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Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



SFV-CAMFT CINEMA THERAPY

Begin Again – Reviewed by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

“The unexamined life is not worth living,” Socrates famously, and wisely, observed.

Contemporary film can be used as a tool in therapeutic setting to help clients look at their lives and address uncomfortable issues. In this column, we are again examining life issues using the camera lens to comprehend a depth beyond the story.



Begin Again is a soul-stirring film about what happens when the unlikely fit of two lost souls meet and join passions to make beautiful music together. Themes of love and heartbreak are told through parallel stories of Gretta (Keira Knightley) and her long-time boyfriend Dave (Adam Levine), and Dan (Mark Ruffalo), a down and out record producer struggling to restore his image and his career. A chance encounter between Dan, the disgraced music-business executive, and Gretta, the young singer-songwriter, turns into a promising and successful collaboration between these two talented artists, a natural fit. The film illustrates how mutual support and nurturing can transform many lives.

Summary: Gretta and her boyfriend Dave are college sweethearts and songwriting partners. Dave, in the throes of fame and success, lands a deal with a major label in Manhattan. Led astray, he gives in to the temptations that come with the glitter of his newfound fame and success. Gretta, reeling, lost, and lovelorn, is abandoned, cast out, and left on her own in the Big Apple. She is soon in crisis mode; rejected, paralyzed with fear, and grieving her lost love, she contemplates both suicide and a return home. Coincidence, however, intervenes in her behalf. Her world takes an upward turn when Dan, our down and out record label exec, stumbles upon her while performing in an East Village club. He is immediately captivated by her raw talent, and a mutually life-changing bond forms between the pair as they work together on Gretta's first album: “Thinking all love ever does is break & burn & end, but on a Wednesday in a café, I watched it *begin again*”. When Gretta becomes successful in her own right, Dave attempts to draw her back in. Gretta, invested in developing her own potential, is no longer entrapped by Dave's seductive persona. She stays strong to her budding **emotional strength and** sense of self.

Dynamic: Now let's apply a psychological template to the story. *Begin Again* uses love and loss to address real life emotional and psychological issues to discover how life crises can lead to turning points and transformation. *Begin Again* takes us on a hero's/heroine's journey, as articulated by Joseph Campbell, from home (lunar birth), leaving home (going beyond the known), searching for the gold (what's missing), finding the treasure (the booty), and then coming home, reborn, meaning a transformation of consciousness and new sense of self. The characters' awakening passion is driven by an inner song set to the soundtrack of a summer in New York City.

From the characters' chance encounter, a fascinating portrait of a mutually transformative journey emerges. It represents the real life struggle to define one's self in the realms of work, family, and romantic relationship. Gretta remained “stuck” in the background, devotedly serving Dave's drive to achieve success in the music industry. As

Dave's emotionally submissive sidekick, a loyal pet, she was unaware of her own "gold." Her role, though limited and largely unfamiliar, became a "comfortable shoe." Dave took emotional advantage of Gretta and used her raw talent for songwriting to achieve his own fame! When Dave discards her, Gretta is depressed, **acts-in**, contemplates suicide, and then puts her pain to make music. In contrast, when Dan's wife dumps him, he spends the next several years in a relationship with alcohol, and **acts-out** his pain. He loses his creative drive, his work, and his family.

Meeting at "the pub" becomes their turning point where, instead of booze, Dan drinks in Gretta's music, and thirsts for more. Through their connection, each leaves their comfort zone (home), and their depression (crisis) in search of the unknown: their treasure, their gold. Each is pushed in a new direction by their common wound, mutual focus, and common drive. On their journey, they mentor, guide, and nurture one another's potential, they face their fears head on, Together, each has the courage to imagine life anew, to begin again. They slay their inner dragons and begin a new stage of psychological maturity and development.

The characters exemplify how support and nurturing can dispell the ghosts that haunt our lives with acting-in and acting-out behaviors, such as abandonment, fear, co-dependency, and alcohol. Opportunity is always knocking! Life's journey holds many possibilities for change. When we let go of our fears, when we go into the dark night of the soul, we push past the crisis, slay the inner dragon, and begin an inner journey. Say **Yes** to the adventure of life!

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