Person-Centered Ordinary People Paper

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Person-centered therapy is a technique of counseling started by Carl Rogers, a key spokesperson for humanistic psychology. Rogers' views were revolutionary in comparison to the other approaches of therapy that were already present at the time. He proposed a theory that focused on the client and held them as the primary delegate for self-change rather than depending on the therapist for this responsibility. According to Gerald Corey's *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Rogers highlighted the attitudes and personal characteristics of the therapist and the state of the relationship between the client and their therapist (Corey, 2015, pp. 165). He strongly believed that the client has the power to self-heal, which is opposite to other theories that focused on the therapist and their knowledge and skill set as being the determinant for the client's success. Ultimately, this approach allows the client to have more power than the therapist to steer the course of change.

Carl Rogers' approach to therapy is based on the sense of trust in the client's ability to self-analyze and grow if the proper environment for this growth is present. He believed that at a person's core, all have a positive center and that people are generally trustworthy, capable of understanding themselves and giving themselves direction, that all are able to make constructive changes and are able to live productive and effective lives (Corey, 2015, pp. 170). Because all people have these traits, according to Rogers, counselors should be able to communicate positive emotions, such as non-judgmentalness, support, care and more, to the client to catalyze significant changes within the client. Three attributes that the pioneer maintained were crucial for each therapist to have to create a proper environment for growth include congruence, unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding.

Conrad Jarrett, the main character of the movie *Ordinary People* by Robert Redford, is a young student that recently survived a suicide attempt and experienced the traumatic event of

losing his older brother to unfortunate circumstances and he feels responsible for it. At the beginning of the film, it is implied that Conrad is having a hard time interacting with those around him; he seems a bit closed off, nervous and fearful. As the film goes on, Conrad meets with a counselor, Dr. Berger, who starts sessions with him. The sessions seem friendly and comfortable, where conversation goes to an array of topics and Conrad seems to thrive in this setting. Dr. Berger presents himself as a trustworthy person and shows the characteristics that Carl Rogers believes all therapists should exude to clients: of congruence (although could be mistaken for vulgarity), unconditional positive regard and understanding towards Conrad's experiences and dilemma.

Two techniques that would be appropriate to use for Conrad's treatment if person-centered therapy was applied would be group therapy and the therapist building presence leading to assessment. According to Corey, a therapist's presence is essential for a client's progress. This presence consists of being completely attentive and immersed in the client and their concerns (2015, pp. 177). It is crucial for the therapist to show skills such as empathetic understanding, acceptance and respect, as well as active listening to the client to create an environment nurturing to a client. Assessment is needed in order to properly capture the needs of the client and where they currently are. In this form of therapy, the therapist allows the client to perform self-assessments. Conrad would benefit from self-assessing, digging deeper into why he wanted to die and coming to terms with the events of his brother's death, as well as the aftermath relationships he has with his parents. It would be best for these realizations to come from Conrad himself instead of the therapist.

Group therapy would be a beneficial technique for Conrad, giving him the space to express himself among people that have similar experiences to him. In the film, Conrad's friend

from the hospital, Karen, reunited with him at a restaurant to go over life after being released. Conrad was evidently excited to see her, but after trying to contact her a few weeks later, he learns that Karen committed suicide. Conrad could have felt alone and felt that he lost someone he has grown close to once again. It would be helpful for him to know he does not have to experience the struggles of change by himself and he would be comforted by knowing he is not alone in what he has been through.

Applying person-centered therapy to Conrad Jarrett has a great possibility of helping him change and live life effectively and productively. The highschooler is at the stage of life of puberty and learning more about himself and this approach encourages self-actualization and self-change instead of putting all or a lot of the weight on the therapist. Conrad needed someone to talk openly with and this approach would provide this for him with unconditional positive regard, genuineness and non-judgmentalness among other qualities that he would need from the therapist to feel safe.

References

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

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