

Film Ordinary People with Gestalt Therapy Applied

Feng Zhu

Alliance University

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George James Ramos

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Gestalt therapy is an approach that prioritizes present awareness and the quality of contact between individuals and their environment. The primary goal of Gestalt therapy is to assist clients in gaining awareness, which leads to change. Awareness is essential for clients to restore their self-regulation. As clients become more aware, they are better equipped to resolve opposing forces within themselves and work towards reintegrating all aspects of themselves. In addition to awareness, other key concepts of the approach include here and now, dealing with unfinished business, contact and resistance to contact, body language, and the role of experiments in therapy. The therapist collaborates with the client to identify the most pressing issues, needs, and interests, as well as to design experiments to sharpen those salient figures or explore resistance to contact and awareness.

From a Gestalt therapy perspective, Conrad's behavior in the film *Ordinary People* could be understood as unfinished business related to his brother Buck's death and its impact on his current contact with his family and friends, especially his mother. He was stuck in past experiences and emotions, and he was unaware that he was carrying old baggage, which heavily interfered with the present.

I would use two techniques from Gestalt therapy to help Conrad re-integrate himself. I would use the "empty chair" technique to help Conrad to express his emotions towards his deceased brother Buck. By role-playing the conversation with Buck, Conrad can work through his feelings and begin to integrate his emotions. Another technique I would use is dream work. Conrad dreamed of Buck and himself in a sinking boat, but he failed to save Buck at the end of his dream. According to Perls, every element in a dream is a projection of the dreamer. I would use dream work to help Conrad discover his projection in this dream by asking him to "become"

different parts of his dream. First, he could try to be the boat and have a dialogue with the rest of the elements in the dream, then try to become the stormy sea, the wind, Buck, etc. He would become more aware of the range of his feelings once he discovers the existential messages of his dream.

Through the Gestalt approach, Conrad could be guided toward becoming aware of how he carries his past experiences and how they interfere with his current life. Conrad may need to re-experience past feelings and memories related to his brother Buck's death to understand how it has impacted his present life. Conrad could develop a more profound self-awareness by exploring his emotions and experiences in the present moment. Ultimately, the therapy will help Conrad process his unfinished business related to Buck's death and to create more attentive relationships with others in the present.

References

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