

Adlerian Ordinary People Paper

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The Adlerian approach to psychology is a theory started by Alfred Adler, a former colleague of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Adler was originally part of the foundation of psychoanalysis, but parted ways with Freud after disagreements on the inner motivations of humans; Freud believing that motivation is mostly sexually-based, while Adler believed that motivation was mostly based on social and family placement, which, in turn, develops personality. According to Gerald Corey's *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, the Adlerian approach stresses the unity of personality and that people can only be understood as complete beings- making human behavior purposeful and goal oriented. Adler saw humans as both the creators and creations of their own lives. Style of living, deriving from personality, is cultivated to achieve set goals in life (Corey, 2015).

Alfred Adler's approach to therapy is evidently different compared to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic approach, even though Adler worked closely with Freud on the psychodynamic approach before parting company. Adler believed that a person starts to form an approach to life before the age of six. He believed that an individual's past and their interpretation of early events influence a person's present behavior and that motivation for human behavior stemmed from social relatedness and not sexual urges, as Freud suggested (Corey, 2015). Some of the key concepts within the Adlerian approach include: social interest and community feeling, the view of human nature, unity and patterns of human personality, life hacks, subjective perception of reality and birth order and sibling relationships (Corey, 2015). According to Adler, clients are not sick people in need of healing, but instead are discouraged due to faulty values, useless and selfish goals or mistaken beliefs. Therapists who adhere to the Alderian theory approach clients

with the assumption that clients will feel and behave better when they discover and correct their mistakes, leading to encouragement and therefore drive to live better lives (Corey, 2015).

Conrad Jarrett, a young highschooler in the film *Ordinary People*, directed by Robert Redford, deals with life after the death of his older brother and a suicide attempt that his small town is aware of. At the start of the film, the relationship between Conrad and his mother and father seems typical for a teenager who is likely going through puberty, brain development and social placement at school and with friends. As the film goes on, it is made clear that Conrad and his mother do not have the best relationship and that his deceased older brother was the main receiver of his mother's affection in the house. His relationship with his father stands firm throughout the film, indicating that Conrad does have the support and affection of at least one parent, which according to Adler, is not the typical case for the second born or two children (the second born strives to have the approval and attention of both parents, in light to surpass the older sibling), probably stirring the inferiority complex within Conrad against his brother, Buck. The audience also sees that Conrad feels a sense of guilt for his brother's death, but still desires the affection of both his mother and father afterwards and may be struggling because he cannot seem to have it.

There are a few techniques, under the four phases of therapy created by Adler, that would help Conrad achieve his positive life goals. Two techniques that would be beneficial to Conrad would include family constellation and encouragement. Family constellation would help the teenager through walking him to understanding his unique view of himself, his friends, his family members, his crush and to life in general. Conrad grew up seeing his brother's relationship with his mother as the favorite child and it would be beneficial for him to explore this, coming to terms with the differences between him and his brother and assessing the family

dynamic and its effects on Conrad and his personality and views. The other technique that would be helpful to Conrad is encouragement. This would be introduced to the client after re-orientation and re-education, techniques that would help Conrad see his life and the people around him differently. Encouragement would lead the highschooler to act as if he is the person he wants to become, causing his attitudes towards his mother and the dreadful accident of his brother's death to change and build his self-confidence and courage.

Applying the Adlerian theory to Conrad Jarrett has a great possibility of not truly helping Conrad overcome his current life situations and live a successful life. The youngun is dealing with trauma that may become worse if looked at through the lens of birth order, because he can never take the place of his older brother as the second born child. It also may not be enough to attempt to encourage Conrad, even after delving into establishing a therapeutic relationship, exploring his mental dynamics and trying to help him develop insight. A person will be encouraged if they choose to be encouraged and it is not definitive for a client to all of a sudden gain self-confidence after the first three phases of therapy are completed. That is the result that a practitioner would hope for for their client, but it is not a guarantee and may cause further discouragement for the client.

References

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

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