

As a gay artist living in New York, Simon in *As Good As It Gets* exuberates mental distress. After undergoing hospital treatment for a brutal assault and robbery, Simon conveys feelings of hopelessness and depression. His passion to paint has wilted, and he is left in a situation of financial disarray. Simon reveals that his problematic relationship with his parents contributes to his mental distress. His uncharacteristic experiences with his mother as well as abusive incidences with his father during his childhood are anxiety provoking in the present. Simon seeks help from Dr. G, an eclectic psychotherapist that applies a specific orientation tailored to her client's particular problems. Dr. G and Simon decide to explore psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, as well as feminist therapy, a less popularized and less empirically supported form of therapy than psychodynamic or CBT.

Psychodynamic theory, while not a universally applicable orientation, places emphasis on repressions that result from past trauma or anxieties experienced from childhood. According to Freud's personality theory, people seek to express instinctual drives and urges, and when the personality develops, conflict occurs between the id, ego and superego. Psychodynamic therapy seeks to help the client overcome defenses so the repressed instincts are uncovered, have the client gain insight into inner conflicts and motivations, and gain control over childhood traumas. The theory that distinguishes psychodynamic therapy from any other therapeutic orientation is its focus on unconscious processes. Additionally psychodynamic theory postulates that childhood experiences form personality characteristics that play a crucial role in development. Dr. G feels this is a good technique to explore to allow Simon to understand unconscious thoughts.

In treating Simon for his depressive state, Dr. G must first make him aware of his unconscious anxieties or conflicts. Dr. G recognizes the importance of her client's psychosexual

development as a precursor for personality development. In order to help Simon overcome defenses he developed in his childhood, Dr. G employs free association. Simon is instructed to say whatever comes to mind no matter how illogical or embarrassing it is. By encouraging Simon to talk about whatever comes to mind, Dr. G can interpret Simon's repression and provide understanding to Simon's unconscious processes and personality structures. However Dr. G slowly notices resistance, or a tendency to lose a train of thought or become silent. Dr. G interprets such resistance from Simon as reluctance to release repression he has about his childhood. In order to uncover the threats he has in the present, Simon must not interfere with his stream of consciousness. Throughout their session Dr. G recognizes transference, a primary source of understanding therapeutic progress in psychodynamic therapy. Because his father abused him, Simon engages in transference by acting out his repressed feelings towards Dr. G, who acts as his father. Simon is instructed to develop attitudes and expectations towards Dr. G whether they are negative, hostile, or positive. Transference allows Simon to deal realistically with his painful early childhood experiences. Dr. G and Simon work towards a resolution for his relationship with his father.

While the bulk of psychodynamic theory stems from problems within the unconscious and past experiences and traumas, cognitive behavioral theory focuses on negative automatic thoughts or distorted views that a person has about him or herself in the present. While psychodynamic theory stresses personality development in childhood, CBT differs in that theorists postulate behavior is a result of environmental circumstance, can be inconsistent over time, allowing for behavior to be altered at any point in time. The notion that personality is inconsistent over time and influenced by circumstance is the essence of CBT. Clients learn skills

to overcome anxieties and strategies for dealing with specific problems. CBT also differs greatly from psychodynamic therapy with an importance on the present, rather than the past.

In treating Simon for his negative automatic thoughts about his self-worth, Dr. G feels rational-emotive therapy is appropriate. RET helps clients deal with their negative perspectives they develop about themselves through a rational debate. For example, in Simon's second session with Dr. G, he states that, "I'm worthless and I have no one in the world to love me." Dr. G is well aware this statement is a generalization and a distorted view of reality. She quickly replies with the question, "What about your art dealer and your publicist? They seem to care a great deal for you and were by your side after the robbery!" Simon must reevaluate his negative outlook, into a more positive view by counteracting his generalization. Because his automatic thoughts are so distorted, Dr. G has Simon start a log of every spontaneous automatic thought he has, to evaluate when he has these recurring negative thoughts about himself. Dr. G feels the use of homework assignments strengthens treatment.

Along with RET, Dr. G employs systematic desensitization for treating Simon's generalized anxiety. Simon is anxious about asking his parents for money, and feels he cannot complete the task at hand without undergoing specific treatment. Through a methodical exercise Simon faces his anxieties that accompany his desire to ask his parents for money. After Dr. G collects an extensive history of Simon and explains to him the purpose for exposing him to an anxiety-provoking exercise, the Dr. G begins relaxation. Breathing and music are included to enhance the experience. The purpose of this is to rid him of anxieties in the present. In the next session Simon and Dr. G develop an anxiety hierarchy to isolate specific concerns about the upcoming event. The following hierarchy is a representation of Simon's most anxiety-provoking details about seeing his parents: 1. A week before driving to see his parents. 2. The night before

seeing his parents. 3. Calling his parents to let them know he's in town. 4. Asking them for money. 5. Interacting with his parents after the first time in many years. 6. Driving to their house. Simon is instructed to begin by imagining the least anxiety-provoking circumstance on the list while Dr. G describes the scene. If Simon feels anxious Dr. G will try to recover a state of relaxation. As Simon undergoes CBT, his anxiety concerning his parents will become manageable, and will allow him to ask his parents for financial support.

Unlike the more prevalent orientations of CBT and psychodynamic therapy, feminist therapy seeks to empower clients to take control of their lives and make good decisions. As an eclectic approach, feminist theory stresses social equality and the therapist's theoretical orientations, rather than specific techniques employed by the therapist. Feminist therapy differs from CBT and psychodynamic in that the authoritarian role of the therapist does not exist. Feminist therapy employs an egalitarian approach, emphasizing the importance that the client contributes just as much as the therapist. Dr. G employs a feminist doctrine, and seeks to make Simon aware of his own victimization from unjust social institutions. While unconventional in other orientations, Dr. G incorporates variables such as finances, employment status and sexual preference as an integral part of treatment.

As Dr. G employs a feminist perspective, she is careful to re-work her technique. She feels that his childhood traumas with his parents as well as the assault and robbery are extremely relevant to proper treatment, however other variables important. In the beginning of their treatment Simon tells Dr. G about his father. Simon states that, "He would beat me when I was a younger child. He knew what I was long before I knew what I was, that's probably why I'll never be able to make any progress in therapy." Dr. G recognizes Simon's generalization as a direct result from trauma. Feminist therapy understands trauma within the context of social,

cultural and political circumstances. As a systematic approach to understanding Simon's situation feminist theory realizes Simon's problem as a result of society's inability to create just social systems. Dr. G is able to draw from many modalities such as RET and homework utilized in CBT to allow Simon to cope appropriately and gain empowerment. Homework is relevant to Simon's treatment in depression because of his pessimistic views about himself. Dr. G's instructs Simon to counteract every negative thought he has by thinking of a positive one. Through his homework assignments, Simon can begin restructuring his irrational thought process and understand his traumatic experiences. By placing a cultural context to Simon's negative thoughts, Dr. G allows Simon to understand society's contribution to his disempowered state.

After evaluating the effectiveness of different therapeutic orientations, Dr. G uses her expert knowledge and experience to choose a treatment plan for Simon. Dr. G executes a careful decision to treat Simon with feminist therapy. Dr. G feels that because feminist therapy is not only eclectic in its orientation but also holistic in its approach, Simon can gain a stronger foundation for recovery. Through feminist therapy, Dr. G will guide Simon to achieve empowerment and recognize his past traumas and experiences in a greater social, political, and cultural context. Thus Simon is no longer the sole victim of childhood abuse, homosexual oppression, and a current depressive state. Feminist theory can help Simon gain a connection to humanity and recognize that others suffer with him because of oppressive and domineering institutions. Simon clearly lost a connection with humanity through the assault, and feminist theory can regain his sense of hope for a valuable future to a greater extent than other orientations. While psychodynamic and CBT have empirical success, feminist theory utilizes techniques from these orientations while also putting Simon's situation into a larger perspective.