Flaws* tells the tragic story of a married couple, whose lives are irrevocably altered after a traumatic home invasion, resulting in emotional devastation, marital breakdown, and a quest for closure. By analysing these films, this study explores how cinematic narratives can provide catharsis, promote healing, and offer a mirror through which individuals can confront their personal struggles.

Cinematherapy, as a tool for emotional healing, operates on the premise that film, much like art therapy, can facilitate self-reflection, empathy, and a sense of shared experience (Barry Kantor 24). According to Ayo Odebunmi, “cinema provides a medium through which individuals can engage with their emotions in a safe, controlled environment, making it an essential tool in addressing psychological distress (76). In the Nigerian context, cinema is not just a form of entertainment; it is a cultural artefact that mirrors the societal and emotional landscapes of its people. This makes Nigerian cinema an invaluable resource for exploring the emotional and psychological dimensions of human experience, particularly in relation to trauma and healing.

The impact of films on emotional well-being is not a new concept. As noted by Ife Amadiume, the role of cinema in African society has always been “intertwined with its ability to shape and reflect cultural identity, while simultaneously acting as a platform for emotional engagement and healing” (35). Nigerian films, often addressing complex social and psychological issues, serve as a powerful tool for healing by offering viewers a chance to process their own experiences through the lens of fictional characters. In *The Therapist* and *Flaws*, viewers are not only presented with narratives of personal trauma but are also offered potential pathways to healing and redemption.

In *The Therapist*, the protagonist’s journey from abuse to healing highlights the transformative power of self-awareness and the importance of external support systems, particularly for women in abusive relationships. The film underscores the importance of breaking the silence surrounding domestic abuse and seeking professional help, thereby aligning with the principles of mental health advocacy in Nigeria. Similarly, *Flaws* explores the psychological devastation caused by violence, the lingering effects of trauma, and the difficulty of finding closure. As Adekunle Durojaiye asserts, “the portrayal of trauma and its psychological aftermath in Nigerian films allows for an emotional resonance that viewers can relate to, thus promoting a sense of collective “healing (58).

Moreover, films such as *The Therapist* and *Flaws* provide a critical space for discussing the mental health issues that are often stigmatised in Nigerian society. Mental health, despite its growing recognition “remains a taboo topic in many African cultures, including Nigeria, where issues like domestic abuse, trauma, and psychological disorders are frequently dismissed or misunderstood” Jumoke Ogunyemi (13). Cinematherapy, by normalising these discussions within the context of popular media, serves as a bridge for individuals to acknowledge their struggles and seek help. It becomes a form of therapeutic intervention that, while indirect, can catalyse change in attitudes towards mental health and encourage individuals to take proactive steps towards healing.

In addition to providing insight into the personal struggles of the characters, *The Therapist* and *Flaws* also reflect broader societal issues. As noted by Alex Ekwueme, Nigerian cinema often “functions as a critique of social norms, offering a space for dialogue on issues such as gender-based violence, marital conflict, and emotional trauma (44). By engaging with these films, viewers are prompted to examine the emotional and psychological health of their own relationships and societal structures, thereby fostering a collective process of healing.

The therapeutic potential of film is further enhanced by its ability to create a sense of catharsis, allowing viewers to release pent-up emotions through the act of watching. According to Tolulope Omojola, “the emotional release facilitated by film can lead to significant improvements in mental health, particularly in

individuals who have experienced trauma” (29). In both *The Therapist* and *Flaws*, the protagonists’ emotional journeys—marked by grief, anger, and healing—serve as cathartic processes for the audience, allowing them to confront their own emotions and potentially work through their own psychological struggles.

Theoretical framework

Narrative therapy was developed “in the 1980s by Michael White and David Epston as a means of expanding and enriching a client’s life stories. This allows the client to have a greater range of possibilities for dealing with problem saturated stories” (258). White and Epston posited that individuals understand their lives through narratives—stories constructed from their experiences and shaped by societal contexts. These narratives, however, can either empower or constrain individuals, depending on their content and the meanings ascribed to them. Narrative therapy seeks to deconstruct negative stories and encourage the re-authoring of more positive and empowering ones, enabling individuals to reclaim agency over their lives.

White’s work was heavily influenced by post-structuralist thinkers like Michel Foucault, whose ideas on discourse and power highlighted the influence of dominant societal narratives on personal identity. As White and Epston asserted, “People are not the problem; the problem is the problem.” This externalisation of issues allows individuals to separate themselves from the challenges they face, fostering a sense of possibility and change.

Narrative Therapy Theory’s focus on storytelling makes it an ideal theoretical framework for analysing Eze Odometa’s *The Therapist* and Diana Child’s *Flaws*. Both films explore deeply personal and emotional journeys, addressing themes of trauma, resilience, and self-discovery. As Femi Shaka observes, “Nollywood has become a repository of lived experiences, using the screen as a space for communal and personal healing” (102). This aligns with the therapeutic potential of cinematherapy, which utilises film as a medium for emotional catharsis and introspection.

Theoretical Background and Core Principles

Narrative Therapy Theory is anchored on several key principles. First, it recognises that narratives shape identity, meaning that the stories people tell themselves profoundly affect their behaviour, relationships, and emotional well-being. Second, it emphasises the deconstruction of dominant narratives, which are often imposed by society and can perpetuate negative self-conceptions. Third, the theory advocates for externalisation, wherein problems are treated as separate entities, reducing self-blame and enabling constructive engagement. Finally, it involves re-authoring—creating alternative, empowering narratives to replace harmful ones.

This re-authoring process is particularly significant in *The Therapist* and *Flaws*. Jonathan Haynes notes, “African cinema, including Nollywood, thrives on stories that resonate with viewers’ struggles and aspirations, offering them a mirror through which they can see and reshape their lives” (56). These films’ narratives provide a platform for audiences to reflect on their challenges and envision paths to recovery and growth.

Application to the *Therapist* and *Flaws*

Using Narrative Therapy Theory, this study explores how *The Therapist* and *Flaws* employ storytelling to address mental health and emotional well-being. The protagonists in both films grapple with internal and external conflicts, ultimately re-authoring their narratives to achieve healing and self-empowerment.

In *The Therapist*, Eze Odometa presents a series of therapy sessions where clients confront their traumas and rewrite their life stories. The narrative’s therapeutic essence lies in its ability to externalise problems, illustrating how individuals can separate themselves from their struggles. As Hyginus Ekwuazi observes, “Film is a cathartic medium, offering audiences a safe space to confront and process their emotions” (88).

The protagonist's journey exemplifies the deconstruction of negative societal and personal narratives, replacing them with empowering alternatives.

Similarly, Diana Child's *Flaws* explores themes of identity and resilience, depicting characters who confront and overcome negative self-perceptions. Onookome Okome states that "the power of African cinema lies in its ability to narrate the unspeakable, giving voice to silenced emotions and marginalised perspectives" (74). This resonates with the film's portrayal of characters navigating emotional turbulence and finding strength in their vulnerabilities.

Both films also engage viewers in a process of introspection and self-reflection. Barclays Ayakoroma highlights the communal aspect of storytelling in African cinema, noting that "films are not just entertainment but vehicles for cultural and psychological engagement" (63). By presenting relatable struggles and resolutions, *The Therapist* and *Flaws* invite audiences to reflect on their own narratives, fostering emotional healing and growth.

Deconstruction and Empowerment in Narrative Therapy

Narrative Therapy Theory's emphasis on deconstructing harmful narratives is evident in the films' critique of societal stigmas around mental health. As Hyginus Ekwuazi argues, "Cinema can challenge societal norms, dismantling prejudices and fostering understanding" (92). This is particularly relevant in the African context, where mental health issues are often stigmatised. Both films confront these stigmas, offering alternative narratives that promote empathy and empowerment.

Furthermore, the films facilitate the externalisation of problems, a core aspect of narrative therapy. By portraying struggles as separate from the individual, they reduce the stigma and self-blame often associated with mental health challenges. This aligns with Barclays Ayakoroma's observation that "African filmmakers use storytelling to create spaces of hope and resilience, transforming pain into possibility" (67).

Re-authoring and Emotional Catharsis

Finally, the two films under study underscore the re-authoring process, depicting characters who reclaim their narratives and find emotional resolution. This mirrors the transformative potential of cinematherapy, where viewers experience catharsis through engaging with compelling stories. As Femi Shaka asserts, "The screen offers a canvas for emotional catharsis, enabling audiences to confront their fears and imagine new possibilities" (110).

Narrative Therapy Theory offers a compelling framework for analysing the therapeutic potential of *The Therapist* and *Flaws*. By focusing on storytelling as a tool for healing, the theory illuminates how these films engage with themes of identity, resilience, and emotional recovery. As White and Epston emphasise, re-authoring narratives is not merely an act of imagination but a step towards reclaiming agency and transforming lives. Through their powerful narratives, *The Therapist* and *Flaws* contribute to this transformative process, fostering mental health and emotional well-being.

***The Therapist* as a Tool for Mental Health and Emotional Healing**

Film has emerged as a potent medium for not only storytelling and entertainment but also for education, therapy, and social change. As the global understanding of mental health expands, so too does the exploration of alternative therapeutic methods, including cinematherapy. Cinematherapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses cinema as a means of aiding emotional healing and mental well-being, allowing viewers to engage with complex issues in a reflective and introspective manner. Nigerian cinema, known for its cultural richness and social narratives, provides unique insight into the struggles and triumphs of its people, particularly through films such as *The Therapist* (2021) by Eze Odumeta. *The Therapist* shall be explored as a vehicle for mental health advocacy, examining its narrative and therapeutic implications.

Cinematherapy has been recognized as an effective supplementary tool for mental health care, as it allows individuals to relate to characters, process emotions, and gain new perspectives. According to Kaplan, cinematherapy's strength lies in its ability to offer "emotional release, catharsis, and a platform for self-reflection" (Harold Kaplan 78). The medium of film engages multiple senses, capable of allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the storyline, identify with characters, and indirectly confront personal challenges through a safer, externalized narrative. Particularly in societies where mental health discussions may be stigmatized, films provide an accessible way to approach and understand these complex issues.

Summary of the Films

The Therapist: This film tells the story of a woman, Eloho, who embarks on a journey of healing after suffering years of emotional and physical abuse. Having lost everything and left her abusive marriage with nothing, she makes sure with the help of her friends Gari (a lawyer) and Dum Dum (a playful one) she helps women like Madam Prye and others facing similar trauma to overcome their trauma and break free from abusive marriage. Rather than focusing solely on her trauma, the film traces Eloho's path to self-discovery, growth, and the importance of community in overcoming adversity. The narrative, rich in both emotion and symbolism, explores themes of resilience, self-worth, and the courage required to break free from harmful relationships.

The therapeutic potential of *The Therapist* is woven into its narrative structure. The film portrays Eloho's character as a reflection of the stages many individuals go through in recovery from trauma, including denial, anger, acceptance, and eventual healing. This journey resonates with viewers who may themselves be grappling with similar challenges, offering a sense of solidarity and hope.

Flaws: This film is centred on the lives of a married couple (Seyi and Remi) whose relationship is upended through a violent home invasion by Dennis thereby raping Remi in the presence of her husband Seyi with the help of his friend Emeka. This action leaves the couple psychologically and emotionally devastated to the level of Seyi committing an unintentional murder leading him to 15 years imprisonment. Meanwhile, an application for a plea bargain by his lawyer reduces his crime to manslaughter instead of murder. This traumatic event serves as a catalyst for the couple's journeys, pushing them to confront repressed fears, anxieties, and unresolved emotional wounds. The film captures the complex, often nonlinear path of healing, illustrating how trauma permeates relationships, self-perception, and daily life. By situating its characters within the throes of emotional turmoil, *Flaws* serves as a medium through which viewers can examine their own psychological challenges, allowing for a cathartic release that mirrors therapeutic processes.

The narrative of *Flaws* aligns with key principles in mental health recovery, particularly the importance of processing trauma rather than suppressing it. Though, this trauma almost breaks the home of Seyi and Remi when the former tells his wife never to show up again. In the same way, the wife's mother and friend also advise her to move on with another man. According to Amadiume, cinema in African contexts has long held a "therapeutic function, fostering healing by allowing audiences to connect with familiar struggles and emotions through characters on screen" (152). *Flaws* exemplifies this therapeutic approach, as it does not shy away from depicting the raw and painful stages of emotional recovery. The couple's journey offers viewers a sense of validation and relatability with the reality of life, emphasising that healing is an ongoing process that requires courage and patience, dedication and sacrifice which can be seen in the character of Remi despite the husband giving up on the situation, believing that there would never be a solution.



Plate 3

Plate 1-3: *Show Gari convincing Eloho on why they have to report Fabian to the Police*

As Ogunyemi argues, "Cinema in Nigeria is not just entertainment; it is a mirror of society and a platform for healing" (112). The film's focus on mental health challenges traditional norms by promoting therapy and emotional healing as positive and empowering paths, encouraging viewers to consider professional help as a viable solution to their struggles. The protagonist's journey ultimately represents a cultural shift toward acceptance and openness about mental health.

Cultural Relevance and Collective Healing

The therapeutic effect of *The Therapist* also lies in its cultural relevance. Nigerian cinema serves as a reflection of the society's values, struggles, and aspirations, making films particularly impactful for local audiences. Eloho's character, while unique in her experiences, embodies the silent resilience of many women and men facing domestic abuse and mental health challenges. The film's portrayal of her journey resonates deeply with viewers who see their own experiences reflected in her struggles and triumphs.

By providing a narrative that addresses trauma, *The Therapist* contributes to a larger process of collective healing. Viewers, especially those familiar with Nigerian culture and social issues, are likely to experience a sense of catharsis through Eloho's and Madam Prye's story. According to Durojaiye, "When audiences see their reality depicted on screen, they are given permission to explore their emotions and validate their experiences, a process critical for healing in communities where trauma is often internalised" (Durojaiye 89).

Cinematherapy and Emotional Resilience

The Therapist exemplifies the potential of cinematherapy in fostering emotional resilience and mental well-being. By following Eloho and Madam Prye's journey from trauma to healing, which is exemplified in her statement when appreciating Eloho and her friends:

Madam Prye: Thank you. God will bless you. God will reward you. Ah. For what you have done, your children will reap from it.

Eloho: I told you not to worry

Madam Prye: If you know what I have been through with this man...I will wake up by 5 a. m all the way from Molete to Bode. Sometimes I walk to Oba's market to get herbs. I was almost killed by traditional worshippers because they are not meant to see women. Ah from what you have done, your children will reap from it.



Plate 4



Plate 5

The above pictures show the emotional status of Madan Prye when thanking Eloho and her friends
The film models healthy coping mechanisms and emphasises the importance of external support systems. It encourages viewers to seek self-awareness, self-worth, and connection as pathways to healing.

For viewers who may not have access to therapy, the film provides a secondary form of emotional processing. The representation of therapy as an option for Eloho to heal Mr. Rotimi who equally suffers from an abusive marriage via his wife not only serves as an important plot device, but also acts as an advocacy tool for mental health support in Nigerian society. This means that not only women suffer abuse

from men, men also suffer abuse and trauma from their wives. The film underscores the need for accessible mental health resources, as well as the role of community and friendship in fostering resilience.

Rotimi in this film gets traumatised with the death of his wife and goes on to suffer victimization and manipulation from his wife's friend who lures him into marriage for her selfish interest. Eventually the marriage turns sour when the woman conspires with Eloho and friends to frame him up so that the woman can legally take over all Rotimi's wealth.

Rotimi's New Wife: Well. As you obviously suspect, I didn't fall down from the stairs. My husband did this to me. Ever since his first wife died, he has been angry and abusive and of course infidelity. I do the best that I can, but it's never enough.

Eloho: We're so sorry to hear this. How can we help?

Rotimi's New Wife: I don't want to be in a loveless and abusive relationship. I was hoping there is a way out. All these from Rotimi's new wife are lies. She does all these so that she can use Eloho and her friends to legally defraud Rotimi who is already traumatised with the death of his first wife.

Rotimi's New Wife: That girl Sade (referring to Eloho) is not real. I paid her to sleep with you.

This is the wife confessing to Rotimi when she thinks she has succeeded in getting him. She pays Eloho who in turn is not aware of her antics. She eventually falls in love with Rotimi and decides to do the job of a real therapist, in line with what she studied in school and succeeds in healing of his trauma.



Plate 6

The above picture shows Rotimi and his wife who boastfully tells him that she paid Sade (Eloho) to frame him up

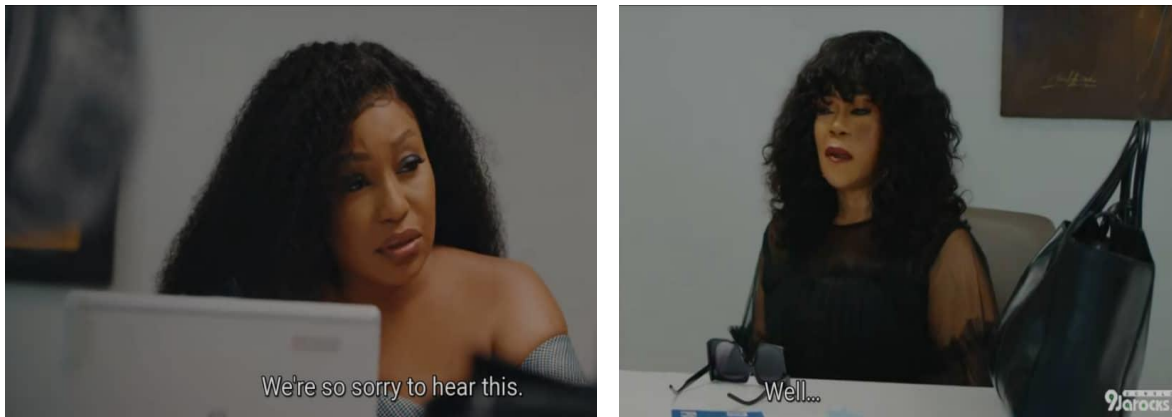


Plate 7&8

The two pictures show the new wife discussing with Eloho and her friends not knowing she is lying

The Therapist serves as a powerful example of the therapeutic potential of cinema, particularly in addressing mental health and emotional healing. Through its compelling narrative, culturally resonant themes, and deliberate use of cinematic techniques, the film invites viewers to reflect on their own experiences and consider the possibilities for healing. By situating mental health within the broader framework of Nigerian culture, *The Therapist* challenges social stigmas and promotes therapy as a viable, positive option for individuals facing trauma. As a cinematherapy tool, *The Therapist* not only entertains but also educates and heals, underscoring the transformative power of film in fostering emotional well-being.

***Flaws* as a Tool for Mental Health and Emotional Healing**

Film is a powerful medium that transcends mere entertainment, often offering viewers a mirror into the complexities of the human psyche. In recent years, Nigerian cinema has embraced topics related to mental health, addressing themes of trauma, resilience, and healing that resonate deeply with audiences. Diana Child's *Flaws* (2020) stands out in this respect, providing an emotionally charged narrative that delves into the aftermath of trauma and the journey towards recovery. By portraying the struggles of a married couple coping with the psychological scars of a traumatic home invasion, *Flaws* offers a poignant exploration of emotional vulnerability and resilience. This paper examines *Flaws* as a case study in cinematherapy, highlighting how its narrative, character development, and cinematic techniques contribute to mental health awareness and emotional healing.

Trauma and Healing in *Flaws*

Characterisation and Emotional Depth

The characters in *Flaws* are depicted with a complexity that underscores the lasting impact of trauma. The husband and wife are portrayed not as one-dimensional figures but as individuals grappling with intense psychological wounds that affect their sense of self and their ability to connect with each other. The wife believes that her dignity had been robbed off her while the husband also believes that his ego as a man has been rubbished for not being able to protect his wife from hurt. This can be established in Seyi's statement to his wife inside the prison:

Seyi: I think I did it because my ego was bruised, because each time I want to make love to my wife, I see his face, because your body is no longer appealing.



Plate 9: *The above picture shows Seyi trying to end his relationship with his wife claiming that his ego has been ruined*

This traumatic experience leads to Seyi murdering Dennis who raped his wife in his presence while he's being held in captivity.



Plate 10 & 11

The above pictures show Remi explaining to his mother why she chooses not to report the rape to the police because of the fear of stigma from society.

The same traumatic experience of being raped also affected Remi; Seyi's wife which prevents her from reporting the case to the police or her mother in order to avoid stigmatisation.



Plate 12



Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15

The above pictures show Remi being raped by Dennis in connivance with Emeka as Seyi is being held down.

Their vulnerability is laid bare, illustrating how trauma can disrupt not only one's mental health but also one's relationships. Child uses intimate dialogue and emotional close-ups to reveal the characters' inner struggles, allowing audiences to empathise with their pain and resilience. "The portrayal of trauma in Nigerian films opens up a space for collective empathy and healing, as audiences can see parts of their own experiences reflected on screen" (Durojaiye 50).

In particular, the wife's journey in *Flaws* highlights the importance of self-awareness in healing from trauma. Her character development is marked by moments of vulnerability and strength, showing how individuals can reclaim their sense of self in the wake of psychological distress. Through her struggle, *Flaws* communicates a message of hope, suggesting that recovery is possible, even if it is fraught with setbacks. This narrative approach aligns with the therapeutic value of cinema, as it allows viewers to witness healing through the lens of someone who has endured similar hardships, fostering a sense of solidarity and catharsis.



Plate 16

The above picture shows Remi and Seyi recovering from the trauma after his release from prison and they are now reunited as a family.

Cinematic Techniques and Therapeutic Resonance

Child employs various cinematic techniques in *Flaws* to enhance the film's emotional impact, utilising sound, lighting, and camera work to convey the characters' psychological states. Dark lighting and subdued colours reflect the characters' internal darkness, symbolising the weight of their trauma. Close-up shots, particularly of the characters' faces, highlight the intensity of their emotional experiences, drawing viewers into their mental world. Ekwueme notes that "cinematic techniques that mirror emotional turmoil create an immersive experience for audiences, allowing them to engage with the characters' struggles on a visceral level" (87).

The film's pacing further contributes to its therapeutic effect. Rather than rushing through the characters' emotional journeys, Child allows scenes to linger, giving viewers time to absorb the depth of their pain and gradual recovery. This deliberate pacing mirrors the slow and sometimes arduous process of healing, underscoring that recovery from trauma is a gradual journey.

Social Impact and Mental Health Awareness

In the Nigerian context, where mental health issues are often stigmatised, *Flaws* provides an important platform for raising awareness about trauma and emotional healing thereby discouraging people from taking laws into their own hands as reflected with the judgment Seyi receives for killing Dennis. By addressing topics such as psychological distress and the importance of seeking help, *Flaws* challenges cultural norms that tend to discourage open discussions about mental health.



Plate 17

Remi and Seyi with a Therapist, seeking assistance on how to heal from their trauma

Jumoke Ogunyemi argues that "Nigerian cinema has the potential to reshape societal attitudes towards mental health, offering a space for dialogue and understanding" (201). Through its depiction of characters dealing with psychological challenges, *Flaws* encourages viewers to acknowledge their own emotional struggles, de-stigmatising the act of seeking help which is why the Remi keeps disagreeing with Seyi, stating why they should not discuss their issues with anyone to avoid stigmatisation.

Moreover, *Flaws* provides a model for resilience, illustrating that healing is a universal process that transcends cultural boundaries. By showing characters who seek support and work through their trauma, the film reinforces the message that mental health is an essential component of overall well-being. Ekong suggests that "cinema as a mirror of society not only reflects individual struggles but also provides solutions, encouraging viewers to confront and address their own issues" (54). *Flaws*, therefore, stands as a valuable tool for mental health advocacy, contributing to a cultural shift that recognises and supports psychological healing.

Flaws demonstrates the potential of Nigerian cinema to serve as a tool for mental health and emotional healing. Through its complex portrayal of trauma, resilience, and recovery, the film offers viewers an opportunity to confront and process their own experiences within a safe, mediated context. Child's thoughtful use of narrative and cinematic techniques enhances the therapeutic impact of the film, allowing audiences to engage with the characters' journeys on a profound level. By destigmatising discussions around mental health and promoting empathy, *Flaws* not only contributes to individual healing but also fosters a collective understanding of trauma's impact. In this way, *Flaws* exemplifies the power of cinema to transform lives, bridging the gap between entertainment and emotional wellness.

Conclusion

In examining the therapeutic potential of cinema, Eze Odometa's *The Therapist* and Diana Child's *Flaws* illuminate the profound impact that film can have on mental health and emotional well-being. Both films serve as conduits for self-reflection and emotional processing, engaging viewers in narratives that address trauma, resilience, and recovery. Through their characters' journeys, they offer pathways to healing that resonate deeply with audiences, promoting awareness of mental health issues often stigmatized in society.

Cinematherapy, as demonstrated in these case studies, uses film as a safe space for viewers to confront personal challenges and find validation for their struggles. By fostering empathy, catharsis, and a sense of shared experience, cinema not only entertains but also facilitates psychological insight and emotional release. This approach underscores film's unique ability to reach audiences across diverse backgrounds, encouraging them to acknowledge their vulnerabilities and seek paths to recovery.

The application of Narrative Therapy Theory in the analysis of *Flaws* and *The Therapist* reveals how film narratives can serve as therapeutic spaces for reconstructing identity and healing emotional wounds. Narrative Therapy, as proposed by Michael White and David Epston, centres on the idea that individuals are not defined by their problems but by the stories they tell about themselves; through re-authoring, they can transform negative self-narratives into empowering ones. In *Flaws*, the protagonist's journey of self-acceptance and the reconfiguration of her traumatic past align with this theoretical lens, as the film externalises her pain and allows her to renegotiate meaning through dialogue and self-reflection.

Similarly, *The Therapist* uses counselling sessions and interpersonal exchanges as narrative devices that facilitate emotional catharsis and re-authoring of personal trauma. The therapeutic process depicted in both films mirrors the narrative therapeutic model of separating the person from the problem, inviting audiences to witness how storytelling becomes an act of healing. Thus, Narrative Therapy Theory provides a critical framework that not only deepens our understanding of character development and conflict resolution in these films, but also highlights cinema's potential as a medium for psychosocial restoration and identity reconstruction.

Ultimately, *The Therapist* and *Flaws* exemplify how Nigerian cinema, through intentional storytelling and culturally relevant themes, can function as a valuable tool in the mental health landscape. They invite viewers to engage in dialogue about trauma, healing, and the transformative power of self-awareness. As

cinema continues to evolve, its role in emotional and psychological healing is likely to grow, making it an essential medium in the ongoing efforts to promote mental health and well-being across societies.

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