

**Ordinary People Application Paper: Feminist Therapy**

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Feminist therapy involves understanding and acknowledging the psychological oppression of women and marginalized people (Corey, 2017). In particular, women's socialization patterns promote giving away their power and voice in relationships unknowingly (as cited in Corey, 2017). Although primarily women are clients in therapy and most practitioners at the master's level are women, white males from American or European cultures have predominately founded most theories that do not apply universally (Corey, 2017). According to Worell and Remer (2003), constructs of feminist theory are "gender fair, flexible-multicultural, interactionist, and life-span oriented" (as cited in Corey 2017, p.341). In addition, Gilligan (1977) was the first to identify that male development was considered the norm by which female development was judged (as cited in Corey, 2017). Lastly, feminist therapists describe personality as profoundly influenced by societal gender-role expectations, so once the sex is identified, those expectations deeply influence personality.

Feminist therapy would reframe Conrad's symptoms as a resistance to oppression and how he is trying to cope and survive within his family environment. Since the basis of diagnosis is what the dominant culture views as standard, feminist therapists prefer to label symptoms as distress rather than psychopathology, look for resilience rather than deficits, and honor differences in strengths rather than look at weaknesses (Corey, 2017). Conrad may be living under his brother's shadow as the standard of normalcy in his household. The oppressive nature of his family might come from Conrad trying to assimilate into the accepted norm, thus unknowingly giving his power away. Therefore, looking and assessing for strengths, skills, and resources become the primary focus in therapy (as cited in Corey, 2017).

One technique I would use with Conrad might be to help him become more aware of his power to change things in his life by asking him, "what is the most powerful thing you could do

for yourself right now" (Corey, 2017, p.349). Conrad may be used to being told what to do or following what he thinks he is supposed to do. Thus, Conrad has become a passive participant in his life as he has given his power to please his mom, for example. Empowering him to look at the power he does have may connect him to choices that align more with his desires.

Another technique might be to look at how gender roles were defined, what constituted masculinity in Conrad's household, and ultimately how that affected the choices he made for himself. For instance, if Bucky's personality traits defined masculinity, then Conrad's singing in the school choir or being more sensitive could have been seen as more feminine and, thus, less desirable. Likewise, if Conrad felt the standard of masculinity was his older brother, he would most likely make choices that followed in his brother's footsteps. Again, however, those choices might not accurately reflect his talents or interests.

I am not sure if feminist therapy would necessarily help Conrad since his mother and father both equally seemed to have difficulty fully expressing their emotions to each other, and his mom seemed to have a strong voice in the family. If anything, his dad seemed to cater primarily to his mom's wishes and desires, which was in conflict when his dad wanted to stick around for Christmas because of Conrad. Conrad's mom wanted to get away, but to her, it may seem like his father chose his son over her and what might help her in her grieving process. His mother seemed to have more problems expressing her emotions than his dad, but his parents did conform to specific traditional values where the man works, and the woman takes care of the home. However, one aspect of feminist therapy that would help Conrad is creating a safe climate to reflect on his needs, choices, painful past and present, and hopes for his future. In addition, talking about how Conrad sees his masculinity or defines masculinity could help him accept the

parts of his personality that might seem more "feminine," unlike his older brother, Bucky, especially if that is how he viewed being accepted by his mother.

## References

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