

Ordinary People Application Paper-Psychodynamic Theory

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GCN 502 OA: Theories and Foundations

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February 7, 2023

Psychoanalytic therapy, founded by Sigmund Freud, focuses on the role of the unconscious and the existence of ego defenses to help cope with internal conflicts or anxiety. According to Freud, the id, ego, and superego form a person's personality. The pleasure principle rules the id and attempts to avoid pain and gain pleasure, while the reality principle rules the ego that controls and regulates the personality. The superego represents a person's moral code and society's traditional values or ideals that pass down generationally. The goal of psychodynamic therapy is to bring forth unconscious motives to the consciousness for an individual to exercise choice. The unconscious holds many experiences and memories that, when out of awareness, will also be outside of conscious control (Corey, 2017).

Ego defense mechanisms such as repression and denial help people cope with anxiety by denying or distorting reality while operating on an unconscious level. Defense mechanisms are normal behaviors as long as individuals do not entirely avoid facing reality. Freud's psychosexual and Erikson's psychosocial stages can give a framework for understanding certain developmental issues in therapy (Corey, 2017).

In the movie *Ordinary People*, Conrad initially looks anxious, tired, and detached as the movie shows him participating in school activities, schooling, friends, and interacting with his parents. There is a disconnect and tension around how he feels and his environment. However, as the movie progresses, we find that his older brother died in a boating accident, Conrad had tried to commit suicide, and he has a strained relationship with his mother. In his first encounter with Dr. Berger, Conrad uses the ego defense mechanisms of repression and denial, claiming everything is good, and there are no problems (Redford et al., 1980). Consciously, he wants more control so people stop worrying about him. However, Conrad is unconscious of his feelings around his brother's death, his mother, and towards himself. He may have been coping by also

using introjection to keep the peace at home so his parents would not have to worry so much about him.

In treating Conrad, I would initially use free association to encourage him to say whatever comes to mind around whatever topic he wants to share. I would do this initially to see what kinds of things he feels safe sharing and what might elicit anxiety. The second technique I would use is to analyze and interpret any resistance that comes up so that Conrad can begin to examine what feelings and thoughts are keeping him in pain. By exploring the reasons for the resistance, I can help him become more conscious of this defensive approach and help him move past the familiar pattern to new behavior. For example, once he expressed his feelings about participating on the swim team, which he felt was boring, he changed a familiar pattern by quitting the swim team. He chose for himself based on his feelings despite the disappointment of his coach, friends, and mother.

The psychoanalytic approach to Conrad would be helpful to him because he is not able to express himself honestly to his family or friends. Initially, he is unconscious of his true feelings, living a detached, anxious, and perhaps depressed life, and does not know how to express his feelings or make choices for himself. He has been living up to an image that does not reflect his feelings. It is also difficult to share his feelings about what happened with Bucky with anyone, so allowing him to set the pace of what he is comfortable with and not comfortable bringing up through free association would give me insight into what topics cause anxiety and how to pace the therapy. Since the psychodynamic theory is about moving the unconscious to the conscious, Conrad would benefit from becoming more aware of his true thoughts, opinions, and feelings to live a more congruent life that would be more satisfying to him.

References

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