

**Feminist Therapy applied to Conrad in Ordinary People**

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## **Feminist Therapy Overview**

Feminist therapy largely grew out of the recognition by women that the traditional models of therapy were limited due to the inherent bias of historical white male theoreticians. It is built upon the principle that a person's social, cultural, and political background informs their problems more than the traditional view that there is an inner issue that the client needs to address (Corey, 2017).

Feminist theory has evolved to emphasize an approach that fosters an understanding of how power and privilege serve to continue to oppress marginalized people (American Psychological Association; Enns & Byars-Winston, as cited in Corey, 2017).

The principles and practices of feminist psychotherapy are also useful in working with male clients, individuals from diverse racial and cultural backgrounds, and people who are committed to addressing social justice issues in counseling practice (Corey, 2017).

## **Application**

The therapist's job is not to take away their client's pain or struggle, or to choose for the client, but to be present in such a way that the client will truly be empowered to make significant decisions (Corey, 2017).

To apply this to Conrad (Ordinary People, 1980), I would convey that I wanted to establish an egalitarian working relationship as a way to help Conrad begin to regain his personal power. I would also spend time explaining my view of the therapy process and how it works.

I would also encourage Conrad to try to understand his parents' behavior in the context of the societal expectations and stereotypes that they were raised with. I might also ask Conrad questions such as "I'm wondering how you might use your new view of your own strength to create the life that you want".

### **Techniques**

Family therapists also make use of reframing as a way of shifting from placing the problem on the victim to considering societal factors in the environment that contribute to a client's problem. Therapists may also use self-disclosure as a way to affirm a client's experience of oppression as valid (Corey, 2017).

Therapists may also engage in bibliotherapy, and suggest their client read a particular book. In the case of Conrad, I might suggest a book such as W. S. Pollack's (1998) book "Real Boys" which shares the gender-role socialization that many boys experience.

### **Benefits**

In the case of Conrad, he is expected to start to see that he doesn't need to keep blaming himself. He will start to learn that many of the messages he has received from his parents and from society about what it means to be a good son have been one-dimensional and flawed.

The major goal of feminist therapy is to replace the current patriarchal system with feminist consciousness and create a society that values equality in relationships, diversity, stresses interdependence, and encourages both women and men to define themselves rather than being defined by societal stereotypes.

## References

Redford, R. (1980), *Ordinary People*. Wildwood Enterprises Inc.

Corey G., (2017). *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, (10th ed.). Cengage Learning