

Ordinary People Application Paper: Person-Centered Therapy

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Carl Rogers pioneered person-centered therapy or client-centered therapy beginning in the 1940s. The basic assumptions underlying this approach are that people are trustworthy,

clients can resolve their problems, and they can grow if the quality of the client-therapist relationship is strong (Corey, 2017). He was a pioneer because he challenged the therapeutic processes used at the time, such as advice-giving, suggestion, persuasion, diagnosis, and interpretation. Instead, he focused on reflecting and clarifying what clients' communicated. At the same time, the therapist's attitudes were essential to conveying empathy and a deep understanding of the client's world.

Carl Rogers believed there were three therapeutic core conditions that were necessary for change to occur in the client:

1. Congruence or genuineness on the therapist's part is essential to help build a strong working alliance. The therapist must exhibit authenticity, and self-disclosure must be well-timed and have a constructive intent. Person-centered therapy will be hindered "if the counselor feels one way about the client but acts in a different way" (Corey, 2017, p.174).
2. The therapist needs to communicate unconditional positive regard and acceptance so that the client feels deep and genuine care. Acceptance will help the client respond more openly, less defensively, and will be more open to exploring any resistance they may feel.
3. Accurate empathic understanding is a core condition that will help the client recognize and help resolve the incongruent feeling within them.

According to Corey (2017), "When clients feel listened to without evaluation, they feel free to disclose deeply personal aspects of themselves" (p.175). As clients self-disclose, therapists need to stay with their clients as opposed to providing interpretations that the client may not be ready for to make necessary changes in their lives.

One reason clients will seek therapy is the "feeling of basic helplessness, powerlessness, and an inability to make decisions or effectively direct their own lives" (Corey, 2017, p.172). Conrad initially exhibits the following symptoms at the beginning of the movie: distracted,

detached, nightmares, lack of appetite, and seeing a cemetery when the train was crossing.

Conrad has gone through several major traumas most notably the passing of his brother due to the boating accident and Conrad's attempted suicide following that trauma. He initially expresses that he has no problems and everything is fine when he visits Dr. Berger, but that he would like to be more in control so people can stop worrying about him, mainly his dad. It is clear that he is not connected to his feelings and is in a state of incongruence which is manifested in the way he is going about adjusting back to his life after his hospital stay and the symptoms exhibited. It is the role of a therapist to help Conrad clarify feelings so that he is able to understand himself better and take an active role in self-healing.

Although person-centered therapy does not rely on specific techniques, if I were Dr. Berger I would use emotion-focused therapy which is a person-centered approach. It is apparent that Conrad has too little emotion and needs help accessing his emotions. His way of coping with his feelings may have been to attempt suicide, but it is important for him to become aware, accept, and understand the emotions he experiences. In EFT, "clients are encouraged to identify, experience, accept, express, explore, transform, and manage their emotions" (Corey, 2017, p. 168). In particular, this type of therapy has been empirically validated to help with treating anxiety and trauma which relate to Conrad's experiences.

Another technique that could be used with Conrad is expressive arts therapy through singing. Conrad is involved in the school choir and clearly expressed himself through singing when he seemed happy interacting with Jeanine Pratt. Singing and music may provide him therapeutic healing as an outlet that provides him positive energy and is more congruent with his inner interests and talents. Rather than swimming that he found boring and did not seem to provide him with any positive outlet, singing and music could foster feelings of joy, creativity, and social interaction that was meaningful to him.

A person-centered approach would benefit Conrad because it would help him get to a place of connecting and expressing his true feelings, loosen his defenses and static perceptions of himself, and move towards a higher level of personal functioning. Genuine care, respect and acceptance of all the feelings Conrad expresses will help him express his emotions and become more aware of them which can help lead to cognitive and behavioral changes. Although he comes to Dr. Berger in a state of incongruence, as he is able to express himself freely without judgment, with empathic understanding and genuineness, he is able to make constructive changes in his life for overall healthier functioning than when he first started therapy.

References

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