

BOOK REVIEWS

Empirical Studies of the Therapeutic Hour. Robert F. Bornstein and Joseph M. Masling (Eds.). (1998). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. 321 pages, \$49.95, ISBN 155798526X.

The split between clinical work and research is sometimes posited as “art versus science.” Like most dualities, this is somewhat simplistic—it is typically the integration of these different ways of understanding that produces the best work. The best clinicians recognize the importance of empiricism, and grow and change with new developments in the field; the best psychotherapy researchers directly understand the deep emotional experience of therapeutic work. This book nobly seeks to join clinician and researcher, heart and mind, art and science. In some ways it succeeds beautifully, in other ways, it falls far short; and, in its shortcomings, highlights why the task is so very difficult. It is, in fact, a quite remarkable book, both in its strengths and, unfortunately, in its weaknesses.

The book is part of a series begun in 1983 to present empirical studies inspired by psychoanalytic theory. This is the first in the series solely devoted to treatment research. With an introduction and eight chapters, it surveys a diversity of research programs focused on psychoanalysis/psychodynamic psychotherapy, from an illustrious set of contributors—Hans H. Strupp, Enrico E. Jones and Pauline B. Price, Sidney J. Blatt, John S. Auerbach and Mosen Aryan, Paul Crits-Christoph and Mary Beth Connolly, Donald P. Spence, Hartvig Dahl, Stanley B. Messer and Stephen J. Holland, and Suzanne M. Gassner and Marshall Bush. The research programs described include studies of negative process in psycho-

therapy, supportive-expressive (SE) psychotherapy, unconscious mental functioning, single-case design in brief psychodynamic psychotherapy, pronoun co-occurrence as a measure of shared understanding, the FRAMES model, mental representations, and interaction structures. Each chapter seeks to describe in detail a program of research, including rationale, methods, and results.

One of the most exquisite contributions of this book is its introduction, by editors Bornstein and Masling. I have never read such an outstanding, honest, beautiful piece of writing on the need for empirical research in psychotherapy. In just 20 pages it conveys, with clarity and passionate conviction, that a fascinating theory such as psychoanalysis not only can be studied, but needs to be, despite a history of arms-length distance from empiricism. It attests to the need for strong psychotherapy research on topics that are not easy to study (such as unconscious processing, outcomes of treatments that are depth-oriented, etc.) In so doing, it offers by its own example the sort of integration that is possible. If it were up to me, this introduction would become required reading in clinical psychology programs.

Another notable highlight of the book is Strupp’s discussion of negative process in psychotherapy. Its very human writing style is like a conversation with a wise man who conveys the essence of experience; for example, “a little bit of bad process can go a long way” (p. 11), and “it is an exceptional therapist who is entirely adequate to the task” of psychotherapy (p. 3). There is a *real* quality to this chapter in its search to understand what makes negative process in psychotherapy so common. It reads like a gentle attempt to hold the field accountable to high standards and to use research to aid that process.

For someone who wants to embark on research, this book also offers state-of-the-art methods and lengthy examples. The methods are described in detail and there are some very interesting descriptive models that feel both clinically rich and also highly researchable (e.g., Blatt and colleagues' model of representational structures). Some of the chapters detail the evolution of a program of research (e.g., Dahl; Crits-Christoph and Connolly; Strupp), thus providing a longitudinal "big-picture" view that is often missing when reading journal articles that report single studies. The chapter by Crits-Christoph and Connolly is particularly appealing. It provides a historical sequence of findings, a clear rationale, and great integrity in its balanced interpretation of data—for example, "... it should be noted that most of the findings the produced thus far do not support the SE model in comparison with other dynamic therapy approaches" (p. 143). This is science at its best—when research is not an attempt to market a pet treatment or theory, but an honest look at cumulative evidence.

Unfortunately, the quality of the book is uneven. At its best, it inspires and energizes. In its worst sections, it gets so weighed down by jargon, detail, abstruse writing, and weak science that it might serve as evidence for why some clinicians don't want to bother with research. If one of the main goals of the book is to help engage people who normally do not like psychotherapy research, sentences such as the following are more likely to alienate than to engage (and are not uncommon in this book): "We theorize that the experience, identification, and understanding of repetitive interaction structures is mutative by way of recovering threatening ideas and feelings and the consequent reorganization and integration of usually primitive, repudiated unconscious mental structures with more complex, differentiated and conscious mental structures" (p. 58). The lack of consistent scientific criteria across

the chapters is also concerning. For example, one study relies heavily on correlations of only .30 as supportive of its hypotheses and uses terms that statisticians repudiate, such as "highly significant" to describe alpha levels. In another study, patients are presumed to change due to the impact of psychotherapy on deep character structure, with only passing mention of the fact that patients had many other simultaneous treatments, including medications. There is an absence of specific description of treatments in some chapters. At other times, the rigor is there but the conclusions are of the obvious variety: for example, "Thus, it was concluded that the quality of the relationship with the therapist is not simply a function of what the patient brings to therapy but that it is affected by the technical interventions made by the therapist." Such weaknesses require the reader to wade through a lot to get to the gems in this book that are also clearly present. Shorter chapters, a summary of key findings within chapters or in the book as a whole, plain English, and stronger attention to consistent application of scientific standards would have helped.

In short, this book takes on an ambitious and noble goal: to illustrate how psychotherapy research can address the complex clinical phenomena of psychodynamic/psychoanalytic theory. It offers insights from some of the top researchers in the field. At its best, it achieves the task of science stated so articulately by Herbert Simon (quoted in the chapter by Dahl): "to make use of the world's redundancy to describe the world simply."

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Received April 10, 1999

Accepted April 10, 1999