



# **An Exploration into the Impact of Film on Adolescent Wellbeing: Implications for Schools and Educational Psychologists**

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“Films are really powerful and they can change how you think about something. There’s something about films that gives you a sense of gratitude, and I think it’s the story – seeing other people’s stories, seeing other’s lives. It can make you see life in a different way. You feel human, not alone, like everything is going to be ok.”

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## Summary

This paper is made up of three distinct parts:

### Part One: Literature Review

The Literature Review narratively presents a rationale for the research topic. An introduction includes current wellbeing concerns, highlighting the need for schools and education professionals to use creative, innovative, engaging but feasible interventions to effectively support wellbeing within educational settings. Adolescents are identified as a group who may be challenging to engage, but who may benefit from wellbeing support. Previous research relating to the usage and impact of film on wellbeing is explored, the focus then narrowed around the impact of film on adolescents' wellbeing in particular, culminating with the research questions.

### Part Two: Empirical Paper

The Empirical Paper provides an account of the research undertaken. A summary of relevant literature is followed by a research rationale, methodology and ethical considerations. Results, following Thematic Analysis, are discussed in relation to the research questions with limitations, implications for future research and Educational Psychology practice also considered.

### Part Three: Critical Review

The Critical Review offers a reflective and reflexive, narrative account of the researcher's journey of conducting the study from a critical but personal perspective. The impact of the decision making processes underlying the method and design, procedure and data analysis is considered. This part ends with a focus upon the contribution to knowledge and practice that this research makes.

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## **Part One: Literature Review**

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# **Part One: Literature Review**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Definitions**

Despite current national emphasis on wellbeing, the definition of wellbeing remains elusive (Dodge et al., 2012), particularly within educational settings and practice. For the purpose of this research an approach to wellbeing is adopted. The approach is a combination of preferred and encompassing descriptions of wellbeing by Day & Qing, (2009) and Dodge et al., (2012). Throughout this research wellbeing is referred to as both a psychological and social construct. A dynamic state in which the adolescent, in this case, is able to develop their potential school work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, contribute to their home, school, and local communities, and build a sense of resilience and belonging in which they feel they have a positive outlook on life. It is considered a subjective term and a model of balance, whereby stable wellbeing is when adolescents have the psychological, social and/or physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge.

Throughout this research the definition of film refers to what Solomon (1995) describes as entertainment films. Films produced for entertainment purposes and not purpose made instructional or educational film.

### **1.2 Overview of the Literature Review**

The following literature review explores the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing. Due to limited research in this area, a narrative style was adopted for this literature review, to enable the consideration of literature at different levels of completeness and comprehensiveness (Grant & Booth, 2009). The review begins with an introduction to the search terms used when collating and examining the literature. Secondly, the national context around CYP's mental health and wellbeing is described, focusing on the prevalence of unstable wellbeing and the vulnerability of mental health among adolescents, highlighting the important role of schools in preventative and intervention based wellbeing practice. Following this, research and literature ascertaining to the positive impact of film is presented, with theoretical underpinnings as a basis for shifting the mind set away from viewing film as a model for violent or negative behaviours. The review will then draw on

research and literature relating to film as a therapeutic medium when supporting wellbeing across a variety of settings. Literature evidencing advantages of using film in this way, are discussed. Drawing on emerging themes from relevant literature, the next chapter considers the way in which adolescent wellbeing specifically, might be supported through the use of film. Finally, implications for schools and EP practice are drawn on outcomes of the literature review. The review will conclude with a rationale for the research and research questions for the empirical study.

### 1.3 Description of Key Sources

A search for relevant literature was conducted between August and October 2021, and again in January 2022 using the following electronic, online databases; APA PsycInfo (See appendix A), Applied Social Science Index (ASSIA), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), British Education Index (BEI), Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). These databases were selected for their coverage of social science, education, and psychology disciplines. The searches were conducted using a combination of keywords and search terms, shown in table 1.

*Table 1: Terms Used in Literature Search*

Search Terms	
	film* OR cinema* OR television OR "motion picture*"
AND	teen* OR "young person" OR "young people " OR youth OR adolescen*
AND	"pro social change*" OR positive change* OR transformat*
The asterisk (*) acts as the truncation character used to search for additional letters after the word (e.g., adolescent or adolescence )	

Relevant journal articles and books were initially identified from their titles and abstracts. Online searches were also carried out for relevant legislation, book chapters and unpublished doctoral theses using the search engine Google Scholar and through backward chaining of references within relevant articles and books, to limit publication bias. Additional manual searches were carried out in relevant Educational Psychology journals. In an attempt to gain a broad enough coverage of a developing field, studies and literature were included if they were written in English, peer reviewed, used a qualitative or quantitative methodology, and the abstract or title referred to the use of film and some

area of wellbeing. This approach aimed to ensure that no relevant material was excluded due to terminology alone, whilst focusing the scope of the review to the current area of study. Although papers relevant to the use of film with adolescents were primarily considered, due to a paucity of research and literature in the field, literature exploring the use of film across all ages were included when considered as relevant contribution to theory development and literature review outcomes. The use of film and Cinematherapy is a relatively new field in psychology, as such, no exclusion criteria based on publication date was deemed necessary. Evidence which provided insight into the potential role of the schools and EP, and was considered useful and transferable within the context of the current research, was also included. This mainly centred around implementation.

The decision-making criteria used to guide the selection of literature included are outlined in Table 2.

*Table 2: Literature Review Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

<b>Inclusion Criteria</b>	<b>Exclusion Criteria</b>
Cinematherapy (all elements)	Literature not in the English language
Therapeutic application of film	Narrative Therapy (all elements)
The use of film to promote change and/or cinematherapy in clinical settings	The use of educational film
The use of film to promote change and/or cinematherapy in educational settings	The use of film to promote change and/or cinematherapy outside of the US or UK
The use of film to promote change and/or cinematherapy with adult, adolescent, children and group populations	
Narrative Therapy use in film	
Application of Narrative Therapy to adolescents	
The use of film to promote change and/or cinematherapy in the US and UK	
All dates	

## **1.4 The Context for Research**

This section focuses on the context for the research which highlights wellbeing and promotion of mental health as key priorities for CYP. This section also focuses on the prevalence of unstable wellbeing and the vulnerability of mental health among adolescents, highlighting the important role of schools in preventative and intervention based wellbeing practice.

### **1.4.1 Wellbeing as a National Concern**

Across the United Kingdom (UK), the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) continues to be a subject of national significance and concern (Department for Education, 2018; Welsh Government, 2012). With government and health reports suggesting that one in four school aged children experience emotional distress and one in ten young people have a diagnosable mental health condition (Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education, 2018), it is important that the wellbeing of children and young people, and subsequently the ways in which this can be supported and fostered, is recognised and continually explored.

CYP spend a significant amount of time within education settings, and therefore prioritising support around children and young people's mental health and wellbeing has implications for schools and education professionals, particularly EPs. School settings are increasingly seen as well-placed arenas in which to foster wellbeing and the government now expects schools and relevant education professionals to contribute successfully to the academic, social and emotional wellbeing of pupils (Brown, 2018; Department for Education, 2018; Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education, 2018; Welsh Government, 2012, 2018).

In Wales, the Donaldson Report (Welsh Government, 2018) has prioritised wellbeing as one of the six core areas of learning, and Welsh government have recommended wellbeing be embedded into the curriculum as well as promoting a whole school approach to wellbeing (Education Wales, 2021; National Assembly for Wales, 2018). Estyn focusses on wellbeing as one of its five core inspection areas (Estyn, 2017). Some research, as reported in the UK's government's green paper (Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for

Education, 2018) suggests that school based interventions and programmes that support CYP's wellbeing can be less-stigmatising than in clinic based settings; and that appropriately trained teachers, school nurses, counsellors and teaching assistants can achieve results comparable with those achieved by trained therapists.

At the same time, financial and time constraints continue to impact school budgets and are among only some of the factors that bear pressures on schools. Within this context, schools are tasked with the challenge of supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of CYP through feasible, creative, innovative and engaging interventions.

#### **1.4.2 Adolescent Wellbeing**

Adolescence is widely recognised as a highly tumultuous period between childhood and adulthood in which the individual is tasked to forge an independent identity during potentially destabilising biological, psychological, social, and cognitive developmental experiences (Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Wiles, 2017). Adolescence and early adulthood are described as periods where mental health problems are likely to emerge as a result of the combined impact of the physical, neurological, psychological and social changes which take place in adolescence, on health and behaviour (WHO, 1998). Adolescents experience unique developmental challenges, with the search for social acceptance, a sense of belonging, approval, potential romantic relationships, and preoccupations with body image and its sometimes associated depression, frequently inducing anxiety (Choudhury et al., 2008; Hartas, 2021). Research has suggested these challenges are attributed to a variety of factors including social media, exams, financial stress, drugs and alcohol and home circumstances (Hartas, 2021). Therefore, it can be argued that navigating life situations during the adolescent developmental stage can be particularly demanding and could be described as a period of unstable wellbeing, where support around coping mechanisms, resilience, relatedness and normalisation is especially important. It is a time of life where support around wellbeing is paramount to positive life experiences and future outcomes.

The WHO (2021) identify adolescence (10-19 years; WHO 2021) as a risk factor for developing mental health problems, illustrating the need to explore and understand preventative as well as therapeutic support around wellbeing in this age group (National Health Service [NHS], 2017).

Literature purports that as adolescents transition from childhood to adulthood, they are in, what Eames, Barker and Scarff (2013) describe as the 'operational stage'. In this stage adolescents are starting to understand the world beyond themselves and develop the capacity for abstract reasoning and improved decision making skills; their thinking becomes more self-reflective and less absolute (Eames et al., 2013). This may have implications for the way their social environments and learning is conceptualised. These developmental transitions can be overwhelming and what has been reported within the literature to be helpful at this stage, is exposure to hypothetical situations and stories, alongside support in communicating with adults about sensitive issues in a way that allows them to leave stress and embarrassment at a safe distance (Eames et al., 2013; Phaire, 2013; Wright & Mahfoud, 2012; Wu, 2008).

## **2. THE POSITIVE INFLUENCE OF FILM**

Research suggests that counsellors, psychotherapists and psychologists have found interventions that incorporate popular culture mediums, such as film, helpful in establishing rapport through being able to connect and build upon something that service users are already familiar with (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000; Hesley & Hesley, 1998; Miller & Harper, 2017). As popular culture mediums, such as film, represent ideas, values and beliefs of society they can be seen as a vehicle for highlighting common denominators among diverse groups and therefore can be used to connect, teach and challenge those who watch them (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000).

The use of film to promote positive growth and change through perhaps, supporting connection, teaching and challenging factors within an individual or a group can be traced back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when, with the advancement and accessibility of technology, military psychiatric hospitals documented film as being used for educational and inspirational gains as well as entertainment (Newgent & Powell, 2011). It was reported that film viewings were supporting patients on social emotional, as well as behavioural levels and that military personnel were discussing how they identified and could relate to the characters and their problems (M. Powell, 2008). As the use of film as a therapeutic medium was gaining momentum within adult populations, some research suggested that it could be an effective therapeutic tool for supporting positive change and generating restorative discussions with CYP (Christie & McGrath, 1987; Duncan et al., 1986; Jurich & Collins, 1996). These

studies were the first documented to suggest that film can be therapeutic for the non-psychiatric and general population. Duncan, Beck, and Granum (1986) used the film 'Ordinary People' (Schwary & Redford, 1980), to support adolescent girls to build resilience, understanding, and coping strategies around reintegration into their homes following residential living. Christie and McGrath (1987) reported using 'The Neverending Story' film (Eichinger, Geissler, & Peterson, 1984) to support a young boy with the understanding of grief and loss. The same authors also report shortly after this study, using 'The Karate Kid' film (Weintraub, Louis, & Avildsen, 1984) to support a youth offender through social and emotional work. Due to these preliminary but pioneering studies within the psychological use of film as a field, the notion that attitudes and behaviours can be positively affected and that film can be used to positively support growth and change amongst adolescents is becoming more widely accepted (Nightingale, 2014).

Some entertainment production companies responded to this research and have since made the decision to embed educational or moral messages in film, believing it to increase knowledge, raise awareness, change perspective and behaviour amongst adolescents in their own lives (Singhal & Rogers, 2012). Much like the military personnel, some researchers purport that this is effective due to adolescent audiences being able to relate to characters and situations as they struggle with similar real-life issues (Cohen, 2013; Irlen & Dorr, 2002; Jurich & Collins, 1996; Nightingale, 2014). Therefore, film may exert a prosocial effect on adolescents and can be seen as a tool in which social learning about human phenomena, in the form of stories about life, may occur. Some literature argues that through watching film describe political beliefs and struggles, and portray hopes and fears for the human race, and stories of resilience and overcoming adversity, film can provide exposure to life's successes and failures, and can normalise a range of emotions and behaviours, through which a greater understanding of others, life, and problem solving can take place, ultimately contributing to stable wellbeing (Caron, 2004; Feustel, 2019; Hesley, 2000; Hesley & Hesley, 1998; Milne & Reis, 2016; Solomon, 1995).

Despite growing and pioneering research, as detailed above, the positive impact of film on CYP's wellbeing in particular, continues to be limited and under researched within educational psychology literature, and this mind set is proving challenging to shift among the general public, psychologists and educators (Deb, 2016). This could be as a result of

early, rigorous, psychological experimental research, suggesting CYP model violence from video and film (Bandura et al., 1963). This early research continues to influence perspectives on modelling from film and brings the potential positive influence of film into question.

### **2.1 Moving Away from the 'Modelling Violence' Mind Set.**

Despite the pioneering research suggesting video and film can model violence, being published in the 60's (Bandura, 1963), research continues to be undertaken and published, suggesting that media, including film, can be responsible for triggering negative, aggressive, and violent behaviours in children and adolescents (Anderson & Pempek, 2005; Bender et al., 2018; Funk et al., 2004; Kirkorian et al., 2008). These negative behaviours have been explained through some research, as CYP's greater access to media, and exposure to often age-inappropriate content accelerating the transition into adulthood, and increasing participation in risky behaviours (Anderson et al., 2001; Jordan & Romer, 2014b).

Despite these explanations, Bender, Plante and Gentile (2018) state in their meta-analyses study that exposure to media violence is linked to actual violent behaviour. However, the results of the meta-analyses relate to video games as the specific media. Consistent with Bender et al's (2018) findings, Baldacci and Funk (2004) suggest that video games can normalise violence through presenting it as justified, and this can lead towards the development of proviolence beliefs and attitudes amongst players/viewers. With video games, a player can create and participate, albeit via simulation, violent actions in the knowledge that no one suffers as it is not 'real'. It can be argued that this experience of creating and participating in violent actions via video games can desensitise players to real life consequences. As some film can be seen to be justifying violence through character choice and action, and can be viewed with an underlying sense of 'this is not real', it can be argued that film, as well as video games may influence development of proviolent beliefs. With the negative associations between media and violence contributing to the majority of the literature in the field, it may be that media and film as a negative medium is maintained amongst parents, educators and researchers, through fear of promoting adverse adolescent development and outcomes.

However, some literature posits that adolescents often find it soothing to immerse themselves in violent stories populated with characters who are going through an

exaggerated version of what troubles themselves (Cohen, 2013; Jones, 2006; Markina, 2014; Taransaud, 2015). This could explain the high levels of adolescent engagement with video games and films as opposed to other age groups, and highlights the positive support that a film may offer, through identification and relatability to characters and or situations.

Taransaud's (2015) claims are based on his analysis of case studies and his own practice, where CYP he has worked with have talked about how some controversial, violent storylines, characters and/or scenes have helped guide them, changed perspective and helped them feel less alone. Taransaud (2015) describes these changes and experiences as healing, suggesting that exposure to life situations through film, negative or positive, can be beneficial. Cohen's (2013) conclusions are also drawn from findings and data that has been provided by case studies and examples of practitioners' use of film as a therapeutic medium. Cohen (2013) interviewed 6 participants who were all researching and/or practicing film therapy in some form. Despite conclusions from this literature highlighting the positive influence of film, it must be noted that the data and literature are based on individuals practice experiences and case studies that may be biased in nature due to the fact that the practitioners are already using film as a therapeutic medium and therefore must believe in its effectiveness.

In an attempt to shift the paradigm towards the positive influence of film, some researchers in the field argue that simply watching film does not directly cause an individual to commit a violent act or model negative behaviour, but rather watching violent films can be referred to as a risk factor for such future actions, and, unlike other risk factors for violence or negative behaviours such as gender, personality, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and family economic status, can be mitigated against (Feustel, 2019; Ojiambo, 2017; Solomon, 1995; Taransaud, 2015; Wolz, 2004). Risk factors, by definition, increase the chances of something happening, and do not directly cause something to happen. It can therefore be theorised that by watching a violent film, or a film that presents anti-social behaviour, the risk factor of modelling violent behaviour could be outweighed by protective factors within the same film, such as building resilience, and improving self esteem. Feustel (2019) uses the 'Color Purple' film (Jones, Kennedy, Marshall & Spielberg, 1985) as an example of therapeutic gains outweighing the risk factors within film. Although the content themes of the 'Color Purple' present sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, and a particularly violent scene of physical

abuse by police officers, exposure to these situations and identification with characters can support understanding, a change in perspective and belief, the development of empathy, and the development of coping strategies and resilience. Feustel (2019) talks about the *Color Purple*, and her experience of watching films throughout her life, as transformative and healing experiences, that have helped her develop healthy coping skills and sustain personal growth. However, Feustel's (2019) conclusions are based on her own experiences and the case studies of film therapy practitioners and as opposed to peer reviewed research, should be interpreted critically and carefully considered when forming a bigger picture of the literature. Ojiambo (2017) similarly describes another example of therapeutic gain from what could be described as violent or graphic film. 'Something Necessary' (Kibinge, 2013), is a film that although includes rape as one of its main themes, can be seen to be used as a useful resource for developing resilience in adolescents. Ojiambo (2017) argues against violent film modelling violent behaviour, and through content and textual analysis suggests that although the film presents rape, which in itself bypasses taboo, and shame, it supports dialogue and communication around the topic. Ojiambo (2019) goes on to posit that the way in which the victim handles the rape can support the development of coping strategies and resilience, and by presentation of one of the perpetrators as a transformative agent, who represents the possibility of men triumphing over oppressive patriarchal norms, a change in perspective and some faith in humanity could occur within the viewer.

Of the limited research within film and neuropsychology, some literature is emerging that also suggests the benefits of watching violent film can sometimes outweigh the risk of modelling violence (Zachs, 2015). In Zach's (2015) book; *Flicker: Your Brain on Movies*, it is argued that neurological and anatomical responses to film can be the same as real life experiences in which the suspension of disbelief is powerful enough to evoke physical responses like crying, laughing, or even sweating and flinching, despite the underlying knowledge, that we are safe on a sofa, or in a cinema, remaining (Zachs, 2015). From a developmental perspective, some researchers suggest that without facing some adversity, people do not develop resiliency skills (Choudhury et al., 2008; Eames et al., 2013). It is therefore important for CYP to experience exposure to challenging life stories, situations and characters in order to be able to learn to face the unexpected, to take calculated risks,

and, within reason, cope when things go wrong. It can therefore be theorised that film, could enable CYP to experience a perhaps unsettling, challenging, violent or upsetting situation but from a safe distance. This experience could appear to be meaningful for an individual, increasing the chances of long term, sustained change. This brings into question, is watching a film, and experiencing these simulated emotions enough to mitigate the risk of modelling violence and learning positively from the experience, or does the viewing need to be guided, de-briefed, and discussed, in order for the experience to facilitate pro social and positive growth and change?

Alongside 'real' but safe experiences of film, and beneficial gains in terms of resilience, perspective change and understanding, Solomon (1995) describes violent or anti-social film as a tool in which a viewer can experience paradoxical learning. A way of learning in which negative reinforcement affects change in thoughts and therefore behaviours. Solomon (1995) explains it by way of imagining a film about a drug addict ending, where the viewer is left with an image of what not to become, what not to let happen to us in our own lives. Solomon quotes, "We can come out of denial rapidly and sometimes learn best by seeing the exact opposite of a satisfying, rewarding, independent way of living." (Solomon, 1995, p.98).

Some research has reported that talking about and discussing film post viewing, is a mitigating factor against modelling violent or anti-social behaviour from film. Yang and Lee (2005) conducted a pilot study which analysed 14 CYP's aggressive behavioural tendencies after watching 'A Bug's Life' film (Lasseter & Stanton, 1998). Results indicated that CYP in the experimental group, in which pre film briefing and post film discussion had taken place, showed a decrease in physical aggression levels via the pre and post Aggression Index (AI) test scores. However, the CYP in the control group indicated an increase in behavioural tendency toward physical aggression levels post film. Without opportunity to discuss the film, its themes and meanings, the control group CYP may have been reinforced by the aggressive nature of the film. Therefore, Yang and Lee (2005)'s study suggests that not all film may have the ability to provide the themes, or circumstances to mitigate an individual's risk factors effectively without structured or assisted viewing and discussion and reflection. It also brings into question individuals' personality as a factor for film being meaningful and

an effective tool for supporting positive growth and change, and wellbeing. Meaningfulness is discussed further in chapter 3.

Therefore, it can be argued that if every story and every character in film can resonate with the personal stories of every viewer, watching a violent film with a troubled adolescent can provide a platform for more productive and meaningful communication. Literature and research suggests that all film, with its diverse content and themes, has the potential to have positive impact and influence, regardless of level of violence, or severity of issue of concern, as long as it is therapeutically approached and implemented within a structured, appropriate, and safe environment, with space for reflection and discussion on the film (Solomon, 1995; Taransaud, 2015).

The paradigm is beginning to shift, as more research develops and emerges suggesting that media and film, when used considerately and therapeutically, can foster positive self-concepts, support the development of social cognitive and physical skills, and provide new avenues for learning and opportunities for positive growth and change that can better the future outcomes of today's adolescent (Jordan & Romer, 2014b).

### **3. FILM AS A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH TO SUPPORTING WELLBEING**

Though using film therapeutically within psychological practice is relatively new, the idea that drama can create positive, therapeutic change can be traced to ancient Greece (Jones, 2006). The ancient Greeks used drama to show the right and wrong paths in life. Drama and theatre was viewed as a catharsis, and was a way of learning about and dealing with emotions. Film can be viewed as a contemporary medium in which an individual can experience positive therapeutic and psychological growth and change, leading to stable wellbeing.

Using a therapeutic approach to work with film is described by Hesley and Hesley (2000) as supporting the CYP to notice how characters and relationships change over time, to notice how characters influence each other and the story, and to discuss and explore identification with characters. When CYP pay attention to the process of the film and characters with what researchers call 'conscious awareness', therapeutic change may take place (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000).

### **3.1 Cinematherapy**

Cinematherapy is a therapeutic technique that uses careful selection of film to be viewed by service users to support positive psychological growth and change, and problem solving. Stemming from bibliotherapy, and a form of narrative therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), Cinematherapy was developed as research documenting the positive use of film was gaining momentum in the late 1980's, in the US. It was created to challenge and change thoughts and irrational belief systems, in the hope that a change in behavioural patterns would follow (Sharp et al., 2002). Through supporting the service user in discussion, reflection and ultimately, identification with characters and projection, cognitive restructuring can take place (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Sharp et al., 2002).

Early cinematherapy pioneers took evidence from emerging literature that film can be used to positively influence people, and promote positive growth and change, and explored theoretical underpinnings through using cinematherapy in practice, documenting in the form of case studies, and defining it as a structured, therapeutic medium (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Solomon, 1995; Wolz, 2004). Cinematherapy is now established in the US as a therapeutic intervention that uses metaphor to support people to understand their own lives and challenges, and to cope with these difficulties. Berg Cross and Jennings (1990) purported that through watching film and through exposure to resolution of another's conflict, the viewer can experience relief and a sense of connection. Through experiencing universal feelings of the shared human story, feelings of inadequacy, guilt and shame are diluted. Therefore it can be argued that cinematherapy is effective due to its diverse range of content themes and topics, such as relationships, grief and loss, gender, power, substance abuse, and self concept, in which complicated and everyday life problems are presented (Hesley, 2000). Cinematherapy enables exploration of the metaphor through identification and relatability of characters and situations, and, through guided discussion, can lead to personal exploration and insight but from a safe distance (Hesley, 2000; Sharp et al., 2002). Cinematherapy has been reported to be effective with individuals, groups and in family therapy (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000; Turns & Macey, 2015).

Research and literature within the cinematherapy field is limited and reports and documentation as examples of its effectiveness are usually in the form of qualitative case

studies and analyses and only in the US (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Solomon, 1995; Taransaud, 2015; Wolz, 2004). Of the limited studies on cinematherapy and its use, only 3 peer reviewed and published studies exist where cinematherapy has been used within an educational setting with adolescents or pre-adolescents from the general population (Christie & McGrath, 1987; Dumitrache, 2014; Jurich & Collins, 1996).

Dumitrache (2014) implemented a 10 week cinematherapy programme in a college setting, in order to measure the effect on personal development, focusing on anxiety levels. It was hypothesised that the students' anxiety levels would decrease after their participation in the cinematherapy programme. 60 participants were included in the study, 30 in the experimental sample and 30 in the control sample. The Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale was used to measure pre and post. There was a weekly meeting that lasted 4 hours, in which a film was viewed and followed by guided group reflection and discussion. Across 10 weeks a range of topics were addressed through the film content. Results indicated a significant drop in anxiety among those who participated in the cinematherapy programme in comparison with those from the control sample. Dumitrache (2014) reported that the group were receptive to a cinematherapy working method, finding opportunity to restructure and transform their own life narratives and stories. Despite Dumitrache's study highlighting the positive impact of structured film use on adolescent wellbeing, findings must be considered in isolation, in terms of a lack of longitudinal effect. It is not known for how long these reduced levels of anxiety remained. However, the study does indicate that cinematherapy can mediate stable wellbeing barriers such as anxiety over a period of up to three months.

Jurich and Collins (1996) used a cinematherapy programme to see if it would increase self-esteem in a group of adolescents. 40 adolescents attended 6 cinematherapy sessions, each lasting 4 hours. The 6 films selected presented a range of topics that were believed to be relevant to adolescence, and small group discussions followed each viewing. The Tennessee Self Concept Scales were used pre and post measure and evaluation suggested that the cinematherapy programme helped improve adolescents' self-concepts, self-satisfaction, family self and social self. Jurich and Collins's (1996) findings suggest that on viewing film that may relate to personal life, adolescents wellbeing can improve. The participants in this study were not compared to a control group, therefore findings must be considered in relation to the possibility that other unknown factors may have contributed to an

improvement in self-concept and that these were unable to be mitigated against. Like Dumitrache's (2014) study, Jurich and Collins (1996) did not use any follow up measures so the longevity of the effect after the cinematherapy programme is unknown.

The third study that highlights the effectiveness of cinematherapy with CYP in an educational setting is the Christie and McGrath (1987) study, in which a focus was on the particular topic of death, loss and grief. Christie and McGrath (1987) used the film 'The Neverending Story' (Eichinger, Geissler, & Peterson, 1984) to support an 11 year old boy who had developed emotional and behavioural difficulties at home and school after the loss of his mother. The cinematherapy was used in a group setting with the boy's family and it was reported that through identification with the character and situation the boy and his family were able to understand and complete the grieving process. The film provided a framework and language for addressing and working through grief. Although Christie and McGrath's (1987) study was a single case study, follow up measures were conducted and after 6 months the boy and his family were functioning well and school and home reported that the boy was much happier and his difficult behaviour had decreased. Christie and McGrath's (1987) study suggested that the positive effects of cinematherapy can last up to at least 6 months.

Research discussion and review so far, has evidenced how film can be used to promote therapeutic change by offering hope and encouragement, deepening emotion, providing role models, enhancing client strengths, reframing problems, improving self-esteem and self-concept, changing perspective, beliefs and values, and building resilience (Hesley, 2000; Lampropoulos et al., 2004). Literature has also emphasised the importance of implementation of film as a therapeutic tool, and suggested that it requires the same consideration that any therapeutic intervention requires and should not be done in a cavalier manner. All the studies explored above have reiterated the importance of structured and guided use and implementation of film when using it therapeutically to support positive growth and change, in order for it to be effective. Like Yang and Lee's (2005) study, the research also highlighted the importance of post film discussion in order to enable a narrative therapy approach and explore identification and metaphor further. Bierman and Krieger (2008) summarise this by defining four stages that viewers must go through in order for cinematherapy to be effective. See figure 1;

*Figure 1: The 4 Stages of Cinematherapy*

1. Identification, where viewers can relate to situations and see similarities between themselves and characters in the story;
2. Catharsis, where viewers allow emotions and internal conflicts to rise to the surface of consciousness;
3. Insight, where viewers make the connection between the circumstances and characters and themselves;
4. Universalisation, where viewers understand that their problems are not unique, they are not alone, and that they are capable of exploring different and effective methods of coping with them (resilience).

The following sections of this chapter discuss narrative therapy, meaningfulness and the importance of discussion as they are essential factors in enabling the viewer to progress through the 4 stages of cinematherapy in order to implement film as a therapeutic tool effectively.

### **3.2 Narrative Therapy**

In order to understand the mechanisms of the effectiveness of film as a therapeutic medium, it may be helpful to view it through a narrative therapy perspective. Nearly all research in the film and cinematherapy field uses a narrative therapy approach as an underlying framework to its efficiency, but only a few report the usage of the term narrative therapy explicitly (M. Powell, 2008; Priester, 2008; Sharp et al., 2002; Turns & Macey, 2015). Developed in the 1970s by Michael White and David Epston (1990), narrative therapy supports identification and discussion of strengths, values and skills associated with individuals, but seen or heard initially within stories of others, before understanding and reconstructing own life stories in order to effectively confront current and future problems (Epston & White, 1990; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Morgan, 2000). Within film as therapy or cinematherapy literature, the narrative therapy approach is mostly referred to as using 'metaphor' (Christie & McGrath, 1987; Heston & Kottman, 1997; M. L. Powell et al., 2006; Sharp et al., 2002). When an individual watches material that involves characters dealing with similar conflicts and issues to their own, people can identify and relate to situations and characters, leading to personal exploration and insight, whilst keeping an emotional

distance from stressful or frightening experiences or topics. Using the narrative metaphor, they externalise their problems consciously or unconsciously and the viewer can be left feeling empowered and equipped to better understand and cope with his or her own difficulties (Freedman & Combs, 1996). Therefore, it can be argued that with film presenting human stories, and opportunity for relatable metaphor, it can be an effective medium used in community settings such as schools, to support CYP to obtain greater insight and new perspectives on how to overcome real obstacles in life that may be preventing them from true happiness and positive change (Heston & Kottman, 1997).

Using narrative therapy as an underpinning enables us to understand how film, used therapeutically, can be particularly effective with adolescents. A film's metaphors can captivate the imagination whilst supporting the adolescent to make sense of seemingly difficult emotions and real world experiences (Hesley, 2000). Reporting on case studies and practice, Taransaud (2015), suggests that CYP, particularly adolescents, find some comfort and enjoyment from living life vicariously through characters and situations in film, despite films only lasting a few hours. This may be explained by an adolescent experiencing catharsis and some form of relief through a film providing the understanding of alternative means to create change, in a non-threatening manner. This in-direct, non-threatening process allows the change to develop intrinsically and enables the adolescent a sense of control and agency in a sometimes challenging and overwhelming situation. Research has shown that when intrinsic, self-motivated change takes place, particularly within adolescents, the change becomes more meaningful and long-lasting (Choudhury et al., 2008; Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Oberle et al., 2011). Further research has suggested that through identifying with a character or situation in film, but remaining detached and protected by the metaphor, an adolescent has opportunity to understand their own story, find new solutions, resolve conflict, and develop trust, leading to an increase in self awareness and an understanding of themselves and others; successful factors of stable and successful wellbeing (Bierman et al., 2008; Heston & Kottman, 1997; Priester, 2008).

Consistent with literature and research examined so far, research highlights the importance of considered and structured use of narrative therapy approaches when used through film, and emphasises essential post film discussion in order for the metaphors and narrative to be

explored effectively (Bierman et al., 2008; Heston & Kottman, 1997; Priester, 2008; Solomon, 1995; Taransaud, 2015). Taransaud (2015) emphasises the importance of allowing for the leading of the CYP during post film discussion, suggesting avoiding bringing to attention and exploring, the similarities between the characters in the film and the CYP as this can be too intrusive, and staying within the metaphor allows for the CYP to make the connections themselves and open up exploration of the themes, with distance, when they are ready. This highlights the importance of implementation and the rapport and connection between the CYP and the adult working with them. It can be defined as a framework as described by Wolz (2004) as stages of connection. See figure 2;

*Figure 2: The Three Stages of Connection for Narrative Change Through Film*

1. The first stage of connection is with the adult who's willing to show interest in genres which appeal to the CYP.
2. The second stage is with a character or situation who suffers or struggles with the same experiences and problems as the CYP.
3. And the third stage is the connection with the CYP's own feelings.

In summary, stage 1 is where the CYP views the film through a detached and distanced approach and focus is on surface meaning metaphor through words or images of the film. Stage 2 can be described as where the CYP begins to identify with a character or situation, but at this stage it is not meaningful, links are universal feelings or ideas . Stage 3 is the stage in which the change usually happens, and through a vicarious connection with the character or situation, the CYP may be able to relate their experiences to their own and gain a greater awareness of personal, salient issues. Successful progress through stages 1 and 2, supported through gentle discussion, can lead to the CYP developing confidence to share feelings and experiences, and as associations and connections to the metaphor are made, personal issues begin to emerge and can be discussed from a broadened perspective, in a safe and contained way.

Narrative therapy is effective when alternative stories can be 'richly described', when they can present a rich description of lives and relationships (Morgan, 2000). Morgan (2000)

describes rich description as ' Fine detail articulation of story lines of a person's life; their motives, histories and own understandings.' (Morgan, 2000, p.63). Film is a medium providing rich description. Through film, the stories of characters' lives are interwoven, and fine detail articulated through image, music, and language, presenting alternative stories for the viewer through the universal understanding and connection with being human. Research and literature has suggested that understanding and discussing metaphor in film can enable adolescents to live out alternative stories, new self-images and new possibilities for relationships and futures.

### **3.3 The Importance of Meaningfulness**

Literature suggests that in order for therapeutic positive growth and change to occur through film, the film, or the experience around viewing the film, has to appear meaningful to the CYP (Nightingale, 2014; Solomon, 1995). Some research has shown that when a film presents content that triggers meaningful connection for the individual, a change in perspective often occurs, with the world viewed as a gentler, and more kind hearted place, leading to a stronger sense of belonging and connection to being human (Janicke & Oliver, 2017). Janicke and Oliver's study (2017) explores the connection between a meaningful film and feelings of love, connection and compassion. With a large sample size of 266 students, results suggested that individuals are more likely to experience positive feelings of growth and change through connectedness, love and compassion when they have viewed a film that is relatable and meaningful to them. Despite the large sample size, participants were incentivised with study credits and data was self reporting questionnaire responses. Therefore it must be acknowledged that there are a number of factors that contribute to a film's meaningfulness for an individual, and this is subjective and dependant on an individuals life experiences. What is meaningful for one person is not for the next. How an individual defines connectedness and compassionate thoughts and behaviour can also differ so a self report measure does not necessarily infer generalisability. With an incentive for participation some responses may also have been what participants deemed expected of them. This is one example of a study where the limitations suggest that the factors discussed below must be considered in relation to individual differences, environment, context and time, highlighting the understanding and awareness that meaningfulness is subjective, personal, and fluid.

As an interpretive art form, film as a medium alone, has potential to be significantly meaningful, as due to its presentation of metaphor through a number of sensory inputs at the same time, choice of metaphor, and therefore meaning and interpretation can occur, which for the individual fosters a sense of control and intrinsic motivation when it comes to change (Christie & McGrath, 1987) . Fostering a sense of agency and control can be helpful for adolescents in supporting thought and behaviour change, particularly around topics that adolescents find difficult to talk about (McCool et al., 2001; Nightingale, 2014; Wiles, 2017).

Solomon (1995) argues that in order for a film to be meaningful, and therefore used as a therapeutic medium, the viewer must experience an immersion, in which engagement levels from the viewer must be high, with no distraction. This relates to engagement at the physical level, concentration, ability to hear and see at maximum potential, but also engagement in the underlying meaning and message of the film. Social learning theory research, along with more recent research around effective modelling from media, suggests that individuals will be less likely to attribute meaning to a message, storyline, character, or situation when they hear it, rather they need to engage with it on multiple levels (Bandura, 1971; Nightingale, 2014).

Across cinematherapy literature, salience has been reported as a factor contributing to an individual's interpretation of meaningfulness in film, particularly within adolescents (Eames et al., 2013; McCool et al., 2001). If some topics and themes are salient within an adolescent at the time of the film viewing such as parental separation, death, grief or loss, or peer relationships, the adolescent is more likely to relate to the film and describe it as meaningful, presenting as more likely to open dialogue around it, to change thoughts and behaviours, and to remember and reference it in the future (Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Janicke & Oliver, 2017). Similarly, and consistent with social learning theory (SLT), identification and relatability to characters is affected by salience within the adolescent. According to SLT, characters (models) who are similar to the viewer (observer) in some way, either through physical characteristics, age, group affiliation or culture, are most likely to be attended to (Bandura, 1971; Bellini & Akullian, 2007). The nature of the relationship between the adolescent viewer and the character is an influential factor on meaningfulness. Further research shows that engagement with a relatable character can create active, long-term meaningfulness within an individual, supporting progression from awareness of an issue

towards thought and behaviour change (Cherry, 2021; Nightingale, 2014). When relatability is strong between a viewer and a film character Nightingale (2014) refers to this as a 'super peer', and suggests that from the adolescent's perspective, the situations and experiences surrounding their super peer will feel real, as if they are happening to a real friend, and this can be helpful to provoke personalisation, evaluation of risk, and therefore thought and behaviour change.

Research reviewed and discussed has highlighted the importance of salience and of fostering choice within the adolescent. Therefore, the selection of film to be used when working with film therapeutically should be carefully considered and perhaps collaboratively chosen in order to increase meaningfulness (Marsick, 2010). To then explore and consolidate the meaningfulness, and as literature reviewed so far has emphasised, post film discussion and exploration is an essential part of film used as a therapeutic medium.

### **3.4 Talking About Film**

Research and literature suggests that for positive psychological growth and change to take place through the therapeutic use of film, pre and/or post film discussion must occur (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Caron, 2004; Dermer & Hutchings, 2000; Solomon, 1995; Turns & Macey, 2015; Wolz, 2004). Solomon, Wolz, Berg-cross and Jennings all use post film discussion in their cinematherapy practice, as, over the years of honing their practice based skills, have found this to be essential in the change process. Literature suggests that discussion alongside film as an intervention is the most effective method of using film therapeutically and has been reported to be more effective than when film is delivered in isolation, or talk therapy takes place, with CYP more likely to model and change behaviours (O'Doherty et al., 2011).

Elias & Tobias, (1996) coined the Television or other audiovisual media, Discussion, Rehearsal and guided Practice (TVDRP) approach after their research detailing the effectiveness of 'combination learning'. The TVDRP approach encourages the participant to evaluate, reflect and discuss the film intervention topics with interactive discussion leading to deeper, critical understanding of the topic. Through discussion of the film's stories, character struggles, and moral dilemmas presented, the CYP and/or facilitator, can access meaningful metaphorical content. Watching a film without pre and/or post film discussion

may not promote successful, meaningful change, and in relation to film presenting violent or anti-social behaviours, may not mitigate the risk factors of modelling (Byrd et al., 2006; Sharp et al., 2002).

As well as using the discussion of film to explore and consolidate deeper understanding and meaningfulness of the topics and themes presented, post-film discussion can be used to facilitate communication and enable dialogue between viewer and facilitator, peer groups, and families (Christie & McGrath, 1987; Turns & Macey, 2015). Turns and Macey (2015) reported findings from a case study with a family including an 8 year old boy who had been described as having behavioural difficulties. Post film viewing discussion was carried out across a few sessions. Turns and Macey (2015) reported that the family responded well to the experience and had reported improvement in the boy's behaviour during the post film discussion. Findings are consistent with what has been defined as effective cinematherapy practice, and suggests that when particular issues or problems are challenging to initially open up about, film can be used to support understanding of normalising similar life challenges, acting as a catalyst through which discussion and conversation can begin and there is opportunity for the facilitator to understand, empathise, and explore (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990). It must be noted here that the findings of the study were self reported by the authors, and as a result, their own practice was analysed. A bias in effective, and what may be deemed successful, outcomes of the case study must be considered and kept in mind when generalising and using this case study to build evidence. As no control case study was used, it is not possible to attribute the effectiveness of the film therapy to the discussion alone. Would the work have been just as successful without post film discussion, due to the film content alone? Despite some literature suggesting that post film discussion is essential to effective change, the limitations in this study have highlighted and brought into question the function and importance of post viewing discussion when using film as a therapeutic medium.

The experience of film becomes shared when discussed, and some cinematherapy literature posits that with this shared experience comes an alliance to the human race, and a common understanding through which connections and relationships are strengthened and communication is more effective with shared constructs (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990). As social beings, humans enjoy shared connections and it can be argued that film is often used

within society as a cultural medium through which values, opinions and personality traits are shared (Solomon, 1995). Some research findings suggested that adolescents often discuss film with peers as a means to seek out new like-minded friends and to improve existing relationships (Caron, 2004; Irlen & Dorr, 2002; Nightingale, 2014). Literature around adolescent development posits that discussions among adolescent friends play an essential role in moral reasoning development. Irlen and Dorr's (2002) study investigated adolescent girls' conversations about popular teen films. Findings suggest that film can be an effective tool for supporting social skill development through presenting real-life illustrations of dilemmas involving serious issues that adolescents may face, and practising negotiating these hypothetical challenges through group discussion. Therefore, it can be argued that discussion around film can positively influence reception, interpretation and understanding of challenging life situations and social and emotional skills, and could be an essential part of using film as a therapeutic medium to support positive change and wellbeing.

### **3.5 Advantages of Film as a Therapeutic Medium**

With technological mediums continually evolving, film, as a therapeutic medium is becoming increasingly useful and accessible in comparison to more traditional therapeutic mediums or approaches such as bibliotherapy (Jordan & Romer, 2014b). Creative and inexpensive, film can be used across individual, group and family levels as it can be universal, cross cultural and relatable in relation to a diverse range of themes and content, addressing real life situations in order to normalise, reframe, and expand ideas (Ballard, 2012; Dermer & Hutchings, 2000; Schulenberg, 2003).

Despite adopting the same psychological underpinnings as bibliotherapy (narrative therapy and CBT), film, as a therapeutic medium, can provide a unique visual and audio experience, enhancing the impact of its underlying psychological approaches (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Calisch, 2001). Theories of learning and creativity suggest that there are seven intelligences (Gardner, 2011), and the more of these intelligences that are accessed by an individual, the faster they learn. Given the facets that make up film, it can therefore be argued that film allows us to access all seven (Caron, 2004; Wolz, 2004). Figure 3 outlines how the domains of intelligence can relate to film:

*Figure 3: Gardner's multiple intelligences in relation to film.*

- The logical (plot)
- The linguistic (dialogue)
- The visual- spatial (pictures, colours, symbols)
- The musical (music and sounds)
- The interpersonal (storytelling)
- The kinesthetic (movement)
- The intrapsychic (inner guidance).

As well as providing a unique, enhanced learning experience, film can be accessed more readily than conventional therapies, with the frequency, ability to pause and resume, and with selected company, at the discretion of the viewer, allowing space for therapeutic reflection and escapism to be easily achieved (Caron, 2004; Solomon, 1995). The ability to repeatedly watch the same film multiple times can enhance the viewer's social emotional learning (SEL) experience. Studies have shown that repeated exposure enhances embedding of the target message, strategy, lesson, or skill from a 2D television source (Barr et al., 2007).

One of the main themes of benefit highlighted across literature and research is that film allows opportunity for a shared experience. Bibliotherapy, talk therapy, and other more conventional forms of therapeutic intervention can be individualistic; the experience of a book is not shared in vivo. Cinematherapy literature argues that it is the communal experience of film that has a significant impact (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Jones, 2006; M. Powell, 2008; Solomon, 1995; Wolz, 2004). Experiencing emotions collectively, regardless of characteristic differences, enables human connection and a sense of belonging to humanity, which can lead to successful wellbeing (Allen et al., 2021; Bowen, 2006; Jordan & Romer, 2014; Nightingale, 2014; Turns & Macey, 2015). Shared viewing experiences can lead to exploration and discussion, enabling dialogue between individuals, and/or groups, around difficult topics or issues.

Throughout years of using film as a therapeutic medium in practice, Solomon (1995), notes that there are multiple factors for individuals that can prevent effective therapeutic support and intervention from taking place such as cost, time, culture, environment, and stigma. Solomon (1995), argues that film as a therapeutic medium mitigates many of these factors,

enabling strong and effective collaborative relationships to be fostered quickly leading to successful and meaningful change. A number of studies purport that film can be time saving in comparison to other forms of therapeutic intervention (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Calisch, 2001; Caron, 2004; Lampropoulos et al., 2004; Schulenberg, 2003). Access to a story, a narrative that can be used as a therapeutic medium, can be viewed within two hours, where as the same narrative or story via a book, or a talk therapy framework, may take weeks or months to journey through.

Having explored the way in which narrative therapy underpins the therapeutic use of film in chapter 3.2, where viewers can explore emotions and issues from a safe distance through the story of another, some studies reported that film enables comfortable, open and honest therapeutic exploration of challenging issues due to feelings of physical safety and familiarity, as well as the psychological safety that narrative therapy offers. Participants in Cohen's (2013) study completed interviews and a survey, answering questions around how they considered film used therapeutically in their own practice, to be effective. One of the main findings of Cohen's (2013) study was that as opposed to a formal environment experienced in conventional therapy, with an unfamiliar facilitator, a film can be accessed any time and anywhere, enabling a comfortable, familiar, less formal environment in which to explore challenges. An environment that fosters psychological but also physical safety and comfort can allow a relaxed and positive situation, in which open, honest and transparent dialogue can be opened and built upon (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Bowen, 2006; Calisch, 2001). The participants in Cohen's (2013) study were film therapy practitioners and therefore would present film as a therapeutic medium as effective so as not to highlight their own practice as ineffective.

Another factor that contributes to film enabling comfortable dialogue, and successful therapeutic exploration, is that films typically have universal appeal, where most people can relate in some way, to the stories they view. Therefore, it can be argued that film can create an equal platform during discussion, where shared language, shared understanding and shared vulnerability can create an equilibrium between the viewers, whoever they are. As opposed to more conventional therapy or intervention, which may be inaccessible to some, film can enable quicker access to empathetic and perspective changing thinking through its versatility; one can experience the world through another's eyes within two hours, enabling

use with diverse groups such as families, schools or individuals, to explore issues such as culture, class, gender, power, and sexual orientation in a comfortable, transparent and equitable way (Turns & Macey, 2015). It must be noted here, that despite comparisons with conventional and talk therapies in this chapter, it has focused on the benefits of the differences that film as a therapeutic medium can offer and is not stating that film as a therapeutic medium is a substitute for a therapist or other forms of recommended therapy. Due to its versatility, as well as being used as an intervention in its own right, if appropriate, film as a therapeutic medium can be used as an adjunct to other forms of therapy in the ways that are being explored throughout this thesis. It may simply be the case that it is more accessible to some, given its universality.

With the pressure of the false 'perfect life' that social media imparts on CYP today, it is important for CYP's wellbeing, to understand and have exposure to the facets of life that are normal and that make up our development and humanity in order to build resilience (Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Jordan & Romer, 2014a). Some literature around film as a therapeutic medium and cinematherapy literature purports that film is able to show and depict what it's like to be human in all its forms (Bowen, 2006; Dermer & Hutchings, 2000; Gregerson, 2010; Irlen & Dorr, 2002; Shaw & Hammer, 2016). Like other art forms, film can reflect both human suffering and capacity for joy, supporting the viewer in building awareness and understanding of the human life journey, ultimately leading to a sense of belonging and a connection with humanity of not feeling alone. As opposed to other art forms, film has become dominant within our culture and therefore could be a useful tool in accessing hard to reach groups, such as adolescents, in which to explore human life issues (Jordan & Romer, 2014b; Taransaud, 2015).

### **3.5.1 Accessibility**

Film is a widely accessible and perhaps therefore popular, cultural experience and art form that, as a result, can have reach and credibility with many children, young people and their families. Film can be accessed easily, and in the way the CYP and families want to, wherever they are, however they want it, whenever they want it. Therefore, using film as a therapeutic tool can enable schools and education professionals to reach diverse groups of CYP and their families and to foster relationships and develop conversation around difficult issues (Nightingale, 2014).

CYP who find reading and consequently, the translation of written word into sensory experiences, challenging and do not access books readily, may find that film appeals more directly to their senses and can therefore support them in developing imagination (Neumeister & Hebert, 2001). An accessible therapeutic platform for illiterate viewers, film can also be accessed by individuals with additional needs who may find some other mediums or methods of teaching challenging, and who may find film relatable, regulatory, calming and sensory stimulating (Caron, 2004; Milne & Reis, 2016). Despite no specific data on participants' backgrounds and demographics across the studies carried out within the video as therapy and cinematherapy fields, a majority of the participants within the studies reported that relating to a film through characters, plots and storylines was powerful in that it enabled engagement and a sense of belonging (Dumitrache, 2014; Janicke & Oliver, 2017; Yang & Lee, 2005). Therefore, it can be argued that individuals from minority groups and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may find that they can relate to the narratives found in film. Plots may focus on their daily challenges, concerns, and be close to their life situations, while likely to include characters from diverse ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds. Film can expose the viewer to a rich and diverse depiction and understanding of cultures and differences; humanity, in many forms, offering opportunity for critical and perspective changing thinking (Caron, 2004).

Some research and literature within the video modelling field can be used in relation to film as a therapeutic medium, or cinematherapy, to explain the perceived effectiveness of the use of film to promote therapeutic change with CYP with additional needs, such as social, emotional, mental health (SEMH) or autistic spectrum condition (ASC) (Bellini & Akullian, 2007; Charlop-Christy et al., 2000). Successful modelling through film within these groups can be attributed to the ability, as opposed to in vivo, to manipulate content on screen. By displaying close ups or focusing in on a particular cue, video modelling is able to compensate for an individual's stimulus overselectivity – a trait often displayed by children with SEMH or ASC. Model's clothes, or other irrelevant cues can mistakenly be focused on whilst modelling in vivo, resulting in the intended focus area (themes, plots, behaviour) being missed (Bellini & Akullian, 2007; Charlop-Christy et al., 2000). The main method of direction used in film, shoots so that the camera frames allow the viewer to follow along with the model's relevant actions by zooming in on relevant cues, better than he or she

does without the film, enabling a better immersion, engagement, and understanding of the plot and experience of the film over all, for all viewers (Dowrick, 1990; Hyler, 1990; Karlinsky, 2003).

Literature reviewed and discussed so far has purported that film is an important, popular and accessible part of all CYP's lives, including CYP who have additional need, and others who may feel socially isolated from their peers. CYP can gain a sense of normality by participating in an activity that is universally accepted in the teenage world (Neumeister & Hebert, 2001; Newton, 1995).

#### **4. USING FILM TO SUPPORT ADOLESCENT WELLBEING**

Research around adolescent development has suggested that during the adolescent years, adolescents become less involved with their immediate family environment and seek information and experience from outside the family. Their physical growth, sexual development, romantic relationship development, cognitive, social and emotional developments are acutely affected by their environment and today's adolescent uses media for a variety of purposes, including obtaining support and information around forming their own identity, coping with problems, and relating to peers (Choudhury et al., 2008; Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Hartas, 2021). Research has suggested that young people today are subject to socialisation influences and other information from film rather than through direct associations with positive adult role models at home, school or within the community (Phaire, 2013; Tisdell, 2008; Wright & Mahfoud, 2012). This may be as a result of new and constantly developing technological advances and accessibility to high quality media and cinema platforms for diverse populations. Research highlights adolescents' affiliation with technology and media, and suggests film to be an effective medium and tool for engagement with the adolescent; a group who previously may have been characterised as 'hard to engage' (Eames et al., 2013; Neumeister & Hebert, 2001).

##### **4.1 Engagement and the Preferred Medium**

Film as therapy and cinematherapy literature notes that film is popular and a particularly significant part of adolescent culture and can therefore enable teenagers to engage and be more receptive to discussing sensitive topics through the use of popular film (Jordan & Romer, 2014b; Lampropoulos et al., 2004; Neumeister & Hebert, 2001; Taransaud, 2015).

Using film to establish discussion and exploration around challenging life situations and understanding can seem informal, familiar, comfortable and safe to an overwhelmed or anxious adolescent as opposed to the perhaps daunting prospect of attending a 6 to 8 week therapy programme with an unfamiliar facilitator in an unfamiliar setting. Research across the video modelling and cinematherapy fields has reported that individuals perceive video to be a compelling medium, which, naturally improves motivation, and in turn can be attributed to generating meaningful engagement (Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Jordan & Romer, 2014b; Jurich & Collins, 1996; Kirkorian et al., 2008; Wartella et al., 2013). Bandura (1965) attributed the attention-getting qualities of symbolic models, such as video and film, to this factor of intrinsic motivation. So, as well as being perceived as engaging, research suggests that video modelling may hold a viewer's attention well due to its novelty within a school setting. It is common knowledge that a novel stimulus will retain attention for longer than a more familiar medium.

#### **4.2 The Social and Emotional Impact**

Positive psychology research has consistently reported that exposure to positive emotions can contribute towards, and enhance successful wellbeing (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Film as a therapeutic medium research has suggested that although the situations and characters presented are sometimes shown to be undergoing a difficult or challenging time, they are found to display positive emotions more than negative ones (Deb, 2016). Newgent and Powell's study (2011), found that positivism was highlighted as a theme by participants, as a factor of viewing film that contributed to a feeling of decrease in hopelessness. It can therefore be suggested that despite negative emotions displayed, it must be considered, as in relation to the literature reviewed so far, that the exposure to the human life situations, whether they are positive or negative, is what may have the more significant impact on the viewer, decreasing anxiety and improving wellbeing over all (Bowen, 2006; Newgent & Powell, 2011; Powell et al., 2006; Thahir et al., 2018).

Exposure to positive outcomes after the depiction of challenging life situations and negative emotions via film can model hopefulness, successful coping strategies, and provoke positive changes in thought and behaviour (Feustel, 2019; Janicke & Oliver, 2017; Solomon, 1995).

This may be particularly useful for those who find emotional literacy challenging and have difficulties understanding and expressing social and emotional regulation, which for adolescents is often the case due to biological and social developmental stage (Choudhury et al., 2008; Eames et al., 2013; Gramaglia et al., 2011). Some research in the adolescent development field has suggested that adolescents may inhibit the expression of negative feelings according to the belief that expressing or experiencing emotions may damage relationships and create or increase conflict (Eames et al., 2013; Gramaglia et al., 2011). Despite some literature and research, reviewed so far, suggesting that cinematherapy and film as a therapeutic medium can be used to improve social and emotional outcomes for adolescents, there is a lack of research and literature that questions how. Some research around cinematherapy in the treatment of individuals with eating disorders (ED) has suggested how film as therapy can create change and improve wellbeing (Gramaglia et al., 2011). There is similarity between the ED and adolescent population groups in terms of need and difficulties with SEMH, so it may be useful to consider Gramaglia's (2011) findings in relation to how film may impact adolescents' social and emotional health and wellbeing. Gramaglia (2011) reported that film therapy may be effective with ED patients due to the therapeutic relationship, and shared language and understanding between patients and therapists, enabling both parties equal weight and more effective communication. Gramaglia (2011) goes on to suggest that using a creative approach, an art therapy, may help to engage a population that don't often want to talk and may contribute to the enhancement of self-discovery and self-expression. Whilst acknowledging that adolescents and ED patients are two different population groups, the findings can be applied to both, highlighting some general themes as to the impact of film as a therapeutic medium on adolescents. Relevant literature has suggested that the exploration of emotion through the therapeutic use of film, from a safe distance (narrative therapy) can lead to the practise and acceptance of difficult, negative or frightening emotions, and can enable the viewer to relate to and understand the lives and beliefs of characters with whom they have little in common, ultimately developing empathy, building resilience and improving wellbeing (Caron, 2004).

### **4.3 Human Connection and Building Resilience**

Literature and research suggests that through exposure to human stories which depict life situations and challenges, film can model coping strategies which can help the viewer to develop a more flexible approach when confronted with challenging situations in the future (Dumitrache, 2014; Dunkan et al., 1986; Ojiambo, 2017). Film can help the viewer to not feel alone or isolated, instilling confidence and empowerment around managing a difficult situation, which in turn can lead to development of resilience which can support successful wellbeing (Dumitrache, 2014; Dunkan et al., 1986; Ojiambo, 2017; Solomon, 1995; Taransaud, 2015; Wolz, 2004; Yang & Lee, 2005).

Dunkan et al (1986) used the film 'Ordinary People' (Redford, 1980), in group therapy to support CYP transition out of a residential home. Findings were that the therapeutic use of this film helped improve self esteem, social adjustment and goal attainment, but most importantly, helped project into the future and equip themselves with coping skills, and understanding of what lies ahead; resilience. Results were measured on the participants self reporting, as to whether their experience had been deemed helpful and positive. The authors also noted that 19 of the 22 participants returned to their families or entered foster homes, and remained within those settings for 6 months. It was this data that indicated effectiveness of the cinematherapy intervention. However, no data was collected after the 6 month mark so there are no longitudinal results and findings, highlighting the need for future longitudinal research.

Having practiced cinematherapy for decades and documented his experiences and findings in books, Solomon (1995, 2001) reports, through case studies, that the viewer can always relate to something in film. Whether struggling with issues like grief, addiction, romantic relationships, parental separation, Solomon could find a film that would help facilitate empowerment and confidence through understanding that they were not alone. The experience would expose the viewer to how some characters were able to triumph against all odds, in situations that were similar to their own. This feeling of not being alone, a sense of belonging, is what motivates and drives a human forward and is particularly salient during the adolescent stage (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hartas, 2021).

David Taransaud (2015) and Brigit Wolz (2004), report experiences consistent with Solomon's practice and purport that the right film can help the viewer feel a sense of gratitude alongside a sense of belonging, and therefore better about their own stressful situation, ultimately, building resilience;

"When we see a character who's going through a similarly painful experience, but emerges from that experience in an uplifting and triumphant manner, or more simply calmer, stronger, more stable and mature, it leaves us with positive lasting images that give us hope and faith in the future (Taransaud, 2015, p.164)."

Film can remind the viewer that there are many who have had or have it worse than them, facilitating reflection and thinking around a sense of gratitude (Wolz, 2004). Gratitude thinking can be perceived as a coping strategy which can lead to more positive thinking with hopeful futures, contributing towards successful wellbeing, particularly within adolescents (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Eames et al., 2013; Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Hartas, 2021).

This sense of belonging can be perceived as social connection. Understanding that others go through the same challenges in life is the feeling of human connection, and it is what the human strives for (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Positive psychologists have repeatedly emphasised the importance of social connectedness as a contributor to wellbeing (Cohen, 2013; Deb, 2016; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). For the adolescent in particular, the need for human connection and belonging is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation, where research has shown that a low sense of belonging and feelings of disconnectedness can be linked to anxiety, and this has been shown to impact wellbeing (Allen et al., 2021; Choudhury et al., 2008; Eames et al., 2013; Eivers & Kelly, 2020).

Research has also shown that adolescents who have a strong sense of belonging, experience more positive academic and social outcomes (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Eames et al., 2013). Through content analysis, Shaw and Hammer (2016) highlighted an example of how The Captain America films can facilitate an improved sense of belonging. The story focuses on a journey of searching for belongingness through which the viewer may encounter feelings of grief, loss, celebration, friendship, and anger. Although the viewer is not a superhuman, the viewer can draw parallels to the journey and realise the confidence and power within themselves to be able to foster relationships. However, with a content analysis method, it must be noted that the conclusions are the author's interpretations and

hypotheses, and the article contributes to a bigger picture of literature and practice, and forms part of an, albeit small, knowledge base of the potential positive impact of film.

Due to historical constructs of film modelling violent behaviour or having negative impact, as discussed in chapter 2.1, there is a lack of research around ways in which film can support vulnerable CYP in preparation for the challenges they face. Jordan and Romer (2014) argue that whether it is dealing with natural disasters or having a parent deployed in war, there are contexts in which vulnerable CYP need different, creative mediums of communication, such as film, to be used in order to support them to build their resiliency to survive, and to achieve more successful outcomes in life. Ojiambo (2017), reports that multi-finality, or many routes to many good ends is characteristic of populations of CYP who demonstrate resilience and successful outcomes. Therefore it can be argued that exposure to multiple coping strategies through film can equip CYP with flexible problem solving skills and the opportunity to practise and find out what works for them, leading to more positive experiences and successful outcomes themselves. Film as a therapeutic medium may not only provide CYP with an opportunity to recognise that they are not alone in facing certain problems, but also help them see that others have overcome the same difficulties which ultimately helps them gain insight into solving their own problems (Yang & Lee, 2005).

#### **4.4 Important Considerations (when using film to support adolescents)**

Literature and research reviewed has highlighted important considerations in relation to using film to support adolescents. As adolescent developmental research posits that adolescents are strongly influenced by film and media (Choudhury et al., 2008; A. B. Jordan & Romer, 2014b), and as discussed, a large body of research brings into question whether negative and disturbing depictions of human life through film could increase a sense of hopelessness and injustice, literature has highlighted the importance and appropriateness of film selection. Individual differences and/or group patterns are factors contributing to appropriate selection of film, emphasising the necessity of pre film discussion to ascertain the CYP's views of the world, their places in it, the topic areas they want to focus on, and their need (Jordan & Romer, 2014b). Film therapy practitioners and researchers suggest the CYP's age, level of understanding, language abilities, and cultural context should be considered when selecting a film, especially for CYP with trauma or violence issues (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000; Hesley, 2000; Hesley & Hesley, 1998; Schulenberg, 2003).

Schulenberg (2003), and Gramaglia (2011), both reported more significant effectiveness with film therapy when the issues addressed were on a metaphorical and symbolical level, rather than literal content and mirrored stories. Working at a metaphorical level highlights the use and effectiveness of narrative therapy, allowing for a more meaningful experience, fostering connections to thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, promoting positive change and decreasing the likelihood of defence based disengagement (Schulenberg, 2003; Sharp et al., 2002). As well as selecting an appropriate film, Marsick (2010), suggests the adolescent or group of adolescents choose the film with the facilitator, based on relatability, topic areas of focus, and salience. Through being part of the selection process, motivation towards and investment in meaningful change increases as it gives the viewer the responsibility for taking the next steps towards change, and the way they behave in life going forward.

Literature has also highlighted the importance of a post film discussion, relatively soon after the film has been viewed to enable the message, the characters, the dilemmas and the resolutions portrayed in the film to be explored, and therefore the meaningfulness consolidated (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Marsick, 2010). Some research has reported that whilst consolidating any insights and benefits from watching the film, as well as examining and resolving any failed connections or adverse effects, it is effective if the film is adapted and connected to the CYP's real life context (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000; Hesley & Hesley, 1998, 2001; Heston & Kottman, 1997; Solomon, 1995; Sharp et al., 2002; Schulenberg, 2003).

## **5. THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS**

The 'Mind over Matter' report (National Assembly for Wales, 2018) stated that around 70% of CYP in Wales who experienced mental health difficulties had missed out on appropriate interventions at an early age and as a result, mental health needs of these CYP only became recognised when difficulties were serious. This highlights the importance of preventative wellbeing interventions within schools, and the existence of a group of CYP in mainstream school who need wellbeing support but do not meet the threshold for specialist services or provision, emphasising the school as best placed to provide school wide, preventative, universal wellbeing intervention. In September 2021 the new curriculum for Wales saw the addition of film and digital media as one of its 5 disciplines under the expressive arts learning area, suggesting credibility and opportunity for film to be used in schools as a tool

for intervention to enhance learning and wellbeing (Education Wales, 2021; Welsh Government, 2021).

Educational and psychology research widely argues that educational psychologists (EPs) are well placed to work with schools and families to promote wellbeing and positive mental health through therapeutic intervention and training at whole school and individual level (DfEE, 2000; Fallon et al., 2010; Rumble & Thomas, 2017). The new provisions of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (2018) highlighted implications for educational psychology practice, including the need to develop a distinctive and creative EP contribution in terms of development of personal skills, such as promotion of a positive self-identity, self-awareness, and resilience. In light of this, using film therapeutically to support adolescents through positive growth and change during life's challenges, and in the development of their resilience, can be an effective and feasible intervention for schools and EPs to use to enhance adolescent wellbeing.

Despite this, there is a lack of research on the extent to which the general psychologist population uses film in practice, with only one study including EPs in data (Lampropoulos et al., 2004). Lampropoulos (2004) suggested that the use of film therapeutically, or in therapy, may vary as a function of practitioners' clinical experience, theoretical orientation, work setting, and other practice characteristics, possibly explaining the difficulty in capturing data around usage. In Lampropoulos's study (2004), 67% of 827 registered practicing psychologists reported the use of film to promote therapeutic effectiveness. Psychologists practicing within eclectic, cognitive behavioural, or humanistic frameworks were more likely to view or use film as a therapeutic tool. Overall 88% of responding psychologists had positive attitudes towards film, and use film in practice. 74% of the psychologists in Lampropoulos's study were private practitioners, which may explain high levels of usage as opposed to psychologists who practice within local authority systems, where more opportunity and time for unfamiliar and creative approaches and interventions does not present itself. In summary, film is being used in practice somewhat, but as an adjunct perhaps, with no consistent documentation, contributing to the lack of existing research and literature.

Therefore, it can be argued that educational psychologists are well placed, and there is the potential for EPs to support schools in preventative, wellbeing intervention through the use

of film as a therapeutic medium. Literature review has suggested effectiveness through a possible two strand approach at the individual and group level, with film being addressed and used across the five key areas of EP practice; in consultation, assessment, intervention, training, and research.

## **6. GAPS IN EXISTING LITERATURE**

Although using film therapeutically is growing in recognition, and is used in practice by some psychologists, empirical research, outside of clinical settings, particularly within education and schools, on the positive use of film and its effectiveness, is non-existent (Newgent & Powell, 2011). Despite some research with vulnerable CYP populations, few authors write about utilising film as an overarching therapeutic approach, for all people, across mainstream school settings (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000). Milne and Reis (2016), suggest that film as therapy usage can be separated into two strands; developmental and clinical. The developmental strand refers to the process of supporting healthy people in their normal growth and development, addressing needs before they become problems, exposing viewers to examples of how other people have dealt with the same developmental changes, equipping them with coping skills and building resilience. In contrast, the clinical strand refers to psychotherapeutic approaches, used by skilled practitioners with populations in a specific treatment programme in a clinical setting. Adopting this definition, literature has shown examples of when film has supported a particular area of clinical concern. There is no research in the UK where the developmental strand has been explored on mainstream adolescents and the impact film may have on their wellbeing.

Schulenberg (2003) stated that systematic outcome research and additional case studies need to be reported in the literature to facilitate a more detailed understanding of the benefits and disadvantages of using films with CYP, as well as the processes underlying how films are perceived and experienced. As well as facilitating more understanding, research can influence realistic initiatives at community levels. Darlaston-jones, (2007), emphasises the importance of embedding and conducting research within local context, in order to assess the potential impact of such interventions. Although film is now one of the 5 areas of discipline under the expressive arts learning area, no evaluation of the impact of using film as a therapeutic tool to support adolescent emotional skills development and wellbeing has been identified in the English or Welsh context. The value of further exploration of the

potential impact of such a therapeutic tool in Wales, which may contribute to a preventative intervention, is therefore indicated. Exploratory research may provide useful and unexplored insights which the existent published literature does not currently do, leading to the development and evolution of intervention pilot possibilities in schools in Wales.

## **7. THE CURRENT STUDY; AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The wellbeing and mental health of children and young people (CYP) in the United Kingdom (UK) continues to be a national concern (Department for Education, 2018; Welsh Government, 2012) and therefore schools and other education settings continue to be viewed as well placed to practice preventative approaches to support wellbeing development amongst CYP (Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education, 2018).

The research and literature explored above has brought into question the impact film can have on adolescent wellbeing and development. With historical, and the majority of film research focusing on the impact of exposing CYP to violent and explicit television, film, and video, there can be conclusions drawn that for children the primary effects of media exposure are increased violent and aggressive behavior, increased high-risk behaviors, including alcohol and tobacco use, and accelerated onset of sexual activity. Despite a paucity in research that argues against the negative effects of film, some literature and research, explored above, has demonstrated that although media exposure can be harmful for CYP, there exists the potential to counteract the negative effects of film exposure and to mitigate against the risks that violent film can pose. Some limited research and literature has suggested that for film to have positive influence it should be used with guided viewing, and post film discussion can be used to help CYP foster curiosity, adequately process and understand adverse and life experiences, and demonstrate critical and active expressions regarding their film experiences. The above literature review has highlighted the need to question not only how film can impact adolescent wellbeing, but how it can be used to effectively do so.

Due to the lack of peer reviewed research in this area, it must be noted that some literature reviewed is from practitioner perspective and often based on their own or others' case studies and experiences. However, conclusions and suggestions drawn from this literature

are important contributors to the current status of the film therapy and psychology field, shedding a light on the therapeutic potential inherent in film, the experiential development and practice of film therapy, and how it works.

The research explored above has suggested that film can be used to improve individuals' wellbeing (Solomon, 1995; Taransaud, 2015; Wolz, 2004), however, literature highlights that there is limited research into the use and impact of film on CYP wellbeing within the education sector (Caron, 2004; Schulenberg, 2003). A small number of film as therapy (Cinematherapy) programme interventions have been implemented in schools in the United States (US) (Dumitrache, 2014; Yang & Lee, 2005), however, they focus on implementation with vulnerable groups of CYP or groups of CYP who have clinical diagnoses or are in particular Social, Emotional, Mental Health (SEMH) provisions. Despite this, the above research and the literature review has provided some positive preliminary insights into the potential for film based wellbeing intervention programmes to develop in UK schools. Literature and research has been explored and reviewed, exposing the need for further study into the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing and its implications, within a UK, mainstream school, to establish a baseline area of research. This study aims to further the knowledge base of mental health and wellbeing in schools, and film as therapy research, by aiming to better understand the impact of film on adolescents and how this can be used in schools and EP practice within a local context, using an exploratory method that can empower the adolescents' voice.

With literature suggesting that mental health difficulties reach their highest levels in adolescence (Choudhury et al., 2008; Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Hartas, 2021), and film argued to be a highly resourceful and economical medium in which to approach the development of successful wellbeing (Calisch, 2001; Dermer & Hutchings, 2000), the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing and implications for the use of film in schools, particularly through Educational Psychology (EP) practice, will be explored.

This study aims to explore the following questions:

- How might film impact adolescents' wellbeing and development?
- How might film be used in schools to support adolescent wellbeing?

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## **Part Two: Empirical Paper**

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## Part Two: Empirical Paper

### 1. ABSTRACT

With the wellbeing of children and young people in the UK continuing to be of national significance and concern, supporting schools in meeting the emotional and wellbeing needs of children and young people is an increasing priority (Department for Education, 2018; Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education, 2018; Welsh Government, 2012, 2018). There is a small, but growing, body of research and literature that suggests film can be a particularly positive influence on adolescents, that can improve wellbeing. However, to date, there is no known UK research or literature on the positive impact of film on adolescent wellbeing.

This study uses qualitative, Thematic Analysis methodology to explore a culturally specific view of adolescents' perceptions and experiences of film and its impact and influence on their lives within a school in the UK. Six young people took part in interviews. Data was analysed and three overarching themes were developed. The findings illustrate that when watched with conscious awareness, and when post film discussion takes place, watching human stories through the medium of film can provide opportunity for understanding others, self, and life, for increasing a sense of belonging, gratitude, hope and resilience, and fostering a connection to humanity, leading to stable wellbeing. Implications for practice in schools and for educational psychologists are discussed.

## **2. SUMMARY OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Current Context: Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Across the United Kingdom (UK), the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) continues to be a subject of national significance and concern (Department for Education, 2018; Education Wales, 2021). With government and health reports suggesting that one in four school aged children experience emotional distress and one in ten young people have a diagnosable mental health condition (Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education, 2018), it is important that the wellbeing of children and young people, and subsequently the ways in which this can be supported and fostered, is recognised and continually explored.

School settings are increasingly seen as well-placed arenas in which to foster wellbeing and the government now expects schools and relevant education professionals to contribute successfully to the academic, social and emotional wellbeing of pupils (Brown, 2018; Department for Education, 2018; Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education, 2018; Welsh Government, 2012, 2018). At the same time, financial and time constraints continue to impact school budgets and are among only some of the factors that bear pressures on schools. Within this context, schools are tasked with the challenge of supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of CYP through feasible, creative, innovative and engaging interventions.

Adolescence is widely recognised as a highly tumultuous period between childhood and adulthood in which the individual is tasked to forge an independent identity during potentially destabilising biological, psychological, social, and cognitive developmental experiences (Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Wiles, 2017). Navigating life situations during the adolescent developmental stage can be particularly demanding and could be described as a period of unstable wellbeing, where support around coping mechanisms, resilience, relatedness and normalisation is especially important (Choudhury et al., 2008; Hartas, 2021). It is a time of life where support around wellbeing is paramount to positive life experiences and future outcomes. The WHO (2019) identify adolescence (10-19 years; WHO 2019) as a risk factor for developing mental health problems, illustrating the need to explore and understand preventative as well as therapeutic support around wellbeing in this age group (National Health Service [NHS], 2020).

Research around adolescent development has suggested that during the adolescent years, adolescents become less involved with their immediate family environment and seek information and experience from outside the family. Some studies have found that today's adolescent uses media for a variety of purposes, including obtaining support and information around forming their own identity, coping with problems, and relating to peers (Choudhury et al., 2008; Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Hartas, 2021).

Research highlights adolescents' affiliation with technology and media, and suggests film to be a powerful and effective therapeutic medium and tool for engagement with the adolescent; a group who previously may have been characterised as 'hard to engage' (Eames et al., 2013; Neumeister & Hebert, 2001). Given the potential influence of film on adolescents, it's important that researchers, policymakers and parents are able to keep abreast of the impact it is having on their children's lives. Through acknowledging the dynamics of this phenomenon, educators bear a responsibility to harness this potential resource in supporting adolescents deal with moral and ethical dilemmas and the navigation of life.

## **2.2 Current Context: Film as a Tool to Support Wellbeing**

According to a review by Anderson et al. (D. R. Anderson & Pempek, 2005), researchers have been studying the potential influence of film on behaviours, attitudes, beliefs, and cognition for more than 50 years. Although film can be a key source of role modelling that influences attitudes, behaviours, values, and beliefs (Feustel, 2019; Kubrak, 2020; Taransaud, 2015), due to Bandura's early body of key empirical research, that found negative influences from exposure to violent images in film (Bandura, 1971; Bandura et al., 1963), most research in the field continues to explore the negative influence film can have on young people (Anderson et al., 2001; Anderson & Pempek, 2005; Funk et al., 2004).

However, there is a small, but growing, body of research (Hesley, 2000; Hesley & Hesley, 1998; Solomon, 1995, 2001; Taransaud, 2015) that suggests film can be a particularly positive influence that can support coping strategies, the development of resilience, and lead to positive transformation and change.

In the US, film is used as a therapeutic tool for change in the form of cinematherapy. Underpinned by narrative therapy, it is a prescriptive intervention programme following specific implementation frameworks (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Jones, 2006). Evaluative research in the cinematherapy field is sparse but results continue to emphasise the transformational power of film. Findings suggest that cinematherapy can support children and young people in finding opportunity to restructure and transform their own life scripts and stories, ultimately reducing feelings of anxiety, increasing self-esteem, improving self-satisfaction and social self, and building resilience (Dumitrache, 2014; Jurich & Collins, 1996). Some research around the impact of film has focused on its effects on academic attainment and transformational learning, to which film has been shown to be a successful aid alongside curriculum learning (Phaire, 2013).

Despite these reported results and advantages, there is still very limited descriptive or exploratory data published on the positive effects of film compared with other more conventional therapeutic interventions. To date, there is no known UK research or literature on the positive impact of film on CYP's wellbeing. As with any new theory, qualitative and quantitative research is lacking in the field, however, this may be explained by some seeing film as an unscientific tool with little research to account for its therapeutic value, believing it to be too simplistic (Schulenberg, 2003). Schulenberg (2003) stated that systematic outcome research and additional case studies need to be reported in the literature to facilitate a more detailed understanding of the benefits and disadvantages of using film with CYP, as well as the processes underlying how films are perceived and experienced.

### **2.3 Research Questions:**

To summarise, with schools tasked with the challenge of supporting the wellbeing of CYP through feasible, creative, innovative and engaging interventions, and adolescents noted as a historically hard to engage group, who often experience unstable wellbeing, it can be argued that film can be an effective medium used in schools, to support adolescents to obtain greater insight and new perspectives on how to overcome real obstacles in life that may be preventing them from true happiness and positive change.

Therefore, further research in this area would perhaps provide a culturally specific view of adolescents' perceptions and experiences of film and its impact and influence on their lives, specifically, within a school in the UK. It is hoped that this study will further the knowledge base of mental health and wellbeing in schools research, by aiming to better understand the impact of film on teenagers' experiences within school, their lives, and their futures, and inform the usage of film to support adolescent wellbeing within education settings and educational psychology practice.

This research aims to explore the following questions:

- How might film impact adolescents' wellbeing and development?
- How might film be used in schools to support adolescent wellbeing?

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Ontology and Epistemology**

The current research is situated within a critical realist (Archer et al., 2013) paradigm, recognising the multi-layered complexity of reality, as shaped by culture, social agency, and historical and political context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Critical realism holds the ontological position of realism, with the epistemological position of constructionism, accepting that whilst objective realities exist and there is an objective truth, it is not tangible and cannot be fully observed due to the way it is perceived by those who experience it (Archer et al., 2013). Instead, a social phenomenon is better understood in relation to the context in which it is experienced (Fletcher, 2017), and may evolve and change overtime. An interpretative approach is used to explore the constructions and perceptions of participants and it is recognised that participants' views will be both socially constructed and a reflection of a physical lived reality as to the impact of film on their lives. Reality in this case is completely subjective and need not be something that can be shared by anyone else but at the same time it is independent of the person living it (Darlaston-jones, 2007). Critical realism allows the unique differences of individuals to come into focus, while at the same time permitting the essential sameness that unites human beings, to be identified (Darlaston-jones 2007).

The research design is chosen to reflect this, in an attempt to more fully understand the wider experience of 'reality' from the perspective of the participants and, due to a

constructionist epistemology, a heavy reliance on the spoken word through conversation, interviews, and narrative is evident.

### **3.2 Research Design**

In keeping with the researchers epistemological and ontological stance a qualitative design was adopted to explore the perceptions of the meaning, understanding, experiences and ultimately the impact of film upon adolescents' wellbeing . A semistructured interview method was developed to gather an in-depth understanding of individual viewpoints and contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013a; Willig, 2017). Educational research is increasingly focusing on and understanding the importance of, young peoples' perspectives (Aubrey et al., 2000). As educational policy and practice constantly evolve, CYP remain at the centre and in order to hear their voice and understand their view points, including them as active participants, rather than research subjects, should be considered (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). By exploring adolescents' perceptions, this study is giving the people at the heart of the topic, and the agents of change, an opportunity to voice their values, attitudes and understandings which can resonate deeply in the minds of policy makers and other educational professionals.

Data was transcribed and then analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), to establish major themes and significant patterns that contributed to answering the set research questions.

### **3.3 Participants**

Due to the time scales and nature of this project, one mainstream secondary school within a local authority area, was chosen at random by the researcher to take part in this study. The World Health organisation defines an adolescent between the ages of 13 and 19 (WHO, 2021), but due to secondary schools in Wales enrolling pupils up to the age of 18 the study sample was pupils between the ages of 13 and 18. 6 pupils were selected at random from a pool of pupils who responded with interest to the invitation poster and briefing session.

#### **3.3.1 Recruitment**

A gate keeper letter (see appendix B) was sent to the headteacher at a secondary school selected at random, in Wales. On agreement and with permission of the headteacher, an invitation poster (see appendix C) and information sheets were emailed to the headteacher to disseminate to pupils between the ages of 13 and 18 at the school. A briefing session was

then conducted by the researcher, during a school assembly, in which the poster and information sheet were discussed and any questions answered. Pupils interested in taking part informed the headteacher and a list of interested pupils was drawn up and sent to the researcher by email. Twenty pupils initially showed interest in response to the poster and briefing session. However, eighteen of those initial twenty were in year eight and due to that providing a limited age range, the researcher conducted a second round of recruitment. The second round of recruitment targeted a year eleven class for a repeat of the briefing session. After both rounds of recruitment, four pupils from years 9, 10 and 11, were interested and volunteered, and 2 pupils from the initial year 8 group were selected at random, to take part, creating a total of 6 participants of a varied age range. As well as providing a varied age range, 6 participants was believed to be a sufficient number of participants for a preliminary study such as this, where individual experiences are explored in detail within a local context. On selection, participant information sheets and consent and assent forms (see appendices D, E, F and G), were distributed to all participants and their parents, explaining the research and their taking part, in order for the participants to not feel coerced into participating. No information was withheld, and no participants misled. All participants were informed that it was entirely voluntary and completely up to them as to whether they took part or not. The researcher's contact details were provided with the information letter, to give participants the opportunity to discuss the study and to ask any questions regarding the research. Upon receipt of consent and assent, an interview date was agreed.

### **3.3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:**

Pupils aged between 13 and 18 years who attend a mainstream secondary school in Wales were invited to participate. Gender was not stipulated.

Exclusion criteria included pupils outside of the adolescent age range as defined by the WHO (13 – 19 years) (WHO, 2021), and pupils who might be disadvantaged by taking part, i.e. those sitting exams at the time of the interviews. Exclusion criteria also included pupils who the school considered not to have sufficient language skills to be able to participate in an interview process.

### **3.4 Materials**

In relation to the research design and the constructionist epistemology, semi structured interviews were chosen in an attempt to provide opportunity for elaboration and clarification around what may be discussion of personal experiences and feelings. As opposed to a questionnaire or survey, interviews can empower individuals to speak out, in their own words, providing greater coverage of issues and supporting non-literate CYP in voicing their attitudes, values, beliefs and opinions (Guest et al., 2017) . A questionnaire could have reached a broader range of participants, however this would have involved participants responding to rigid categories and options predetermined by the researcher, with responses being taken at face value, and not being developed or clarified (Bell, 2010a; Mertens, 2010). Focus groups were also considered, however it was felt this may reduce the ability to hear individual experiences if some participants were more dominant than others (Willig, 2017). Due to the personal nature of the research topic, it was also felt that some participants may withhold more personal information if in a group setting. Therefore, semi structured interviews were considered the most appropriate data collection strategy. With the aim of conducting interviews to elicit a rich understanding of participants' experiences, interview questions were open ended to allow for flexibility and interviewee control over detail in response. For an interview schedule see appendix H.

### **3.6 Procedure**

Each participant was interviewed for between 35 and 50 minutes with a semi structured interview guide (see appendix H) made up of interview questions driven by previous literature and this study's research questions, to ensure that the questions used were appropriate (Willig, 2017).

Before starting each interview, participants were reminded of the aim of the research and their right to withdraw. Participants were required to think of a film they enjoyed and/or of a film they feel had impacted them in some way, positively or negatively, and then answer the questions asked by the researcher, and contribute to, and engage in, conversational flow if it arose. The individual context of each interview and participant engagement dictated how the semi structured questions, the prompts for the interviewer, were used, adjusted or elaborated upon, or in some cases omitted completely, in order to promote a two way dialogue with which to explore key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Langley & Klag,

2019). For each participant, at the end of the interview, a debrief letter was provided (see appendix I). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim within 4 weeks of recording. Pseudonyms were used and all identifying data was redacted from the transcripts. The transcribed data was analysed using Thematic Analysis.

### **3.6 Pilot**

The semi structured interview schedule was piloted with one participant in order to explore the validity of questions and ensure they were appropriate to elicit rich information related to the research topic (Yardley, 2017). Following this, minor amendments were made to the order of the questions, and some prompt questions added, to improve clarity and reduce repetition. As no major changes were made to the questions, the pilot interview was included in the overall analysis. Informed consent was gained from the participant to include their interview within the final data set.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

Given the exploratory based nature of the study and the level at which in depth detail of perceptions and experiences wished to be obtained, thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was chosen as an appropriate method of analytical strategy for this study. TA uses an inductive, data-driven approach, which allows for a rich description of the whole data set and where themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves. However, TA is a flexible enough method to allow for a priori codes to also drive some data analysis. For this study a-priori coding, established and driven by the literature review and previous research, was combined with inductive coding to code the complete data set (see appendix J). Of the literature and research reviewed that purported film as a positive, therapeutic medium, case studies, and participants reported consistent key findings; that film often brings about feelings of comfort and nostalgia, human connection, and can be a guide to overcoming life's challenges. As a result of this consistent pattern amongst the literature reviewed, 3 a priori codes were deducted:

1. A sense of nostalgia, film as a comfort
2. Film as a guide to overcoming life's problems
3. A sense of comfort in being part of humanity and the world

The a priori codes were developed before examining the data and used in the data analysis by applying them to sections of transcribed interview data which presented themes, words, and/or concepts that matched the meaning of the code. The codes helped to begin the coding phase of the data analysis, and highlight and eventually refine themes.

Although some of the analysis was data driven, epistemological frameworks inevitably had influence (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Transcription was conducted verbatim, using the Jefferson notation system (2004) to enable a consistent and rigorous, transcript of the text, which retained ‘true’ information from the verbal account. After transcription, the six phases of TA were implemented as follows:

- data familiarisation
- generation of initial codes
- searching for themes
- reviewing themes
- defining and naming themes
- report production

### 3.8 Validity and Reliability

For the qualitative research process to meaningfully reflect the knowledge produced, the application of different principles to that of quantitative research is required in order to demonstrate validity and reliability (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Yardley, 2017)

Yardley (2008) describes four core principles for assessing validity in qualitative research: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigour; transparency and coherence, and; impact and importance. Table 3 below shows how each core principle has been considered in the current study in order to increase rigour and credibility.

*Table 3: Summary of the Validity and Reliability Considered using Yardley’s (2008) Framework*

<b><u>Core Principles</u></b>	<b><u>Evidence of Consideration in the Current Study</u></b>
<b>Sensitivity to Context</b>	A thorough, narrative literature review was conducted, focusing on the historical, political, and current sociocultural context in relation to

	<p>adolescent mental health and wellbeing and the use of film within schools.</p> <p>Open-ended and probing questions in the semi-structured interview were used to provide opportunity for participants to express views.</p> <p>Coding of transcript data was completed individually for each participant, to explore individual perspectives, before applying thematic analysis to the whole data set to better understand the shared meaning of responses</p> <p>A research proposal was submitted, and ethical approval was gained from the Cardiff University's Ethics Committee.</p> <p>A range of ages of participants was obtained to gain a variety of different contexts and experiences in relation to the research questions. Implications for educational psychologists and schools were discussed.</p>
<p><b>Commitment and Rigour</b></p>	<p>Inter-rater reliability was obtained to determine corroboration of coding on transcription data and to improve rigour.</p> <p>Options for appropriate methodologies were explored to ensure the area of study was approached sensitively.</p> <p>Regular supervision took place throughout the research process.</p> <p>Data analysis methods were considered and Braun and Clarke's six step Thematic Analysis was selected and followed.</p> <p>Substantial time and commitment were given to data analysis, and identification and redefining of themes to improve rigour.</p>
<p><b>Coherence and Transparency</b></p>	<p>Transparency of coding and theme development can be seen in appendix M.</p> <p>A narrative literature review funnelled to a clear rationale as to why the research is taking place.</p> <p>Methodological decision processes were discussed and justified.</p>

	Full transcripts are available separate to the thesis to demonstrate evidence and reporting of findings.
<b>Impact and Importance</b>	<p>Implications for educational psychology practice and schools are explored and discussed.</p> <p>An aim of the study is to contribute to the evidence and knowledge base to establish a foundation for future research and a preliminary baseline for intervention development.</p>

Inter-rater reliability to corroborate coding on transcript data was used to demonstrate credibility, rigour, and trustworthiness in the initial stages of theme identification and interpretation. Following completion of transcript coding by the researcher, one uncoded participant interview transcript was selected as a test piece and coded by a third party. Codes and themes were compared, and no modifications to the coding were required. For a list of inter-rater reliability codes and themes see appendix K.

### 3.9 Ethical Considerations

An ethics proposal for this research project was submitted and approved by the School Research Ethics Committee (SREC) in the School of Psychology at Cardiff University. The ethical considerations, and how these were addressed by the researcher, are displayed in Table 4.

*Table 4: Ethical Considerations*

<b>Ethical Consideration</b>	<b>How this was Addressed</b>
<b>Informed Consent</b>	<p>Gatekeeper permission was sought from the head teachers of the selected school (see appendix B).</p> <p>The briefing session gave potential participants the opportunity to discuss the study and to ask any questions regarding the research. During this session several questions were asked by the researcher to establish potential participants understanding. All participants were aware of the title, aim and objectives of the research prior to taking part and this information was provided in information sheets (see appendices D and E). This allowed each</p>

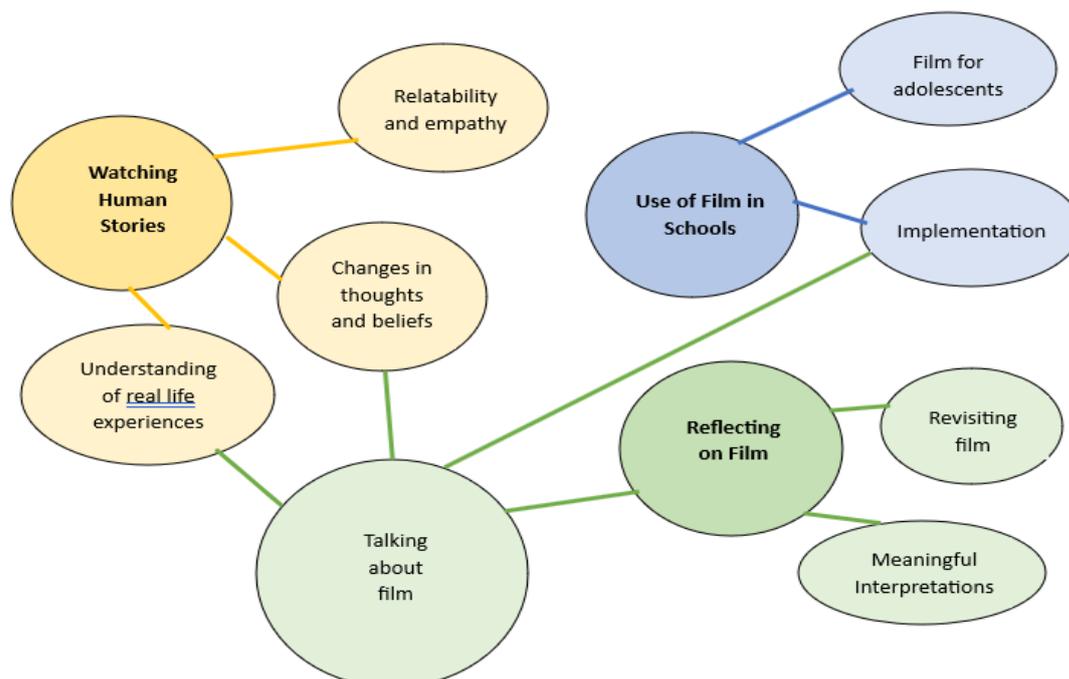
	<p>participant to make an informed decision about whether to participate in this research.</p> <p>As well as obtaining informed consent from the parents on behalf of their children, ethical practice now calls for obtaining ‘assent’ from children by explaining the study to them in language they will understand and getting their agreement to participate (Mertens, 2010). Parental consent and pupils’ assent forms were signed and returned to the researcher.</p> <p>The researcher reminded the participants that the final report and data may be used (in an entirely anonymous state) for publication and presentations. The researcher continually offered reassurance and gained consent throughout the interviews to allow participants the opportunity to decline to answer particular questions or discuss particular topics.</p>
<b>Confidentiality and Anonymity</b>	<p>The interviews were audio recorded and the audio recordings were kept confidential and password protected until transcribed (within 4 weeks of interview), at which point any identifying features were removed and recordings deleted. After deletion of data, participants were not able to withdraw their data from the project. Participants were made aware of this.</p> <p>Where quotes are used in the presentation of the report, steps have been taken to ensure anonymity.</p>
<b>Right to Withdraw</b>	<p>All participants were aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without consequence and could request that their data be discarded or destroyed.</p> <p>Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, up to the point of anonymity.</p>
<b>Debrief</b>	<p>A debrief session was held with participants post interview to give participants opportunity to ask any questions.</p> <p>All participants were provided with a de-brief form (see appendix I) which provided the contact details of the researcher, and research supervisor. The participants were encouraged to contact any one of the above if they had any queries or concerns.</p>

	As responses to interview questions could not be predicted, and may be sensitive, the debrief session enabled the researcher to signpost participants to their school staff and follow safeguarding procedures, if necessary.
<b>Data Retention</b>	<p>The interviews were audio recorded and then kept securely on an encrypted computer until transcribed (within 4 weeks). If any participant decided to withdraw, before anonymous transcription of data, any personal or identifiable data was destroyed.</p> <p>The transcriptions of the interviews will be kept by Cardiff University indefinitely.</p>

#### 4. RESULTS

The researcher generated three a priori codes that were deducted from previous research and literature (see appendix J). Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis and each interview coded separately (see appendix L), resulting in a total of 73 codes. The shared meaning between interviews was explored and analysed as a whole data set and, after the refining (see appendix M), resulted in the development of three overarching themes, comprising of eight subthemes. These are presented in a Thematic Map (Figure 4) and explored in more detail in table format below.

Figure 4: Thematic Map



#### 4.1 Theme One: Watching Human Stories

Table 5: Theme 1: Watching Human Stories

<b>Theme 1: Watching Human Stories</b>		
<p>The first theme identified referred to participants responses and suggestions that being exposed to and watching stories of other humans enabled a sense of hope and positivity. There was a strong sense of belonging highlighted throughout the subthemes that underpinned human connectedness. All participants talked about film providing insight and exposure to human stories, enabling a positive change in thoughts and beliefs through the understanding of what it is to be human and the importance of not feeling alone. The detail and description of the 3 subthemes overlap with each other and are closely linked, referring to encompassing areas in which the exposure to human stories theme was highlighted.</p>		
<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Description of Subtheme</b>	<b>Illustrative Quotes</b>
Relatability and Empathy	<p>All participants reported that relating to a character or situation in a film helped to shift thought change and mind set, build confidence and enabled an opportunity to learn, understand, and practice empathy.</p> <p>Participants reported that watching stories of others' lives and experiencing a sense of relatability to a character or situation in which strategies are used to overcome a challenge or difficulty, instilled confidence to experiment and practice seen strategies, equipping them with resilience and ways of coping in their own lives.</p> <p>Participant responses also indicated that on exposure to human stories via film participants were experiencing a sense of empathy.</p>	<p><b>Participant 6 (p.5):</b> "When I watched Little Women, Jo's story, it inspired me, as it were, to, you know, no matter what people say, do what you want, you know. It made me feel like I could do it as well, like confident, it gave me courage to be like, well everyone's still her friend and she's doing what she wants, so it should be fine if I did it as well."</p> <p><b>Participant 5 (p.9):</b> "I was crying so much, it felt so real, and I just felt so sorry for this person who was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, trying to do the right thing. It was empathy I guess, yeah, definitely empathy. I felt so sorry for him, I was imagining it was someone I knew, like a friend, or someone from my family, or me. Even when I think – like talk about it now, I feel so sad."</p> <p><b>Participant 5 (p.9):</b> "I think perhaps it is important to learn how to be empathetic, and if you feel it when you're watching a film you're like, practicing it, kind of</p>

	<p>Relatability and a sense of empathy were described as two factors of watching human stories that led to changes in thoughts and beliefs, the building and development of confidence and resilience, and an improved understanding of life experiences.</p>	<p>thing. Learning it. You know, you need empathy for situations in you know, like in everyday life. I experienced empathy in that film, like strongly, and now, in everyday life, like, now I might be like, 'Oh, someone got told off for speaking when it wasn't them, that's not fair'. I refer to that film, like, 'Oh, my gosh, I feel so sorry for that person', because you know, what, what happened was horrible, they didn't mean to do that, they were trying to do the right thing. Then it brings me back to that film. That film has kind of opened my mind a bit more, I mean that was on a really big scale - when someone gets put to death for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but I can now use empathy in situations just on a smaller scale."</p> <p><b>Participant 2 (p.8):</b> "I guess it is a bit about the character, but still mainly the story, the character in that story though, that situation, yeah, that would...maybe help. Because it's like, say there's a teenager who's experiencing a lot of stress, and they watched a film, which had another teenager in it experiencing stress, they'd start watching it and they'd be like, that's like me. I'm a teenager. I'm experiencing stress right now about exams or whatever, and that's what they're doing so I'm going to try that to see if it makes me feel less stressed. It is like the death one because the stress one is like, what you'd actually be doing is practising how to cope with stressful things."</p>
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		<p><b>Participant 4 (p.4):</b> “I think it's because you see the characters evolve over time. And so when you see them go through something horrible, like sacrificing themselves then it's kind of just like, a person, a human, like someone you know. Yeah, yeah, it feels like that. you can still feel upset and like, linked to a character even though you've only known that character for like, an hour and a half or whatever. Yeah, me personally, I like to connect with a character, if that makes sense, and I like relate myself to them. I guess I relate because I feel sad, they've lost family members and they feel lonely, and I'm thinking if this was happening to me, this would be really sad and horrible, and as a human being - I'm a human - and as a human being that must be really sad for them.”</p>
<p>Changes in Thoughts and Beliefs</p>	<p>All participants reported experiencing a change in personal thoughts and beliefs after watching human stories through the medium of film. All participants discussed how a change in thought often led to a change in behaviour or action.</p> <p>All participants spoke about how watching stories of others changed their perspective and outlook, gave them a sense of gratitude and hope, and changed their thoughts to reflect an ‘I can cope’ mind set. With these changes of thought, participants described how this led to more helpful and kind</p>	<p><b>Participant 6 (p.5):</b> “Films can teach you about very important things and can make you rethink how you look at things and change how you behave. I think it changed the way I behave at school I guess. I think with little women, with Jo inspiring me to have more confidence, it just - it made me speak up more in class and whatnot, and share my opinions during conversations, more openly, as it were.”</p> <p><b>Participant 6 (p.2 &amp; 3):</b> “It makes me think about like, how fleeting everything is, as it were, in that you know, it can be gone really easily, and so you should enjoy it while it lasts. What I do now really is, any opportunity that comes along, I tend to accept it, because yeah, I probably won't get offered that opportunity ever again,</p>

	<p>behaviours, as relationships and life became more appreciated.</p> <p>A change in perspective and a new way of seeing things was discussed frequently across all interviews. All participants described film as a vehicle for 'eye opening' stories to be told and heard, in which they saw others in a different light as a result. Participants reported that meaningful film can enable everyone to see everyone as equal human beings.</p> <p>Participants reported that awareness around changes in thoughts and beliefs, and the change itself was facilitated through, in part, post film discussion.</p>	<p>so I might as well take it while it's there, you know, rather than just staying home and doing nothing, you should go and do something."</p> <p><b>Participant 4 (p.6):</b> "I think it's made me appreciate - not appreciate – just it's made me be aware of the fact that we won't last forever and we won't always have everyone and so just be kind and grateful for the moments that you have with people. Yeah, it is quite a big [change] because I'm going to go off in my life now and maybe be a bit more kind."</p> <p><b>Participant 3 (p.5):</b> "film can be really powerful to people's lives, like film can make people feel so much better. It's kind of like what like, a therapist is doing, but a film can do. Yeah, maybe it changed the way I – I like, think about friendships and relationships with people. After watching that film I think friendships are really important. Yeah. I think it's something I can take through my life with me. I'll always like, go back to the Grinch and think about it and use it in my life."</p> <p><b>Participant 1 (p.13):</b> "films are really powerful and they can actually change how you think about something, which is amazing because that's changing your whole life like me, now, I'm gonna go forward in my whole life, through my 20's, 30's, 40's living this life where this film has changed the way I think about something. I think it's the story, but there's something about films that gives you a sense of gratefulness and I think it's the story –</p>
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		<p>seeing other people's stories, seeing other's lives. You know, there's loads of kids out there who don't really have anything, so it just makes you grateful for what you have. It can make you see life a different way from what you've heard or seen before."</p>
<p>Understanding of Real life Experiences</p>	<p>All participants talked about gaining further understanding of life, and life's experiences when watching human stories. When exposed to others' stories via film, participants reported they gathered insight into different cultures, backgrounds, circumstances, and challenging situations.</p> <p>Although some of the challenging situations are not uncommon and are a normal part of the journey of life, they were situations that participants had not, and may not, be exposed to otherwise.</p> <p>Death and grief, loneliness, bullying, and poor mental health are some of the life experience topics that participants reported having a greater understanding of post film watching.</p> <p>All participants felt that further understanding of, and exposure to, a diverse range of human life experiences led to feelings of not being alone, a sense of belonging, human connectedness, equality,</p>	<p><b>Participant 3 (p.9):</b> "It makes me feel like it's okay, like, I think it kind of makes me feel like there's a reason for people to be in the world. Because there's other people to help. There's other people to help you get through difficult stuff, and that's kind of a reason to be in the world, like, you know the world is kind and you'll be okay."</p> <p><b>Participant 5 (p.10):</b> "I think I would say both films, you know, made me realise like every human being experiences rubbish times, sad times and happy times. Relationships, humans, people's stories are kind of like, just not simple. Nothing is how it seems really, just never simple. That makes me feel a bit overwhelmed but kind of you know, makes me think like, actually life is messy, but that's okay because we're kind of all the same, everyone has tough times. I would say that before I watched those films and thought about them, I thought my life was like really tough right now, because it's really messy, you know, I can't do this, I can't do that, I'm so stressed, I'm really overwhelmed kind of thing, but like, most people probably feel this, so it's okay, and a lot of people - a lot of people don't let on that, that bad things happen like that. You know, they think like - something sad happens in their life and then they're like, I've got</p>

	<p>and a sense that the world, and life, is actually ok.</p> <p>It was also indicative that exposure to life experiences through stories in film worked like narrative therapy and exposed the viewer to a situation that they might relate to, that was not their own, therefore watching from a distance and perhaps experiencing unconscious realisation and change.</p>	<p>depression or anxiety, but like, no, that's a completely normal part of everyday life. No one's gonna just tell random people like, these are all the bad things that have happened in my life and, this is what's been tough or like, rubbish lately – no one's gonna do that. A film is like, you see what life can be like, well, what life is like. Everyone's life is messy in one way or another, people just deal with it differently. films made me realise that, you know, the realisation of what human life really is. Like everyone has these constant things going on, constant problems, and you just have to, you know, you just get through it. At the moment, well, the last few months, I've been going through, not the best time you know, it's a really difficult time in my life and these films reinforce, you know, you're not the only one you know, not to invalidate my own feelings, but at the same time I think other people have been through this, other people have got through it. It makes me look at the positives, you know, they got through it and they're stronger than ever now.”</p> <p><b>Participant 2 (p.8):</b> “If someone may have lost like, a relative or something like, if you're a teenager and you've lost a relative, if you watch a movie about someone recovering from losing that relative it might help you go through what's happening to you, by watching that movie. It might help you cope with that situation. It could be anything, not just death. Experiencing situations like mental health problems, like going through - like becoming an adult, like you know,</p>
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		<p>going through periods, puberty and stuff like that, like maybe like going through work and schoolwork or like dealing with GCSEs and tests and stress. Anything that's happening in a teenager's life really. There's loads of films out there aren't there? That can show us how to cope. I think films can help because we can learn to cope from them, like, how to carry on, like everything is going to be ok, the world is actually ok, kind of thing.</p> <p><b>Participant 2 (p.7):</b> "I don't have a dog but those two things I've been able to have like, understanding of ...without experiencing it in real life. I haven't had to join the army to understand the kind of things that those people go through, and how their mental health can be. It's like I have that understanding just from watching the film and it's not like, I've had to go out and experience anything real to get that. I think the experience you get from film gives you a much bigger understanding of what's going on....about things you don't know about or have never seen before, yeah sometimes even dangerous things that you wouldn't learn about, like gangs, war, drugs, alcohol. It's like, when you see someone else in that situation, you realise, maybe I should be a bit more like, aware of what I'm saying and thinking, it makes you think about it more and then I guess it changes your thoughts and behaviour. I feel like two different people would have like similar experiences and thoughts about something if one was watching a film and the other like lived it. I think film gets very close to the real thing."</p>
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		<p><b>Participant 4 (p.8):</b> “It feels so real. It's like, you know this is a film and you're still sitting on your sofa, but there is part of your brain that thinks it must be a real experience you've just had, because you might have physically cried so...It's like a film can make you experience something and have an experience like - it can make your brain, um, and your body and you, have an experience that's really similar, if not exactly the same, as a real life one. Even a negative experience still teaches you like, something. Like, if half the world's population got wiped out, and there was a lot of death and loneliness, you don't really want that to happen, but you've still had that kind of experience without the world having to lose half its population. Like without you having to lose family members or anything. That film was sad but like, me feeling sadness and empathy made me think I'm going to be grateful for who I've got, like, I'm going to treat people kindly.”</p>
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## 4.2 Theme Two: Reflecting on Film

Table 6: Theme 2: Reflecting on Film

<b>Theme 2: Reflecting on Film</b>		
<p>The second theme identified referred to participants' discussion around reflection of film and the impact of this. There was a strong sense of deeper meaning and understanding, and positive connection with others through a shared experience, when film was talked about with others and reflected upon as individuals. All participants noted that the research interview was an opportunity to reflect on and talk about film, and that this was an example of a catalyst for change in thought and behaviour. Most participants talked about revisiting film, either through watching it multiple times or accessing it through memory, in order to support them through a specific challenge or difficulty, or to deepen interpretation and understanding of a particular topic. All participants talked about the importance of talking about a film post viewing, in order for the viewing experience to hold meaning, salience, and therefore lead to change. The detail and description of the 3 sub-themes overlap with each other and are closely linked, referring to encompassing areas in which the reflecting on film theme was highlighted. The sub-theme 'Talking about film' also links to 2 sub-themes of theme 1; 'Watching Human Stories', as participants described talking about film post viewing as the catalyst for changes in thoughts and beliefs, and a facilitator in the understanding of real life experiences. The sub-theme 'Talking about film' also links to the sub-theme 'Implementation', that sits under theme 3; 'Use of Film in Schools', as all participants reflected on the necessity of post film discussion as part of a therapeutic film based programme if it was to be undertaken in schools.</p>		
<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Description of Subtheme</b>	<b>Illustrative Quotes</b>
Talking About Film	<p>Five out of the six participants indicated that talking about their chosen films throughout the research interview helped them identify and clarify the impact the film had had on them. This experience led to discussion around the importance of the discussion of film post viewing, with a strong sense of necessity if meaningful change was to take place. Therefore this sub-theme is also linked to the 'changes in thoughts and beliefs' sub-theme that sits under theme 1.</p>	<p><b>Participant 3 (p.9):</b> "I guess we wouldn't have this conversation. It's like us talking about it now. We wouldn't have been thinking about all these things about what the Grinch means would we? If you just watched it and turned it off, and then you were quiet and no one ever spoke about films then maybe you wouldn't know how they kind of made you think, like, how they affected you. Maybe they wouldn't be that powerful then."</p> <p><b>Participant 6 (p.6):</b> "I think it's because I've really enjoyed the film and want to share it with people and, you know, discuss my thoughts with them, as well. Usually, it'll be with someone who's also seen the film,</p>

	<p>All participants spoke about post film discussion as a shared experience - enhancing connection and relationships with others due to a human instinct to crave and enjoy these shared experiences.</p> <p>All participants discussed talking about film post viewing as a catalyst for change as a result of opportunity to safely discuss a particularly challenging or sensitive topic that they may relate to but was not directly about themselves. Therefore this sub-theme is also linked to the sub-theme 'Understanding of real life experiences' sub-theme that sits under theme 1.</p> <p>Some participants spoke about how talking about film brought up opportunity for film recommendation, and how, depending on salience and topic, an introduction to a film can lead to specific positive change and outcomes for others.</p>	<p>and if they haven't I say you should watch it then come and talk to me and we can talk about it together. I think it's like the relationship between you and the person you're telling, whether a friend or whoever they are, It's about having that shared experience, like doing something. It kind of improves your relationship, you know, just having a good connection."</p> <p><b>Participant 6 (p.7):</b> "I think talking about films afterwards is very, very important. Maybe not all films because some you don't get a feeling or an emotion or something from them, but others, they can change how you perceive stuff, and I think it's important to talk about those kind of films because I think it's good to communicate how you feel about things with other people. So that maybe you could like deepen your relationship with them. Also, if they haven't seen something, they might then go and watch it and they might change their life as well, for the better. They might go and have the same experience as you or different slightly because like, everyone's different, but they might still get something from that film, which impacts their actions or their life or their thoughts or whatever."</p> <p><b>Participant 5 (p.12):</b> "The other person you watched it with might have completely different views and you know, it's always a good discussion and that's what makes you think and maybe change your views, or like, someone else's. It's just like really nice to have like a shared experience and you can do it through films. So</p>
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		<p>not only can a film like help teenagers in a time where they need help and kind of support, but it's like, if you watch a film with somebody and then talk about it, it's even more of like a therapy because it's like, giving you the endorphins of a kind of shared experience as well and probably makes your relationship like more – better, which is something that you always kind of, crave. There are some films out there that can really change you. People sometimes talk about films they've watched like, years ago. I mean, I watched, I think I was like 13 or 14 when I watched the green mile, I'm only 16 now but it's still made an impact.”</p> <p><b>Participant 5 (p.11):</b> “I think talking about a film is almost like, I wouldn't say better than the film, but almost as good to be able to talk about it.”</p> <p><b>Participant 4 (p.6):</b> “Talking about it today, now we’ve talked about it I’ve realised the film has changed the way I think.”</p> <p><b>Participant 2 (p.6):</b> “It cements it, it makes my understanding of it even better. Because I’m retelling it really aren't I? So it's like I have to remember parts of it. I guess when you talk about films with people, like we’re doing now, it shows you what other people think about things. Sometimes, somebody else who watches the same film might not feel the same way that I did about it or something. Two people might see the exact same</p>
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		<p>scene and then they might think completely differently about something.”</p> <p><b>Participant 1 (p.12):</b> “[Talking about film] made me understand it more because I’m actually talking about it out loud. Like we’re talking about that film today really. It’s making me think about how it affected me and how it changed me. When you talk about film some people probably go, ‘Oh, I really found that it made me feel confident about something, or it made me feel like I wasn’t alone, like I could achieve things’. Like that kind of stuff.”</p>
Revisiting Film	<p>There were three main factors as reasons for film being revisited that were discussed by all participants, across all interview data. Film was re-watched intentionally, in order to support the viewer through a difficulty. Film was reflected upon and accessed via memory to support with coping and boosting confidence and resilience, and film was re-watched due to enjoyment, nostalgia, and to find new perspective and knowledge.</p> <p>All participants believed that each time a film is watched, even if it has been viewed previously, some change within that individual occurs.</p>	<p><b>Participant 5 (p.11):</b> “Personally, for me now, I’m like going through this like, tough time, I would watch both of those films again because they would definitely like, help me get through this time.”</p> <p><b>Participant 3 (p.2):</b> “I watched it when I was a lot younger, then when I was getting bullied I remembered and thought about that film and then I felt okay. Thinking about that film helped me to remember that I had people there for me.”</p> <p><b>Participant 2 (p.11):</b> “I’m usually like, I like watching films again, because it might help me see - if I watch it once and understand one thing, when I watch it a few times, I might understand even more. I might learn another thing, a new thing. Stuff that changes me again.”</p>

		<p><b>Participant 4 (p.13):</b> “I feel like all people can be changed by film, I hope. I think that all people can use film to like, that they would like, look back on, and then think - change their ways.”</p>
<p>Meaningful Interpretations</p>	<p>All participants talked about film having more of an impact; remembering and reflecting upon it more, and it leading to changes in thought and behaviour more effectively, when it was meaningful to the viewer.</p> <p>Participants explained that film felt more meaningful to them when they were able to relate to a character or situation, and had a real, physical experience. When a film made them cry, laugh, or feel on edge. Over half of the participants described a film viewing as an experience, and noted that, when compared to one on one talk therapy, or other more conventional therapies, the film experience can create a more meaningful impact in terms of change due to individual interpretation and agency.</p>	<p><b>Participant 6 (p.8):</b> “I think sometimes if you get physical - if something's happening physically, that's even more meaningful for you because you're having an experience, I guess. It'd be quite unusual if somebody was just talking to you, and they said you know, I think you should really, maybe like, say your opinion a bit more because you've got nothing to be afraid of or whatnot, you're a great person or whatever, in class, you're not gonna - it's not – you're not going to be like, that person's just said that to me, and it's given me butterflies and I just really feel like they're right, I'm going to go off now and like, do that, I feel like I don't think that would happen easily. Having those physical feelings and like, the whole film experience is more meaningful than lots of other ways of changing perspective.”</p> <p><b>Participant 6 (p.3):</b> “Well, I think when you just - if you see something and you make a decision for yourself and form your own opinion on it, it just is more meaningful to you. It was more meaningful to me when I had those thoughts about that film, when I kind of, like, reflected on it as it were, and made that opinion about life. Rather than someone telling me, ‘oh yeah, life's fleeting, and you'll miss these opportunities if you don't take them’, and whatnot.”</p>

		<p><b>Participant 5 (p.7):</b> “I guess it's making the experience more real. Yeah, I kind of believed it more. You're like uncomfortable. So you were therefore a little bit more on edge, therefore taking things in more seriously. I wouldn't have taken it in as deeply as I did if it wasn't like that. I have a deeper experience with a film if it's - if it's giving me a real experience. And if that's through plot or how it looks or how it makes me feel, like, I said it made me feel on edge. So that's a real, real feeling, isn't it?”</p>
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### 4.3 Theme Three: The Use of Film in Schools

Table 7: Theme 3: The Use of Film in Schools

<b>Theme 3: The Use of Film in Schools</b>		
<p>The third final theme identified referred to participants suggestions around the use of film in schools, particularly with adolescents, the impact this can have and implementation ideas for the future development of the use of film in UK schools. All participants discussed how they believe adolescents may benefit from film use in schools, and what this may look like. The detail and description of the 2 sub-themes overlap with each other and are closely linked, referring to encompassing areas in which the use of film in schools theme was highlighted. The sub-theme 'Implementation' is linked to the sub-theme 'Talking about film', (a sub-theme within theme 2), as all participants reflected on the necessity of post film discussion as part of a therapeutic film based programme if it was to be undertaken in schools.</p>		
<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>Description of Subtheme</b>	<b>Illustrative Quotes</b>
Film For Adolescents	All participants discussed why film used in UK schools may work with adolescents. All participants indicated that utilising film as a therapeutic medium; viewing, followed by	<b>Participant 6 (p.6):</b> “it's like something that would usually change like, in therapy, like if you saw a psychologist or therapist or whatnot. I think films can be quite powerful, just as powerful as therapy. Sometimes

	<p>guided discussion, would be beneficial for adolescents in UK schools for some of the following reasons:</p> <p>All participants frequently compared film viewing and post film discussion to one on one talk therapy, indicating that for adolescents in particular, film could be more effective at enabling engagement and supporting positive change due to the sometimes direct, formal, daunting, and time heavy nature of counselling therapy sessions.</p> <p>Participants suggested that film can be beneficial to adolescents as it can offer escapism, catharsis, exposure to a diverse range of topics and situations, and is a familiar and enjoyable medium, that adolescents already have interest in.</p> <p>Some of the participants discussed film use as supporting problem solving, or challenge navigating, through the safe distance of watching someone else's story and therefore in-direct discussion, leading to personal realisation, growth and change.</p>	<p>better, because therapy could be like, scary, or take ages or something, with teenagers, I guess. It's like, with film, it's like, when you relate to the character, and their experiences, it helps you, like resonate with them more, because you're like, Oh, we're very similar, but she can speak up about stuff and I want to be like that, you know? If she can do it, I can do it. It could take months for you to think like that if you're just trying to like, talk about it, with a therapist or something."</p> <p><b>Participant 6 (p.8):</b> "It's probably because it's part of a story. It's just - it's not like you're having a conversation about one specific thing, or yourself, which can be quite daunting, it's more part of a long story about someone else, that you can follow and relate to. Someone else's story I guess. That makes it more meaningful, probably."</p> <p><b>Participant 5 (p.11):</b> "Films are able to kind of take me away from like - give me a kind of escape. So I think there's a few things film can help teenagers with, like, getting you through tough kind of, times, helping you relax and like, escape and get away from it and then realisation, with all those other things we've talked about like, big questions, you know, opening my mind and I do think films really, like, help because they just, they just help you realise a bunch of things. There are so many different things you could realise, kind of learn from films, and think about. I think because you know, when you're this age, sometimes you do think you know everything, you do, there are times when you're like Oh I</p>
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		<p>know that, I understand that, and my parents are like, you don't know, wait until you're older and so I think films can expose you to things you never knew, or even thought about. You kind of become more like, knowledgeable, but like, about the world. Worldly I guess, you become more worldly. It's like exposure to new situations but in a safe way.”</p> <p><b>Participant 5 (p.11):</b> “I don't know quite how it would work, but if at the end of the day, you know that oh, well we've got this - you know, we're gonna go and watch some film or some clips or whatever, later, it would make the whole day like, oh, well, you know, that'd be nice. Like, it would be the highlight of the day for teenagers because not only is it like, escapism from the busyness of school, it's like, it would genuinely bring your spirits up. It would be a great experience to have like a film group because again you're maybe with your friends, like you'd be able to talk about it and you have that shared experience, like, shared interests, you get to know people. It's like we said before, you find out like, people's stories.”</p> <p><b>Participant 4 (p.11 &amp; 13):</b> “I think it can help some people just like, escape this reality and just like put themselves in somewhere else, have a break and just step away and just like, calm down, because I feel like sometimes everything can just be like a bit too much and you just need like, some space and time away from other people and just do what you want to do.</p>
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		something - it can make you think a different way, it can make you feel something different.”
Implementation	<p>All participants talked about how film as a therapeutic medium, could be beneficial when delivered as a programme/intervention in UK schools for adolescents. Most of the discussion around implementation across all data, focused on film and topic selection. All participants spoke about the importance of group salience and therefore careful and considered joint topic and film selection by the adolescents themselves.</p> <p>There were differing conclusions as to whether films should be watched in a group or individually, but all participants consistently highlighted post viewing discussion as an essential component of a film programme.</p> <p>All participants also indicated the importance of an adult facilitator to guide discussion and support group members.</p> <p>Over half of participants suggested preventative viewing, emphasising that all film addressing all topics presents something that everyone can learn from, use to understand a situation better, and</p>	<p><b>Participant 3 (p.11):</b> “I think schools are good places to do it because it's a place where there are groups of teenagers together, and they could have a whole film club or room or like, something. I think it still would be helpful if they watched the films at home though, like, on their own. They don't have to be in groups to watch it, but maybe they should be in groups to talk about the films. Yeah because you get different ideas then. Maybe some people will think about the film in a different way. Maybe at break they could have like, a session talking about like - so they could have watched a film one session and then the next session they could all talk about how it makes them feel? I mean, different sessions, and I think it should be with like a teacher or like an adult there too, kind of leading the group, like asking the questions, like you today, so then they can like take it as well.”</p> <p><b>Participant 4 (p.14):</b> “I feel like I think it's based on what the person is going through at the time. So if you're going to have films in schools it would be like, - you have to be thinking really carefully about what the people want to see at that time, like, in their lives, if you want it to help them.”</p> <p><b>Participant 1 (p.13):</b> “I think it definitely would work. I just don't think it should be a big group of people who have different problems, or it could be a group, but you</p>

	<p>equip themselves with coping strategies and resilience to enhance preparedness for future challenging life situations.</p>	<p>need to be careful about what films you choose, you kind of need to know the people's troubles, because you could watch a film about the divorced parents and it might make them worse or something. Like if their parents are not divorced they might think 'Oh, gosh, this could happen to mine'. And then they would worry more. So I guess you need to be careful how you pick the people and how you pick the films. Don't pick someone who's just had a divorced parent and you're going to watch a film about something completely different. I think they should choose the film. So they can say this week I'm really worrying, or I'm upset about this thing, and then there'll be a list of films that match that thing, and then they can choose one. Yeah."</p> <p><b>Participant 6 (p.11):</b> "I think maybe like, if maybe, like if a film was introduced to you, after you've gone through an experience, it may be good to introduce it to other people, before they go through that experience. Even if someone watches a film about a topic they haven't necessarily experienced, it's almost like they're ready to experience it. Because if you go through something in life without knowing anything about it, it can be very shocking, it can be traumatic, but if you've learned something about it before it can maybe calm you down a bit more. Make you think about it a bit more reasonably."</p>
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## **5. DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 Overview**

This aim of this exploratory study was to better understand the impact of film on adolescents and how this can be used in schools and EP practice within a local context. The results from Thematic Analysis are explored in relation to each research question, concluding with implications for educational psychologists, and limitations and future research. Overall, the themes identified within the interviews, support the findings of the research examined in the literature review.

### **5.2 Research question 1: How might film impact adolescents' wellbeing and development?**

Overall, all interview data identified film as having a positive impact on adolescent growth and change when it was used as a therapeutic medium. Consistent with literature, exposure to human stories, and relatability to characters or situations in film enabled adolescent viewers to build and practice empathy skills, build resilience and develop coping strategies, and develop positive, therapeutic change in thoughts and beliefs. Participants described changes in thoughts and beliefs as a change of perspective, and as result of a greater understanding of life experiences after film viewing, which gave them a sense of belonging, gratitude, and hope.

In line with examined literature (Dumitrache, 2014; Dunkan et al., 1986; Ojiambo, 2017), results found that film can model coping strategies which can help the viewer to develop a more flexible approach when confronted with challenging situations in the future. Findings can therefore suggest that film can help the viewer to not feel alone or isolated, instilling confidence and empowerment around managing a difficult situation, which in turn can lead to development of resilience which can support successful wellbeing. Results of this study also indicated that the viewing of human stories through film helped participants feel less lonely, and as Baumeister and Leary (1995) purport, this feeling of not being alone, a sense of belonging, is what motivates and drives a human forward and is particularly salient during the adolescent stage. With research and examined literature suggesting that a low sense of belonging and feelings of disconnectedness can be linked to anxiety (Allen et al., 2021; Choudhury et al., 2008; Eames et al., 2013; Eivers & Kelly, 2020) and adolescents who have a strong sense of belonging, experience more positive academic and social outcomes

(Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Eames et al., 2013), findings from this study can suggest that film as a therapeutic medium can provide opportunity for social and human connectedness and therefore support adolescent wellbeing and development positively.

Participants awareness and reflection throughout the data, on how reframing negative or challenging storylines and situations in film in to opportunities to build skill and resilience is an example of how all film can lead to positive therapeutic change, despite historical stigma around violent or negative films triggering inappropriate thoughts and behaviours. A sense of hopefulness and gratitude were highlighted as themes by participants even from film that demonstrated particularly dark or challenging, and difficult storylines or negative and violent characters, remaining consistent with findings from Newgent and Powell's study (2011), reporting the same. It can therefore be postulated that despite negative emotions displayed, the exposure to human life situations, whether they are positive or negative, is what may have the more significant impact on the viewer, decreasing anxiety and improving wellbeing over all.

Participants spoke consistently with postulations across literature, that film is a medium that is part of adolescent culture in which they enjoy, feel comfortable with, have an affiliation with, and therefore engage well with. All participants compared film as a therapeutic medium to one to one school counselling or therapist led talk therapy, and highlighted the benefits that film has with adolescents over these other more conventional therapies, such as time, comfort and ease, in-direct discussion about distanced situations, sense of agency and intrinsic motivation. Consistent with social learning theories, participants reported that film may hold a viewer's attention well due to its novelty within a school setting. Bandura (1965) attributed the attention- getting qualities of symbolic models, such as video and film, to this factor of intrinsic motivation. It is common knowledge that a novel stimulus will retain attention for longer than a more familiar medium. Therefore findings from this study can suggest film an effective and appropriate therapeutic medium, in which the adolescent is likely to engage with and be more receptive to discussing sensitive topics, as an alternative to more conventional therapies and school counselling or talk therapies.

Reflecting on film was a main theme highlighted throughout the data, with the 'talking about film' sub-theme emerging as a key finding. All participants emphasised the importance of post film discussion and reflection in order to experience meaningful therapeutic change. In order to highlight the importance of discussion around film, and to depict 'Talking about film' as a key finding across all data, the sub theme 'talking about film' became linked to multiple sub-themes, where it interacts with them to create change. Talking about film post viewing, was discussed as an essential part of film used as a therapeutic medium, that can create opportunity for shared experience and connection with others, creating deeper meaning and acting as a catalyst for change. Throughout the interviews it was noted by both participants and the researcher that the interview itself was providing a reflective platform, and, essentially, post film discussion opportunity. The data gathering process paralleled what the therapeutic film intervention programme would look like. In line with reviewed literature, the interview as post film viewing discussion enabled reflection and exploration around building coping strategies, insight and understanding of real life experiences, expression of gratitude, and a sense of human connectedness. The interview process was a real-time example of the importance of post film discussion on the impact of film on adolescent participants.

Similarly, the interview process gave opportunity for narrative approaches to be used and explored. Consistent with cinematherapy literature and documented practice, all participants used the interview as post film discussion and to support identification and discussion of strengths, values and skills associated with themselves, but seen or heard initially within stories of others via film, before understanding and reconstructing own life stories in order to effectively confront current and future problems. Narrative approaches have emerged as a key finding from this study, suggesting that narrative therapy underpins the effectiveness of using film as a therapeutic medium, and that when viewing material that involves characters dealing with similar conflicts and issues to their own, adolescents can identify and relate to situations and characters, leading to personal exploration and insight, whilst keeping an emotional distance from stressful or frightening experiences or topics. It can be postulated that film can enable thought change and ultimately transformation, that would be gained from a real lived experience, from the safety and comfort of a sofa. Adolescent viewers can externalise their problems consciously or

unconsciously and can be left feeling empowered and equipped to better understand and cope with his or her own difficulties.

Film can be an effective medium used in community settings such as schools, to support adolescents to obtain greater insight and new perspectives on how to overcome real obstacles in life that may be preventing them from positive change, stable wellbeing, and true happiness.

### **5.3 Research question 2: How might film be used in schools to support adolescent wellbeing?**

Findings from this study are consistent with literature and have highlighted important considerations in relation to using film to support adolescents in schools.

All participants discussed a film as therapeutic medium programme as an effective intervention, detailing six to eight sessions as a block for a group of adolescents in a mainstream UK school. Findings suggest careful consideration around film selection, with participants highlighting individual differences and/or group patterns as factors contributing to appropriate selection of film, emphasising the necessity of pre film discussion to ascertain the groups' views of the world, their places in it, the topic areas they want to focus on, and their need. This is consistent with Jordan and Romer's research (2014), and Marsick's (2010) work that posits the groups' age, level of understanding, language abilities, and cultural context should be considered when selecting a film, especially for adolescents with trauma or violence issues. Findings suggest that the adolescent or group of adolescents choose the film with the facilitator, based on relatability, topic areas of focus, and salience. It can therefore be argued that through being part of the selection process, motivation towards, and investment in, meaningful change increases, as it gives the viewer the responsibility for taking the next steps towards change, and increases a sense of personal agency. Despite a focus on salience and group need when selecting appropriate film, some participants suggested accessing a range of topics in film as a preventative method, purporting that all film can support greater understanding and insight and help to build resilience for preparedness of future life experiences.

Consistent with literature (Berg-cross & Jennings, 1990; Marsick, 2010), key findings from this study have also highlighted the importance of a post film discussion, relatively soon

after the film has been viewed to enable the message, the characters, the dilemmas and the resolutions portrayed in the film to be explored. All participants described talking about film and post film discussion as an opportunity for consolidating meaningfulness and insight, and examination, analysis, and therefore resolution of any failed connections or adverse effects. These findings support literature that posits interactive discussion alongside intervention tools such as film, increases the effectiveness of the intervention as a whole and can lead to increased generalisation across settings. Participants suggested an adult facilitator to lead the programme and guide the post film discussions, indicating that this would provide a safe and monitored space to support the group. Findings suggest post film discussion is effective if the film is connected to the individual's real life context in some way, and narrative therapy approaches can then be used. It can therefore be suggested that post film discussion would form an essential part of the film programme and allows for safe and guided exploration and closure.

#### **5.4 Implications for Educational Psychologists**

The new provisions of the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018 (2018) highlighted implications for educational psychology practice, including the need to develop a distinctive and creative EP contribution in terms of development of personal skills, such as promotion of a positive self-identity, self-awareness, and resilience.

Educational and psychology research widely argues that educational psychologists (EPs) are well placed to work with schools and families to promote wellbeing and positive mental health through therapeutic intervention and training at whole school and individual level (DfEE, 2000; Fallon et al., 2010; Rumble & Thomas, 2017). In September 2021 the new curriculum for Wales saw the addition of film and digital media as one of its 5 disciplines under the expressive arts learning area, suggesting credibility and opportunity for film to be used in schools as a tool for intervention to enhance learning and wellbeing (Education Wales, 2021; Welsh Government, 2021).

Acknowledging this current context, examined literature, and the voices of the participants of this study, it would seem that using film therapeutically to support adolescents through positive growth and change during life's challenges, and in the development of their resilience, can be an effective and feasible intervention for schools and EPs to use to enhance adolescent wellbeing. Further research trialling an intervention programme and

evaluating its impact and effectiveness would provide insight into the EP role within film therapy intervention, however, this study highlights the potential that EPs are well placed to use film as a therapeutic medium as part of their practice in supporting schools and CYP.

Exploration of literature and practice, and key findings around implementation, suggest a potential two strand approach to the use of film in schools in relation to EP practice; individual and group level. At the individual level film can be used as a recommended activity in order for the EP to build rapport and a connection, to base discussion on, to gain insight and enable dialogue with the CYP (Hesley, 2000; Hesley & Hesley, 1998). EPs can work with CYP, using narrative approaches and film as a metaphorical tool to promote self-exploration, personal healing and therapeutic change (Dumitrache, 2014). Similarly, when recommended to the family or peers around the CYP as a group watch, film can be a conversation starter, giving young people and their families an appealing way to have conversations that are essential, but often difficult to begin. Whether these conversations happen in classrooms or living rooms, film can be an effective platform and tool for the EP to facilitate reflection and communication around views, values, and plans for prevention with the people around the CYP (Nightingale, 2014). As a preliminary piece of research, conclusions and implications from this study must be adopted cautiously, acknowledging contribution to building up an evidence base and the need for further research in order to develop the field.

At the group level an EP could facilitate a film therapy intervention programme with a group of CYP for 6-8 weeks, addressing topic areas, chosen by participants, including issues such as culture, class, gender, power, loss, death, and sexual orientation. In line with the Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018, which emphasises the need for provision of training and support for school staff in effective implementation of such wellbeing interventions, the EP can train school staff to use film therapy with individuals and groups. This would be an important part of an EP's role as literature has warned that with similar interventions, such as bibliotherapy, training is essential in order to maintain fidelity and effectiveness of the intervention but also so as not to cause harm (Newton, 1995; Solomon, 1995, 2001; Wolz, 2004) . Teachers, parents, and other education professionals who wish to use film as an approach need to understand the principles and practices of film as therapy and cinematherapy, and narrative therapy and its application to schools, and CYP

in the context of wellbeing. As part of a general scientist– practitioner approach to practice, it should be noted that regular monitoring of the process and outcomes of use of film in EP practice should be documented in order to measure and evaluate CYP progress and change, the intervention itself, and to contribute towards the knowledge base.

### 5.5 Limitations and Future Research

The perceived strengths and limitations of the study are outlined in the table below.

*Table 8: Strengths and Limitations of the Study:*

Strengths	Limitations
	The researcher may demonstrate a developing understanding of conducting research, with this study as part of the requirements to complete a professional doctorate training programme, therefore research perhaps considered a secondary skill.
The research was exploratory, preliminary, and offered a unique perspective. The use of a qualitative design was beneficial to explore the in-depth views and experiences of the adolescents who participated.	The research was not prescriptive and systematic, and did not focus on measuring impact. The exploratory and qualitative design resulted in a small sample of adolescents in Wales. Inferences cannot be applied across the UK.
This study used a small sample size in its design in order to research the topic in a focused, comprehensive and in – depth manner, gathering rich detail.	A small number of participants reduce the extent to which the results are generalisable to the adolescent population. With participants from just one school, broad recommendations and generalisations could not be drawn upon.
Participants recruited were adolescents across an age range in order to explore different perspectives around the current context of the use of film within secondary education.	The participating school in the current study was in an area with little cultural diversity. Perceptions of film from adolescents in culturally diverse or low socio economic areas were not gathered and represented.
Interviews were conducted face to face, which may have impacted positively on ability to read non-verbal body language and exchange of organic interactions. This may have encouraged contributions from some participants.	
Inter-rater reliability was used on transcript data to corroborate coding, and to demonstrate credibility, rigour, and trustworthiness in the initial stages of theme identification and interpretation.	The data was coded and themes identified by the researcher alone, with only one person used for inter-rater reliability checking. This limited multiple perspectives from a variety of people with differing expertise. There was no “member checking” of the participants carried out, again, limiting the opportunity for interpretation to be challenged.
This study offers a unique insight into an unexplored area of wellbeing intervention and potential EP practice in Wales. Findings	This study did not include the views of EPs or school staff, as to the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing, and in particular ideas

highlighted the positive impact of film used as a therapeutic medium on the wellbeing of CYP, whilst also addressing important implementation considerations.	around usage and implementation of film in schools and practice.
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It is suggested that this research provides some positive preliminary indications that film used as a therapeutic medium in schools, and in EP practice, at individual and group level, may contribute to successful wellbeing, and pro-social growth and development in adolescents. Participant data provided insight into ways in which film can be used in schools and EP practice to further develop support and improvement in adolescent wellbeing. There are further questions which the research raises which may provide a direction for future exploration. Further research may include:

- Facilitation and quantitative evaluation of a film group programme. Despite agreement within the arts therapy field that art therapies are individualised and therefore difficult to measure, it still remains important to better understand the effectiveness of such interventions.
- Preliminary research into the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing across a wider range of schools, including those in culturally diverse areas, with focus on individuals who have experienced adversities and use film to maintain successful wellbeing.
- Longitudinal research to explore the extent to which the impact of film was retained and utilised over time.
- Qualitative, case study research, conducted retrospectively with adults, where the impact of film on their adolescence has shaped their life and wellbeing.
- Continued research in non-clinical, specifically educational settings.
- Community based action research in order to gain insight into the impact and influence of film on a wider group.
- Research into the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing within the additional learning needs population, specifically those with social and emotional difficulties.
- Studies using control conditions, larger sample sizes and random assignment to further develop the evidence base.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

It is suggested that this study makes a unique contribution to the literature due to its rationale, research questions, and methodological approach. It is the only study that the researcher is aware of which qualitatively explores the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing.

This study has provided rich insight into the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing, suggesting that film, as a therapeutic medium, can support CYP to obtain greater insight and new perspectives on how to overcome real obstacles in life that may be preventing them from true happiness and positive change (Heston & Kottman, 1997). Through immersion in a film experience, including discussion and exploration post viewing, there is opportunity for emotions to come to the surface during the process, shining a light on detrimental thought patterns and modelling triumphant character arcs. Findings suggest that the positive impact of film occurs due to in direct exposure, but identification and relatability with the characters, to fictional tales, the viewer later realises is related to themselves, which can lead to the discovery that ultimately, despite adversity, a full and creative life can be within their reach. Findings suggest that as well as supporting the development of resilience, film is effective in improving adolescent wellbeing due to the way in which it can provide adolescents with an improved sense of belonging and connection with humanity.

This study has highlighted the importance of facilitation, guidance and implementation when using film as a therapeutic medium with CYP and in schools. Post film discussion and debrief is an essential part of the intervention, alongside training, monitoring and evaluation. Findings suggested that film has to be salient, meaningful and talked about, for it to have significant impact, enough to change thoughts, beliefs, perspective and to support transformative healing.

These findings already have important practical implications for schools and EP practice, and for the understanding of the potential role of film and its relation to adolescent wellbeing in the secondary school setting. At the very least, these findings can be used as a preliminary resource for selecting and using film as a therapeutic medium and tool in education based wellbeing practice. The study of children, adolescents, and digital media is vast and growing,

which sets an encouraging climate and context in which preliminary findings of this research, and its implications, may be explored and developed further.

*“It’s extremely important to know . . . that how you appreciate a movie has everything to do with your life experience at the moment when you see it, how you see it, and where you see it.” Movies are subjective.” And that’s why we keep coming back. Movies are not just movies, they are mirrors of ourselves, our society, and our dreams—even if we’re not quite ready for them. They make us laugh, cry, ponder our humanity, and escape from it entirely – (Elder, 2011)*

## 7. REFERENCES

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## **Part Three: Critical Review**

**Word Count: 5483**

## **Part Three: Critical Review**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

This critical review aims to provide a reflective and reflexive account and exploration of the research process and the role of the researcher within it. The critical review is discussed in two parts; Part A: A critical account of the research practitioner, and part B: Contribution to knowledge. Part A will reflect on research focus and rationale, worldview and theoretical perspective, and methodology and analysis. Part B will discuss contribution of this study's findings to EP practice and the knowledge base. To reflect the present and active role of the researcher and to maintain a personal critical position, this section will be written in the first person. Writing a critical review in the first person supports the recognition and accountability of the researcher's involvement in the development of knowledges (Langley & Klag, 2019).

### **2. PART A: A CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF THE RESEARCH PRACTITIONER**

#### **2.1 Research focus and rationale**

Literature argues that in order to establish a strong foundation and therefore an idea about how to proceed, the first point of research investigation requires giving serious thought as to why we are interested in investigating a particular issue or area (Braun & Clarke, 2013a; Wertz, 2011; Willig, 2017).

My interest in the impact of film was triggered by my own experience of the feelings that film gave me. I often reflect on film and find myself using it to guide me through alternative thinking and perspective taking, offering me strategies to navigate situations I come up against. I find discussing film with friends and family strengthens my connections and relationships and the shared experience is positive and enjoyable. Even without reflection, the immediate experience of film, always gives me a sense of gratitude, empathy and hope, and helps strengthen my faith in humanity. Personally, I believe film can be a powerful experience that directly impacts my wellbeing positively. I wondered what experiences others had with film, and whether film could have a positive impact on others' wellbeing as well as my own? Throughout my training practice I have, with the guidance of frameworks such as COMOIRA (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008), underpinned my work with social constructionism and systems thinking, and I have come to understand the importance of

practicing holistically and taking a meta-perspective when working with CYP and their families. Drawing on my personal experience and limited research and literature, I have found myself using conversation around film to build rapport, broach sensitive or difficult topics and issues with service users and CYP, and to gather useful information and insight into the lives of CYP and the systems surrounding them. Film was already proving to be a useful tool in my practice, and was something that I believed was having a positive impact. I wondered about the impact film was actually having on the people I was working with, and how this could be documented and measured. From the position of a trainee educational psychologist, and with current national emphasis on mental health and wellbeing within education (Department for Education, 2018; Welsh Government, 2012), and the new curriculum in Wales including film as one of its 5 disciplines under the expressive arts learning area, (Education Wales, 2021; Welsh Government, 2021), I questioned the impact of film on others, specifically adolescents, and the potential use of film in support of wellbeing in schools. I wondered whether film was used as an intervention anywhere, and whether educational psychologists could be taking an active role in facilitating this and using film as part of practice. I was aware of historical research suggesting the negative impact of film around modelling violence and advocating negative behaviours (Anderson & Pempek, 2005; Bender et al., 2018; Funk et al., 2004; Kirkorian et al., 2008), and I thought that studying the positive effects of film may be a refreshing change in an age in where psychologists predominantly study whether films inspire people to smoke or to behave aggressively.

## **2.2 Ontology and Epistemology**

Critical thinking around my ontology and epistemology helped me to understand my role as researcher in this study. I believe it was important for me to reflect on my values, my worldview, and my motivation around the topic area, in order to understand my inherent bias and context, to be able to consider how this may interact with the research. As Darlaston-Jones (2007) suggests, it is perhaps critical that we understand these relationships and interactions between self and research before we embark on the research itself.

Understanding the relationship between my ontology and epistemology enabled me to determine my methodology, research design, and to articulate the rationale. Examining my reality, my world views, and the meaning I ascribe to knowledge helped me to make sense of the study.

I felt that throughout this study it was important to consider that peoples' understanding of their experiences and perceptions are shaped within a social context, and that this can evolve and change over time. I believe that the only way to explore insight into the impact of film is to gather the views of, and understand the individual and diverse experiences of participants from their perspective. It was therefore decided that this research was approached from within a critical realist paradigm (Archer et al., 2013). Critical realism holds the ontological position of realism, with the epistemological position of constructionism (Fletcher, 2017). This positions the research within a paradigm that accepts that whilst objective realities exist, peoples' understanding of their experiences are shaped within a social context, and are sustained by social processes (Burr, 2015). In order to move through the process with some clarity, it helped me to accept that due to my ontological and epistemological stance, the constructions and perceptions of the participants would inevitably be explored using an interpretative approach. At this stage, my understanding of the limited generalisability of data with this methodology was also accepted, being mindful that the data is an interpretation of the views of the study participants, but hopeful that the data was going to be rich and insightful.

On reflection, deciding on a research design, that would allow the different voices of the individual's experience to emerge and be represented, before I began examining literature within the field fully, indicated that ontological and epistemological positions, and therefore the orientation of the whole study, was dictated and determined by my personal world view.

### **2.3 Literature Review**

When beginning my literature review I realised the paucity of research and literature around the impact of film explored through qualitative methods and design. Some research did exist, but it was within clinical settings and focused on pre and post changes of a specific behaviour within a specific population such as anxiety among children in residential care. Case study and practitioner experience, and thesis literature, what may be called grey literature, did exist, was more exploratory, and was looking at the positive impact of film on development, wellbeing, and future outcomes, however, this literature was scarce. It became evident to me early on that my research would be very much preliminary, establishing a foundation within the field, with which to build upon further. Despite the

diversity of the existing literature, it was all still relevant to my study and I would be able to use it to link theory and frameworks, and to consider impact of film on transference of setting.

Having already established that the study was to explore the impact of film, then the implications specifically for educational psychology practice and application, in line with review literature I felt that a literature review that critiqued methods, rather than positions of the research, such as systematic, may not have been useful for applied EPs, who may instead benefit from real world applications of practice (Clegg, 2005; Darlaston-jones, 2007; Fletcher, 2017). A narrative literature review was therefore selected in order to support a broader, more flexible review of the literature and research with focus on applied and practice knowledge, and opportunity for the development of theory and concept in an area for which there was very limited previous research. I hope that by taking a narrative approach, it has helped to synthesise the relevant material into useful and practical information for practitioners.

## **2.4 Method and design**

I found the process of establishing method and design to be one of the most time-consuming and tricky parts of the whole research process. I spent months attempting to ascertain what it was exactly I was exploring and would this have an impact on and implication for EP and education practice, would it present relevant contribution to the knowledge base? At the beginning I was being driven by personal interest and passion, which meant a lack of clear direction and focus in the topic area. I knew it was an area that had not been explored before and I knew that the impact of film would be a personal experience for each individual, therefore I knew it was important to be able to capture individual experiences and perceptions qualitatively and that it would be empowering for the voices to emerge and determine themes and therefore implications and outcomes. Using supervision to explore my objectives was particularly helpful in refocusing the aims of the research and in considering what and how film might be helpful to the school and EP communities, I eventually decided on an exploratory, qualitative design that would hold sensitive to individual experiences through using interviews. Choosing a qualitative design helps to give voice to participants by providing opportunities to explore their experiences and how they make sense of the world (Braun & Clarke, 2013a; Willig, 2017). Adopting a semi

structured interview by design provided me with opportunities to explore individual perspectives in-depth (Willig, 2017). Refocusing my aims and selecting my method and design did not jeopardise my personal interest and although it had been a challenging part of the process that had meant significant delays, sticking to my original concept and desire meant I was embarking on the following parts of the process with enthusiasm and engagement.

Consideration was given to design around the population of the participants when I initially wanted to explore the views and perceptions of CYP within vulnerable groups, or populations of CYP who had experienced adverse childhood experiences and/or challenging life situations. I thought including these populations as participants would perhaps demonstrate the more positive impact of film on wellbeing as they may have overcome difficult situations through viewing others' stories in film and developing a sense of hope and resilience. After reviewing this option in supervision and reflecting on it further, it was felt that recruitment around such specific populations would prove challenging and questions arose as to how criteria would be disclosed in relation to discrimination and GDPR. Discussion around this also highlighted that focusing on specific populations within the field would limit the generalisability, which, at this stage of the development of the research and knowledge base, is important to capture in order for the research to be viewed and accepted as a preliminary foundation. It is however, perhaps an important alternative design in future research.

My exploration of literature suggested that navigating life situations during the adolescent developmental stage can be particularly demanding and could be described as a period of unstable wellbeing, where support around coping mechanisms, resilience, relatedness and normalisation is especially important. It is a time of life where support around wellbeing is paramount to positive life experiences and future outcomes (Eivers & Kelly, 2020; Hartas, 2021). The WHO (2021) identify adolescence (10-19 years; WHO 2021) as a risk factor for developing mental health problems, illustrating the need to explore and understand preventative as well as therapeutic support around wellbeing in this age group (National Health Service [NHS], 2017). My literature review also highlighted that developmental transitions within adolescents can be overwhelming and what has been reported within the literature to be helpful at this stage, is exposure to hypothetical situations and stories

(Eames et al., 2013; Phaire, 2013; Wright & Mahfoud, 2012; Wu, 2008). Therefore, due to a combination of historical research and literature around teenage development and the current health and wellbeing context within adolescents in education, I designed my study to explore the experiences and perceptions of the adolescent population group.

Due to a focus on applied psychology in practice and therefore an exploration around implications for EPs, I initially thought educational psychologists would make up a population group of participants for my study. Although EP participants could have provided useful insights about how practice around the use of film as a therapeutic medium may develop, as my research process developed and I further considered the limited current research base surrounding the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing, I thought it important to focus on providing a broad, preliminary piece of research that can be a foundation for the future research base, with initially exploring the experiences of the impact on individuals, not experiences of using film in practice just yet.

## **2.5 Recruitment of participants**

Considering the emphasis in research literature on the importance of the number of participants that determines adequate for a qualitative research study (Braun & Clarke, 2013a, 2021; Langley & Klag, 2019), careful consideration was given to recruitment methods and participant numbers.

A gate keeper letter (see appendix B) was sent to the headteacher at a secondary school selected at random, in Wales. On agreement and with permission of the headteacher, an invitation poster (see appendix C) and information sheets were emailed to the headteacher to disseminate to pupils between the ages of 13 and 18 at the school. I then conducted a briefing session, during a school assembly, in which the poster and information sheet were discussed and any questions answered. Pupils interested in taking part informed the headteacher and a list of interested pupils was drawn up and sent to myself by email. Twenty pupils initially showed interest in response to the poster and briefing session, however, eighteen of those initial twenty were in year eight. I was concerned about the lack of range of data that this would provide, and the way that this would alter the study's design, becoming even more specific to just one age group. I had set out to explore a range of views and perceptions across the adolescent population, and this would not be holding

true to that. I decided I needed to attempt a second round of recruitment in order to enlist CYP across the 13 – 18 year age range. I considered my initial recruitment briefing and the invitation poster, and the language used and considered how talking about personal experiences of film can be challenging and possibly uncomfortable or sensitive. I had also come to realise the difficulty in articulating and explaining how film makes an individual feel, it is somewhat intangible, and that this was perhaps one explanation for the lack of published research. As a result of these reflections I met with the headteacher to re visit and tweak my recruitment briefing session to include emphasis on participants being part of wider change in the wellbeing and education field, and that they will have exposure and experience in taking part in psychological research, which may be of insightful interest if they want to study psychology or film further. The second round of recruitment targeted a year eleven class for a repeat of the briefing session. The second round was successful and volunteers signed up from years 10 and 11. Of those interested, after both rounds of recruitment, six pupils were selected at random to take part.

I am aware that due to the recruitment method used in this study, participants responded to invitation voluntarily and therefore the type of CYP interviewed may have been seen to have an interest in the subject, may have been more assertive, had more experience, and be motivated to share ideas around implementation in school. This may have created a positive bias in the data, and so upon reflection, the use of a more blanket recruitment method or a larger sample size, would have addressed this.

## **2.6 Data collection**

In line with research literature and through carrying out interviews, I learned that the process of the interview allows both the emergence of the individual experience and the creation of a combined understanding of the phenomenon (Darlaston-jones, 2007). In order to complete data collection smoothly and as Mertens (2010) states, “The researcher needs to enter the field in the least disruptive manner possible, taking care to establish good rapport with the participants” (p.251). The use of a semi-structured interview helped to build rapport with participants and promote a natural conversation to gather a range of in-depth responses (Braun & Clarke, 2013a; Willig, 2017). Whilst using semi structured interviews allowed me to explore the experiences of the participants in my study and uncover the meaning that the experiences had for them (the subjective interpretation), I was aware of

my role within the interview process, and was able to challenge how my own experience with film and my views and biases might be interacting with participant narratives to create my understanding and interpretation of those narratives. Semi structured interviews allow the interview process to become interactional and co constructed (Darlaston-jones, 2007), and so a flowing dialogue, with limited interference from the researcher is important, and I believed could be created through developing questions that could be used flexibly. Care was taken to ensure open ended questions were used to allow genuine concepts from participants to emerge. However, I felt that through using semi structured interviews with open ended questions may have meant that I subconsciously transferred interpretations and themes established and discussed, across interviews, in participant responses, after the first interview and then subsequently. An alternative method may have been for me to use a fully structured interview, without discussion and prompting in between questions. It is however, asserted that the research paradigm taken makes no claims for 'objective reasoning' and that bias is always present in any attempt at understanding and representing the experiences of others.

I did consider using focus groups as a method of data collection as research literature argues that focus groups can allow challenge, and extension and development of ideas between the participants, which can provide rich data (Willig, 2013). A focus group may also have enabled participants to engage in shared ideas, encourage more positivity through emotion sharing and enthusiasm, and to aid memory recall after years of collective experience. However, it was decided that semi- structured interviews would offer the participants the opportunity to open up honestly but anonymously, within a confidential and safe space, and considering the content, this was most likely. Semi-structured interviews also avoided the 'groupthink' (Janis, 1972) theory, where participants start to mirror what other's in the group are saying, thinking that they have experienced similarities in order to feel a sense of belonging and merge with the majority.

Reflecting on the interview process and the data collection highlights research skills I have developed. I have learned the importance of pauses in interviews to allow participants space to think and expand their answers. These pauses were supported by prepared prompt questions which I found helpful as a guiding framework during the interviews. I also came to understand the importance of participant voice, and in order to allow participants to

complete their views, it was important to allow some interviews to slightly run over. As Mertens (2010) states “ethical concerns direct that researchers explicitly turn control of the interview or focus group over to the participants. Turning over control means allowing the person to end the interview at any time, choose not to answer specific questions and raise issues that the researcher did not bring up” (p.373). I believe that being able to reflect upon the role of the researcher within the interpretation of data collection increases the rigour of the study (Darlaston Jones 2007).

## **2.7 Data Analysis**

When considering an appropriate method of qualitative analysis, Braun & Clarke's (2006) Thematic Analysis (TA) framework was viewed as a suitable fit both within a critical realist paradigm and in relation to the method of data collection. Thematic analysis was chosen due to its light guidance and flexibility, which seeks to combine researcher creativity, theory and reflection to make sense of the data that is presented. I felt that TA enabled an inductive approach and although allowing for researcher interpretation of the data, the 6 phase structure enabled some containment and objective stance. Due to the research focus on implications for practice for schools and educational psychologists, I felt TA supported the translation of rigorous research findings into accessible material that can be applied to people's personal and professional lives.

I decided to analyse the data at the semantic level, maintaining a focus on the surface meaning of the data, with no exploration of the meaning behind the spoken word. However, upon reflection I did think that analysing data at a latent level can perhaps sometimes offer a richer picture and therefore further consideration was taken around transcription. Transcriptions cannot reflect everything that takes place during interview, which can reduce the validity of findings (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). It is only spoken word transcribed, and although in this study it was carried out at a semantic level, non-verbal communication was, and is often, left unrecorded officially, however, I learned that non verbal communication still emerges through the process of interpretation of data and becomes evident in later stages such as refining themes and sub themes. When I was transcribing I felt my interpretation of the sentence pattern and meaning was what I interpreted it to be, adding question marks and commas where I thought appropriate. Perhaps the use of a video recorder could be used in some future studies.

I generated three a priori codes that were deducted from previous research and literature (see appendix J). Interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis and each interview coded separately (see appendix L), resulting in a total of 73 codes. The shared meaning between interviews was explored and analysed as a whole data set and, after the refining (see appendix M), resulted in the development of three overarching themes, comprising of eight subthemes. I was aware that throughout the analysis process that I played an active role in identifying patterns and themes within the data, perhaps selecting those that were of interest, and then reporting them. Due to the exploratory nature of my research, this was challenging to control, however using a framework for data analysis such as TA enabled some validity and reliability. I found the refining of the themes and subthemes stage of the analysis process time consuming and difficult to work through. I thought my themes were too broad, and it felt like there was too much overlap across sub themes and overarching patterns. However, the framework enabled me to continually revisit, recode and restructure the interpretations and themes made, and on attempting a revisit and a refining, I would often end up with the same patterns and themes. This was indicative that I was working under consistent interpretations that were drawn from experiences within the data and not just random. I learned the very process of reflexive thematic analysis is engaging with this challenge and repeatedly returning to the data at each of the six stages to review, refine and redefine my interpretations. Thematic analysis is time consuming and recursive, but through this process I was able to strengthen my sense-making of the data and as a result, the knowledge it produced.

In order to avoid biasing my personal interpretations and to demonstrate credibility, rigour, and trustworthiness in the initial stages of theme identification and interpretation, I wanted to carry out inter-rater reliability to corroborate coding on transcribed data. Despite Braun and Clarke (2021) suggesting that the researcher sits paramount to the research itself and that their existing knowledge and ontological and epistemological assumptions, lend to the outcomes produced, I felt that involving other's perspectives allowed me to think more critically, and therefore more fully, about the data that I was presented with. It helped me, as a novice researcher, to consider the decisions I was making and reflect on why I was making them. Following completion of transcript coding, one uncoded participant interview transcript was selected as a test piece and coded by a third party. Codes and themes were

compared, and no modifications to the coding were required. For a list of inter-rater reliability codes and themes see appendix K.

Despite carrying out inter-rater coding, and in line with Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive TA framework, I was aware and prepared to trust my own instinct and interpretations of codes if the inter-rater reliability exercise did present different codes and interpretations of data. It was me who was present with the participant during the interview and therefore the only person who experienced the entirety of the interview, the body language, intonation, and hesitation that occurred and that can contribute to meaning and understanding of the whole experience. Darlaston-Jones (2007) suggests, it is as a result of the conversation between that particular participant and that particular researcher that results in the co-construction of meaning that emerges.

### **3. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

#### **3.1 Contribution to Existing Knowledge and Relevance to Practice**

The relevance of findings, both from the literature review and the research itself, draw attention to the potential positive impact that film can have on adolescent wellbeing. My literature review confirmed that there is very limited research exploring the impact of film on adolescent wellbeing within the UK education context. Therefore, the current research was small-scale, exploratory, and preliminary, and provided some initial feedback on adolescents' perceptions of the impact and potential usefulness of film within schools around prevention and intervention within the context of wellbeing. A qualitative and exploratory approach supported the views and experiences of participants, which led to the emergence of themes and key findings as to how film can impact adolescents. Therefore this study strengthens any existing research in the area by contributing to the development of understanding of the impact of film on CYP and education, and how the use of film can be applied within educational settings. I hope that this research can be used to inform development of film therapy or cinematherapy intervention programmes within schools in the UK.

The role of the EP and implications for EP practice in relation to current research findings is discussed within both the literature review and the empirical paper. Findings suggest there are two strands to the potential use of film in schools in relation to EP practice; individual

and group level. At the individual level film can be used consultatively, as a recommended activity in order for the EP to build rapport and a connection, to base discussion on, and to gain insight and enable dialogue with the CYP. Findings also suggest that film is a conversation starter, giving young people and their families an appealing way to have conversations that are essential, but often difficult to begin. At the group level, findings suggest EPs are well placed to facilitate a film therapy intervention programme with a group of CYP for 6-8 weeks, addressing topic areas, chosen by participants, including issues such as culture, class, gender, power, loss, death, and sexual orientation. With findings emphasising the importance of planning, film selection, monitoring, evaluation, and implementation, it is essential that EPs are the facilitators of training and supervision.

On reflection and throughout this critical review I have become increasingly aware that this study may have wider implications for policy developers and perhaps local authorities in Wales. This study raises awareness of the importance for preventative and intervention work within the wellbeing context to continue to develop within education settings and for policies around this to include the unique contribution and collaborative working methods of the EP. Therefore this study also highlights that appropriate funding arrangements need to be available to local authorities and schools so that feasible, creative, innovative and engaging interventions, such as film as therapy, or cinematherapy, which offer effective preventative support, can be implemented.

### **3.2 Contribution to Future Research**

As a result of the lack of research on film as a therapeutic medium within the education and educational psychology fields, this research has been able to offer a preliminary foundation from which future research can expand and develop. Findings from this study establish an understanding of the potential role of film as intervention for wellbeing, within schools and within applied educational psychology. The knowledge base may be expanded through future research focusing on the facilitation and evaluation of a film group intervention programme in the UK. This would help to better understand the effectiveness of such an intervention, and the mechanisms of the impact, which could then be used to inform further development of film therapy or cinematherapy intervention programmes within the UK. Longitudinal research to explore the extent to which the impact of film was retained and utilised over time may be able to run alongside and be a beneficial contribution to the

expanding knowledge base. This study has highlighted the need for research across a wider range of schools, and population groups, including the additional learning needs population, and those in culturally diverse areas, with focus on individuals who have experienced adversities and use film to maintain successful wellbeing. I have learned throughout this process the importance of research providing opportunity for the development of further research in order to advance understanding of what works, for whom it works, and in what circumstances (Bell, 2010b; Mertens, 2010; Willig, 2017). It is the future research that contributes towards extending the generalisability of findings over all, which is what leads to a stronger evidence base and therefore wider application.

### **3.3 Dissemination**

As previously discussed, I feel that the findings of this study have relevance in supporting evidence informed practice within applied educational psychology. My passion and enthusiasm around the research area drives me to utilise film therapy creatively and flexibly in practice and I feel I will be able to take the key findings and conclusions of this research into all areas of my practice as a fully qualified educational psychologist. I want to share my findings with colleagues, service users, policy makers, and researchers in order to emphasise the importance of creative art based therapeutic interventions, and to begin to establish a shift, and movement, towards the development of film based intervention programmes that can bring about change and effectively support the wellbeing of children and young people. As critical realism literature argues, findings of such research as this are perhaps integral to application and successful real world intervention (Clegg, 2005; Danermark, 2019; Fletcher, 2017). Dissemination of the findings from this research will include:

- Attempting the publication of this research within academic journals relevant to applied educational psychology practice.
- The sharing of the full thesis and a written summary of the research findings to the headteacher and participants of the participating school, so that they can see how their contribution and voices have been represented and can inform future practice.
- Integration of findings into training programmes such as ELSA and SAP, highlighting the use of film as a tool and resource for building resilience, creating a sense of belonging, gratitude and hope, and ultimately supporting wellbeing.

- Presenting my thesis and the research findings to my educational psychology service team, emphasising the potential utilisation and benefits of film across all areas of practice.

#### **4. Concluding Reflections**

The critical review has offered me an opportunity, and provided me with a space, to consider the research process more fully and to think critically about the decisions made. Through discussing my account of myself as a research practitioner, and the contribution to knowledge this study has made, I have reflected on the impact of the process on my professional development, both as a researcher and a trainee educational psychologist. Despite its challenges I have enjoyed the learning process that each stage of this research has offered. The process has enhanced my enthusiasm for film as a therapeutic medium, and its potential positive impact on the wellbeing of adolescents. The findings of this study have encouraged me to seek opportunities to promote and develop film and its utilisation to support wellbeing, in applied educational psychology practice. I will strive to increase the presence of creative art based therapeutic mediums such as film and psychology in the wellbeing arena, so as to encourage acknowledgement of its positive impact on, and potential usage for, CYP, their families and their schools. The voices and perceptions of the young people within this study, and therefore the emergent themes, have influenced my thinking in everyday life and enhanced my understanding of what it is to be human. To experience the stories of others is to understand that we are not alone, and in gaining this understanding, we find gratitude, hope and perspective, which means we feel we can live another day.

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## **Appendices**



## Appendix A: PsycInfo Literature Search.

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▼ **Search History (17)** [View Saved](#)

<input type="checkbox"/>	# ▲	Searches	Results	Type	Actions	Annotations
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	films/	8818	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	<a href="#">Contract</a>
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	cinema*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	3145	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	movie*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	7888	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	television.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	20876	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	motion picture*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	2926	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6	1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5	35786	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	7	teen*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	25334	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8	young person.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	1538	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9	young people.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	32930	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	10	youth.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	111818	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	11	adolescen*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	500366	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	12	7 or 8 or 9 or 10 or 11	569992	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	13	pro social change*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	17	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	14	(positive adj2 change*).mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	15776	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	15	transformat*.mp. [mp=title, abstract, heading word, table of contents, key concepts, original title, tests & measures, mesh word]	56611	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	16	13 or 14 or 15	71786	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	17	6 and 12 and 16	73	Advanced	<a href="#">Display Results</a> <a href="#">More ▼</a>	

Combine with:

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## Appendix C: Invitation Poster



**Can you think of a film that has made a difference to you?  
Has a film made you change the way you think about something?**

**Has a film empowered you to face difficult situations?**

**How do you feel when you watch a really great film?**

If you are aged between **13** and **18** and can answer any of the questions above, then **YOU** are invited to take part in a research study that aims to explore and investigate the impact of film on adolescents' lives and wellbeing.

### **Who will conduct the research?**

My name is Laura Barnsley and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University, conducting this study as part of my training.

### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

6 pupils from your school will be selected at random to take part.

If selected you will be asked to **attend an interview that is likely to take 45 – 60 minutes**. This will be organised at your convenience. The interview will involve answering some questions based on your experiences and perceptions of the impact film has on you and your peers' lives.

Information discussed during interviews will remain confidential and not be passed on.

### **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is entirely voluntary and completely up to you whether you take part or not. If you do not wish to take part then you do not need to do anything.

### **The benefits of the research:**

It will give you an opportunity to express your views on how film has had an impact on your life, and to experience discussion in an interview for research setting.

The finished study will help future researchers, teachers, schools, educational psychologists, and policy makers to better understand the impact film has on teenagers and how the outcomes of the study may have implications for them.

**If you are interested in taking part, please inform your headteacher** and they will contact me confirming your interest.

## **Appendix D: Participant information sheet for pupils' parents.**

### **An Exploration into the Impact of Film on Adolescents' Wellbeing: Implications for Educational Psychologists.**

#### **Participant Information Sheet**

Your child/young person is being invited to take part in a research study that aims to explore and investigate the impact of film on adolescents' wellbeing.

Before you consent, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please contact me. Thank you for reading this.

#### **Who will conduct the research?**

My name is Laura Barnsley and I am an Educational Psychology Trainee at Cardiff University, conducting this study as part of my doctorate.

#### **Why has my child/young person been chosen?**

All children/young people who fall within the age range of 13 – 18 at their current school have been invited to take part in the study. Your child/young person responded to the invitation as someone who wanted to take part and was then selected at random out of the interested invitees. I have asked 6 children/young people to take part.

#### **What would my child/young person be asked to do if I they took part?**

Your child/young person will be interviewed by myself either online or in person (at the discretion of the school), for between 45 and 60 minutes. During the interview their experiences of film and its impact on them and their lives will be discussed. The interview will take place on a school day.

#### **What happens to the data collected?**

The interview will be audio recorded and the data transcribed. I will then analyse the data and present the findings to other Educational Psychology Trainees, our course tutors at Cardiff University, and a small number of Educational Psychologists from Local Authorities in Wales.

#### **How is confidentiality maintained?**

The audio recording of the interview conversation will be kept confidential and password protected until it is transcribed at which point any identifying features will be removed. The original recording will then be destroyed.

#### **What happens if I do not want my child/young person to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is entirely voluntary and completely up to you whether your child/young person takes part or not. If you do not wish for your child/young person to take part then you do not need to do anything, but if you wish you can contact me on the email addresses below to discuss the study further. I can answer any questions you may have. If you do decide for your child/young person to participate then please read and complete the enclosed consent form. There is no rush, the deadline for completed consent forms is \*\*/01/2022. Even after consent your child/young person is free to withdraw with or without reason, up to the point at which the data is anonymised (approximately four weeks after the interview takes place).

**Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

In the event that the research is published, all data will be anonymised.

**Disclosure and Barring Service Check (if applicable)**

I have obtained appropriate DBS checks.

**Contact for further information**

Laura Barnsley xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

My research tutor can also be contacted for information on the project. Their contact information is:

Dr Ian Smillie xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Or please contact the Ethics Committee at Cardiff University:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee

School of Psychology

Cardiff University

Tower Building

Park Place

Cardiff

CF10 3AT

Tel: 029 2087 0360

Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

## **Appendix E: Participant information sheet for pupils**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

You are being invited to take part in a research study that aims to explore and investigate the impact of film on adolescents' lives and wellbeing.

As a potential participant, and before you consent, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information, please contact me. Thank you for reading this.

#### **Who will conduct the research?**

My name is Laura Barnsley and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University, conducting this study as part of my doctorate.

#### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

To help the researcher obtain a range of views and perspectives on the study topic area. All pupils between the ages of 13 and 18 in your school were invited to take part. You were selected at random after responding to the invitation and briefing session as interested.

#### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

You will be asked to attend an interview that is likely to take 45 – 60 minutes. This will be organised at your convenience. Prior to the interview please think about a film that has made a difference to you and your life and/or made you change the way you think about something. The interview will involve you discussing this film or films, and answering some questions based on your experiences and perceptions of the impact film has on yours and other teenagers' lives and school experiences.

#### **What happens to the data collected?**

The interviews will be recorded so that the researcher can transcribe the content in order to read the text. The recording will be kept confidential and password protected until it is transcribed at which point any identifying features will be removed. Data will be anonymised and the transcript destroyed within 4 weeks of collection. The conversations will then be examined for 'themes' and a report will be produced discussing teenagers' experiences. The researcher will present the findings to other Educational Psychology Trainees, course tutors at Cardiff University, and a small number of Educational Psychologists from Local Authorities.

#### **How is confidentiality maintained?**

Whilst semi structured interviews are not considered to be confidential, information discussed during interviews will remain confidential and not be passed on. Names of participants will not be disclosed to anyone except the researcher.

#### **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

It is entirely voluntary and completely up to you whether you take part or not. If you do not wish to take part then you do not need to do anything, but if you wish, you can contact me on the email address below to discuss the study further. I can answer any questions you may have.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, without consequence and can request your data be discarded or destroyed up to the point of anonymity. If any participant decides to withdraw, before anonymous transcription of data, any personal or identifying information given will be deleted.

Even after consent you are free to withdraw with or without reason, up to the point at which the data is anonymised (approximately 4 weeks after the interview takes place).

**Can you refuse to answer a question or leave the study?**

Yes, you can 'pass' on an answer, and, up until the data is transcribed, you can leave the study (and have your contributions discarded/deleted), without giving a reason.

**The benefits of the research:**

It will give you an opportunity to express your views on how film has had an impact on your life, and to experience discussion in an interview for research setting.

The finished study will help future researchers, teachers, schools, educational psychologists, and policy makers to better understand the impact film has on teenagers and how the outcomes of the study may have implications for them.

**Contact for further information**

Laura Barnsley [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX](#)

My research tutor can also be contacted for information on the project. Their contact information is:

Dr Ian Smillie [XXXXXXXXXXXX](#)

Or please contact the Ethics Committee at Cardiff University:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee  
School of Psychology  
Cardiff University  
Tower Building  
Park Place  
Cardiff  
CF10 3AT  
Tel: 029 2087 0360

Email: [XXXXXXXXXXXX](#)

## Appendix F: Opt-in consent form for parents

### An Exploration into the Impact of Film on Adolescents' Wellbeing: Implications for Educational Psychologists

I confirm that I give my full and informed consent on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ to participate in the above study. I understand that the information \_\_\_\_\_ provides will remain anonymous and confidential so that they may not be identified. I give my permission for the results of this study to be presented to a small group of Trainee Educational Psychologists, their tutors and Local Authority Educational Psychologists, but understand my child/young person will remain anonymous throughout.

- I understand that as part of this study the above named person will discuss the research topic in an interview about the impact of film on their lives.
- I have been informed that the general aim of this study is to explore and investigate the impact of film on adolescents' wellbeing.
- I have been informed that the above named person's general participation in this study will not involve unexpected discomforts or risks.
- I have been informed that there are no disguised procedures in this study.
- I understand that the researcher will answer any questions that I or the above named person have regarding the study once the above named person has participated.
- I understand that the above named person is free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Concerns about the study may also be directed to the researcher's tutor, or the ethics committee.

Signed:

To confirm consent please read the above and the attached information sheet carefully and email the researcher at [barnsleyl@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:barnsleyl@cardiff.ac.uk) by the \*\*/01/2022 with a signed copy of this form and your child's full name.

#### Contact for further information

Laura Barnsley [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX](#)

My research tutor can also be contacted for information on the project. Their contact information is:

Dr Ian Smillie [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX](#)

Or please contact the Ethics Committee at Cardiff University:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee

School of Psychology

Cardiff University

Tower Building

Park Place

Cardiff

CF10 3AT

Tel: 029 2087 0360

Email: [XXXXXXXXXXXX](#)

## Appendix G: Opt-in assent form for child/young person participants

### An Exploration into the Impact of Film on Adolescents' Wellbeing: Implications for Educational Psychologists.

Please put a tick in the box to let us know you are OK with what we have described and that you want to take part (or not). If something is not clear, I (Laura Barnsley) will explain it to you.

- I will meet with you and we will discuss the study topic in an interview
- It will take between 45 and 60 minutes and will take place either online or in school on .....
- The research is taking place to help Educational Psychologists understand the experiences young people have of film and the impact it has on their lives
- You can ask questions at any time
- You can change your mind about being involved at any time and without giving a reason

Yes, I agree

My name is

and I agree to take part in the project.

## Appendix H: Semi Structured Interview schedule

### KEY

- Is a prompt for the researcher

### Film

- Tell me about the film you've chosen to talk about today.
  - How did you feel and what happened when you watched the film?

### Individual

- How did watching this film make a difference to you?
- How did watching the film change you/How are you different after watching it, and how do you know it changed something?
  - What was it about the film that enabled the change? (character, lines, story, music?)
  - Did the film change the way you think about things?
  - Did the film change the way you behave in any way?
- Did you talk about the film with anyone?

### Others

- Why do you think film is important?
- How do you think film can be helpful for teenagers?
  - In schools?
- Do you think film can change all people?

Do you have anything further to add?

## **Appendix I: Debrief letter for participants**

School of Psychology  
Cardiff University Centre for Human Developmental Science  
70 Park Place  
Cardiff  
CF10 3AX

DATE

Dear participant

Thank you for taking part in my study into the impact of film on teenagers' lives.

This research is being undertaken in order to better understand teenagers' experiences of film and the impact it has on their lives to see whether, and how, film could be used in schools to support teenager wellbeing. This study will help to give teenagers an opportunity to voice their experiences and perceptions around film and its impact on their peers and themselves. Due to contribution of research to the field, future researchers, headteachers, schools, educational psychologists, and policy makers may benefit from the outcomes of the study.

The research involved interviews with 6 teenagers. The conversations from the interviews will now be transcribed, and then sorted into 'themes' that will be discussed in a research paper and presented to fellow students and tutors at Cardiff University, and to a small number of Educational Psychology Services from Local Authorities in the UK.

All participants' details will be completely anonymous. Confidentiality is maintained throughout the study. Once the interview conversations have been transcribed, it will not be possible for people outside of the study to identify participants' individual responses. If you wish for your data (including your conversations) to be removed from the study data, please contact the researcher before (DATE), after which the data will be anonymised and it would not be possible to identify it in order to remove it. You will not need to provide a reason for requesting removal.

If you have any concerns or have been affected by the content of the interview please contact your school staff.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or my supervisor at:

xxxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxx (Dr Ian Smillie - research supervisor)

Many thanks again for your involvement in this research project.

Regards,

Laura Barnsley, Trainee Educational Psychologist.

Appendix J: Full list of codes

Full list of codes

A-Priori, deductive codes

- ① A sense of nostalgia, film as a comfort
- ② Film as a guide to overcoming life's problems
- ③ A sense of comfort in being part of humanity and the world

Inductive, data-driven codes

- ④ based on true story reliability, human connectedness
- ⑤ length of film time
- ⑥ shared experience
- ⑦ talked about the film with others
- ⑧ changed thoughts and beliefs
- ⑨ strengthened faith in something (humanity, religion)
- ⑩ feelings of comfort (from film & environment)
- ⑪ overcoming sadness or negative feelings
- ⑫ Being able to cope
- ⑬ difficulty explaining the change the impact of film how film makes you feel
- ⑭ film was prescribed
- ⑮ understanding death
- ⑯ feelings of contentment & calm
- ⑰ understanding of life & others (learning) being human

- ⑱ further insight & understanding through talking about film
- ⑲ neurological changes (feels good, brain thinks real)
- ⑳ physical changes
- ㉑ plot/storyline as catalyst (meaningful)
- ㉒ feeling real
- ㉓ seeing human stories (characters, knowing them)
- ㉔ music deepens emotion
- ㉕ remembering poignant scenes
- ㉖ watching films multiple times
- ㉗ changed behaviours
- ㉘ can be helpful for others
- ㉙ improving relationships with others
- ㉚ The world is ok (they's hopes I'm going to be ok)
- ㉛ A sense of hope
- ㉜ prepared for future
- ㉝ all people can change from film
- ㉞ change in perspective on life
- ㉟ sense of gratitude.
- ㊱ people experience film differently
- ㊲ all film can have some impact, always learn something from film
- ㊳ salience affecting impact
- ㊴ teaches life lessons, learning something
- ㊵ I'm not alone, I belong, belongingness

- 41 film addressing multiple areas of topic
- 42 relatability as catalyst (meaningful)
- 43 exposure to something new, learning something new
- 44 can help teenagers with range of topics
- 45 use in schools, implementation
- 46 works in a group
- 47 works individually
- 48 parental divorce or separation 41
- 49 bullying 41
- 50 friendships and relationships
- 51 reflected on the impact of film during interview
- 52 building confidence
- 53 mental health
- 54 animals 41
- 55 feelings of sadness
- 56 feelings of empathy } makes it meaningful catalysts for change.
- 57 knowing the characters 42 (relatability)
- 58 feelings of ~~positive happiness~~ appreciation upliftment <sup>inspiration</sup>
- 59 ~~concerns awareness~~ whilst watching (no distractions, fully engaged) is important
- 60 reflected on film individually to form own, meaningful interpretations and ideas 61
- 61 Experiencing ~~about~~ something from ~~safe~~ <sup>safe</sup> distance
- 62 schoolwork, stress 41
- 63 adolescence engagement with film as a medium

64 <sup>as</sup> film more meaningful than therapist (than talk therapy, than external advice or help) <sup>as</sup> therapeutic intervention instead of other models

- 65 used the film years after seeing it remembering film
- 66 film subconsciously stored in mind
- 67 film as meaningful & personal
- 68 environment around film - comfort, food etc.
- 69 emotional, cathartic, therapeutic Escapist
- 70 enables openness, dialogue (platform)
- 71 narrative therapy It's the talking about them that reinforced the power of narrative therapy.
- 72 live a good life
- 73 Power of film.

## Inter-rater reliability codes/themes:

- nostalgia
- plot/storyline as engaging and catalyst for <sup>thought</sup> change
- feelings of sadness
- Empathy
- death/loss
- feeling real
- enables openness, platform for talking about feelings
- film having different meanings to different people
- character relatability as catalyst for change
- shared experiences
- improved relationships with others when sharing experience (watching or talking about)
- can teach life's lessons
- can change perspective
- can change behaviour
- film as powerful

Appendix L: Data Coding Examples.

Ppt 6:

Ppt 6 (55) feelings of sadness (20) physical changes  
Yeah, and there were parts of it which were sad, which did make me cry, so that was another kind of physical reaction I had I guess, but

Laura

I cry at films all time. So why are you feeling sad? You're watching this, what you perceive to be a sad scene, and what's going through your mind, why are you crying? Or why are you feeling sad?

69  
national  
Ppt 6 (15) understanding death (23) seeing human stories (57) knowing characters  
Well, there's a character in it who died and I liked that character very much, and they died in a very sad way, and that just made me quite emotional, I suppose. I felt for the character. I guess you start to think about if it was someone you knew, or yourself in that situation, it's just sad. It's like the film is making you think about real life. (56) feelings of empathy (40) relatability (13) exposure

Laura

Okay, so that film gave you an experience, and although it was a sad experience, and you were crying, you're still saying that you enjoyed that film. So that means you enjoyed having the experience of crying, did you?

Ppt 6 (20) physical changes (55) feelings of sadness  
Yeah, I guess I did. The crying, or my kind of experience of the film must have meant something to me, because I've watched it multiple times. I've gone back to it even though it's sad.

Laura

So there's something about it, you must be getting something from it. So let's talk about that a little bit more. So does that film make a difference to the way you think about things or in life, or the way you act towards something or?

Being  
woman  
Ppt 6 (8) changed thoughts & beliefs (34) change in perspective  
It makes me think about like, how fleeting everything is, as it were, in that you know, it can be gone really easily, and so you should enjoy it while it lasts. (17) understanding life & others (15) understanding death (36) sense of gratitude.

Laura

That's, wow, that's really powerful, isn't it? So it's a film, albeit an animated film, some people might see that as a child's film, but it doesn't mean that it's not powerful, because isn't there that film that's out recently, Encanto? It's been in the media a lot. That's obviously having quite a big impact, and again, that's an animated child's film, isn't it, but it doesn't mean it's not powerful so that's amazing then, you think that that film has enabled you to have an understanding and gave you an insight which then in turn made you reflect on how fleeting life is, and then what did you say after that?

Ppt 6

I said life is fleeting so you should enjoy it while it lasts.

Ppt 5:

Laura

Yeah completely, although at the back of your brain you've got something telling you you're just sitting on your sofa watching a film -

Ppt 5 (20) physical changes (61) experiencing something from safe distance.  
Yeah but you've still - you can still have like, physical reactions to it. Like when people cry at films I guess.

(71) narrative therapy (55) feelings of sadness

Laura

Exactly, so there must be another part of the brain that's not affected by the bit that's saying 'this isn't real' and that part of your brain that makes you cry or makes you feel a bit uncomfortable, feel a bit on edge - those feelings are real. You're really having those feelings at that time.

Ppt 5 (19) neurological changes (22) feeling real

So that means that part of your brain is thinking that it's real. Hmm, yeah. So you are having an experience, even though you're on your sofa. Your brain doesn't know where you are. It just knows that right now you're going to cry or you're feeling scared or like, on edge or whatever, but to your brain that is a real experience.

(22) feeling real (20) physical changes (69) cathartic, therapeutic, escapism

Laura

Yeah, I mean, you could be outside in a dark alleyway at night, and somebody could have a knife against you and you might be experiencing some of the same feelings or reactions that you would sitting on the sofa watching a knife attack in an alleyway, does that make sense? The same part of your brain is feeling the fear feeling or the scared feeling.

Ppt 5 (11) narrative therapy (61) experiencing something from safe distance

Definitely I would agree. It's like film is giving you like, an experience - if not the same as, then similar to a real life thing. But you're - it's in like, a safe way. Because sometimes when people watch films, they're sad, sweating or shaking or like, like you do have physical - your body can have physical reactions. So your brain must think it's real. It's like, this is a different film now, I don't want to go into it too much, but I watched The Green Mile. (19) neurological changes (20) physical changes

Laura

Yeah, I love that film.

Ppt 5 (65) used film years after seeing it / remembering film (66) film subconsciously stored in mind

I should have spoken about that! Honestly, I've never forgotten that film. It was so - I watched it when I must have been about 14, and it was just so like - I didn't even sleep that night because of how much it impacted me. I will remember that for the rest of my life. The amount of times I've asked people in the last probably, two years, have you seen the green mile? Like, you know, it just always comes up because it was such a moving film, that was one film that I'll never forget.

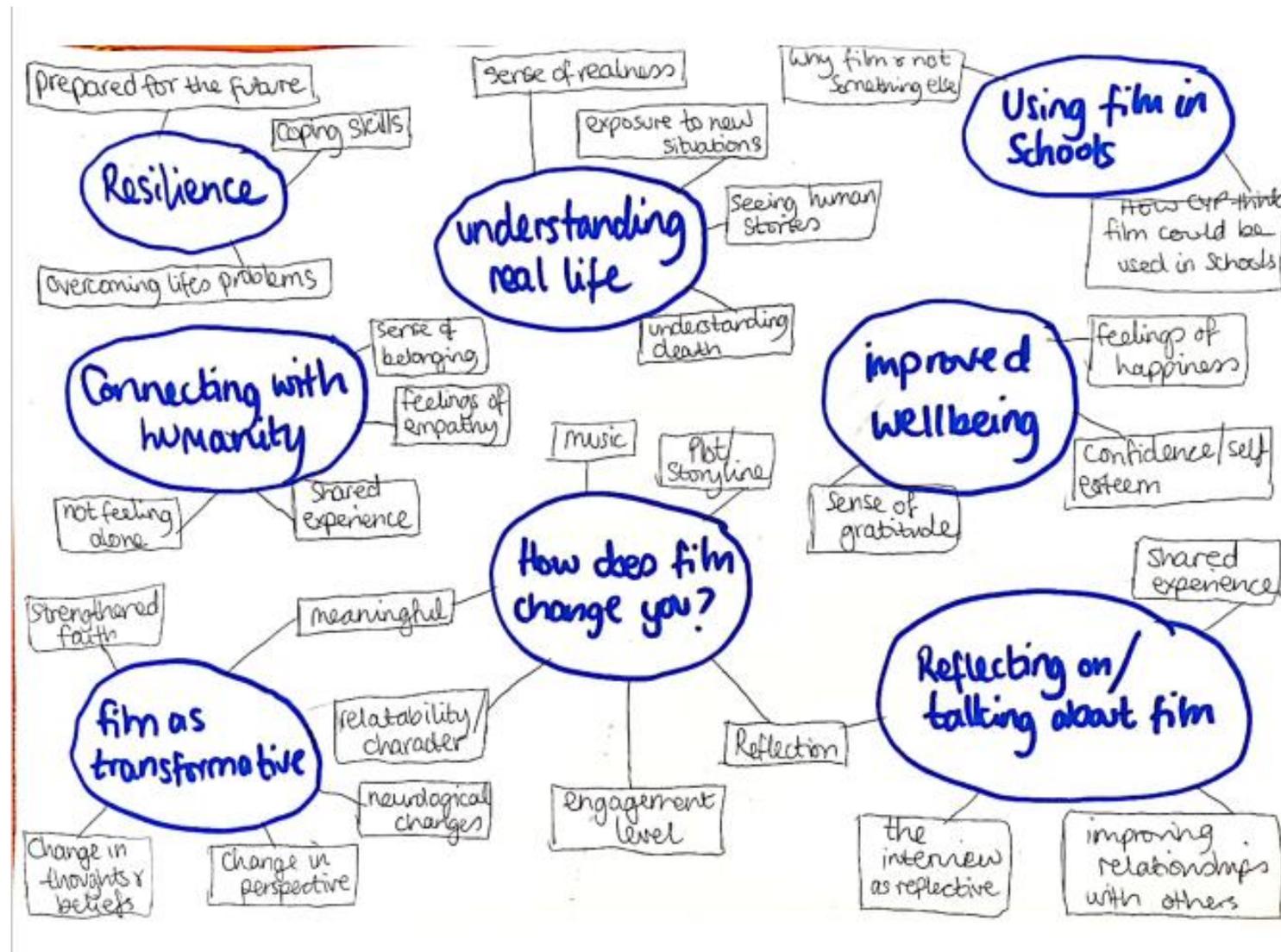
(69) emotional, cathartic, therapeutic, escapism

Laura

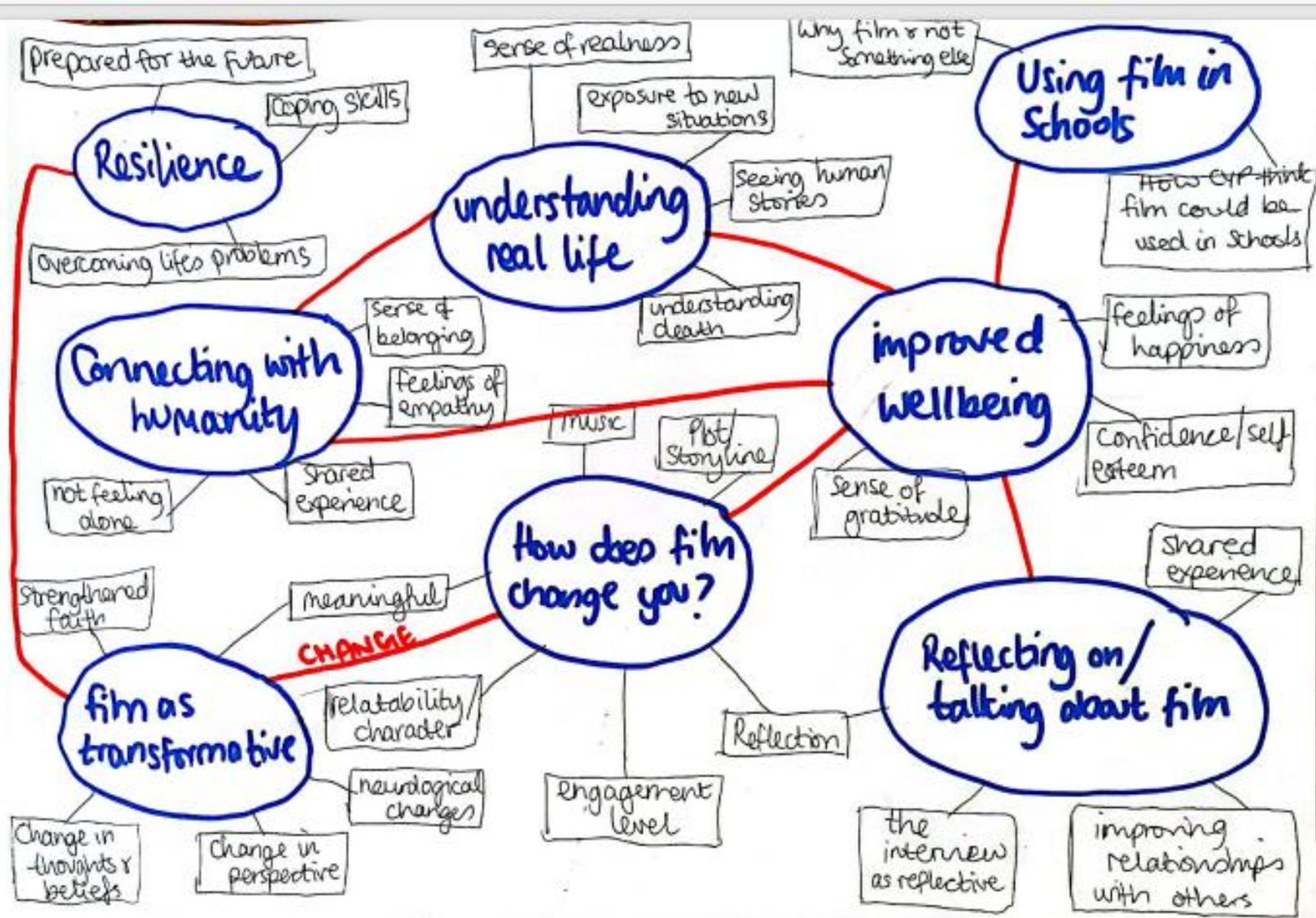
I wonder why? Would you say that film changed your life?

Appendix M: Refining Initial Themes and Subthemes

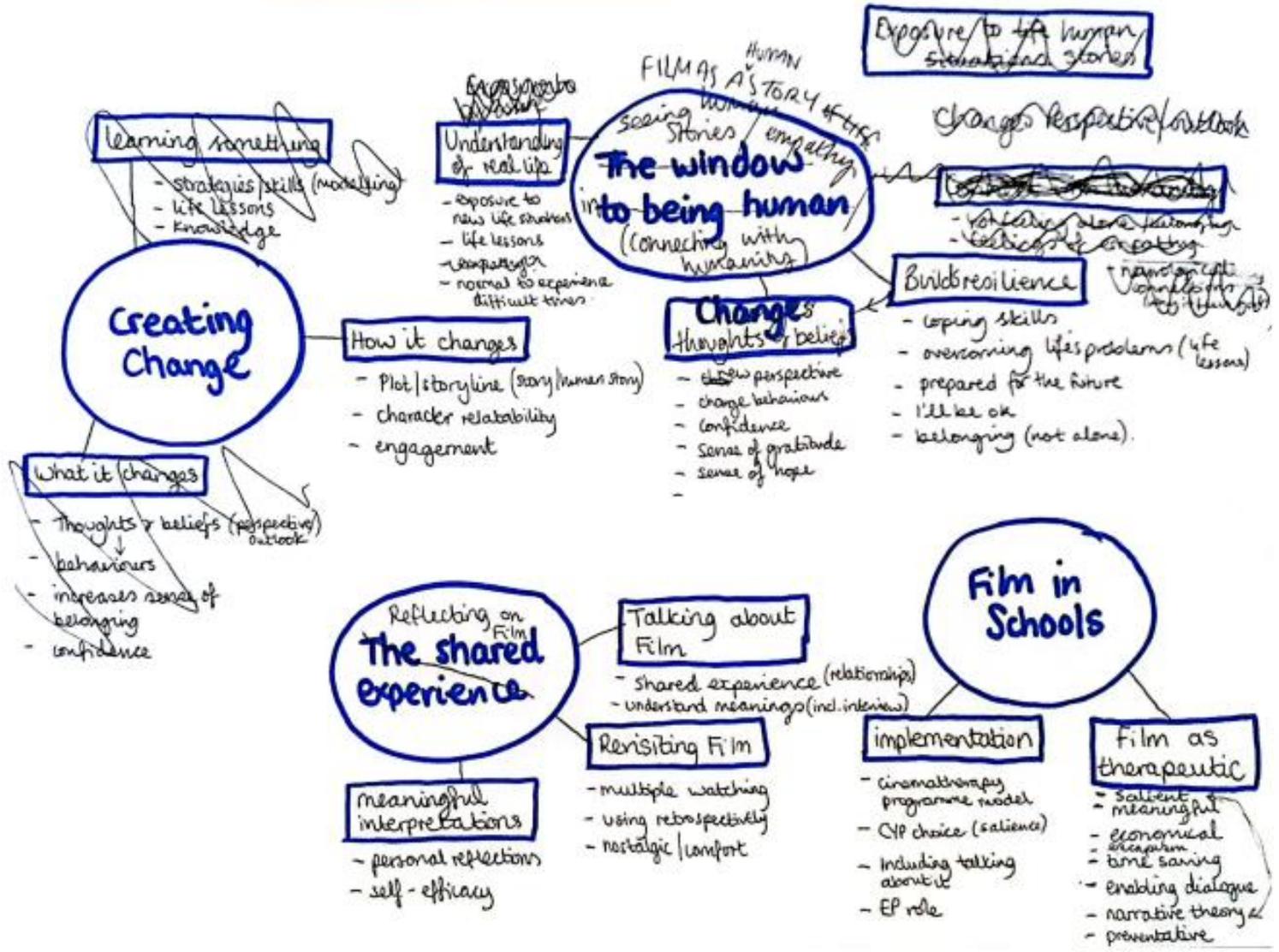
1 Initial Thematic Map:



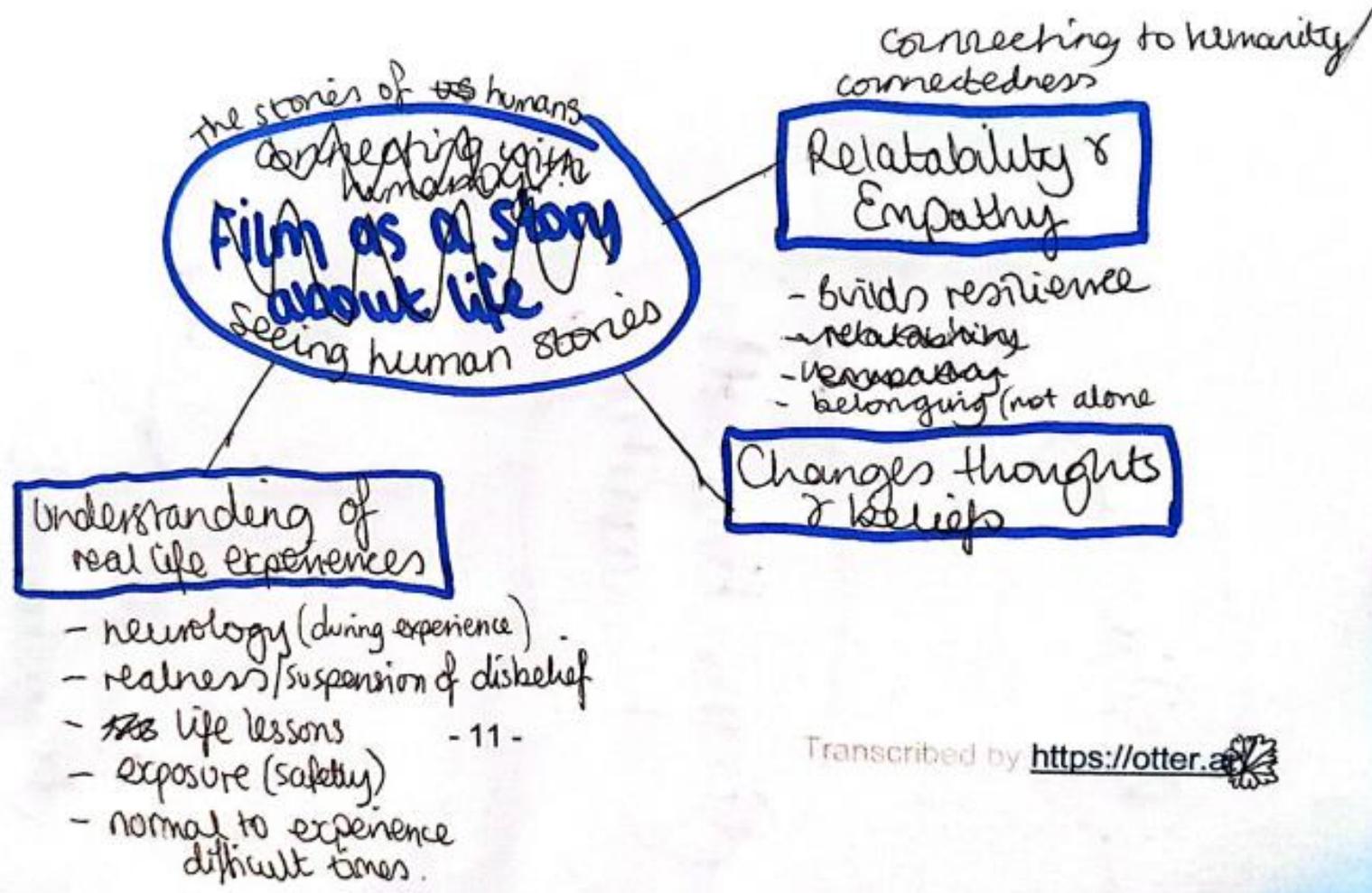
2 Tracked Changes:



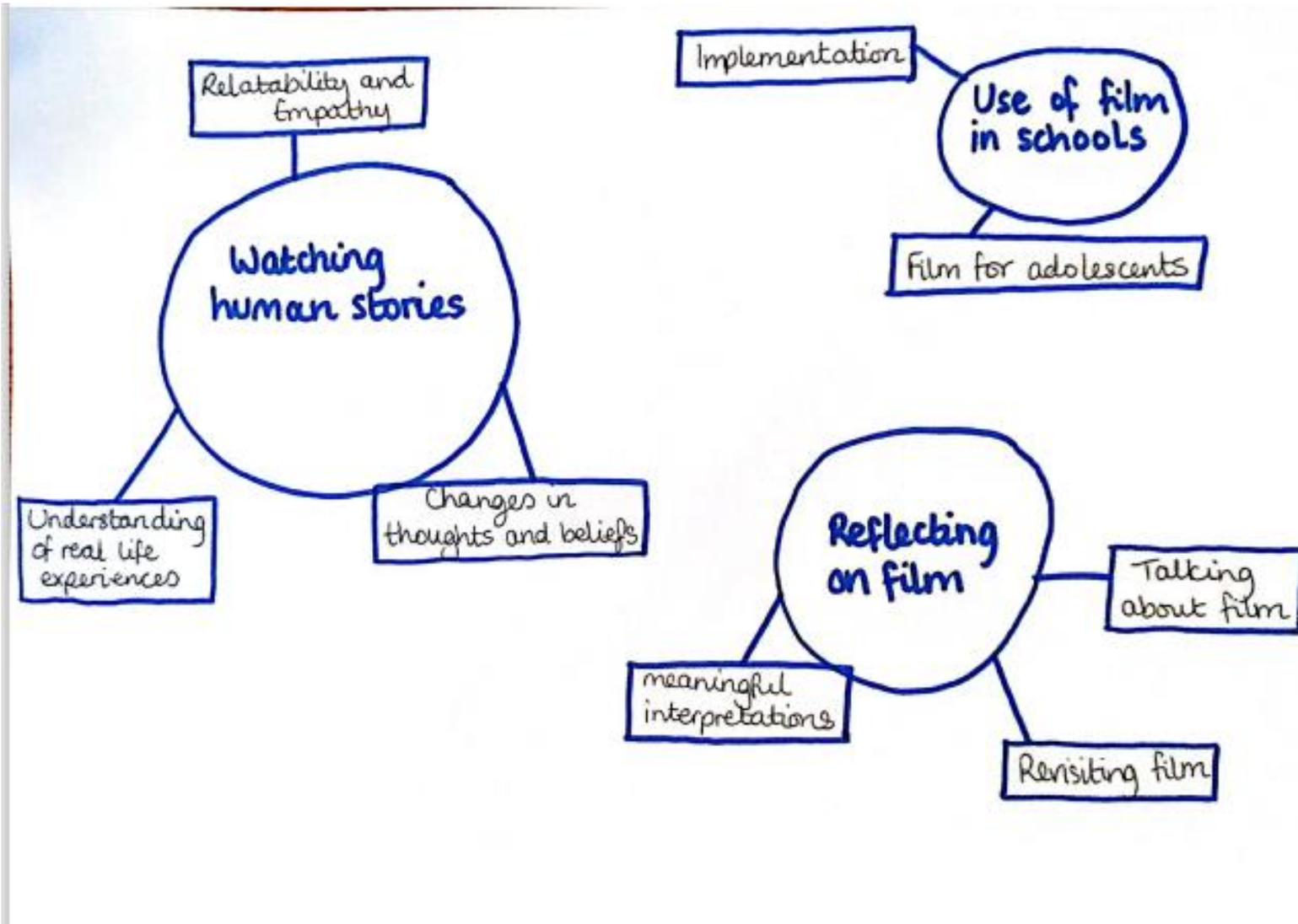
### 3 Refining Themes:



Refining Themes Continued:



#### 4 Final Thematic Map:



5 Amended Thematic Map:

