

Ordinary People Application Paper: Gestalt Therapy

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Gestalt Therapy is an existential approach where awareness of what someone is experiencing in the here and now helps move a client toward taking responsibility for their choices and actions (Corey, 2017). A basic assumption of Gestalt therapy is that people can self-regulate when they are more aware of what is happening internally and externally. Gestalt means whole or completion, so these therapists see the person as whole. In addition, contact using our senses is necessary for change and growth, and both contact and withdrawal are essential to functional health. Five contact boundary disturbances that act as resistances for coping with life include introjection, projection, retroflexion, deflection, and confluence (Corey, 2017).

An essential contribution to the Gestalt approach is appreciating and experiencing the here and now in the present moment. Therapists will ask "what" and "how" questions through dialogue rather than "why" questions (Corey, 2017, p. 204). Additionally, we can be left with unfinished business when relationships with people in our lives are incomplete or unresolved. As a result, clients can have unexpressed feelings like resentment, abandonment, pain, guilt, or anxiety. They may come to an impasse that the therapist has to help them overcome without rescuing or frustrating them (Corey, 2017).

Conrad's symptoms show an unawareness within himself as to what he may be feeling. He looks like he is numbed out and just going through the motions of life upon his return to his regular school life. It is as if he has disowned various parts of his personality and needs to integrate the different parts into a whole person who is more aware of the different parts. In addition, he is using introjection to passively go through life rather than knowing or understanding what is congruent to his wants or needs. Corey (2017) states, "If we remain in this stage, our energy is bound up in taking things as we find them and believing that authorities

know what is best for us rather than working for things ourselves" (p. 202). Initially, Conrad defers more to his parents and their wishes in the movie.

One technique I would use for treating Conrad would be the Internal Dialogue Exercise. Conrad struggles with what his parents want and what he wants, but he is unaware of the two competing forces, so he passively lives by what his parents want. He went to Dr. Berger in the first place because his dad suggested it, and he told Dr. Berger he was there to have more control over his life so others would not have to worry about him so much. Using this exercise will help Conrad become more aware of himself and his use of introjection to accept others' beliefs and standards of him, mainly his parents. For example, was French Toast his favorite breakfast or something he said to appease his mother?

Another technique I would use is the Empty-Chair Technique and ask him to explore and role-play as his mother. It would enable him not to just talk about the conflict he feels with his mom because communication is difficult, but experience how his mother might feel and how he feels towards her. This technique would help him integrate his conflicting feelings and learn to live with and accept his mother. Disassociating his feelings around his mother leaves him at an impasse, conflicted, and lashing out at her, ultimately creating guilt. This role-reversal technique can help him become more aware of his feelings about his mom.

Gestalt Therapy would help Conrad because he leads a disjointed existence at the movie's beginning. He is unaware of his thoughts, feelings, and desires because he has used introjection to assimilate into his family. In addition, his brother's death and subsequent suicide attempt have not confronted the relationship dynamic with his parents. A Gestalt therapist who confronts him by inviting him to look at his behaviors, attitudes, and thoughts through dialogue, appropriate

exercises, and honest and immediate reactions would help Conrad become a more integrated and whole person.

References

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