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Adlerian Theory and the Case of Margarita

Abstract

Margarita comes seeking therapy for her propensity to angry outbursts, depression, and social awkwardness. Using the Adlerian theory, this paper will show what the important goals need to be set for Margarita's treatment as well as the interventions that would best suit her case. Using interviews, subjective and objective, as well as early memory recollection, you will see how Margarita's problems can be successfully addressed and treated with the usage of Adlerian practices. Also, an understanding of the cultural considerations and limitations will be gained. The pros and cons of the Adlerian model of counseling are discussed and it is shown that the pros outweigh the cons of using this method on a Hispanic person.

Adlerian Theory and the Case of Margarita

Margarita comes to therapy with presenting concerns of aggression and anger as well as depression and social anxiety. This section of the paper will address Margarita's issues from the view of Adlerian theory. Goals will be established for Margarita using this theory and interventions from the Adlerian perspective will be applied as well. Being from Puerto Rico, there are some cultural considerations that come into play in this case and those will be addressed along with any limitations that the Adlerian theory may have in successfully treating Margarita.

Establishing Goals for Margarita

The most basic goal of Adlerian therapy is to challenge client's premises and life goals. "Adlerian Therapy is a growth model. It stresses a positive view of

human nature and that we are in control of our own fate and not a victim to it." (PsyWEB, 2011). By reading Margarita's case study it is clear that she is in need of growth and a more positive view of herself. She admits to feeling depressed most of the time yet not expressing those feelings outwardly. She states the reason for this is that she has responsibilities and must put on her game face to take

care of what she needs to take care of (kids, work, and school). Margarita also admits to having anger issues without being able to pinpoint the cause of her anger. She appears to have isolated herself as she states she has no friends and feels fearful of social situations. Ironically though, Margarita belongs to many organizations and committees where she must take charge and show strength and ability. She admits that in these situations she feels in her element and in control though as far as gaining friends from these experiences, she does not feel worthy of such relationships. Knowing these things allows for goal setting to begin.

In the case of Margarita there are four specific goals that the therapist should work towards; encouraging a view of equality, changing of lifestyle, decreasing feelings of inferiority, and changing faulty thinking and motivations. With the issues in Margarita's life it is clear that she employs faulty thinking that leads her to feelings of inferiority. "For those of us who strive to be accomplished writers, powerful business people, or influential politicians, it is because of our feelings of inferiority and a strong need to overcome this negative part of us according to Adler." (Heffner, 2002).

Margarita is striving to become successful in her own right and this is apparent through her work with the community boards and her recent acceptance into law school which is a prestigious honor. Even with these accomplishments Margarita still does not feel equal to her peers or good enough to be where she is in life and this is in part due to faulty thinking patterns. One of the most important goals, however, will be to find ways to overcome her outbursts of anger. By looking into the rest of her issues, the root of these outbursts should become more apparent and therefore targeted for removal and/or control.

Intervention and Techniques

During the therapeutic process, various techniques are used in order to help Margarita. One technique that is not special to her case is encouragement. "Encouragement is the most powerful method available for changing a person's beliefs, for it helps clients build self-confidence and stimulates courage." (Corey, 2009, pg 105). This is the basis of the relationship that allows the

interventions to work for the client. The Adlerian therapeutic process has for phases. The first is the establishing of the relationship between therapist and client. The therapist and client work together in goals and interventions in order to reach success. The types on interventions used with a client stem from the relationship and the types of interventions used depend upon the individual. In the first phase of therapy, "the main techniques are attending and listening with empathy, following the subjective experience of the client as closely as possible, identifying and clarifying goals, and suggesting initial hunches about purpose in client symptoms, actions, and interactions." (Corey, 2009, pg 109).

The second phase in Adlerian therapy is exploring the client's psychological dynamics. This is an assessment phase where the counselor gets an understanding of the client's life. To do this the counselor may conduct interviews with the client. The first interview that Margarita would take part in is the subjective interview where she will be encouraged to tell the story of her life in the most complete, unedited way she can. At the end of this interview the counselor would want Margarita to answer "The Question". This final question allows the client to show their life without any problems and restraints. For Margarita, "The Question" the counselor would ask her would be "How would your life be different if you did not face these issues? What would you be doing differently that would make your life different then it is now?"

The second interview technique is the objective interview. This is a discovery interview where the therapist does information seeking. This includes information about how Margarita's problems began her social history, and the reasoning behind why she decided to come to therapy at this particular point in time. Once these interviews are complete, the counselor will have a deeper understanding of Margarita and better know what techniques to use with her.

In doing these interviews, the counselor has found that Margarita's early life events may be at the root of her present issues. Because of this, the early recollection technique is employed. Margarita is asked to make a list of her earliest memories for the counseling session. "From a series of early recollections, it is possible to get a clear sense of our mistaken notions. Present attitudes, social interests, and possible future behavior." (Corey, 2009, pg 111). Through this technique, the counselor finds that Margarita has a reoccurring theme from her childhood. One memory is at age 4 where her mother is screaming at her father and he is trying to calm her. Another memory at age 5 is of her giving her mother a handmade Christmas gift which was not received as well as the gold ring her older brother gave to her. At age 6, Margarita recalls

overhearing her parents talking about what to do with a little girl with so little potential. From this short list the a counselor can see that Margarita learned from an early age that she was not valued and not worthy of love and success.

The counselor now sees where Margarita's faulty thinking began and now will address this issue. During her sessions, Margarita has used overgeneralizations and applied false goals of security. She is highly fearful of her husband leaving her due to her anger issues and therefore feels that she must be perfect in order to make it so he will never leave her. The reality is that her husband loves her and does not need her to be perfect, just to be in control of her emotions. She over generalizes when she states that while she does important work for the community, no one likes her and she can see why that is true. The counseling must call her out on these things in order to bring them to the front and center so they can be addressed and worked through.

The third phase deals with encouraging self-understanding and bringing insight to the client. "When Adlerians speak of insight, they are referring to an understanding of the motivations that operate in a client's life. Self-understanding is only possible when hidden purposes and goals of behavior are made conscious." (Corey, 2009, pg 113). During this third phase the counselor will provide interpretation for Margarita. These interpretations come as suggestions. For instance, the counselor may say to Margarita, "It seems to me that you feel insecure about your ability to engage people in meaningful dialogue." By doing this, the counselor is helping Margarita to understand her own motivations.

The final phase is reorientation and reeducation. This is where the action of the therapy comes into play. "This phase focuses on helping people discover a new and more functional perspective." (Corey, 2009, pg 113). Margarita will begin her reorientation of her motivations and behaviors. She will be able to find her lighter, happier, more useful side. The counselors place is that of the encourager. Margarita will be encouraged to make decisions and modify their thinking and goals. At this phase the past and present have already been explored. Faulty thinking and behaviors that do not work have been examined. Now it is time for action. Margarita and her counselor will develop a plan that she can follow when she feels that she is veering off track. New goals can be set and Margarita can now see what her possibilities in life are.

Cultural Considerations and Limitations Though Margarita has lived in America for 10 years, her first 16 years were spent in Puerto Rico where the culture differs from that of the United States. In addition to her years spent in Puerto

Rico, her parents have not assimilated to their new culture and therefore Margarita was raised in a home in which her original culture reigned supreme. There are some theories of counseling that would not be beneficial for Margarita due to those facts. However, Adlerian therapy would be a good fit. Adler was ahead of his times in respect to social equality and cultural considerations. "Adlerian counseling takes into account the social and cultural values of minority groups, such as social embeddedness, integration of family members, and spirituality into the counseling process." (Bornsheuer, & Polonyi, 2011). These are the reasons that Adlerian therapy could be a successful fit with Margarita.

Though Adlerian therapy typically does fit well in cross cultural situations there can be limitations as well depending on the client and how deeply rooted their cultural beliefs are. The only limitation that the counselor can see getting in the way of successful treatment of Margarita is that many times Hispanic families can be close-mouthed when it comes to sharing personal information with those outside their family circle. In her case study it states that the only people who see her depression and angry side are her husband and her parents. This tells the counselor that there is a possibility that Margarita's culture, having taught her to be silent with strangers, may stop her from being completely candid about her life which would stunt the success of her treatment.

Conclusion

The emotional and behavioral issues that brought Margarita to therapy can be identified and treated successfully using Adlerian therapy. The goals set forth at the beginning of the therapeutic relationship were taken from her initial presentation, and using the techniques (early memories, interviews, reeducation) that are typical of Adlerian therapy, the counselor was able to show how treatment with this model could be successful for Margarita's case. While there is a clear limitation due to cultural issues, the counselor feels that Adlerian therapy would be a good match for Margarita.