
ASSESSING THERAPEUTIC EFFECTIVENESS

The Effectiveness of Psychotherapy: An Introduction

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These three papers, initially presented at a symposium in honor of Jerome Frank, refract different facets of his impact on research in psychotherapy. Frank's challenge to the use of a medical model of differential diagnosis and differential treatment came almost concurrently with Eysenck's call for evidence that psychotherapy had any attributable effects. The summation of two decades of evaluative research has laid to rest the doubt that psychotherapy can be demonstrated to have any therapeutic results. Yet Frank's challenge still survives because the evidence for differential effects by methods of treatment is largely unimpressive. Not that no differential treatment results are to be found, but that they are not pervasive or large.

Against this backdrop, Luborsky makes the strongest move. "So be it for differences in treatment methods," he seems to say, "let us examine individual differences in therapists and patients." From a reanalysis of four sources of data, including some of his own, he finds strong evidence that therapists contribute to the variance in effectiveness, some weak evidence that patients contribute, and, once more, little evidence for method differences. He wants to follow this pathway back to the question of method by searching for the answer to what differentiates more successful from less successful therapists, and what occurs differently when a therapist succeeds or fails. He already has at least one candidate for potential explanatory process concepts, the working alliance.

Strupp is not yet ready to concede the need for a shift in paradigm. He challenges the very aforementioned data base, arguing the case for individual tailoring of outcome observations and for clinical synthesis in place of standard measures rigidly applied in group comparisons. Moreover, he insists, too much emphasis is placed on situationally governed responses rather than intrapsychic states such as are reflected in increased self-acceptance. He affirms his belief that there are specific therapeutic skills, founded in verifiable theories and principles which serve to further the patient's goal of self-understanding and mastery. Let us not be distracted, he warns, by the pseudohypothesis of nonspecific versus specific (technique) factors. Let us get on with the kind of process research needed to support this view.

As seems appropriate in light of their long personal association, Parloff brings us closer to the man, that gentle iconoclast being honored. He places Frank's challenge in the social and economic context of third-party payments, cost containment, and accountability. In addition, he seeks to move our perspective to a position from which we can see that Frank's nonspecific hypothesis is not incompatible with, but includes concern about specifics.

These papers by three wise men of psychotherapy research do, indeed, honor the wise man who preceded them!

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