

Behavior 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 28, 2023

The behavioral approach to psychotherapy is an approach that morphed through many stages, starting from the 1950s up until the early 2000s. This type of therapy departed from the typical psychoanalytic perspective that was popular at the time, and is now broadened into its “third wave” or “third generation,” according to Gerald Corey, author of *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Corey, 2015, p. 234). This “third generation” of behavior therapy includes different sub-approaches, such as dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT). Behavior therapy is used to treat a range of mental disorders.

There are four major areas of development within behavior therapy, which include classical conditioning, operant conditioning, social-cognitive theory and cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). The inclusion of CBT makes this approach very different from other approaches because of behavior therapy being focused on both the cognitive and behavioral. 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 (2015, p. 233). Clinical professionals that use behavior therapy usually conduct a thorough functional assessment/behavioral analysis to identify conditions within their client by gathering information about situational precursors, in order to problem solve.

In *Ordinary People*, a film by Robert Redford, teenager Conrad Jarrett has just been released back home from a hospital stay after attempting to commit suicide. He has also just lost his older brother to a tragic and unfortunate boating accident. Conrad is facing changes within himself (as a growing teenage boy experiencing puberty), as well as changes within the

relationships around him (including his parents, his friends and his love interest). Behavior therapy might help Conrad during this tumultuous time, leaning into his present thoughts and behaviors and how he can take charge of his life.

Two techniques that could be used on Conrad would be progressive muscle relaxation and social skills training. Progressive muscle relaxation would help Conrad by it being a popular method on helping people cope with stresses produced by daily living (2015, p. 242). Conrad is dealing with getting back to the flow of normal, everyday life, and is dealing with the mending (or lack thereof) relationships between his parents and his peers. Progressive muscle relaxation would help Conrad relax in situations that make him tense, nervous or afraid. He has trouble with flashbacks, graphic memories and dreams that may be calmed by this technique.

Social skills would help Conrad interact more effectively in social situations, i.e. the situations with his parents, his peers, his crush and so on. Conrad is having a tough time communicating with his parents, particularly his mother. She plays her own role in the dysfunctional relationship, but Conrad does not seem to know how to even approach her. Conrad has even distanced himself from his school friends, possibly due to feeling out of place and uncomfortable, since everyone knows he tried to kill himself. Teaching Conrad social skills may help him communicate and interact better in his everyday life. He is going through a rough time and only has Dr. Berger to speak to; it is important to have a solid support system, especially since more than one traumatic incident recently occurred.

Behavior therapy would be a beneficial approach for Conrad Jarrett. Viewers can see the disturbing flashbacks and thought patterns Conrad faces in the movie. These are influencing how he acts and this approach would help him be more familiar with why he thinks the way he does and how this influences his behavior.

References

Corey, G. (2015). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy 10th Edition*.

Redford, R. (Director). (1980). *Ordinary People* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.