

Twelve Theories

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## Twelve Theories

### Abstract

In this paper, we will be discussing twelve psychological theories, and how they will be utilized in the case study of a film entitled “Ordinary People.” Some individuals have difficulty coping with feelings after a tragic loss of a beloved family member, some seek professional counseling, and others choose to work through them under their recognizance. Either way, each theory has tools to assist every individual through grieving, discouragement, inferiority, negative patterns of thinking, reinforcing understanding and trust, building rapport, and being loved and accepted.

## Ordinary People Paper

The movie "Ordinary People" introduces an upper-middle-class family living in the suburbs and dealing with emotional and psychological turmoil due to the unexpected death of their elder son and older brother Buck, during a boat accident. The main character Conrad, playing Buck's younger brother, was with him during the boating accident and watched his brother give up and submit to drowning. Conrad is in emotional and psychological turmoil, cannot regulate his emotions, was hospitalized for a suicide attempt, deals with fear, and blames himself for his brother's demise. His father, Calvin, appears to be responsible and forgiving, working towards solutions between Conrad and his mother Beth, while coming to terms with the possible demise of his marriage due to the lack of love and comfort Beth is unwilling to give Conrad. Amid their grief, the mother appears cold-hearted, indifferent toward her son Conrad and struggling with her pain and uncertainty concerning her family's future. Her recourse is to edge Conrad out of their affairs, put distance between them, and control how society sees the family after the dreadful tragedy.

## Twelve Theories

### Discussion

#### *Behavior Therapy*

This theory focuses on the client's current problems and how to assist the client in changing them. "Behavior therapy utilizes a combination of various techniques, such as relaxation training, behavioral assessment, self-modification programs, operant conditioning techniques, mindfulness, acceptance-based cognitive behavior therapy, modeling, social skills training, assertiveness training, and ACT (acceptance and commitment therapy), just to name a few (Tan, 2011). These "therapies are focused on the thoughts, beliefs, influences, actions, relational framework, behavior patterns, and learned behaviors that can be changed" through the application of the client.

The counselor, in a session with Conrad, could utilize "mindfulness, which helps Conrad to focus on pleasant mental images in order to evoke feelings of relaxation, and use acceptance-based cognitive behavior therapy, which consists of committing to values and goals, accepting unwanted feelings as part of his life experience, and exercising calming and coping self-talk, or self-instruction" to combat physical violence against himself and others (Tan, 2011).

The counselor probably found it intriguing when "Conrad had the epiphany concerning "who can't forgive who, about his Mother" during their fifth session together because he assumes his mother is never going to forgive him for trying to commit suicide" but in actuality, the first step in forgiveness is understanding that you must forgive yourself by, accepting responsibility for what happened, acknowledging your feelings of remorse, opening your heart to receive kindness and compassion, learning from the experience, accepting the fact that we are all flawed human beings, worthy of love and forgiveness, and we must accept the limitation of others because people can only give as much as they're able" (Ordinary People", 2015).

## Twelve Theories

### Discussion

#### *Cognitive Behavior Therapy*

The task of this therapist is to function as a “pathologist, educator, and technical consultant who assesses dysfunctional cognitive processes and works with the client to create learning experiences that may set straight these dysfunctional cognitions, and the behavioral, and affective patterns that have a mutual relation” (Tan, 2011). This theory consists of “actively scheduling activities that bring a sense of skillfulness and knowledge, accomplishment, pleasure, enjoyment, and social connection. “Bibliotherapy consists of self-help homework reading for the client to help the client to continue to make therapeutic progress between sessions. Books like *Feeling Good*, *Love is Never Enough*, and *Mind Over Mood* can be used in therapy for clients suffering from Cognitive Therapy.”

After the assessment, the therapist can assist Conrad in defining specific areas where he wants to make a change, for example, “Conrad indicates that he does not want to feel apologetic for his existence, and he has trouble talking with his boss and co-workers, so the counselor introduces role-playing, and behavior rehearsal; the counselor is also initiating more effective behaviors, as the counselor plays the role of the boss” (“*Ordinary People*”, 2015).

As the counselor explains the probable reasons for Karen’s demise; like guilt, irrationality, undeserved self-punishment, depression, and how it’s a counterproductive way of feeling, he also has to be mindful of Conrad’s anxiety level, and the frightening images that his mind could produce, and in that case the counselor may introduce into the therapy sessions *Developing Placement Imagery*, to help Conrad to visualize or imagine calming and coping imagery in place of frightening imagery; so that this loss does not further take him into an avoidant state of mind.

## Discussion

*Rational Emotive Therapy*

There are three major therapeutic techniques used in REBT, in the categories of cognitive techniques which focus on irrational beliefs, as the root of emotional disorders. Emotive techniques, and behavioral or behavioristic techniques. The characteristics of these therapies are forceful, active, directive, and vigorous, with a disputational therapeutic style, and disputing irrational beliefs is a core cognitive technique in REBT. Clients are taught the A-B-C model or theory of personality functioning, in which A stands for Activating Events, or situations encountered by them; B for the beliefs that are triggered by the activating events in their lives that are irrational, dogmatic, absolutistic, and negative. C is for the consequences (emotional & Behavioral (feelings of depression and anxiety, and avoidance of feared situations). D is when the REBT therapist helps the client to go on to D, for disputing their irrational beliefs in a vigorous, active, and directive way, first by the therapist, and then by the client.

In the film, “Ordinary People, we see a volatile explosion of argumentation between Conrad and the therapist, in a therapeutic attempt to cause Conrad to get angry and express his feelings, the therapist insights him with snide words, and quick verbal comebacks, which causes Conrad to lose his temper and have an epiphany about his mother concerning “who it is that can’t forgive who” (“ Ordinary People”, 2015).

A turning point in this event was watching how Conrad’s negative self-defeating beliefs and resistance to grief slowly changed. He developed a new sense of compassion and purpose when he permits himself to grieve over Buck and Karen, and the second turning point is when he starts to become stronger and more courageous when he hugs his mother in the living room and kisses her on the cheek, as though it was a sign of repentance and acceptance.

## Twelve Theories

### Discussion

#### *Adlerian Therapy*

This theory focuses on the client's strengths, assets, and psychological and emotional abilities; it is rooted in "lifestyle, social interest, and intentional behavior, examining feelings of inferiority, superiority, goal direction, birth order, and fictional finalism," which is the future goal that a person aspires to achieve, Tan (2011). The counselor needs to continue to engage the client in reflective conversation by leading them into a series of questions that may produce a deeper or more aggressive response.

The counselor could ask Conrad about his relationship with Buck before the accident. Has Buck ever shared moments of intimate conversation with you concerning any fears, doubts, failures, or feelings of inferiority or superiority while growing up?

Was there ever a moment when Buck discussed his relationship with his mother and whether he felt loved, needed, or inferior to him? The counselor could use these questions to gain insight into whether Conrad had an insight into any weaknesses that Buck might have had to build a foundation of strength in Conrad.

The counselor could also use the "Push Button Technique" which is geared to cause a reaction in Conrad to teach him how to create the feelings he desires and to control specific frames of thought that may be displeasing and cause anger, pain, and resentment. With this technique, Conrad would be asked to remember an unpleasant event that he experienced and connect with that feeling which may produce a sense of anger, pain, or rage, and then connect with a pleasant memory that may have the ability to create a calm, relaxed nature, less anxiety, and positivity so he can recognize his ability to control his emotions and his thoughts, and choices he makes in life (Tan, 2011., p.71).

## Discussion

*Psychoanalytic Therapy*

Conrad, who plays Buck's younger brother, is having various disturbing dreams that are in direct correlation with the boat accident that caused Buck's life, so now, the Counselor may introduce dream analysis therapy into the visits with Conrad, which involves trying to unlock repressed feelings that can be expressed in an individual's dreams, by "interpreting the content to reveal underlying motives or symbolic meaning; through extracting specific symbols from the dreams, and asking Conrad to share thoughts, words, and anything that comes to mind" (Tan, 2011., pg. 48).

This therapy aims to bring the" unconscious nature into the conscious nature and help the individual become less controlled by the biological drives and impulses of the superego; because unconscious thoughts and feelings need clarity so that the individual can understand how to deal with their thoughts and feelings" realistically, according to Freud, Tan (2011). The therapist would look for fears, hidden motives, desires, and symbolic events or images as they appear in the dream, and a series of tests that show pictures, words, or scenes to help reveal what has been repressed in the unconscious may be helpful, and this is called "interpretation."

The Counselor must assess that Conrad has post-traumatic stress disorder, by using the "PSS-1-5, which consist of twenty symptom-related questions and four additional questions in order to assess distress and interference in Conrad's daily life, as well as the beginning of symptoms and the length" ("PTSD Assessment Instruments," n.d.) also, ask questions concerning his eating habits, sleep function, socialization, family dynamics, panic attacks, flashbacks, prolonged psychological distress, extreme bouts of rage, and an inability to express positive emotions. These questions are viable because it's necessary to exempt any mimicking symptoms.

## Twelve Theories

### Discussion

#### *Jungian Therapy*

Jungian therapy implements confession, which helps the client to release secrets, and unconscious and conscious thoughts and feelings that might have been repressed. “This therapy specializes in assisting the individual in becoming whole by introducing techniques that connect the unconscious with the conscious; hence, they become one unique person, called the individuation of the client.” (Tan, 2011., p. 89-90).

The counselor would allow the client to develop personal and individual meaning in their life with new aspirations for their future. The Counselor would engage Conrad in conversation concerning the relationship with his mother and how he sees that relationship six months from now. Role-playing might help use reflection and open-ended questions, so Conrad can take the time to consider his thoughts, control his emotions, take responsibility for forgiving, and try connecting with his mother psychologically and emotionally before actually seeing her.

During role-play, “Conrad may experience a transference of various aspects of himself onto the counselor. Visa-versa, the counselor projecting onto Conrad, which can help to build a closer relationship with the counselor,” but the experience must be acknowledged and spoken about in detail so that Conrad can develop a clearer perception of the therapist’s role in helping him to recognize his projections, resolve his issues, and have a better chance at creating a better life for himself (Tan, 2011).

This therapy should have long-term effects on Conrad’s life if he applies the tools given and takes the time to analyze his thoughts before his actions while remaining calm, responsible, and strong in his convictions concerning control over his emotions. Accepting the things, we cannot change and being okay with it isn’t easy, but it’s a steppingstone to maturity, and healing.

*Existential Therapy*

Existential therapist “believe their clients have the freedom to choose to live life as genuinely as possible in spite of their past experiences which may have included pain, trauma, or emotional and physical abuse” Conrad is encouraged not to dwell on the past events with his Mom, brother Buck, and the loss of Karen, but to embrace his future, and his freedom to choose personal values, and make rational decisions concerning his life’s circumstances” and the relationship with his Dad (Tan, 2011). This therapist will use empathetic listening, genuine dialogue, and gentle but firm confrontation when necessary, with Conrad for support, self-disclosure, and encouragement, as well as shedding some of the therapist own experiences in order to assist Conrad in dealing with core existential problems of freedom, choice, and responsibility.

An example of this would be “Conrad explaining to Dr. Berger that if he would of known that Karen was going to kill herself, he would of taken on the responsibility of preventing it” and the counselor using firm confrontation, questions him about trying to take on another person’s situation without resolving the extreme situations in his life first, “you saw her once, and you want to take her on too” (“Ordinary People”, 2015).

Due to Conrad’s anxiety about death, and the need to act in some way, the counselor could talk about the “basic contingencies of life, or existential givens that are certainties in life; for example, everyone must die, and out of death, can come life, out of meaningless, can come meaning, and out of isolation, and aloneness can come intimacy” (Tan, 2011., pg. 108) so that he can come to terms with the idea that “existence is an ongoing cycle from nonbeing to being, and he has a right to choose to be a part of life’s cycle” and live life to its fullest.

*Person Centered Therapy*

This therapy also known as “nondirective, and client-centered therapy, was developed by Carl Rogers; and the focus of this therapy is congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic understanding; which is the role of the therapist with the client, so that the client is not perceived as someone who is sick, and in need of a cure” (Tan, 2011). The atmosphere would be one of a warm, compassionate, and genuine therapeutic relationship in order to produce positive change and functional growth. The client is viewed as good and trustworthy, with an innate tendency toward self-determination, and self-actualization.

The therapist would use the aspects of this therapy to assist Conrad in “self-actualization, and self-determination by sharing techniques to help him maintain relationships, finding humor in his mistakes, discovering his purpose, strengths, and short comings” learning to accept people for who they are instead of who he thinks they should be, and working towards goals to achieve his aspirations, and personal responsibilities. (Tan, 2011).

Considering Conrad’s feeling of unworthiness, and anxiety, the therapist might consider the possibility of “subception (a subliminal emotion provoking stimulus, that threatens or is incongruent with one’s self-concept)” in the sharp suggestion to go and clean his filthy room, and the look on Conrad’s face, as though his mom were deliberately calling him filthy (“Ordinary People”, 2015).

The therapist must be extremely careful not to “lose themselves as they empathetically share in Conrad’s internal frame or subjective world of experience, and find themselves in danger of losing his or hers own sense of self, and clinical objectivity, and supreme regard for the primacy and autonomy of the self, can lead to self-worship, and self-objectivity” (Tan, 2011).

*Gestalt Theory*

This therapy focuses on pragmatic methods rather than verbal ones, and the techniques include “empty chair, converting questions into statements, holism, field theory, the now, the figure-formation process, unfinished business, and experiential dream analysis by increasing the client’s awareness of the present, and the holistic integration of body and mind. The therapist is directive, active, empathetic, and confrontational to assist the client in growing from dependence to self-support, while integrating the obstructive parts of their personality” (Tan, 2011).

The therapist may want to introduce “The Now” form of therapy to Conrad, to emphasize the power he has presently, to promote emotional, psychological, and intellectual change, as he learns the techniques, and applies them to his everyday routine, through answering what and how questions; for example, when Conrad says: “Do you really feel that.” The therapist will ask him to convert the question into a statement, so Conrad says: “I don’t think you really feel that.” This technique is meant to help Conrad acknowledge his beliefs, and feelings while taking responsibility for them.

Due to the volatile relationship with his mother, and the questions that his brother Buck can never answer; the therapist could use the “empty chair technique” as a means of self-actualization and unlocking the unconscious mindset between the super-ego and the underdog, which is the passive side of Conrad’s character, to bring about a more effective integration of himself as a whole person (Tan, 2011).

Using this therapy in Conrad’s life, should assist him in depending less on others, and trusting himself to fulfil his needs and become more efficient, mature, and self-aware.

*Reality Therapy*

Was founded by William Glasser and is an “approach to therapy that focuses on the present, and emphasizes the client’s strengths, and ability to make choices, and control behavior. This is a choice therapy and offers revisions and modifications of control theory such as, (avoiding criticizing, blaming, or comparing, avoiding relying on excuses, and avoids discussing symptoms)” (Tan, 2011). Glasser believed that people are responsible for choosing their own thinking, and actions that affect their emotional and psychological functioning.

Conrad has a desire to change the way he thinks his mother feels about him, the passiveness, and overly supportive defense concerning his Mother’s actions or words from his father, the fact that Karen took her life, and the fact that Buck gave up and died; but his own psychological and physical needs are not met, and change happens when people have a purpose to change.

The Counselor will use “these techniques to encourage Conrad to seek his own positive power from within and gain a sense of achieving, encouraging loving himself so that he can love others and find his place of belonging in family and community” (Tan, 2011). Conrad would be encouraged to release the burdens and find his own personal freedom, and maintain his personal space, a place to relax, enjoy life and embrace new relationships.

Through forming a close connection with the therapist, Conrad has a fantastic opportunity to “reform, form and strengthen connections with friends, family, and community by developing a plan with his therapist” to address his needs while withholding criticism, and blaming others for his plights (Tan, 2011).

*Family Systems*

Family Systems Therapy was “developed by Alfred Adler, and this approach is based on an educational model, with emphasis on family atmosphere, constellation, and the interaction between family and life’s circumstances” (Tan, 2011), of which the family is rooted. The family, “called a social system, has characteristics, rules, various roles, communication patterns, and power structure; and aligned within the system are sub-systems including parent-child, siblings, marital, and co-parenting subsystems” (Horner, 2012).

If the counselor were looking into the family systems, and structures using a genogram, which is (a way of recording and interpreting family history, so one can better understand the genetic, social, medical and cultural aspects of a family, through a series of questions) from Conrad, and possibly his dad; then there’s a good chance that some of the difficult characteristics in the framework of his immediate family, might have historical connections to past family relations.

Bowen’s theory states “the action of one family member is affected, and affects the reaction of another”, families affect their members feelings, thoughts, and actions profoundly, and it seems as though they are all living under the same “emotional skin” (“Introduction to the Eight Concepts — the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family,” n.d.).

In the “Jarrett family, we see the slow emotional, psychological, and communicative decline, due to the death of the eldest Son. The mother distracts herself from reality and pain through material things, and assuring what goes on in the house, stays in the house. Conrad is struggling with survivor’s guilt, accompanied with emotional, and psychological distress. The father is tangled in emotional repression and doesn’t validate the feelings of others” and a therapist would initiate a re-orientation of the family through family systems therapy.

*Christian Therapy*

Christian therapy is seen as a “consecrated counseling with one who counsels from a Christian world view, with spiritual values, motivations, and actively seeks God’s presence, intervention, resources, and spiritual leadership, within ethical guidelines. This therapist does not initiate discussion of spiritual or religious issues with the client, and does not openly direct, impose or employ resources or interventions such as prayer, and scripture in therapy with the client” (Tan, 2011).

This therapist using an “utter integration approach, will be silently praying for the client, and be genuine in showing agape love, and empathetic understanding to the client. The therapist will reflect on biblical values and convictions without imposing them on the client, or intentionally discussing religious issues in a conversation with the client”, as to persuade the client toward the therapist convictions.

Prayer is known as a spiritual resource or intervention that is used in explicit integration. It is described as simply communing with God, and refers to other ways of experiencing or focusing on God like, meditation (waiting and worshipping in God’s presence, making their request known unto God), having a conversation that’s relational, and filled with gratitude, seeking the transformation we all need. Inner-healing prayer, “which is used in a clinically sensitive way, with informed consent from the client, should be used when the therapist has engaged in proper client assessment, proper timing, with client comprehensive treatment; after guiding the client into a relaxed state, using brief relaxation strategies ( slow, deep breathing, calming self-talk, and pleasant prayer and bible imagery)” (Tan, 2011., pg. 344).

“Close the prayer calmly and discuss the inner-healing prayer experience with the client.”

## Conclusion

There is such a variety of psychological theories, and approaches that implement various counseling techniques, from practical ideas, and assumptions to spiritual, ethical, humanistic, and cognitive resources, which sync with the realities of our lives. Behavioral counseling theories, assist in problematic behavior and thinking, in an environment that may re-enforce problems. Psychoanalytical theories may help people to understand that psychological problems can be influenced from unconscious drives, motivations or extensions of past experiences, or relationships; and every theory whether from a Christian perspective or practical incentive bares a truth, that can be shed abroad in the hourglass of our lives.

As Christian multicultural counselors, we learn and engage in a variety of preferred models, from theoretical categories, and our task is to determine through continued experience and training, which theories best fit our personal counseling styles, function, and ethical and spiritual perceptions. These theories are not geared to work within your comfort zones because they each present a challenge, first to the counselor and then to the client who will submit to be counseled with them. “Our awareness of ourselves, and those around us is more frequently marked by acceptance, compassion, and understanding” (Wicks, 2012).

## Twelve Theories

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Twelve Theories

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## Twelve Theories

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