

**Ordinary People: Psychoanalytic Approach**

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The primary concept of psychoanalytic theory includes the dynamics of the and its influence on behavior. The psychoanalytic theory takes careful consideration of the role anxiety plays on an individual's conscious and unconscious. This theory seeks to understand the meaning behind transference and countertransference in the therapeutic process, while also evaluating the development of personality at various stages of an individual's life. According to Freud, "Our behavior is determined by irrational forces, unconscious motivations, and biological and instinctual drives as these evolve through key psychosexual stages in the first six years of life" (Corey, p. 59).

Regarding the Freudian perspective, personality consists of three systems: the id, the ego, and the superego. All of these function as a whole in a person's personality. The id is at the seat of instincts and is ruled by the pleasure principle. The ego is the executive function that governs, controls, and regulates personality, being the "traffic cop" between a person's instincts and their environment. The ego is ruled by the reality principle. The superego is the judicial branch of personality that contains a person's moral code and strives for perfection. Distortion in any of these systems can have a profound negative effect on a person's mental and emotional well-being.

The psychoanalytic theory can be applied to Conrad in several ways. In the film *Ordinary People*, Conrad is portrayed as this lonesome teenager striving for his parents' affection, particularly his mother's. The film portrays Conrad's personality type as that of a withdrawn, introverted, and socially inept individual with very few friends. His late brother, Buck on the other hand, was depicted to be a charismatic, outgoing, favorable, and popular individual. This theory is emphasized throughout much of Conrad's childhood as he struggled to fit in and competed for his mother's love and affection often leaving him in the shadows of his late

brother. this understandably left Conrad to suppress many negative emotions and conflicts in his upbringing that were amplified after Buck's tragic and unexpected passing. the ID, ego ,and superego of Conrad's consciousness were in constant conflict as many negative emotions and self-destructive behaviors seat deeper into the unconscious

Psychoanalytic therapy uses various methods to bring out unconscious material with the goal of working through them in the therapeutic process. Careful attention is placed on childhood experiences which are discussed, reconstructed, interpreted, and analyzed (Corey, p. 89). In this instance, as it pertains to Conrad, I would use dream analysis to uncover unconscious material which would allow Conrad to gain insight into feelings that were left unexpressed. In the film, Conrad struggled with night terrors that were directly related to the night of the tragic boat accident. During sleep, a person's defenses are lowered and repressed feelings are brought to the surface from the unconscious. Through the therapeutic process of dream work, I would attempt to uncover the meaning behind his dreams.

Another technique that I would utilize for Conrad's therapy sessions is free association. In free association, Conrad would be encouraged to say whatever comes to mind no matter how painful, illogical, or trivial his thoughts may seem. I would utilize this technique because free association opens doors to the unconscious wishes, fantasies, conflicts, and motivations a person has. This technique would allow Conrad to release intense feelings that may have been blocked and suppressed in his unconscious mind. A recollection of past experiences and trauma may help Conrad to understand his behaviors and emotions better so that he may eventually learn to heal and overcome pain from his past and ultimately change his behavior.

My belief is that the psychoanalytic approach would be useful in helping Conrad overcome and make sense of his early childhood experiences. Because the psychoanalytic approach uses a conceptual framework for looking at behavior and for understanding the

meaning behind symptoms, I think this approach would help Conrad gain better insight into his emotions and the reasons behind them. I believe this approach would help Conrad conceptualize and process the tragic passing of his brother and also give reason to the unsteady and rocky relationship he has with his parents, particularly his mother. Hopefully by understanding his past, Conrad would be able to make sense of his present behaviors and emotions So that he may be able to work through them in therapy and be better adjusted for a healthy and successful future mentally and emotionally.

## References

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

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