

Ordinary People Existential Theory

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The existential therapy began to populate in Europe and was introduced to the United States by Viktor Frankl. Cory (2021) gives credit that “Frankl developed logotherapy which means therapy through meaning” (130). Frankl believe that a person words and deeds had meaning. That is through a person suffering and achievements that a person can begin to achieve real meaning in life. Existential therapy focuses on the person taking responsibility, creating action, reflection on life’s challenges, and changing our attitudes will help a person move forward. It is our choices that we make and not always the things that happen in our lives that help shape up into who we are. We have the power within ourselves to change what we don’t like to become the person that we are suppose to be or to be the authentic person. There are other philosophers and writers who have made great contributions through this theory but the core foundation is self-awareness and what it means to be human.

This would be a good treatment for the character Conrad in the movie Ordinary People because he is suffering for survivors remorse. He is questioning what his purpose is, why did he survive, watching his brother die before him and what does it all mean for him going forward. He is depressed, suicidal, and has begun to alienate himself from people. The existential theory would help him to answer the questions of the meaning for his life. This theory focus on mortality, aloneness, and anxiety, and freedom. His process of thinking and how it has shaped his life so far and how changing his thinking will help motivate him to new elements of living would be a good fit for him.

The two choices I would choose for Conrad would be Proposition 2: and Responsibility and Proposition 6: Awareness of Death and Nonbeing. Conrad main problem was overcoming the death of his brother and the guilt that was associated with it. In the movie, Ordinary People, Conrad comes to terms

with the fact that he held onto the oar while his brother let go and drowned. Conrad had to come to terms with the fact his brother made a choice to let go and he made a choice to hang. The therapist allow Conrad the opportunity of realizing that since he survived now it was up to him to live and how he choose to live his life. Conrad choices were based on how he view his life going forward and what he was going to do with it. I would help Conrad come to terms that it is not a bad thing that he lived but a blessing but only if he saw it that way. The decision to live to his fullest potential would be his decision to make. By thinking of his brother dying Corey(2021) makes the distinction that it gives Conrad the opportunity to reflex on his death as, “the motivation for us to take advantage of appreciating the moment” (145). His brother death should not be in vain but enlighten Conrad to, “reflecting on the reality of death can teach us how to live fully” (146).

I would help Conrad to understand that he has freedom to choose that would lead to, “alternatives and therefore play a large role in shaping their own destiny’ (139). When Conrad released the shackles that were holding him back, he became optimistic about the future. Once Conrad realizes that he no longer had to limit his thinking in a guilty fashion but can expand himself to a wide range of possibilities of living his life authentically. The author Corey gives us the three values of existential therapy which would incorporate freedom, reflect, and the capacity to act. If Conrad forgives himself for being the survivor he can then begin to accept the freedom of choosing to live. Conrad must first change his mind set to move forward with an action plan for change. In the end it did happen with Conrad, when he had accepted the truth of his brother death, how he thought about himself, and others changed. He began to put in motion different ways of living a life that would be rewarding. He realizes everyday would not be a good day but it would come with the responsibility of him choosing to be miserable and get stuck or change and move on.

The hinderance that the existential therapy may not work for Conrad is if he gets stuck waiting for the therapist to give him the answers. Conrad began to open up to his counselor but he was also looking for the counselor to give him answers based on what he said. In existential therapy Cory (2021) points out that it is the, “major task for the counselor who practice from an existential perspective is to provide enough concrete direction for these clients without taking the responsibility away from them” (154). It would be the responsibility of Conrad to make a decision and take the initiative to change and not for the counselor to make it for him by giving a playbook of instruction on how Conrad should live his life.

Cites

Corey, Gerald. (2021). THEORY AND PRACTICE OF COUNSELING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY. *Updated Tenth Edition*. CENGAGE. www.cengage.com.

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