Ordinary People: Family Systems Therapy

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Family systems therapy (FST) differs from the other theories we have covered because it views the individual as part of a system of people with reciprocal relationships. It gleans from different theories and approaches that focus on the relational issues of problems. It can be a difficult adjustment for a counselor to change their perspective from treating a sole person shifting to a systems view. The societal view is that one is autonomous and is free to make independent choices. FST challenges that perspective in that it views a family as the system in which the individual figures out his or her identity, develops, and finds support (Corey, 2021).

FST asserts that the best way to understand a person is to do so within their family system. Corey states that FST sees the family as “inextricably interconnected” (Corey, 2021, p 404). You can’t understand the part without first considering the whole. Clients' maladaptive behaviors are considered to either, serve a function or purpose within the family, are nurtured by the family process, be a result of the family’s inability to function productively, or be dysfunctional patterns or habits handed down through generations. FST requires therapeutic intervention for both the individual and the family as effective change is believed to affect all parts of the system (Corey, 2021).

Family systems therapy can be used with Conrad and his family to see how their individual reactions to losing Buck have influenced their relationships with each other. FST can look into how the relationship between him and his parents factored into his decision to take his own life. In working with his mother they can explore what in the family system causes her to favor one son over another. FST can be used to look at why the mother chooses to react the way she does to those around her. Perhaps some questions about her own upbringing could help her identify if these are behaviors that have been taught to her by previous generations.

Family systems therapy integrates techniques from multiple theories of counseling that best suit the characteristics of the counselor. This speaks to the importance of the therapeutic relationship with the family. It is vital that the counselor convey transparency and empathy. Any techniques used require flexibility on the part of the counselor as they are dealing with a family

of individuals. Some techniques might work better for some than for others. It would be optimal to employ an integrative approach.

Conrad and his family would benefit from FST as they are all grieving a great loss. His parents have lost a son; he has lost a brother. Though both his mother and his father have lost a son they process it differently. It would be beneficial to each family member to be presented with the others' grief and attempt to understand it. If they could see each other's pain it would help to create change within the system and allow them to become more functional within it.

References

Corey, G. (2021). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (10th ed.). Cengage.

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