

Ordinary People Application of Psychodynamic Therapy

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Psychodynamic therapy is deeply rooted in Sigmund Freud's theories on personality development. Psychodynamic therapy is primarily focused on exploring and discovering the unconscious because it is believed that the unconscious influences and motivates behavior. The foundational principle is that in understanding the unconscious and bringing it into consciousness, an individual is able to have control over it, therefore resulting in healing.

Although Freud is credited with the foundation of psychodynamic therapy, his contemporaries later adapted the philosophical underpinnings of his theories, most notably Erik Erikson and Carl Jung. Perhaps the biggest point of divergence between Freud and Erikson and Jung is in the influences of the unconscious on behavior and personality. Freud believed that the foundations of personality are built upon the first six years of life, through the oral, anal, and phallic stages of psychosexual development. Erikson, on the other hand, took a more expanded view of personality development beyond early childhood and into old age, via the psychosocial stages. Erikson believed that throughout life, the psychosexual and psychosocial stages of development work together to help an individual master key developmental tasks of each life stage. Jung's theory of personality development expanded this even further believing that humans are not just shaped by past events, but by our future as well, because humans are constantly growing and developing as we find meaning in life.

Based on psychodynamic theory, Conrad's behavior is probably influenced by his relationship with his mother. In his childhood, he was aware that his mother had a closer relationship with his older brother and that she and Conrad never had a close connection. This was further punctuated after his brother's death, when he and his mother became estranged. He seems to also have been hurt that she did not visit him in the hospital. Another important event

for Conrad was the death of his older brother when he was an adolescent. Conrad felt guilt for surviving and anger that his brother didn't hang on. This all resulted in his suicide attempt and depression.

Psychodynamic therapy has six basic techniques: maintaining an analytic framework, free association, interpretation, dream analysis, analysis of resistance, and analysis of transference. Although all six techniques would be helpful in treating Conrad's symptoms and condition, there are three in particular that may be most effective. After leaving the hospital, Conrad seemed to be drifting aimlessly through his life. The structure, regularity, objectivity, and boundaries of maintaining an analytic framework would help to center Conrad with a consistency and predictability he could hang onto. Free association would also be helpful for extracting Conrad's uncensored thoughts. In the beginning of therapy, Conrad had difficulty opening up. Perhaps introducing free association with words such as "father," "mother," "brother," "swimming," could have helped to open up what is locked in his unconscious. Finally, analysis of transference would also be a powerful technique in locking unconscious feelings, beliefs, desires, and conflicts that Conrad felt toward his mother, his brother, and his father and onto the therapist.

Psychodynamic therapy would be a helpful approach for Conrad. Pragmatically speaking, he had the means to afford consistent and frequent psychodynamic therapy through his father's financial support. He also had the time after school to meet several times per week. Most importantly though, there were deeply rooted unconscious feelings that Conrad was experiencing that needed to be brought into consciousness to better understand his feelings of guilt and isolation. Just tackling surface-level issues, such as everyday frustrations with his

mother or even the death of his friend, would not be sufficient in helping him discover the deeper wounding that is causing his reactions to his present experiences.

References

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