

**Reality Therapy Ordinary People Paper**

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GCN 502: Theories and Foundations of Counseling

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April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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The concepts underlying reality therapy were first developed by William Glasser in the 1950s and 1960s when he created the framework of choice theory, which is concerned with how people make their own decisions and how these decisions can either fulfill or not fulfill fundamental drives and goals. Choice theory is the theoretical basis for reality therapy; it explains why and how we function (Corey, 2015, p. 314). Reality therapy offers a delivery system for helping individuals effectively control their lives. The basic assumptions for choice theory are that symptoms result from choices we've made, and we can choose to think, feel and behave differently. With choice theory, emphasis is placed on personal responsibility, and the therapist's function is to keep therapy focused on the present and not the symptoms. Choice theory rejects the traditional notion that people with problematic physical and psychological symptoms are mentally ill (Corey, 2015, p. 318).

Nonetheless, Glasser has cautioned people to exercise caution when using psychiatry because it can harm one's physical and mental health. He opposes the DSM-5 for primarily being utilized by the conventional psychiatric establishment for diagnosis and therapy (Corey, 2015, p. 318). Glasser questions conventional wisdom regarding mental disease and its management through medication, particularly the pervasive use of psychiatric drugs that frequently has detrimental physical and psychological side effects (Corey, 2015, p. 318). Choice theory's general ideas about human behavior assume that people often mistakenly choose misery in their best attempt to meet their needs. In addition, people tend to act responsibly when they meet their needs without keeping others from meeting their needs, and a person's quality world is like a picture album of specific wants and precise ways to satisfy these wants. Lastly, according to choice theory, all internally motivated behavior is geared toward meeting one or more of our basic genetically encoded needs: love and belonging, power, freedom, fun, and survival

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(physiological needs). When it comes to reality therapists, the notion of transference is rejected. The main character Conrad in the film *Ordinary People* (1980), experienced the tragic loss of his older brother Buck in a boat accident. Unfortunately, Conrad was present when the accident happened. Since then, Conrad has been deeply wounded emotionally and mentally and scarred and traumatized to the point of attempting suicide. It was clear that Conrad was showing signs of survivor's guilt and dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to being directly exposed to the traumatic event. Conrad's symptoms in the film were recurring nightmares and flashbacks, lack of motivation, sleep, and interest in normal activities, loss of appetite, difficulty focusing in class, and feeling isolated and alone.

Choice theory would suggest that Conrad was in need of several basic genetically encoded needs, one being love and belonging from his closest relationships (mother and father). Conrad was dealing with a cold and distant parent who seemed to have pushed him away emotionally and mentally after the death of his brother. Freedom, power, and fun are other basic needs that would address some of Conrad's feelings of guilt, hopelessness, and shame. Although some of the symptoms that Conrad was experiencing were due to PTSD, choice theory would imply that Conrad's choices are the reason for the symptoms he was experiencing because he has the choice to think, feel, and behave differently by taking personal responsibility. This could be true in the sense that Conrad can choose to get help from a professional and deal with his guilt to free himself and keep his focus on the present rather than the past. Focusing on the past "protects" clients from facing the reality of unsatisfying present relationships and focusing on symptoms does the same thing (Corey, 2015, p. 317).

Many of Conrad's issues stem from his fixation on the past and his present relationships with those closest to him. If I were Conrad's therapist, I would first create a therapeutic

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environment that's supportive, challenging, and non-coercive. I would then first address and devote a small amount of time to Conrad's feelings and thoughts on his traumatic past so we can focus on the present. Although the past has propelled Conrad to the present, it does not have to determine his future. By focusing on present problems, especially interpersonal concerns, therapy can generally be shortened considerably (Corey, 2015, p. 318). Conrad's symptoms from PTSD are present; however, our focus would be on what choices Conrad can make in the present to alleviate those symptoms. In addition, I would help Conrad find ways to fulfill his need for love and belonging. The primary goal of reality therapy is to help my client learn better ways of fulfilling all of their needs, including achievement, power or inner control, freedom or independence, and fun.

Lastly, I would address Conrad's conscious behavioral problems by implementing a specific procedure called "WDEP" that leads to changes in behavior. The WDEP system includes questions for my client. For example, wants – what does my client want to be and do? Doing and direction – What is my client doing, and where do they want to go? Evaluation – does my client's present behavior have a reasonable chance of getting them what they want? Lastly, planning for change (SAMIC). As a reality therapist, my goal is to assist Conrad in evaluating his own behavioral direction, specific actions, wants, perceptions, level of commitment, possibilities for new directions, and action plans. Conrad can then decide what to change and formulate a plan to facilitate the desired changes. The outcome is better relationships, increased happiness, and a sense of inner control over their life considerably (Corey, 2015, p. 319). The techniques used in Reality therapy are helpful for Conrad because it places emphasis on responsibility and choice, which can help Conrad acquire a sense of self-direction and empowerment. During the film, Conrad is not very talkative with his therapist Dr. Berger and shows much resistance at the

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beginning of his sessions. Reality therapy can be effectively used with individuals who manifest reluctance and who are highly resistant.

References

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