

Original Article

ANIMATED NARRATIVES AS THERAPEUTIC COMMUNICATION: A SEMIOTIC AND BIBLIOTHERAPEUTIC ANALYSIS OF FAMILY DYNAMICS

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the application of animated films as a therapeutic medium of communication, figuratively communicating family dialogue, emotional conflict and healing through semiotic and bibliotherapeutic paradigms. By incorporating Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP) and Bibliotherapy as the methodology, the study takes an interdisciplinary perspective to address emotional and communicative features of three animated movies: Finding Nemo (2003), Inside Out (2015) and Spirited Away (2001). The analysis of visual and verbal semiotic codes was conducted by means of qualitative content analysis so as to identify the meanings of constructing and resolving family communication and showcasing emotions.

According to the findings, there is emotional change through adaptive communication and symbolic narrative in the movies. Overprotective-empathetic change in Finding Nemo is a kind of communicative deviating and then convergence to a communicative convergence as a healing process of relationships occurring in the form of trust. Inside Out explains the emotional fusion in the self, which the reconciliation of Joy and Sadness represents emotional literacy and balance. The adaptive communication in Spirited Away provides freedom of choice and also builds an identity, represented by name and space. The analysis of the FCP Theory implies that the higher the level of conversation orientation and the lower the level of conformity, the higher the empathy and relational openness. The Reading Therapy school of thought emphasizes the curative role of such stories, which include the viewers in identification, catharsis and discernment, hence turning animation into a tool of emotional self-exploration.

In general, the research paper adopts the conclusion that the animated stories are a type of visual reading therapy in which symbolic communication and telling of stories can be used to build empathy, resilience and mental development. The paper that consists of communication theory, semiotics and narrative therapy contributes to the understanding of animation as a form of art and a way of therapy that allows people to feel better and feel empathy with other cultures.

Keywords: Animation Studies, Family Communication, Semiotics, Bibliotherapy, Communication Accommodation Theory, Emotional Healing, Narrative Therapy, Empathy, Therapeutic Communication, Visual Storytelling

INTRODUCTION

Animation has grown to be more than what was originally associated with the amusement of children, to be an exquisite form of expression that is capable of expressing complex themes of emotional, moral and family problems. The animated films turned into an approach to exploring the inner workings of human emotions and relationships through a language that is easy to understand, yet very symbolic due to the unusual mix of visuals, sound and narrative design [Udris-Borodavko et al. \(2023\)](#). Animation is a

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narration that combines colour, motion and metaphor to externalise inner emotional sensibilities, providing the participant the ability to experience as well as internalise losses, separations, self-growth and shaping of identities without regard to language and culture. The movies like *Inside Out* (2015), *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Finding Nemo* (2003) demonstrate such an expressive possibility, with anthropomorphic characters and symbolic environments, that can be intergenerational in an interpretation.

This trend is connected to a more wide-ranging academic trend of defining animation as an aesthetic and psychological medium, as opposed to an entertainment one. Affective imagery and symbolic communication to foster empathy and moral awareness have been examined by a growing body of research [Napier \(2021\)](#), [Vine et al. \(2020\)](#), [Cai et al. \(2023\)](#), for instance, emphasize that animation is a unique form of emotional pedagogy that uses metaphorical codes to connect human cognition to visual storytelling in visualizing emotion. Similarly, the *Arts Journal* (2022) also emphasizes that the anthropomorphism of animation facilitates emotional connection and relational cognition, since the characters tend to represent human values, weaknesses and development. These components turn the film experience into an emotional exchange between the film and the spectator.

While examining media psychology, it is explored that cognitive and emotional effects are produced and through the effects on attention, empathy and recall of the information, they are documented [Praveen and Srinivasan \(2022\)](#). It is capable of influencing the ability of the viewer to perceive and process emotions through its symbolic richness. It is this characteristic that makes animation a tool of therapeutic interaction that is especially potent because it integrates both emotional literacy with narrative enjoyment [Yuanyuan et al. \(2024\)](#). The emotional states of anger, joy, sadness, or fear can also be evaluated and interpreted by the viewers with the help of their symbolic forms due to the dynamic visual language of animation, allowing one to assess the state of his or her inner world [Bissonnette \(2019\)](#), [Jiang et al. \(2022\)](#). The role of animation as a therapeutic and communicative tool has gained particular attention in interdisciplinary studies combining psychology, communication and literary theory. Films can be powerful narrative tools that can help engender reflection, affective catharsis and insight in individuals and families done in a bibliotherapy and cinematherapy context [Sacilotto et al. \(2022\)](#). The nature of animated films, which is metaphorical and accessible, fits well for those uses. According to [Bosticco and Thompson \(2005\)](#), television narratives construct emotionally secure spaces in which experiences of anxiety, grief and conflict are symbolically represented rather than directly confronted.

Movies like *Finding Nemo* are great examples. They depict how overprotective parents can hurt their kids. And they also show parents getting lost and finding each other again. The film *Inside Out* represents how emotions and cognition interfaces with each other creates a colourful imagery of emotions and teaches us how sadness and joy coexist. *Spirited Away* investigates how identity as well as memory become significant, resilience as well as transformation are among the integral themes [Napier et al. \(2021\)](#). The stories demonstrate communication and emotion regulation. These stories have therapeutic principles and empathy perspective [Hardin \(2025\)](#)

Even with the increasing critical and popular appreciation of these films, academic studies often isolate aesthetic or psychological dimensions out of which could significantly be built communicative or therapeutic frameworks. Animated texts have the power to model modes of therapeutic communication through the verbal and non-verbal exchanges of characters which creates a context for family communication patterns and emotional development. They are a mechanism of communication. There is a tendency to read these kinds of animations semiotically and psychoanalytically and not much is done at the level of analysing how these narratives are involved in communication. In the same vein, [McLeod and Sundet \(2022\)](#) claim that the bibliotherapeutic potential of animation remains unexplored in English and Communication Studies where film texts may be read as narrative interventions that trigger reflection and healing.

Existing literature provides valuable but fragmented insights. Studies in communication theory [Jazeri and Nurhayati \(2019\)](#) elucidate how convergence and divergence shape interpersonal relationships, but rarely apply these frameworks to animated media. Meanwhile, family communication research [Abdullah and Salim \(2020\)](#) focuses on real-life discourse patterns without examining how cinematic families represent or reshape these dynamics symbolically. Likewise, the meaning-making processes in visual media are examined using semiotic approaches [Barthes \(1979\)](#), which rarely relate to therapeutic results. Lastly, as bibliotherapy research [McLeod and Sundet \(2022\)](#), [Sacilotto et al. \(2022\)](#) utilizes narrative healing, the possibilities of animation within this paradigm are largely unexplored.

Thus, the present research will be located at the crossroad of communication theory, semiotics and bibliotherapy, a triple process enabling the analysis of symbolic family communication as the process of communication and therapeutic process. Through analysis of animated movies on telling stories of emotional accommodation, empathy and resilience by visual and verbal codes, the purpose of the research is to broaden the conceptual scope of the animation research field to the fields of therapeutic communication and emotional literacy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research seeks to critically analyse the role of animated narration as a therapeutic method of communication, that is, representing family contact symbolically in terms of emotional regulation and curing via semiotic and bibliotherapeutic theories. It also aims to learn how visual and narrative symbols support empathy, emotional literacy and relationship development.

- 1) To examine how semiotics, both visual and verbal, have been used to symbolically construct family communication and emotional relationships in animated narratives.
- 2) To elucidate emotional negotiation patterns, adjustment and reconciliation through the combined perspectives of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP) and bibliotherapy.
- 3) To determine the promise of animation as a form of therapeutic storytelling, it is important to highlight its capacity to evoke empathy, foster resilience, and facilitate reflective emotional growth through narrative and visual expression.
- 4) To introduce a cross-disciplinary approach that interconnects communication theory, semiotic analysis and therapeutic narrative, further theoretical development of animation as an instrument of emotional and cultural curing.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (SHORT VERSION)

COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY (CAT)

Composed by [Giles et al. \(1973\)](#), CAT describes how people modify their communication patterns by converging (when they want to work with social relationships) or diverging (when they want to promote individuality) to control social relationships [Giles and Ogay \(2019\)](#). These adaptations are symbolically expressed in animated movies by the use of dialogue, tone and gesture. As an example, in *Finding Nemo*, a shift being controlled to empathy by Marlin points to communicative convergence, whereas internal emotional negotiation by the character of *Inside Out* depicts adaptive communication. CAT can therefore be used to decode the manner in which the family members in the animation adapt to the differences in emotions to attain understanding.

FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS THEORY (FCP)

The theory of [Rauscher et al. \(2020\)](#) classifies families according to the conversation orientation (openness in dialogue) and the conformity orientation (focus on hierarchy and obedience). These orientations play a part in emotional attachment and conflict management. In *Finding Nemo*, high conformity is replaced by open conversation and in the *Inside Out*, emotional acceptance is embodied by a balanced family dialogue and in *Spirited Away*, self-expression is illustrated as the means to self-freedom. FCP theory thus explains the modelling of family structures in terms of emotional openness and reconciliation through animated narratives.

SEMIOTICS

Drawing on [Barthes \(1985\)](#) and [Peirce \(1998\)](#), semiotics examines how signs, colours, and symbols construct meaning. In animation, visual codes such as colour palettes, motifs and character design express psychological states. The use of colour in *Inside Out* to represent different emotions, such as yellow for joy and blue for sadness and the importance of names and masks in *Spirited Away*, shows how semiotic cues resonate with emotions and identity transformation. This framework helps one interpret emotional meaning in animated communication and storytelling.

BIBLIOTHERAPY LENS

Bibliotherapy (book therapy) and cinematherapy (film therapy) are techniques using narratives to heal and create empathy and reflection [McLeod and Sundet \(2022\)](#), [Sacilotto et al. \(2022\)](#). In this sense, cartoon films serve as therapeutic texts that externalize conflicts and resolutions in regard to emotion and feeling with the use of symbolic characterisation and visualisation. Films like *Finding Nemo* and *Inside Out* features characters that undergo a journey reflecting processes of emotional regulation resilience and reintegration through fear loss and reconciliation. When we look at animation through a bibliotherapeutic lens, we see that it is a medium that narrates internal experiences for reflective and psychological growth.

INTEGRATED RELEVANCE

Collectively, these frameworks provide many ways of doing things:

- **CAT** and **FCP** address interpersonal and family communication.
- **Semiotics** decodes emotional meaning through symbols.
- **Bibliotherapy** interprets the therapeutic impact of these narratives.

This integration enables the study to analyse animated films as sites of therapeutic communication, where visual storytelling fosters empathy, understanding and emotional healing.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

In this research, the qualitative content analysis design is undertaken, which involves a combination of semiotic and narrative methodologies in order to interpret the communication of emotive and familial messages by animated movies. The qualitative content analysis will allow a person to analyse the manifest and latent meanings of a text, both verbal and visual, in a detailed way [Schreier \(2012\)](#). The paper will seek to understand the essence of animated communication as a therapeutic communication by deciphering symbolism representations and a pattern of communication creating empathy and emotional reflection. It incorporates the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP), and Bibliotherapy as a logical theory of interpretation.

DATA SOURCES

A selection of three celebrated animated movies was selected through purposive sampling, which has a thematic intensity on the topics of family, emotional growth and interpersonal communication:

- 1) *Finding Nemo* (2003, Pixar Animation Studios) – depicting parental anxiety, autonomy, and reconciliation.
- 2) *Inside Out* (2015, Pixar Animation Studios) – exploring intrapersonal emotional dialogue and family empathy.
- 3) *Spirited Away* (2001, Studio Ghibli) – examining identity, transition and intergenerational understanding.

The movies have been chosen because of their cross-cultural aspects and the depth of the plot, which reveals universal tendencies in emotional expression and power. They were all read in their original cinematic form, based on the scripts, stills and any other academic commentary that would ensure interpretive validity.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

These analytical stages were performed by using a mixture of semiotic, communicative and therapeutic approaches through three stages of analysis:

Step 1: Family Communication Themes Identification: Narrative sequences that were used during a familial or emotional interaction were recognised and broken down into parts that were to be analysed. Dialogue, conflict, empathy and reconciliation cases were identified as communication events.

Step 2: Visual and Verbal Semiotic Coding: The semiotic coding was done in the model of [Barthes \(1985\)](#) and [Peirce \(1998\)](#), with visual and verbal signs (colours, spatial patterns, gestures, objects) and verbal signs (tone, repetition, silence) being coded and interpreted as symbolic signs of emotional expression and familial bonding.

Step 3: Theoretical Interpretation: Results were explained using Communication Accommodation Theory [Giles and Ogay \(2013\)](#) to investigate communicative adjustment; Family Communication Patterns Theory [Rauscher et al. \(2020\)](#) to determine dialogue openness and conformity and Bibliotherapy [McLeod and Sundet \(2022\)](#), [Sacilotto et al. \(2022\)](#) to measure the effect of therapeutic intervention. This was then followed by cross-film comparison to generalize common patterns of emotional healing, empathy and communicative development.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Conceptual validity was supported through triangulating the theories, analytical reliability through systematic coding and reflexive interpretation [Creswell and Poth \(2016\)](#). The research highlights being descriptive with regard to depth and qualitative in nature with regard to quantification as is done in the qualitative hermeneutic inquiry in the cultural and communication study.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This segment explains the chosen animated stories in light of the integration. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) frameworks, Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP) and Bibliotherapy are guided by semiotic analysis of visual and verbal signs. The discussion centres on accommodating characters, negotiation and healing in communication and mediation of emotional understanding in visual semiotics.

The results are summarized in three analytical tables related to the core of the study.

Objectives:

- 1) allegorical definition of family communication,
- 2) emotional negotiation and reconciliation, and
- 3) learning and reflection on therapeutic.

COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY

The Communication Accommodation Theory of adaptation to relevant behavioural standards by the characters can be applied to the three chosen animated films *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Inside Out* (2015) and *Spirited Away* (2001), via the communication mode to emotional reconciliation and psychological recovery that the characters seek. In the narratives, convergence and divergence and maintenance patterns are reflected across the dialogue and non-verbal semiotic means representing the transformation of relations and emotional development.

1) *Finding Nemo* (2003)

- Initially in its speech, Marlin is divergent, which is characterized by overly controlling directives and inflexibility of feeling, separating him from Nemo's needs.
- Through his expedition, Marlin gradually moves towards convergence, becoming empathetic and cooperative in his conversation with Dory and finally with Nemo.
- Semiotic signs, like a shift in any closed coral reef to large spaces of blue oceans, represent the psychological shift in fear towards freedom and trust.

2) *Inside Out* (2015)

- The conflict between Sadness and Joy is a form of divergence in the intrapersonal level and that is a form of dissonance of emotions within the psyche of Riley.
- Their reconciliation will eventually take the form of emotional convergence, in which Joy learns to tolerate the logic of Sadness' emotions.
- The communicative integration is supported by the visual coding of the symbolic blending of emotional states through the merging of yellow and blue colour palettes

3) *Spirited Away* (2001)

- At first, the relationships between Chihiro and the spirit world are divergent; the girl is not willing to conform to the rules of the world of the dead and she is characterized by silence and fear.
- It is through relational adaptation when new forms of speech are learned that she adapts through gestures and humility to adaptive convergence, which allows trust and belonging.
- This transition to mutual understanding and reestablishing identity is represented in symbolism of water, reflective surfaces and tonal and proximity transitions being used to visually depict change.

Table 1

Table 1 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) – Patterns of Emotional Adjustment				
Film	Communicative Context	Type of Accommodation	Semiotic Markers	Emotional / Relational Outcome
<i>Finding Nemo</i>	Marlin's overprotective dialogue with Nemo	Convergence through empathy and trust	Changes in tone; calmer ocean hues; closer spatial framing	Mutual understanding and emotional reconciliation
<i>Inside Out</i>	Joy and Sadness negotiating control over emotions	Dynamic convergence recognition of emotional interdependence	Colour interplay (yellow–blue balance); overlapping visual space	Integration of emotions; restoration of inner harmony
<i>Spirited Away</i>	Chihiro adapting communication with spirits and elders	Adaptive convergence for survival and belonging	Light transitions, symbolic name recovery, bowing gestures	Identity restoration and relational maturity

The findings support the assumption that communication is the basis of emotional accommodation and healing of animated stories. [Giles and Ogay \(2013\)](#) also state that convergence promotes social approval and relational solidarity, whereas divergence emphasizes identity assertion and distance. In these movies, divergence usually denotes fear, domination or misinterpretation, whereas convergence refers to acceptance, empathy and emotional sensitivity.

This is further interpreted through semiotic analysis:

- Emotional accessibility is in the form of visual frames (closed and open spaces).
- Colour symbolism (using combinations of colours, colour nuances) denotes affective
- convergence.

- It is indicated by relational openness (via gestural shifts (softening of posture, eye contact, common movement), which is demonstrated by gestures.

These semiotic signifiers are a reflection of linguistic and behavioural aspects of accommodation. The seascape in *Finding Nemo* is described as warm, and to illustrate the point, we can note the voices of Marlin, more relaxed, and the role of Sadness in the movie, which is reflected in the merging of the emotional colours in *Inside Out*.

Through this interpretive scheme, CAT is not a figurative scheme of emotional healing, but it is a model of communication. It depicts the way openness, listening and adjustment to each other restored relationships that were broken. The self-awareness through empathy and adaptation that is universal is the communicative flexibility of *Spirited Away* as the therapeutic principle.

The outcomes of the three animated tales testify to the fact that emotional healing and the harmony of relationships are deeply grounded in the method of communicative accommodation as defined by Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT). [Shavkatbekovna \(2023\)](#) notes that people change their non-verbal and verbal behaviours by converging to make their solidarity stronger and diverging to make their individuality or emotional space. *Finding Nemo*, the communicative change that Marlin experiences is an example of convergence as the means of reconciliation when he ceases to be overprotective and empathic [Brydon \(2018\)](#). The progressive attenuation of the sound and the increase in the size of the visual space of the ocean reflect the symbolic change of fear into trust, which, in turn, depicts the interplay of the linguistic and environmental semiotics; these two environments mutually support the process of emotional accommodation [Udris-Borodavko et al. \(2023\)](#). Likewise, in *Inside Out*, the interaction of Joy and Sadness represents an inner conversation of convergence, where emotional extremities find a solution to each other by knowing and acknowledging each other. The amalgamation of yellow and blue colour semiotically is illustrative of the merging of opposing emotional conditions, which confirms [Imran et al. \(2025\)](#) thesis that the animation externalises the inaccessible aspects of human emotion via colour and shape. The idea of adaptive convergence in *Spirited Away* is reflected in the adaptive communication of Chihiro with the spirit world as the metaphor of intercultural empathy and self-development. Her transitioning into non-speech and the voicing with confidence is a sign of an emerging emotional intelligence which transcends language.

In these movies, communication is depicted as a form of therapy and it is used to heal the lack of connectedness and create understanding. The linguistic and symbolic flexibility of the communicative style of the characters is a manifestation of the therapeutic model of emotional accommodation presented in the bibliotherapy [McLeod and Sundet \(2022\)](#). This effect is in keeping with the therapeutic triad of identification, catharsis and insight where the character and viewer both feel an emotional release and introspection through narrative involvement. These films present convergence as healing. They turn personal communication into a cinematic version of therapy. CAT is relevant in the analysis of emotion narratives. Also, as shown in semiotic indexes (spatial opening, tonal modulation and gesture), the convergence-divergence axis is proof of sign's [Peirce \(1998\)](#) being mediator of meaning outside the verbal. Animation and design in communication are social acts that happen in social interaction and create empathy in communicative exchanges. In this regard, animated narratives will go beyond the interpersonal aspect to the therapeutic aspect and show how adaptive communication can be used to develop resilience, emotional literacy and self-awareness. The universal legibility of animation's symbolic language, as proposed by [Napier \(2021\)](#), underscores empathy and understanding as foundational elements of communicative and therapeutic processes within animated narratives.

FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

The *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Inside Out* (2015) and *Spirited Away* (2001) presentations through the views of Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP) identify different but coinciding communication change lines. Both of the films depict the changes in the direction of conversation (the focus on an open emotional conversation) and conformity direction (the focus on obedience and hierarchy), showing how animated narratives symbolically re-create the family conversation and emotional equilibrium.

1) *Finding Nemo* (2003)

- The conversation level at the beginning of the relationship between Marlin and Nemo is low.
- Orientation and high conformity orientation are defined by high levels of parental control and lack of emotional conversation.
- Conversation orientation is built up slowly through a situation of common experience and vulnerability, as conformity is reduced.
- The cracking of oceanic barriers and the expansion of the spatial frames used in the semiotic indicators represent increasing relational openness and emotional trust.
- The result is the shift of the control to communication, reaching the end of mutual respect and empathy.

2) *Inside Out* (2015)

- In the movie, there is a moderate orientation of conversation in which emotional dialogue has been depicted is but is frequently limited by incomprehension.

- A parental empathetic approach is formed as the conformity yields to the acknowledgement of emotional complexity, especially in cases where Riley is acknowledged to her sadness is not a form of negative response.
- The mixing of colour schemes and imagery of verbal confirmation (the family one) reunion) represent a visual representation of emotional clarity and regained equilibrium.
- The result shows the reinforcement of family unity by means of emotional acceptance and vulnerability.

3) Spirited Away (2001)

- When Chihiro is unable to find words to communicate herself in the unfamiliar world full of authoritarianism, this is the first indication of the first low conversation orientation.
- The conformity problem is rebelled against by the action of courage and self-assertion that leads to the emergence of autonomy and emotional independence.
- The semiotics of the use of symbolism of the names, the absence of physical closeness to the parents and visual metamorphosis strengthen her growth into the expression of self and authority.
- This results in a reformed family relationship based on identity, maturity and freedom of choice.

Table 2

Table 2 Family Communication Patterns – Orientation and Conflict Resolution				
Film	Conversation Orientation	Conformity Orientation	Semiotic / Narrative Indicators	Outcome in Family Dynamics
<i>Finding Nemo</i>	Initially low → increases with trust	Initially high → decreases	Oceanic barriers breaking; shared journey imagery	Shift from control to open dialogue and mutual respect
<i>Inside Out</i>	Moderate and emotionally nuanced	Balanced conformity; parental empathy increases	Emotional colour blending; verbal validation scenes	Emotional transparency; strengthened family bond
<i>Spirited Away</i>	Low → self-assertive communication	Authority challenged through personal agency	Name symbolism; spatial distancing from parents	Emergence of autonomy; redefined familial connection

The findings affirm that animated narratives symbolically dramatize shifts in family communication orientations, aligning with Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2012) assertion that conversation orientation enhances emotional understanding while excessive conformity inhibits openness. Relational development in the three movies is established between families in which the hierarchical control is substituted by dialogic empathy due to psychological and communicative healing.

The transition to dialogue in *Finding Nemo* is like a rehabilitative process of learning to relinquish control by the parent, which in the film is evidenced by the disintegration of spatial boundaries. This is absorbed within the psyche of the family and makes emotional repression communicative validation within the inner world of the psyche in the film *Inside Out*. The last reconciliation scene is carried out visually through the emotional assimilation through assimilation of colours, which is a semiotic manifestation of empathy and equilibrium. The silence/communications metamorphosis in the dancing of *Spirited Away* is the cross-cultural adaptation of conversation orientation by Chihiro into her newfound ability to speak out in the circumscribed systems, and symbolically speaking the self-development and renegotiation of family organizations.

The dialogue, gesture and visual design interaction affirm that no communication pattern is solely spoken but semiotic act of emotional coincidence. Conversation orientation brings emotional literacy to the family when it gets greater; when conformity decreases, empathy emerges. This balance will not only indicate a healthy communication but also a therapeutic dynamic in accordance with bibliotherapeutic principles McLeod and Sundet (2022), where the narrative reflection allows healing and understanding.

The depiction of family communication in these animated films refers to the fact that the emotional process is achieved with the transition of the dialogue to transformational with the transition of the domineering conformity to conversive empathy. The movies confirm the FCP Theory as they show that expressive communication is beneficial in establishing unity and that strict compliance is a characteristic that creates a wall of alienation and ignorance Wang (2024).

In *Finding Nemo*, emotional healing is achieved when Marlin transitions from overprotective control to mutual trust, mirroring a therapeutic dialogue between parent and child. This aligns with Ryden (2010) concept of narrative healing, where identification and reflection produce emotional catharsis. Similarly, *Inside Out* reconstructs the family unit as an emotionally intelligent system emphasizing that validation of emotion is central to maintaining psychological well-being. The movie represents this by the semiotic convergence between sadness and joy as the representation of harmony between the emotional truthfulness and the relational care Feng and O'Halloran (2012). In *Spirited Away* communication is a survival instrument as well as a metaphor of independence. The fact that Chihiro does not want to stay quiet and regains her name is an indication that selfhood is therapeutically expressed through dialogue and agency Lim (2013).

Combined, these films extend the coverage of the Family Communication Patterns Theory to its sociological roots, which proves that animated communication transcends the language barrier to become an artistic and emotional code of comprehension, altering and surviving. Symbolic narratives in media articulate the significance of openness, understanding, and relational equality as central values within interpersonal and emotional dynamics. So much so, animation is an educative and curative form of cinema, simulating an emotionally adaptive communication that simulates the process of reconciliation and development in the real world.

BIBLIOTHERAPY LENS

The analysis of *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Inside Out* (2015), and *Spirited Away* (2001) through a bibliotherapeutic framework demonstrates that animated narratives function as therapeutic texts in which emotional identification, catharsis, and insight are enacted within the story world itself. Across the three films, key bibliotherapeutic mechanisms identification, catharsis, and insight are symbolically articulated through visual semiotics, affective dialogue and narrative resolution, illustrating processes of emotional transformation and psychological integration.

1) *Finding Nemo* (2003)

- **Identification:** Viewers empathize with Marlin’s worry and Nemo’s independence.
- **Catharsis:** The emotional journey of separation and reunion articulates a process of releasing fear and restoring trust within the narrative world, reflecting psychological reconciliation and emotional renewal.
- **Insight:** The ocean is so vast that it shows acceptance. It shows us that love is all about letting go.
- **Semiotic Indicator:** The changes in ocean colour, as well as the movement they share, show an emotional healing.

2) *Inside Out* (2015)

- **Identification:** Riley’s struggle with sadness and change can be very relatable as we all go through it.
- **Catharsis:** The moment Joy hugs Sadness was the emotional peak where he learns they can exist simultaneously.
- **Insight:** Combining the shades of blue and yellow expresses acceptance of feelings and vulnerability.
- **Semiotic Indicator:** The color-coded memory spheres change from one colour to two colours showing emotional balance and resilience.

Table 3

Table 3 Bibliotherapy Interpretation – Therapeutic Messages via Semiotics				
Film	Therapeutic Theme	Key Semiotic Symbol	Emotional Resolution	Bibliotherapeutic Outcome
<i>Finding Nemo</i>	Overprotection, fear, and release	The ocean as a metaphor for freedom and emotional distance	Marlin learns trust and acceptance	Catharsis and relational healing
<i>Inside Out</i>	Acceptance of sadness; emotional integration	Memory orbs and colour transitions	Joy embraces sadness as essential	Emotional literacy and self-acceptance
<i>Spirited Away</i>	Identity, transformation, resilience	The name “Chihiro/Sen,” masks, tunnels	Recovery of self and purpose	Empowerment and emotional resilience

3) *Spirited Away* (2001)

- **Identification:** Chihiro, who feels scared and confused, eventually gains a sense of empowerment, thereby constructing a narrative of emotional growth that parallels a psychological one of adaptation and resistance.
- **Catharsis:** An adventure in the spirit world brings loss and transformation and the gradual rebuilding of inner balance. All this happens for emotional renewal through symbolism.
- **Insight:** The recovery of Chihiro’s name signifies the reclamation of identity and self-awareness, marking the culmination of psychological integration and renewed purpose.
- **Semiotic Indicator:** Name symbolism, transformation sequences, and purifying water motifs embody the cleansing process of healing and self-recognition.

The bibliotherapeutic analysis shows that animated films work as story therapies. The symbolic narratives help users relive their emotional processes in a contextual setting. Each film involves a process of reflection and feeling that is based on the therapeutic triad of Rubin (2016) identification, catharsis and insight.

In *Finding Nemo*, parents can easily relate to Marlin’s overprotectiveness of Nemo and they can relate to Nemo’s autonomy. Marlin learns that trust, not control, saves emotional bonds. The narrative positions the character as a conduit for emotional learning, while *Inside Out* advances this therapeutic trajectory through its visualization of emotional literacy, illustrating that the acceptance

of grief fosters empathy and emotional balance. In the same way, *Spirited Away* makes its fantasy setting a space for self-exploration. Chihiro's name reclamation acts as type of therapy that dramatizes restoring a name dislodged by trauma.

The healing signs of inner transformation are colours mixing, changes in light and objects that are symbolic. Through these images of animation, animation is not merely ornamental; it is a narrative healing [McLeod and Sundet \(2022\)](#) that helps in emotional processing and enables us to know ourselves better. Using bibliotherapy in animated films shows that movies can help people regulate their emotions and develop them in the films.

Animation is discussed within the context of bibliotherapy/cinematherapy as a medium of emotional awareness and resilience made possible through symbolic engagement. Bibliotherapy is based on the idea that reading about stories with which you resonate will allow you to process your feelings indirectly. It is believed that exposure to such stories will allow you to reflect upon yourself and your own feelings without actually having to confront them [Saciotto et al. \(2022\)](#), [McLeod and Sundet \(2022\)](#). Countries with different cultures may have different ways of creating animated films; but though cultural differences certainly show in animated films, still there are shared characteristics.

The ocean journey in *Finding Nemo* embodies the therapeutic process of letting go and trusting presented by the parent to his child, mirroring the bibliotherapeutic stages of anxiety, reflection and resolution. Through the film, may we reconsider those relationships that are sinister and controlled. *Inside Out* is an animated movie which teaches you emotional complexity through visual languages of colours showing emotions that it's not a weakness it's wholeness. [Eilert et al. \(2025\)](#) argue catharsis causes emotional integration when the individual is recognized with authentic empathy. On the other hand, *Spirited Away* shows us that cross-cultural healing is represented through the symbolism of rebirth and self-discovery.

The findings suggest that animation functions as a therapeutic narrative form in which visual symbolism performs the reflective and restorative roles traditionally associated with bibliotherapy. An image, movement and emotion combination that is inherent in the multimodal language of animation are more helpful in eliciting sympathy and emotional intuition, according to [Raz \(2022\)](#) and [DeGalan \(2024\)](#). Its findings consequently render bibliotherapy not a component of literature but a multisensory therapeutic device enabling the cultivation of reflection, empathy as well as emotional literacy.

The animated films not only describe emotional healing, but actually engage in a group therapy by incorporating semiotics with bibliotherapy since the viewers are allowed to become a part of a group therapy. This is entirely suitable within the nature of the study to uncover animation as a therapeutic communication tool and justifies its use in the promotion of psychological rudeness, compassion and kinship with heterogenous watchers.

The comparative study of *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Inside Out* (2015) and *Spirited Away* (2001) shows that the animated stories are rather powerful instruments of the therapeutic communication that mix the emotional narrative with the symbolic representation and interpersonal growth. The study has demonstrated through the application of the Communication Accommodation Theory that emotional healing can take place when characters engage in adaptive communication where divergence is transformed into convergence and fear transformed into empathy. The Family Communication Patterns Theory also described how the shifts in conformity-oriented to conversation-oriented relations allow one to become open, trustful and emotionally literate in family relations. It is through such dynamics that are manifested in the language of dialogue, gesture and visual semiotics, that the communicative transformation is modelled without which there would be no psychological harmony and understanding between them.

The analysis of this identification formed the basis of the Bibliotherapy model in which the films were perceived as therapeutic scripts, which brought the viewers through identification, catharsis and insight stages. Animation is then a pictorial bibliotherapy whereby the colour, symbol and narrative resolution frame out the internal healing processes. All these findings establish the fact that animation is a representation and a cure that is a medium in which emotional awareness is created and a relational harmony.

By merging semiotic analysis and theory of communication and therapeutic theory, the paper can be included in an interdisciplinary understanding of animation as pedagogical and psychological device. Besides entertainment, animated films possess the effect of creating empathy, resiliency and emotional connection thus, making them a valuable resource to cultural studies and therapeutic learning.

CONCLUSION

This paper ascertains that animated films are not purely artistic or entertainment media, but they are dynamic vehicles of therapeutic dialogues, which can have the power to mediate the emotional cognition, family relations and psychological remedies. Using both verbal and visual semiotics in the delivery of emotional complexity and evocation in the analysis, the animated stories that participated in empathy have resulted in the discovery of the communication patterns between the family members with the help of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Family Communication Patterns Theory (FCP) and Bibliotherapy. In *Finding Nemo*, *Inside Out* and *Spirited Away*, the concept of communication turns out to be the main force of change that happens to both of the characters as they cease to be afraid and controlling people and start to trust others and become open-hearted and emotional. The process of divergence to convergence (CAT) and conformity to conversation orientation (FCP) change is similar to the therapeutic action of relational healing, where empathy replaces the authority and dialogue replaces silence. Simultaneously, the

bibliotherapeutic element demonstrates that the films also assist in locating an identity, catharsis, and not merely the lesson of characters but the lesson of viewers as well, that implant these emotional lessons into their hearts. Animation transfers the abstract emotions to tangible signs of development and self-realisation using the colour symbolism, space design and narrative resolution.

The paper unites the communication theory, semiotics and bibliotherapy to advance the interdisciplinary approach that considers animation a communicative and therapeutic practice. The results highlight the fact that animated stories teach emotionally intelligent communication, promote reflective learning, and foster resilience qualities that are required in the family and social settings. Finally, this paper once again proves the strength of animation as a narrative healing tool that can be used to facilitate the aesthetic, psychological and pedagogical aspects of storytelling to facilitate empathy, understanding and emotional health across cultures and generations.

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