
Robert Redford's Drama Movie , Ordinary People: A Psychological Analysis

The movie that I decided to watch and analyze from a psychological point of view for this reaction paper is Ordinary People based on the book by Judith Guest. Ordinary People describes the life of the main character, Conrad Jarrett, and his mother and father (Beth and Calvin Jarrett) after the death of his older brother Buck. The book is mainly from Conrad's point of view considering it is about how Conrad is dealing with Buck's death. After the death of his older brother, caused by a terrible boating accident, Conrad tried to commit suicide by slashing his wrists, because he feels troubled by the fact that his brother is now dead and he feels as if it is his fault.

Conrad's suicide attempt was thwarted when he was discovered by his father before he bled out. Since then Conrad has been seeing a therapist to help him come to terms with his brother's death and his suicide attempt. It seems that Conrad's attempts at recovery are thwarted by his lack of interest in life and low motivation that he has about things. The family not only has to deal with the death of Buck, now they also have to deal with Conrad's suicide attempt and his poor emotional health.

The symptoms that Conrad seems to exhibit throughout the movie is suicidal tendencies/thoughts/actions, his lackluster attitude toward life, his low motivation to really become interested in the things he used to do before his brother's death, nervousness at every little thing, and at times how Conrad seems to be really unemotional attached from others and didn't seem to care much sometimes. I consider these things symptoms because it seems like for the greater half of the story Conrad is exhibiting low motivation at everything he used to do before his life reached a downward slide. Conrad no longer wants to hang out with his friends, he doesn't want to stay on the swimming team anymore, and even ordinary things, like getting ready for school, feels like Conrad is going through the motions. This type of behavior was pretty consistent throughout the story no matter where Conrad was. He always felt that life just didn't have the meaning it did for him before. Conrad feels that everyone else received their direction in life, but he missed the memo or something (NIH, 2015).

The nervousness that Conrad felt throughout the movie seemed to be pretty consistent throughout the book. Conrad was constantly being nervous and worrying about if he failed a quiz/test, if his friend would be late picking him up for school, would his mother worry, because he is late getting to school, and he is always worrying about doing something that will cause others to think that something is wrong with him again. This may feel like a few of the normal things that Conrad should be nervous about or that he should worry about because of the situation he is in, but he is constantly nervous and he is constantly worrying about every little thing that he is really putting so much stress on himself (NIH, 2015).

The next symptom is the anger that Conrad seems to carry with him now. At first in the film when Conrad is starting out he avoids voicing to others what he really thinks of situations, like when Stillman was making fun of him for taking an interest in Jeannine Pratt and when he really wanted to quit the swim team because he really didn't like Coach Salan. It gives you the thought that Conrad is a regular person who does not need anymore problems in his life so he

avoids conflict with others just to make sure that he does not add any more trouble in his life or burden others.

Later on through the film this feels like it isn't the case, at least in my opinion. Throughout the story later on Conrad seems to have a blasé attitude towards ruining the relationships he has with people, and not caring if he is distancing himself from others. When Stillman starts making fun of him later in the story Conrad responds with an equally offensive comeback, Conrad offends Lazenby later on in this part of the film as well and he just doesn't seem to care if he lost any friends at all. Conrad comments that they were his brother's friends anyways so it doesn't matter if they don't want to hang out with him anymore he doesn't need them. It's like Conrad no longer cares others and their feelings anymore, and if they are going to be too sensitive about the replies he gives to their smart remarks they are no longer needed in his life. Conrad also acts like this earlier in the film when he meets up with his friend Karen that he had met at the hospital.

Their meeting was so quick and she seemed too busy to stay long to meet him that after she leaves he sarcastically remarks to himself that it was great seeing you after a long time Karen, who needs you or anybody else for that matter. Conrad is again emotionally detaching himself from yet another friend and it seems he is hurt by Karen's early departure, so he feels that if anyone doesn't have time for him why should he have to make time for them. This type of behavior seems to happen when he is speaking to those he used to socialize with before or during the time that his life took a turn for the worse. When you really get into the movie you see that Conrad is trying to suppress his emotions and to stay unemotional for many situations, so he has a lot of pent up anger. Any other people that he managed to talk to once he returned to school, Suzanne or Jeanine, they seemed to communicate alright.

The biggest symptom of all from Conrad is his suicidal thoughts and actions (NIH, 2015). The whole reason Conrad has to see a therapist is just because of his brother's death it's also because he tried to commit suicide thing that the death was his fault. The only reason that Conrad didn't succeed at his suicide attempt is because his dad managed to find him in time. There are points in the story where Conrad thinks that he wanted to commit suicide to escape the fact that his brother is dead and because he thought that committing suicide would help him sleep at night. This is a huge red flag for Conrad's mental state. Considering that suicide was a way to help with your insomnia is an extremely strange way of thinking.

Watching this movie I feel that this has shown some realistic ways that people deal with death. The Jarrett's refused to communicate to professionals, friends, or each other and it was slowly eating them up inside. This was not healthy for this family and they really suffered for it. Conrad tried to kill himself and the family just tried to brush over it like nothing happened at all. That was pretty sad considering that there were a few family members that really did try to make things work. The father at least tried to work on their familial problems, but the mother was just so bent on keeping all her emotions inside. I really felt that the entire family needed to go to therapy together instead of just Conrad going by himself.

Maybe the family would have benefitted well if they tried Narrative therapy as a therapeutic system for the family. Narrative therapy is a therapy that involves the client presenting a dominating story to the therapist that explains the reason why they are there at the therapy session. This way the family could have a chance telling their sides to the story of how they reacted after the death of Buck, hopefully coming to an understanding of where they are coming

from. This sounds easy on paper but really with their family so many things could go wrong, especially with the way the mother copes with death.

It could be helpful if the client is willing to speak about what addiction they may have and what lead them here to your office in the end or it may be harmful if the client may tell stories that may not even pertain to why they are there forgetting the whole reason that they are there to talk to you. This can be further complicated if family was brought into the situation. With narrative therapy you will get the client's side of what they think happened in the story, but adding in the family members into the mix can add conflicting stories of their point of view of the story (Worden, 2003). The mother ma just drive a wedge between her and the family more with this type of therapy, I know she ended up leaving the family at the end of the movie, but maybe if they found a way to talk it out with her maybe they could have kept the family together. This was just my idea of what the characters could have possibly used as a way to try to come back together again. Even though the mother left in the end I still feel like there was a "happy ending"

With the mother gone the father and Conrad can finally breathe without saying or doing anything that could set the mother off. Not to make Mrs. Jarrett a villain, I just feel that she was really hindering the healing process of the family as a whole with the way she would lash out and get defensive when someone would judge her. I realize it was a coping mechanism, but she needs to find a better way to cope through situations or she may never get back to her family again. I really enjoyed this movie and I enjoyed analyzing the details of Conrad's feelings about his brother's death in the film.