

Ordinary People Paper: Family System Therapy

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Family systems therapy is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on the family as a whole (Cherry, 2022). One central aspect of this approach is that a family is an emotional unit and individual behavior must be considered in the context of the family. Cherry (2022) points out that people are influenced by their families; however, each person also influences their entire family. In addition, the approach suggests that the family system is more than the sum of its parts. Family system therapy factors in how a person within the family system is affected by a problem or condition, and how it can have a resounding impact on every other member of the family (Cherry, 2022). The assumption is that a client's problematic behavior can be a factor of (1) serving a purpose for the family, (2) unintentionally maintained by family processes, (3) be a function of the family's inability to operate productively (4) be a symptom of dysfunctional patterns handed down across generations (Corey, 2016, p. 404). For that same reason, the strength and stability of the family unit can provide balance and support when one family member is experiencing problems (Cherry, 2022). Furthermore, when examining the family system, the factors of religion, culture, and gender within the framework of the family system are significant.

Therapy approaches that are focused on families can be effective for a number of different issues that affect family members. Such as anger management, divorce, job loss, financial difficulty, parenting, as well as dysfunctional relationships. In terms of mental conditions, family therapy can be useful for a wide range of disorders such as eating disorders, bipolar disorders, personality disorders, substance use disorders, anxiety disorders, and clinical depression (Cherry, 2022). When analyzing individual mental health conditions, family system therapy looks at the contributing role the family system has on the onset or maintenance of that condition.

Family system therapy implements a number of different techniques that are designed to help both individuals and the entire family unit (Cherry, 2022). One of the techniques that I believe would be effective as a mental health practitioner is intergenerational family therapy. This technique focuses on understanding how the pathology of generational influences has affected both individual behavior and how the family unit functions. This technique assists the psychoeducation of the family to understand how patterns acquired from previous generations are affecting the family as they learn new ways of interacting (Cherry, 2022). Another technique I believe would be effective to implement as a mental health practitioner is narrative therapy. This technique focuses on the approach in which people develop a story of their life that helps them better understand their experiences, behaviors, and roles (Cherry, 2022).

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. After identifying those cumulative symptoms, I would consider the application of the technique of narrative therapy. As Conrad's mental health practitioner, I believe that this technique allows Conrad to look at his lived experiences in the past and re-create his story in a way that allows him to comprehend how his behaviors and role in his family system impact the family unit. In addition, it will allow Conrad to grasp how his behaviors are directly influenced by his family system. Ultimately, I believe this technique will be able to subside the symptomology he displayed in the film.

During another 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 his mental health practitioner applying this type of therapy, I would utilize the technique of intergenerational family therapy. I believe that by applying this technique will assist Conrad in looking at the role the family system from both parents played a part in his behaviors and acceptance of those behaviors. Specifically, providing Conrad with insight on the grandparents from his mother's side of the family. In the film his grandparents were active in his life as well as influential on their views of his suicide attempts, ideations and privacy amongst their family system. As a result of applying this technique, dealing with guilt and frustration, the application of this technique will assist him in reducing the guilt, anxiety, and negative emotions that are at the forefront of his behavior issues. Furthermore, this technique will help Conrad develop in the areas of responsibility and maturity that he lacks in the film.

In my opinion, the application of this theory is very useful in terms of looking at an individual's behaviors, problematic issues, and mental conditions from the perspective of a family system. I believe it is beneficial to look at all aspects of an individual's behavior through that scope, being that a large part of who you become is influenced and shapes by your familial views and culture.

Reference

1. Cherry, K. (2022, January 10). *What is Family System Therapy?* Very Well Mind.
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2. Corey, G. (2016). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*. 10th ed. Boston, MA: Cengage Learning US.
3. Redford, R. (1980). *Ordinary People*. Wildwood Enterprise.