Psychoanalytic Theory: Ordinary People Movie

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Sigmund Freud is considered the father of the psychoanalysis model. He believed that we are driven largely by the unconscious forces within ourselves. According to Freud, the human psyche follows life instincts, which is our instinct for survival and oriented toward growth and creativity. He also believed in the death instincts which account for the aggressive behaviors due to an unconscious wish to die or to hurt ourselves or others.

Freud believed that personality was composed of 3 systems working as one within a person. The id is the first impulse, driven by the pleasure principle. The ego is the part of personality that is driven by the reality principle, and regulates the personality. The superego holds the moral code in our personality and represents an ideal and perfect standard.

Other contemporaries of Freud either expanded on his theories or developed their own model of psychoanalysis or psychotherapy, with the framework of the unconscious as the main driver of behavior.

In the movie, Ordinary People, the character of Conrad was coping with the aftermath of the death of his brother. The incident that caused his brother's death was a boating accident, and Conrad was there when it happened. When Conrad met with Dr. Berger, he presented with many symptoms related to suicidal tendencies, PTSD, and anxiety.

In the Freudian personality theory, I would describe Conrad's superego as unconsciously controlling his thoughts and actions. He was carrying around the guilt of some moral code that he felt he had broken, and this caused his Moral anxiety. He exhibited the ego-defense mechanism of Repression as described by Freud; he involuntarily removed his painful thoughts and feelings from his awareness. (Corey, 2015)

When he first approached Dr. Berger, Conrad was resistant to the idea of therapy. If I was employing the psychoanalytic approach on Conrad, I would first exercise the free association technique, and let him speak without censorship. I would gently ask him some probing questions, especially about the relationship with his mother, his other family members, friends and other influential people in his life.

After some time of getting to know him and building our client-therapist alliance and trust, I would address his resistance to talk about his brother's death and his own suicide attempt with the hope that he would bring his unconscious guilt to the conscious. I would also work towards building a dynamic to create transference between us so Conrad could work through his inner conflicts.

My main goal of psychoanalysis treatment with Conrad would be to make the unconscious conscious and lessen his irrational guilt. I would want him to recognize the patterns that have been built in him of carrying unnecessary guilt stemming from his childhood, and how that manifested with his brother's death. I would use a more contemporary approach with Conrad, as opposed to the classic approach in that rather than maintaining neutrality, I would use more expressions of sympathy, support, and reassurance.

References

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