

Ordinary People: Psychodynamic Theory

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Sigmund Freud was the first to focus his study on the development of the human personality. His interest and observation brought him to the development of psychodynamic theory. Freud theorizes that the human personality develops in a series of psychosexual stages which all take place before the age of six. In these stages, a child must achieve various levels of fulfillment for proper development. If not fulfilled, the person will seek to fulfill those needs throughout the rest of their life. Many childhood experiences are stored in the unconscious. Through the long and intense process of psychodynamic therapy, Freud sought to bring those experiences into one's consciousness. Those conflicts could be resolved through the clients' work with the therapist (Corey, p. 58-60).

Erik Erikson was also a psychoanalyst who expanded on Freud's theory. He sought to combine the psychosexual and psychosocial stages of development. The psychosocial developmental stages are lifelong stages during which one must settle social conflicts that arise during a designated segment of one's lifespan (Corey, p. 58)

Another psychoanalyst who contributed to psychoanalytic theory is Carl Jung. While initially a colleague of Freud, Jung's theory of personality development focused greatly on what happens to a person during middle age. A great deal of Jung's theory is derived from his own midlife crisis experience. He theorized that one is influenced by one's past as well as one's future. Jung felt that a person primarily seeks to integrate both conscious and unconscious parts of their personality called individuation (Corey, p 77-78).

In the film *Ordinary People*, Conrad was with his brother at the time of the accident. In witnessing interactions between Conrad and his mother, it seems that she favored his deceased brother, Buck. You get the sense that this has been the case throughout Conrad's life and there is a sense of hostility between the two. The hostility and distance between the two are compounded by Buck's death. Conrad has great difficulty confessing to his mother that he quit the swim team. When she is upset with him due to finding out his decision from another parent, he points out that she does not care about him and is only upset that she found out from

someone else. While it is not known, the psychoanalyst may derive that some of Conrad's needs were not met during the Oral Stage or Infancy. Perhaps because he was not Buck. When he is hospitalized, he is happy because he feels that he can finally be honest, unlike the facade that he has to keep with his mother (Redford, 1980).

As Dr. Berger, I might use free association to encourage him to vocalize exactly how he is feeling. I would reinforce that there is no judgment regarding his feelings as he seems uncomfortable with them. They are very painful to him, and he feels guilt over his inability to save his brother. Neither of which he feels comfortable vocalizing. Free association may allow him to do so. Once he does state his true feelings, he can be taught that he did not cause his brother's death.

Dream analysis is another technique that can be used with Conrad as his dreams are a great deal of the reason why he continues to lose sleep. His dreams can reveal what he cannot bring himself to say. They can bring his unconscious into consciousness.

Psychoanalysis could be useful because Conrad has so much unresolved with his brother and his mother. Perhaps if transference occurs for him, he can resolve those conflicts with the therapist as both his mother and his brother. There is a glimpse of this in the movie where Conrad is screaming his frustrations at Buck and Dr. Berger answers as Buck.

References

Corey, G. (2021). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (10th ed.). Cengage.

Redford, R. (Director). (1980). *Ordinary people* [Film]. Paramount.