

**Psychodynamic Ordinary People Paper**

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Psychoanalysis, a psychological theory founded by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is a practice used in psychotherapy that focuses on personality development, defense mechanisms, anxiety, and the conscious and unconscious of a person's mind. This theory seeks to answer the "why" in human behavior. According to Gerald Corey's *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, one of the main functions of psychoanalysis is to aid clients acquire freedom to enjoy their lives and to assist them in becoming more honest, self-aware, and successful in their relationships, as well as helping the clients handle anxiety in healthy ways and gain control over unwanted behaviors (Corey, 2015).

The psychoanalytic theory, also known as the psychodynamic theory, in the Freudian view, focuses on human instincts that have sexual undertones, indicating that humans desire pleasure in life, as opposed to pain (Corey, 2015). Personality is broken down into three systems: the id, the ego and the superego, which speak to a person's motives and behavioral patterns. Ego-defense mechanisms include an array of different responses to issues people may face and all of which serve a sense of protection to the individual. According to Freud, there are also stages of personality development that need to be met; a person may be stuck in a developmental stage even as they age due to unfulfillment in that particular stage. An essential aspect of psychoanalysis includes the study of anxiety that is divided into reality anxiety, neurotic anxiety and moral anxiety. Freud believed that the human mind had the conscious and the unconscious- the unconscious stores all memories, experiences and repressed material (Corey, 2015), while the conscious is more easily recognized and forthcoming.

In the film *Ordinary People*, directed by Robert Redford, Conrad Jarrett is a young highschool student who is dealing with adjusting to life after his attempted suicide and the unfortunate death of his beloved brother. In the beginning of the film, Conrad wakes up in a cold

sweat after a dream. Afterwards, he is noticeably distant from those who are trying to be close to him, he is nervous and seems disconnected from his surroundings. As the movie progresses, the conflicts between his mother and himself are revealed, as well as the guilt he harbors for his brother dying, even though his brother's death was not his fault. The psychoanalytic theory may explain Conrad's behavior through the stages of personality development, particularly due to his relationship with his mother. The theory may also explain the teenager's behavior through the unconscious and ego-defense mechanisms.

In order to treat Conrad Jarrett, dream analysis and interpretation would be two effective techniques to help him live a better life. Dream analysis would help Conrad uncover unconscious thoughts, feelings and desires and give him awareness of the unsettled issues he is facing, particularly the issues with his mother and letting go of guilt for his brother's failure to hold onto the boat. Conrad has a dream about the boat accident and seems to think about that night quite often. His dream at the beginning of the movie is about him singing in his school's choir and includes his crush, Jeannine Pratt, who sings in front of him at their school choir rehearsal in real life, furthering the decision that Conrad's dreams hold material that he keeps inside. Interpretation would also be beneficial for the highschool student, as it would identify, clarify and translate the material he presents in session (Corey, 2015). This technique is not one that can be rushed or poorly timed due to a client's dismissiveness of interpretation, so it would be important to bring up interpretations as Conrad seems to be uncovering his issues himself so that he would be receptive to perspectives different than his own. This technique would help Conrad's anxiety, guilt and worthlessness when it comes to his mother.

The psychodynamic approach to Conrad Jarrett is one worth exploring and implementing. He is dealing with trauma that can cause repression (an ego-defense mechanism) and it would be

helpful to him to discover what he is holding onto inside. Teenagers are in a vulnerable state of life, learning who they are and what they want to be and trying to fit in somewhere. The psychoanalytic theory would confront childhood unfulfillment and personal understanding of behaviors, which Conrad needs to grow into himself.

### References

Corey, G. (2015). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy 10th Edition*.

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