

Ordinary People Paper: Behavioral Therapy

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Generally, behavior therapy practitioners focus on directly observable behavior, current determinants of behavior, learning experiences that promote change, tailoring treatment strategies to individual clients, and rigorous assessment and evaluation (Corey, 2016, p.233). However, in terms of modern behavior therapy, this approach to psychotherapy is founded on a scientific view of human behavior, that accommodates a systematic design approach to counseling. In addition, behavior therapy deals with the client's current problems and the factors influencing them today rather than analyzing possible historical determinants. Emphasis is on specific factors that influence present functioning and what factors can be used to modify performance.

Behavior therapists examine the current environmental events that maintain problem behaviors and help clients produce behavior change by changing environmental events, through a process called functional assessment, or "behavioral analysis." In analyzing, the behavior therapist understands the importance of the individual, the individual's environment, and the interaction between the person and the environment in facilitating change (Corey, 2016, p. 237).

The general goals of behavior therapy are to increase personal choice and to create new conditions for learning. In doing so, the client, with the help of the therapist, defines specific treatment goals at the outset of the therapeutic process. Although assessment and treatment occur together, a formal assessment takes place prior to treatment to determine behaviors that are targets of change. Ongoing assessment throughout therapy determines the degree to which identified goals are being met. It is important to devise a way to measure progress toward goals based on empirical validation (Corey, 2016, p. 238).

Many modern behavior therapists stress the clients' active role in formulating specific measurable goals. Those goals must be clear, concretely understood, and agreed on by the client and the counselor. The counselor and client discuss the behaviors associated with the goals, the circumstances required for change, the nature of subgoals, and a plan of action to work toward these goals. This process of determining therapeutic goals entails a negotiation between the client and counselor that results in a contract that guides the course of therapy. Behavior therapists and clients alter goals throughout the therapeutic process as needed (Corey, 2016, p. 238).

In accordance with creating goals with the client, behavioral therapists now apply a variety of evidence-based techniques in their practices, including cognitive behavior therapy, social skills training, relaxation training, and mindfulness strategies.

According to Corey (2016), behavioral therapy has been implemented to treat an expansive range of psychological disorders with specific client populations. In those populations, anxiety disorders, major depressive disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, substance use disorders, eating disorders, sexual problems, pain management, and hypertension have all been successfully treated by using the behavioral therapeutic approach. In addition, behavioral methods have been noticeably utilized in fields such as developmental disabilities, mental illness, education and special education, community psychology, clinical psychology, rehabilitation, business, self-management, sports psychology, health-related behaviors, medicine, and gerontology (Corey 2016, p. 233).

As I examined the main character Conrad in the film *Ordinary People*, he appeared to be a high school kid that continued to display ongoing symptoms of anxiety, low-self-esteem, worry, agitation, and disturbance when around people. These symptoms were highlighted in his hostility, inattention, aggression, and self-harming practices throughout the film. The film was

able to capture these symptoms and behaviors in several instances toward his mother, swim teammates, father, and psychiatrist. During the session, I would initially conduct a thorough analysis of his bio psycho-social for indicators of past diagnoses. This would be prompted due to the symptomology that Conrad was displaying. Because the application of behavioral therapy has been successful in treating many disorders, I would implement the mindfulness strategies technique. I believe this type of technique would assist Conrad in practicing and focusing on what is called the “present experience with acceptance” (Corey, 2016, p. 251).

During a session, Conrad also expressed having memories in the form of dreams that were unpleasant in multiple sessions. He continued to express how his memories of his brother’s death caused his distress and intrusive thoughts. In addition, Conrad verbalizes how his brother was “screwing around in the thunderstorm” (Redford, 1980, 1:38:59). As a psychiatrist applying this type of therapy, I could also utilize the technique of relaxation training. I believe this would help Conrad cope with the distress that he is dealing with on a daily basis. His ability to remove the anxiety and ruminating thoughts would help him relieve his guilt for the accident.

In my opinion, the application of this theory would be useful in terms of the many techniques that can be applied to this approach and behavioral change in clients. In addition, I believe that this theory focuses on “the now” and does not dwell on the past, which can become a detriment to the progress and behavioral change of clients like Conrad.

Reference

1. Corey, G. (2016). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. 10th ed. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning US.
2. Redford, R. (1980). *Ordinary People*. Wildwood Enterprise.