

Home Alone Movie Analysis

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HOME ALONE ANALYSIS

As I watched Home Alone as an adult and a socially aware mental health student, my initial concern was for Kevin. In the beginning of this movie, he is incessantly being bullied by his siblings, neglected by his parents being left to fend for himself. The height of this abuse and neglect was of course when he was left home alone for a few days; vulnerable to the chances and dangers of the world. One thing I've always noticed about family dysfunction is that when it is not dealt with it escalates; usually to something that no one is able to see coming down the line until it actually happens; and it is too late to reverse. At that point, it is like trying to stop a roller-coaster from diving down an inclined track. A unresolved conflict can be compared to sin. In the scripture reference to sin, James 1:15 says "After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (New King James Version, 2023). It's the same with conflict. When it is full (continual and unhindered by resolution), it leads to behaviors and situations that are renegade; And though these situations may seem renegade and disconnected to the original conflict, it was produced by the original conflict. The continual miscommunication and abusive language in the McCallister household is what ultimately led to a minor being left home alone for days; an unlawful act in some parts of America; particularly New York City, the setting of the movie. The continual use of abusive language among siblings, cousins, aunts, and uncles gave bred to both internal and external conflicts that were never acknowledged or dealt with. The miscommunication even between the adults; and the dismissive nature of the adults and parents towards the children, Kevin, also contributed to this.

The story of Kevin McCallister's experience in Home Alone is a direct reflection of the therapeutic process that leads to wholeness and healing. Kevin experiences trauma and neglect on a continual basis that causes him to have antisocial desires. Early in this feature, he declared he no longer desires to have a family. He even says, "when he grows up and gets married, he

HOME ALONE ANALYSIS

wants to live far away from everyone”. He expresses this desire to live in this maladaptive way of separation and isolation to deal with his trauma. This eventually happens through Kevin being left behind alone. Kevin ultimately receives his desires; and as he navigates life alone, at first he is able to manage himself well. He is independent, happy, and capable of managing his own affairs.

In this section of the movie, I noted this as a classic example of how survival mode can appear to be normal. Kevin went grocery shopping as if he were an adult pretending his parents were in the car. The cashier realized it wasn't normal, but his diversions and excuses were acceptable. It's similar for most people who continue living life having not dealt with their childhood trauma. We adopt maladaptive ways of coping, make excuses for our behaviors, rationalize them to people, and normalize them. Once we can get through, we think that we are whole because we got through, but it is unhealthy. Unresolved conflict, even after normalizing maladaptive ways of living, such as isolation, can cause an abnormal amount of psychological distress due to this level of differentiation (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). In the case of Kevin McCallister, conflicts not being dealt with properly lead Kevin to have this desire to want to be away from them, alone. The night before Kevin wished something along the lines of his family would all disappear when he woke up the next day. Though this may bring him some relief, we know the cause of his trauma was not resolved.

But after a while of isolation, Kevin begins to feel lonely and rethinks his desire for separation from his family. He begins to feel lonely as if something was missing. At the end of the day, the interaction with his family, though toxic fulfilled a need. That need produced emptiness and a sense of lack for Kevin. In addition to this, Kevin also had to fight off two burglars on an ongoing basis while home alone. The burglars would have never even targeted his

HOME ALONE ANALYSIS

home if they weren't aware the family was gone, and he was home alone. Through these experiences, Kevin began coming to terms with his negative feelings and beliefs about family.

Generally, in therapy, when the counselor or therapist applies a particular technique, the purpose of it is for the client to do exactly what Kevin did: connect with and work through their emotions in a healthy way which ultimately influence their beliefs and behaviors. The actual experience of therapy in some cases is to make their problematic situation as realistic during a counseling session to work through it in the most authentic way. These experiences may include what are referred to as techniques, experiments, and/or exercises. All, when carefully administered, explores clients' perspective about a situation, themselves, and others involved changes. These experiences allow for the client to often explore new ways of dealing with situations and people in their lives, leaving them at more peace. Similarly, after Kevin's experience, his desires and beliefs about his family shifted. Kevin decided he would rather have his family around. It appears that Kevin would rather have his dysfunctional family in his life to fill the emptiness and as a safety precaution instead of being alone. This mirrors the Future projection technique associated with Gestalt Theory. In this technique, a client creates a wish/concern into the present and gains new insight.

After watching Home Alone through the eyes of mental health counselor, I believe the most effective way to administer therapy to the McCallister family is to utilize an experiential and humanistic approach, particularly the Walter Kempler approach. The experiential approach is hands on/in vivo to help clients interpret, adapt, and create change. It allows "...each individual the opportunity to immerse themselves in the experience" (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2015). The experiential humanistic movement gave birth to many forms of therapy including the gestalt

HOME ALONE ANALYSIS

therapy and its family approaches. The Walter Kempler is one of the experiential humanistic approaches that focuses on family and pulls majorly from the Gestalt Theory.

Two important facts to note about Gestalt is it allows clients to expand their awareness of what they are experiencing in the present moment, and client must be seeing in their natural environment (gestures, non-verbal, etc.), or the closest thing to this. The Gestalt therapist values leading clients to more of an awareness of themselves, particularly in relation to their environment and the people who exist in them. Gestalt therapists employ 2 kinds of techniques in-session; exercises and experiments. Exercises are prepared before sessions to help a client or clients achieve a particular goal they would've previously identified. Experiments evolve out of the interaction in a session. Before administering an experiment, the therapist should first prepare the client for it. Important to note is confrontation is also used as a therapeutic intervention in Gestalt . There are a myriad of interventions associated with the Gestalt Theory. Three that would benefit the McCallister family are "The Empty Chair Technique", "Staying With the Feeling", and "Making the Rounds".

The empty chair technique in Gestalt would be useful to apply to the McAllister family. I anticipate that a few of the verbal exchanges where Kevin is being bullied would come up in session. I'd ask each family member to complete the rehearsal exercise reprising their role in a conflicting conversation, then ask them to take on the role of Kevin, and any other person involved. The purpose of this exercise is for clients to experience the conflict more fully. They would connect with their feelings and explore the feelings and perspective of every other person in the conflict. This ultimately introduces the family to effective ways to communicate with each other.

HOME ALONE ANALYSIS

The “Staying with the Feeling” technique is used to address the individual within a familial conflict context. In every conflicting situation, the individual will be able to connect with the conflict in a way where they fully acknowledge their feelings and explore it further by leaning into the discomfort of it.

“Making the Rounds” technique encourages family members to be vulnerable with each other. With the technique, family members who are comfortable enough and will walk up to each person in a group and share a truth. It can be a truth about them, or their relationship with that person such as “I don’t trust you because...”, “Nobody in here seems to care very much”, “I’d like to make contact with you ok but I’m afraid of being rejected [or accepted]. This creates a space for individuals to take risks in a safe setting (Corey, 2015).

References

Capuzzi, D., & Stauffer, M. D. (2015). *Foundations of couples, marriage, and family counseling*. John Wiley & Sons.

Corey, Gerald. (2015), *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 10th edition USA, Thompson Learning.

New King James Version. (2023) James 1:15 Bible <https://www.bible.com/bible/1/JAS.1.15.KJV>

