

Ordinary People Paper

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Abstract

In this paper, we will be discussing twelve psychological theories, and how they will be utilized in the case study of a film entitled "Ordinary People." Some individuals have difficulty coping with feelings after a tragic loss of a beloved family member, some seek professional counseling, and others choose to work through them under their own recognizance. Either way, each theory has tools to assist every individual through grieving, discouragement, inferiority, negative patterns of thinking, reinforcing understanding and trust, building rapport, and being loved and accepted.

Ordinary People Paper

The movie "Ordinary People" introduces an upper-middle-class family living in the suburbs and dealing with emotional and psychological turmoil due to the unexpected death of their elder son and older brother Buck, during a boat accident. The main character Conrad, playing Buck's younger brother, was with him during the boating accident and watched his brother give up and submit to drowning. Conrad is in emotional and psychological turmoil, cannot regulate his emotions, was hospitalized for a suicide attempt, deals with fear, and blames himself for his brother's demise. His father, Calvin, appears to be responsible and forgiving, working towards solutions between Conrad and his mother, Beth, while coming to terms with the possible demise of his marriage due to the lack of love and comfort Beth is unwilling to give Conrad. Amid their grief, the mother appears cold-hearted, indifferent toward her son Conrad and struggling with her pain and uncertainty concerning her family's future. Her recourse is to edge Conrad out of their affairs, put distance between them, and control how society sees the family after the dreadful tragedy.

Discussion

Behavior Therapy

This theory focuses on the client's current problems and how to assist the client in changing them. "Behavior therapy utilizes a combination of various techniques, such as relaxation training, behavioral assessment, self-modification programs, operant conditioning techniques, mindfulness, acceptance-based cognitive behavior therapy, modeling, social skills training, assertiveness training, and ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy), just to name a few (Tan, 2011). These "therapies are focused on the thoughts, beliefs, influences, actions, relational framework, behavior patterns, and learned behaviors that can be changed" through the application of the client. The counselor, in a session with Conrad, could utilize "mindfulness, which engages in relaxation techniques), and acceptance-based cognitive behavior therapy, which consists of (committing to values and goals, accepting unwanted feelings as part of his life experience, and exercising calming and coping self-talk, or self-instruction)" to combat physical violence against himself and others (Tan, 2011).

The counselor probably found it intriguing when "Conrad had the epiphany concerning "who can't forgive who, about his Mother" during their fifth session together, because he assumes his mother is never going to forgive him for trying to commit suicide" but in actuality, the first step in forgiveness, is understanding that you must forgive yourself, and accept the limitation of others because people can only give as much as they're able" (Ordinary People", 2015). The counselor probably thinks this is a strong turning point for Conrad because he's participating in "acceptance and commitment techniques" unaware (Tan, 2011). If the counselor has made a good assessment of Conrad's goals for himself at this stage of the therapy, then there should be a continuation of excellent progress.

Discussion

Cognitive Behavior Therapy

The task of this therapist is to act as a “pathologist, educator, and technical consultant who assesses dysfunctional cognitive processes and works with the client to create learning experiences that may set straight these dysfunctional cognitions, and the behavioral, and affective patterns that have a mutual relation” (Tan, 2011). This theory consists of “actively scheduling activities that bring a sense of skillfulness and knowledge, accomplishment, pleasure, enjoyment, and social connection. “Bibliotherapy consists of self-help homework reading for the client to help the client to continue to make therapeutic progress between sessions.” Books like *Feeling Good*, *Love is Never Enough*, and *Mind Over Mood* can be used in therapy for clients suffering from Cognitive Therapy.”

After the assessment, the therapist can assist Conrad in defining specific areas where he wants to make a change, for example, “Conrad indicates that he does not want to feel apologetic for his existence, and he has trouble talking with his boss and co-workers, so the counselor introduces role-playing, and behavior rehearsal; the counselor is also initiating more effective behaviors, as the counselor plays the role of the boss” (“Ordinary People”, 2015).

As the counselor explains the probable reasons for Karen’s demise; like guilt, irrationality, undeserved self-punishment, depression, and how it’s a counterproductive way of feeling, he also has to be mindful of Conrad’s anxiety level, and the frightening images that his mind could produce, and in that case the counselor may introduce into the therapy sessions *Developing Placement Imagery*, to help Conrad to visualize or imagine calming and coping imagery in place of frightening imagery; so that this loss does not further take him into an avoidant state of mind.

Discussion

Rational Emotive Therapy

There are three major therapeutic techniques used in REBT, in the categories of cognitive techniques which focus on irrational beliefs, as the root of emotional disorders. Emotive techniques, and behavioral or behavioristic techniques. The characteristics of these therapies are forceful, active, directive, and vigorous, with a disputational therapeutic style. Disputing Irrational beliefs is a core cognitive technique I REBT. Clients are taught the A-B-C model or theory of personality functioning, in which A stands for Activating Events, or situations encountered by them; B for the beliefs that are triggered by the activating events in their lives that are irrational, dogmatic, absolutistic, and negative. C is for the consequences (emotional & Behavioral (feelings of depression and anxiety, and avoidance of feared situations). D is when the REBT therapist helps the client to go on to D, for disputing their irrational beliefs in a vigorous, active, and directive way, first by the therapist, and then by the client.

In the film, “Ordinary People, we see a volatile explosion of argumentation between Conrad and the therapist, in a therapeutic attempt to cause Conrad to get angry and express his feelings, the therapist insights him with snide words, and quick verbal comebacks, which causes Conrad to lose his temper and have an epiphany about his mother concerning “who it is that can’t forgive who” (“ Ordinary People”, 2015). A turning point in this event was watching how Conrad’s negative self-defeating beliefs and resistance to grief slowly changed. He developed a new sense of compassion and purpose when he permits himself to grieve over Buck and Karen, and the second turning point is when he starts to become stronger and more courageous when he hugs his mother in the living room and kisses her on the cheek, as though it was a sign of repentance and acceptance.

Conclusion

Rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT) is a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), that focuses on helping a person challenge unhelpful thoughts to avoid negative emotions or behaviors. Focusing on a person's present situation can help them develop a new way of thinking about events, to prevent maladaptive behaviors and negative emotions. Conrad started to understand that the events from the storm with Buck, did not cause the consequences that happened in his life, but rather his thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about that tragic event that lead to the negative reaction.

References

Ordinary People. (2015, May 6). Retrieved March 4, 2023, from
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Tan, S. Y. (2011). *Counseling and Psychotherapy: A Christian Perspective*. Zaltbommel, Netherlands: Van Haren Publishing.