Reality Ordinary People Paper

Bénie Ntoto

Alliance Graduate School of Counseling, Alliance University

GCN 502: OA Theories and Foundations of Counseling

Professor George James Ramos

March 21, 2023

Reality therapy and choice theory are two psychological approaches to therapy started by Ohio natives, William Glasser and Robert Wubbolding, in the mid-1900s. Glasser did not take a liking to the Freudian model, after seeing trained psychodynamic therapists actively not apply Sigmund Freud's prinicples; instead they held their clients responsible for their behavior, which is not much of a practice in psychodynamics, where the fault lies on childhood events and disposition. Glasser noted while he was working in prisons and schools that psychoanalytic training would not help young people and their mental health. According to Gerald Corey, author of *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Glasser thought it best to speak to a client's "sane" side instead of their troubled side (Corey, 2015, pp. 312). This later became the beginnings of what we now know as reality therapy. Wubbolding aided Glasser's new found theory with techniques to apply to clients.

The basic assumptions of choice theory-reality therapy state that symptoms are the result of choices people make for themselves, that we can choose to think, feel and behave the way we truly want to, and that therapy should focus on the present because that is the only state that can be controlled. The theories also hold five basic needs, of which being love and belonging, power, freedom, fun and survival (Corey, 2015, pp. 314). These needs are in everyone from the time of birth until death and if these needs are met, a person lives a satisfied and fulfilled life. Glasser commented that he believed that love and belonging are the primary needs of a person but simultaneously the most difficult to fulfill because a person needs to get these things from a cooperative person, which is not in the receptor's control. Some goals of this type of therapy is to help clients connect or reconnect with the people the client wants to have relationships with, as well as help clients reach and fulfill most (if not all) of their five basic needs.

In the film *Ordinary People* by Robert Redford, Conrad Jarrett is a highschool student that has suffered from a suicide attempt and the recent passing of his older brother, Buck, whom he was very close to. The film shows Conrad's life as he is adjusting to being released from a hospital after his attempt and how he is plagued with guilt and trauma from witnessing the death of his beloved brother. Conrad's parents also each have a different relationship with him; his father wanting to understand Conrad, while his mother almost wants nothing to do with him probably due to the favoritism she gave to Buck and the embarrassment of Conrad trying to kill himself and the town knowing about it. With this turmoil at home, Conrad finds solace with his crush, Jeannine, who is not afraid to be around him and actually listens to what he has to say. Choice theory/reality therapy may be of good use to Conrad because of its nature.

Two techniques in reality therapy that would be useful to the teenager would include the counseling environment and procedures that would lead to change. The counseling environment is important because this is what would allow Conrad to feel comfortable and/or challenged to self-reflect. The therapeutic relationship is the foundation for effective practice (Corey, 2015, pp. 321) and it is crucial for client growth. It is up to the therapist to be caring, accepting, congruent, mildly confrontive and noncoercive with their client. This kind of atmosphere would help Conrad open up about how he is currently feeling and what he is currently doing (and not focusing on the past).

Procedures that would lead to change include two parts: when we are convinced that our present behavior is not meeting our needs and when we believe we can choose other behaviors that will get us closer to what we want. This would help Conrad think about his needs and goals in life and how he can actively reach them.

Reality therapy/choice theory could be extremely beneficial for Conrad, in the sense that it places responsibility for his actions on him, which may help him make choices that will help him live a satisfied life and may even restore the broken relationship he has with his mother and old friends. This theory could also be equally harmful to the student. A lot of his feelings seem to be influenced from past experiences and this type of therapy avoids focusing on the past but focuses more so on the present. By not talking about the past, Conrad may not be able to understand why he feels the way he does and may be haunted by that for a long time until confronted. This type of therapy aight not be able to help him with that.