

Behavior Therapy Ordinary People Paper

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[Shortened Title up to 50 Characters] 2

The origins of behavior therapy (behavioral approach) began in the 1950s and early 1960s. It is grounded on a scientific view of human behavior, allowing for a methodical and structured approach to counseling. Behavioral therapists focus on directly observable behavior, current determinants of behavior, learning experiences that promote change, tailoring treatment strategies to individual clients, and rigorous assessment and evaluation (Corey, 2015, p. 233).

Behavior therapy is a therapeutic approach that's been used to treat a variety of psychological disorders in certain client populations. Some psychological disorders successfully treated using this approach are anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, eating and weight disorders, sexual problems, pain management, and hypertension (Corey, 2015, p. 233). There are four key areas of development that can be used to understand modern behavior therapy: (1) classical conditioning, (2) operant conditioning, (3) social-cognitive theory, and (4) cognitive behavior therapy.

Behavior therapy is primarily action-oriented and educational, meaning therapists will teach their clients self-management skills. A contemporary trend in behavior therapy is creating procedures that give clients control which would broaden their range of freedom. According to this type of therapy, behavior can be operationally defined; it includes overt actions and internal processes. In addition, change can occur without insight into underlying dynamics and the origins of a psychological problem. Behaviorists would ask, “*What* treatment, by *whom*, is the most effective for *this* individual with *that* specific problem, and under *which* set of circumstances?” The general goals of behavior therapy are to increase personal choice and to create new conditions for learning.

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

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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. Behaviorists would look at Conrad's circumstances and the issues he is facing and try to figure out what treatment/approach would be the most effective for him for his specific set of problems. In addition, behaviorists would assume that Conrad's behavior and pattern of thinking result from his environment and specific factors, like learning to cope with his traumatic past and present relationships. The behaviorist would use the functional assessment of behavior (Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence model) to understand key components of Conrad's behavior in order to achieve change in his unwanted behavior.

If I were Conrad's therapist, I would use EMDR as one of the techniques to treat Conrad's symptoms. EMDR is a form of exposure therapy that entails assessment and preparation, imaginal flooding, and cognitive restructuring in treating individuals with traumatic memories (Corey, 2015, p. 247). EMDR is an integrative psychotherapeutic approach that considers current mental health problems stemming from past experiences that have been maladaptively stored neurophysiologically as unprocessed memories (Corey, 2015, p. 247). This approach and treatment for Conrad would be helpful because it would involve using rapid, rhythmic eye movements and other bilateral stimulation to treat his traumatic stress. DBT and Mindfulness-based approaches would also be techniques I would use on Conrad because they help treat symptoms related to anxiety, depression, relationship issues, and PTSD. These

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approaches can also treat behavioral problems such as suicidal behavior and self-harm. I believe behavior therapy can help Conrad restore his complicated relationship with his mom, the PTSD he's developed, his suicidal thoughts and impulses, his guilt, shame, and the anxiety he struggles with because of his brother's death. It can help him accept what happened and what is and create positive change in his life.

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