

**Ordinary People Application Paper: Rational Emotive and Cognitive Therapy**

Sophia Lee

Alliance Graduate School of Counseling

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Professor George J. Ramos

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Cognitive Behavior Therapy consists of such therapies as Albert Ellis's rational emotive behavior therapy (REBT), Aaron Beck's cognitive therapy (CT), Christine Padesky's strengths-based CBT (SB-CBT), and Donald Meichenbaum's cognitive behavior therapy (Corey, 2017). Although there are differences between the different cognitive therapies, there are six attributes they all share in common:

- 1) a collaborative relationship between client and therapist
- 2) the premise that psychological distress is often maintained by cognitive processes
- 3) a focus on changing cognitions to produce desired changes in affect and behavior
- 4) a present-centered, time-limited focus,
- 5) an active and directive stance by the therapist
- 6) an educational treatment focusing on specific and structured target problems (as cited in Corey, 2017, p. 270).

Ellis's REBT bases therapy on philosophical principles compared to Beck's CT, backed by scientific research. In addition, REBT is highly directive, confrontational, and the therapist's role as a teacher helps clients identify and challenge irrational beliefs (Corey, 2017). Conversely, cognitive therapy uses Socratic dialogue, poses open-ended questions, and helps clients identify misconceptions for themselves. Beck believed clients' distorted beliefs resulted from cognitive errors rather than just their irrational beliefs. Thus, Beck considered that people live by certain underlying assumptions and then have difficulties interpreting and assessing their situations based on those assumptions. Cognitive therapy treats various client issues, such as depression, personality disorders, substance abuse, and couples and families therapy.

Conrad is dealing with underlying assumptions preventing him from getting to a healthier space. For example, some irrational beliefs Conrad may have had are "I am responsible for my

brother's death," "I am responsible for other people worrying about me, or "As long as my parents are happy, I will be happy." These beliefs exhibit symptoms of detachment, sleep disturbances, and general malaise as he attempts to reengage with his life after his suicide attempt.

One technique I would use for Conrad if I were Dr. Berger would be to have Conrad make a list of all the "shoulds" and "musts" in his life to begin challenging some of his irrational beliefs. For instance, his participation on the swim team could stem from previous "shoulds" and "musts," like "I should follow in my brother's footsteps because my mom likes that he swims" or "I must keep my parents happy, so they do not worry about me." Then, as he challenges those beliefs, I could help Conrad change his language from helplessness and self-condemnation to new self-statements to help him think and behave more aligned with his desires. For example, Conrad could start thinking, "Even if my parents are unhappy with my choice to quit swimming, they are responsible for their emotions, and I am responsible for making true choices for me. Therefore, I am not responsible for their emotions."

Another technique I would use is strengths-based cognitive behavior therapy. This type of cognitive therapy would help Conrad focus and create a new way of doing things and establish a vision of how he would like his life to look to bring happiness and other positive traits to alleviate some of the sufferings he experiences. For example, singing is one strength that brings him happiness, so he could look into how to bring more of that activity into his life.

Cognitive behavior therapy would benefit Conrad since it would help him identify irrational beliefs or underlying assumptions affecting his behavior and feelings. Then, as he challenges those cognitive distortions, he can effectively challenge his thoughts, affecting his behavior and decisions and ultimately affecting his feelings, improving how Conrad feels as he

makes decisions that bring him more personal happiness and fulfillment. For example, he may hold a big misconception or irrational belief that he is responsible for his parent's feelings, which held him back from making decisions that would bring him joy. If he realizes he has no control over their emotions and, more importantly, did not cause their feelings, he can make better decisions that would positively affect his life and take their reactions less personally.

## References

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- Redford, R., Sargent, A., Schwary, R. L., Kanew, J., Hamlich, M., Pollack, B., Bennett, P., & Riva, J. M. (1980). *Ordinary People*.