

# CHARLYNE GELT, PH.D.

Encouraging Self-Discovery and Empowerment



## CINEMA THERAPY

### The Intern – Reviewed by Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D.

“The unexamined life is not worth living,” Socrates famously, and wisely, observed. In this column, we are examining life through the camera lens. Contemporary films can be a useful tool in therapeutic settings to help clients address uncomfortable issues.



The recently released *The Intern* is a lighthearted take on creating change while facing some very serious issues, such as aging, retirement, grief and loss, death, affairs, and relationships. The film’s narrative matches the needs of Ben Whittaker (Robert De Niro), a retired CEO businessman, and Jules (Anne Hathaway), the CEO of a new e-commerce start-up. The film encompasses a variety of emotions experienced through life’s stages: joy, sorrow, grief and loss, pain, anxiety, and transition. It also explores deeper order change after the death of a spouse: a (sometimes painful) search for personal meaning.

The film explores the world of title character Ben, a 70-year-old widower, who finds meaning through new relationships built around later life work experience as a “senior intern.” Ben spent his life chiseling an image of the American dream, including an organized, affluent life-style. Now, having lost his wife and returned to an empty house, Ben recognizes his emotional isolation and searches for something to fulfill him. Soon, his life becomes an ever-changing kaleidoscope. Acknowledging his loneliness acts as a transition that pushes him in a new direction; it propels him in a search for meaning. While struggling through the aftermath of retirement, death, and life change, the importance of searching for identity becomes high on his list. Ben’s shift in consciousness is a wake-up call for personal change which occurs in a previously validating yet novel work environment with new relationships.

Psychotherapists who work with issues across the lifespan recognize that it is not uncommon for one to feel depressed, lost, and lonely after one’s spouse dies. Ben’s work as a “senior intern” lets us examine the personal lives and marital problems encountered along with the success of Jules’ e-commerce company. Jules and her staff are tech-savvy but lack emotional wisdom and communication skills, and herein lies the conflict. Jules’ professional success results in personal stress and marital discord. The twin demands of life and work have a way of presenting us with win-lose situations.

Unlike *The Devil Wears Prada*, *The Intern* is not about power and domination in a masculine world of industry. Healthy relationships are bloody in the struggle to work things through. Jules’ husband Matt (Anders Holm) feels uninvolved with the passions of life and work, rejected by his wife’s iron-willed drive toward success, and demoralized by his role as caretaker and the expectations placed on him in that role. Blaming her success for his failure to invest in his own potential, he has an affair. Thus, he also creates a win-lose dynamic. Change, of course, can occur in many settings, even outside therapy. When Ben sees Jules’ driver sipping from a flask, he replaces the driver. The car, like the therapy office, becomes a vehicle for life change. With Ben as Jules’ driver, Jules learns to talk about her stress and sit with anxiety and pain rather than act-out or withdraw from it as does her husband.

The film's characters represent the struggle to find balance and success in the realms of work, home, and family. Cooperation versus power and working things through in a relationship crisis versus trolling for a different life partner are dominant (and relevant) themes. Although the youthful, tech-savvy cast of characters at Jules' company initially lacks emotional intelligence, Ben's old-school wisdom paves their way from impersonal, detail-oriented detachment to self-confident, genuinely connected relationships in the business world. Ben, seeing the bigger picture, takes the initiative and with steadfast support, finds ways to help in all areas of the business, including being a strong bearer for feminine empowerment.

The message of *The Intern* is clear: we need to be peaceful warriors championing relational health, self-reliance, and our own potential. Therapeutically, the film shows us ways to draw out the deadened aspects of ourselves. In times of crisis, we forget the wisdom buried deep within ourselves (and each other). The film offers a more open and imaginative approach to reclaim aspects of ourselves that have either been self-rejected or self-neglected.

*Charlyne Gelt, Ph.D. (PSY22909) is a clinical psychologist who practices in Encino. She leads **Women's Empowerment Groups that help women learn the tools to move beyond self-destructive relationship patterns.** She may be reached at 818.501.4123 or [www.drgelt.com](http://www.drgelt.com). Her office address is 16055 Ventura Blvd. #1129 Encino, CA 91436.*