

**Person-Centered Therapy Ordinary People Paper**

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During the 1940s, American psychologist Carl Rogers developed his ground-breaking theory of person-centered therapy. This kind of therapy encouraged a therapeutic process that promoted positive change within the client. For this process, the therapist would need to establish a supportive environment to ensure the client feels safe, secure, and comfortable disclosing their concerns or struggles during therapy sessions. According to Carl Rogers' humanistic approach and his view on human nature, he believed that humans, at their core, are trustworthy, resourceful, and positive and are capable of self-understanding, making changes, and living productive, effective lives (Corey, 2015). In addition, Carl believed that humans innately gravitate toward self-actualization, and given the right growth-fostering conditions, individuals strive to move forwards and fulfill their creative nature. When therapists can experience and communicate their realness, support, caring, and nonjudgmental understanding, significant changes in the client are most likely to occur (Corey, 2015).

The person-centered approach challenges the assumption that "the counselor knows best," the validity of advice, suggestion, persuasion, teaching, diagnosis, and interpretation, the belief that clients cannot resolve their own problems without help, and the focus on problems over persons. Person-centered therapy emphasizes the therapist's personal characteristics, the quality of the therapeutic relationship, the counselor's creation of a "growth-promoting" climate, and the person's capacity for self-directed growth if involved in a therapeutic relationship. The three therapist attributes that create a growth-promoting climate are congruence (genuineness or realness), unconditional positive regard (acceptance and caring), and accurate empathic understanding (the ability to deeply grasp the subjective world of another person). Some ways in which the person-centered approach and philosophy could be applied or be useful in real life are

crisis intervention, group counseling, person-centered expressive arts therapy, motivational interviewing, and emotion-focused therapy.

In the film *Ordinary People*, Conrad (the main character) is experiencing the tragic and traumatic loss of his older brother Buck who passed away in a boat accident. It left Conrad scarred and traumatized to the point of attempting to commit suicide. It was clear that Conrad was showing signs of survivor's guilt and dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to being directly exposed to the traumatic event. Conrad's symptoms in the film were recurring nightmares and flashbacks, lack of motivation, sleep, and interest in normal activities, loss of appetite, difficulty focusing on class, and feeling isolated, misunderstood, and alone. Through the lens of humanistic psychology and person-centered therapy, one could say that Conrad would benefit greatly from this approach because he was suffering internally and was bottling up so much since losing his brother. As a result, he became stagnant in his own personal growth and was not changing for the better. At one-point, Conrad started to push himself to see a therapist as per his father's request and tried to reconnect with his distant mother and get himself out there again (socialize) with a girl. In Rogers' perspective, this would indicate that Conrad naturally wanted to have a normal life again after the tragic loss of his family and was desiring personal growth and change and trying to be positive in some ways.

However, soon after, there is a scene in the film where Conrad begins to experience a mental breakdown/crisis after hearing about his friend's (girl) suicide. Conrad's therapist Dr. Berger began to deal with Conrad's emotional and mental breakdown after receiving a frantic call from Conrad by showing him some characteristics of a person-centered approach. Dr. Berger offered Conrad a safe space to open up and let out everything he felt. Dr. Berger listened to Conrad, told him he was his friend, and held him close as a father would to a son, and it finally

helped calm Conrad. This scene presented Dr. Burger as an empathetic, understanding, caring, accepting, genuine, and supportive therapist.

If I were Dr. Burger, I would have definitely taken the same approach and intervention as he did in the film during Conrad's mental/emotional crisis. At that moment, Conrad felt helpless and powerless unable to control his thoughts and emotions. When people are in crisis, one of the first steps is to allow them to express themselves fully. Conrad was already dealing with guilt, shame, low self-esteem, and feeling misunderstood by his family and friends. Person-centered therapy would provide Conrad with a safe, secure, and supportive therapeutic environment in which he would be given the power to be the agent of change and healing in his life. This approach would help Conrad gain self-confidence and a stronger sense of identity and authenticity. It would also help him not to second guess his own abilities and the choices he could make to move forward and live a thriving life despite the loss of his brother and the trauma he experienced during that time. The person-centered approach can also help Conrad have more self-awareness and self-reflection so that he learns to exercise choice. Another way this approach can benefit Conrad is by helping to develop better coping skills for the problems he may later face in his life.

References

Corey, Gerald. (2015) *Theory and practice of Counseling and psychotherapy, Enhanced*

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Redford, R. (Director). (1980). *Ordinary People*. Wildwood Enterprises Production.