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CORRECTIVE EXPERIENCES IN PSYCHOTHERAPY: AN INTRODUCTION

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We open this volume with an example of a corrective experience from the first author's college days:

> I chose very carefully the college I attended. I had not been a good student in high school and seriously feared that I would not be able to complete an undergraduate degree. So, when it came time to choose between the two universities that accepted me into their psychology program, I said to myself, "Well, University of Montreal accepted more than 90 students, while University of Sherbrooke took less than 30. It will be no big deal for a university to throw out one student out of 90 because he can't make it, but getting rid of one student when there is only 30 accepted the program, that would be huge—that is much less likely to happen. So Sherbrooke it is!"
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> The fear of being kicked out of school came back with a vengeance when I wrote my first paper, and even more so when I got it back. Glued to my desk, I slowly turned the seven to eight pages that I wrote, feeling a mixture of nausea, shame, anxiety, and depression while staring at the comments throughout the paper. I swear that I stopped breathing when I got to the end and saw the full page and a half of written text. I felt assailed and devastated by the heavy red ink and underlined comments

that were jumping out from the sheets of paper. "I knew it. I just knew it. I can't believe this.... I failed. Oh, f—... I am so out of here."

How long I stayed at my desk, I don't know. I know that I failed to notice that all of the other students had left the classroom, and I startled when the faculty member approached my desk and said, "You seem dismayed by my feedback." "But I worked so hard," I replied. "Yes, and it shows," he said. "But you have no idea how hard I worked on this," I pursued. "Yes, yes, yes, I know that. Listen, you did well, very well. You got the highest grade in the class.... There, at the end of my comments, see, I gave you 19 out of 20 points," he said. "Oh ... but, but this is a long comment you wrote, I mean it's a very long comment," I bemoaned. "Well, if you read it," he replied, "you will see that what I am saying is that you presented a very good behavioral analysis of human functioning. Your analysis is perfectly correct; there is nothing false about it. In fact, you presented classical and operant conditioning more clearly than I ever could. You will write one day, I am sure of that. I just disagree with the assumptions of this approach, and I was trying to articulate my Rogerian position regarding them. I'd be curious to know what you think about it."

"What do you mean by 'I will write one day?'" came out of my mouth while I was saying to myself, "Sh—, he obviously thinks that I don't know how to write, and unless I pick this up, I will be thrown out." "Well, I mean writing, publishing," he replied. "Hmm, but I have no intention of becoming a journalist," I said. "No, no, I mean scientific stuff. I predict that you will be writing articles and other types of professional publications later in your career," he clarified.

I do not remember anything more of this event other than feeling totally shocked and relieved by this unexpected feedback and (I must admit) very proud. Obviously, it took more than this event for me to decide to go into academia, including the steady and nurturing guidance and support from this faculty member throughout my undergraduate program. To this day, however, I am convinced that it opened my mind to a career direction that I had never thought about before, increased my confidence toward completing college and setting ambitious goals beyond it, and certainly fueled energy toward my reading (and writing about) psychology. Of course, I will never know how much of an impact this event has had on my career. One thing that I am sure of, however, is that it is directly linked to one of my publications that is most meaningful to me: Twenty-five years later, and after keeping up with my published work, this mentor (Yves Saint-Arnaud) asked me to write the preface to the last book he wrote before retiring from academia. The resonance of this event has been long lasting.

Although they may not all be as transformative as this example, events that challenge one's fear or expectations and lead to new outcomes often take place in psychotherapy. In fact, many therapists across a variety of theoreti-

cal orientations hope that their clients will achieve such corrective experiences (CEs). Unfortunately, limited attention has been given (by scholars and researchers alike) to the definition of CEs, to the delineation of their nature, to what facilitates them, and to their therapeutic consequences. The goal of this book is to address these gaps in knowledge by providing conceptual, clinical, and empirical descriptions of CEs as they manifest themselves in different approaches of psychotherapy.

ORIGINS OF THIS BOOK

This book is based on a series of three conferences held at Penn State University (PSU). As with a previous set of PSU conferences that led to a book on insight in psychotherapy (Castonguay & Hill, 2006), this series of meetings involved psychotherapy researchers from a variety of theoretical orientations and a range of methodological (quantitative and qualitative) backgrounds. All participants were internationally known for their empirical contributions to psychotherapy and, with very few exceptions, lived within driving distance of PSU (needless to say, we had to restrict the number of people we wanted to invite, both to provide optimal conditions for group work and for financial reasons).

We agreed ahead of time that we would focus on CEs in psychotherapy. We were particularly interested in CEs because we wanted to examine common factors across theoretical orientations to further understandings of the mechanisms of change in psychotherapy.

DEFINITION OF CORRECTIVE EXPERIENCES

The origins of the term *CE* go back to Alexander and French (1946), who coined the term *corrective emotional experiences* to describe such events within the context of psychoanalytic therapy (see Chapter 3, this volume, for more history about this construct). To broaden the term, however, and make it more applicable to experiences that occur in different types of psychotherapies, we use the term *CEs* here. In this way, we followed Goldfried (1980), who considered CEs to be a common curative factor across all psychotherapy approaches.

On the basis of 12 hours of open discussions and observations of CEs in videotaped sessions, the first PSU meeting led to a consensus about the definition of CEs: CEs are ones in which a person comes to understand or experience affectively an event or relationship in a different and unexpected way. Note that this definition allows for events that are emotional, relational,

behavioral, or cognitive. This definition stresses, however, that such events are not just typical helpful events in therapy but that they are surprising or disconfirming of past experiences and often have a profound effect.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

As mentioned above, our goal was to shed theoretical, empirical, and clinical light on CEs. Hence, the first section of the current book provides a number of conceptual contributions about CEs. In the second section, we present several empirical investigations. In both of these sections, the authors include clinical materials not only to show the clinical relevance of their concepts or findings but also to offer guidelines that may improve practitioners' ability to foster CEs and promote change. In the final chapter, we summarize what we have learned.

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

The first section begins with Chapter 2, by Goldfried, who more than 30 years ago identified CEs as a common factor in psychotherapy. He expands on his thinking and argues that, as a principle of change, CEs play a crucial role in the general process of helping clients move from states of unconscious incompetence, to conscious incompetence, to conscious competence, and finally to unconscious competence. The next two chapters review the role of CEs in psychoanalytic psychotherapy, providing a historical perspective of how the construct has changed over time. Reflecting CEs' complexity, Sharpless and Barber (Chapter 3) identify 12 components within Alexander and French's (1946) perspective on CEs. In addition to differentiating CEs from other major constructs (e.g., alliance, transference), they describe several of the controversies that this construct triggered within the psychoanalytic tradition, especially regarding the role of insight versus the relationship in therapeutic change. Christian, Safran, and Muran (Chapter 4) then focus on how CEs fit within relational psychoanalysis. Specifically, they discuss how Alexander and French's emphasis on interpersonal components (i.e., the therapeutic value of experiencing a new type of relationship) has been echoed in some of the contemporary (interpersonal and relational) psychodynamic models. On the basis of their own research, they show how Alexander and French's view of CEs is highly consistent with the therapeutic benefit that can be derived from the exploration and resolution of alliance ruptures.

Interestingly, Hayes, Beck, and Yasinski, in Chapter 5, also argue that Alexander and French's (1946) view resonates strongly with several principles of change underlying cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). They high-

light such theoretical convergence by showing how exposure and cognitive techniques (including setting up behavioral experiments to test thoughts and expectations) are aimed at activating maladaptive patterns of reaction, exposing clients to (and helping them process) new information, and learning and consolidating more adaptive patterns. Involved in this process of change are the activation of emotion and the construction of new meaning, which according to Hayes et al. are not only consistent with Alexander and French's view of CEs but also congruent with other theoretical orientations.

Humanistic and experiential perspectives about CEs are the focus of the next two chapters. After delineating the conceptions of CEs that are central to some of the most influential approaches of the "third" movement of psychology, Greenberg and Elliott (Chapter 6) describe two forms of CEs (intrapersonal and interpersonal) that they espouse in emotion-focused therapy. Both forms of CEs involve the conscious access of emotions (persistent and maladaptive; overlooked and adaptive) and rest on facilitative conditions provided by the therapeutic relationship. Another crucial approach of the humanistic tradition, the person-centered therapy, is the focus of Chapter 7, by Farber, Bohart, and Stiles. These authors identify three manifestations of CEs (e.g., disconfirmation of "conditions of worth" that can result from the therapist's unconditional positive regard) that emerged in the work of Carl Rogers and Eugene Gendlin. They then describe how these different strands of CEs played an important role in the well-known brief session that Rogers had with "Gloria."

In contrast with the previous chapters, the last two chapters of this section present perspectives of CEs that are not tied to a particular approach or tradition in psychotherapy. In their expectancy-based model, Constantino and Westra (Chapter 8) define CEs as revisions of the client's view (working model) of self and others, and they argue that such revisions frequently involve different levels of functioning (interpersonal, cognitive, and affective). Their integrative view incorporates constructs from psychodynamic, interpersonal, cognitive behavior, and humanistic theories, as well as from basic social and developmental psychology. Basic psychological research is also the foundation of Chapter 9, by Caspar and Berger, who take on the challenge of demonstrating how we can advance our thinking about CEs by paying attention to recent advances in cognitive and neuropsychological sciences. They illustrate how CEs develop and help to change brain structures.

Each of the chapters described above provides a sophisticated understanding of the complex theoretical issues related to CEs. Each of them also presents case materials to illustrate subtle clinical processes related to these constructs. As a whole, they offer a broad and multifaceted view of CEs. This view, however, is further enriched by the new, and much needed, empirical investigations presented in the second section of the book.

Empirical Investigations of Corrective Experiences in Psychotherapy

The first two chapters in this section provide what may be the first window on how clients experience CEs. Based on a multisite collaboration, Heatherington, Constantino, Friedlander, Angus, and Messer (Chapter 10) content analyzed responses provided by 76 clients after every four sessions to open-ended questions aimed at assessing changes in therapy and how such changes took place. In the Chapter 11, Knox, Hess, Hill, Burkard, and Crook-Lyon provide qualitative analyses of interviews conducted with 12 clients—therapists themselves—regarding corrective relational experiences during their own psychotherapies.

Chapters 12 through 15 describe studies examining CEs in specific forms of therapy or treatment settings. Berman et al. (Chapter 12) qualitatively focus on relational events (making judgments about whether these were corrective) in three cases of acceptance and commitment therapy (a recent approach in CBT) for anorexia nervosa. In Chapter 13, Castonguay et al. use comprehensive process analyses to examine CEs for one anxious client who participated in both CBT and interpersonal/experiential therapy. Qualitative analyses are also presented in Chapter 14, by Anderson, Ogles, Heckman, and MacFarlane, who intensively analyzed the in-session process of CEs identified by clients in posttherapy interviews. Finally, Grosse Holtforth and Flückiger (Chapter 15) describe the results of a quantitative study on CEs. Within the context of a CBT-based treatment, they investigate which of two forms of CEs (those that are built gradually, i.e., micro events, or those that occur as a singular, macro, event) is most predictive of client's improvement. This section ends with Chapter 16, a qualitative study of CEs in supervision. Ladany et al. analyze interviews with 15 doctoral trainees to assess what types of CEs occur in supervision and the impact of such events on the trainees, their clients, and the supervision process.

From a scientific perspective, all of these studies were conducted rigorously. In addition, they all have great clinical relevance. With the interest of clinicians in mind, the authors provide examples and practical implications that anchor their findings in clinical reality.

Summary Chapter

Chapter 17, the final chapter of book, reflects a collective effort to describe what we have learned and what should be done to better understand CEs. This chapter is based on the third and final PSU meeting, which was aimed at getting consensus among our group of researchers (in terms of both what we agreed on and disagreed on) with respect to four major questions: What is the nature of CEs? What facilitates them? What are their effects?

And what are some of the future directions (with regard to theory, research, and practical implications) that can be recommended to the field in order to further clarify and more effectively foster CEs? Considering the breadth of the conceptual, methodological, and clinical knowledge represented by the authors in this volume, we believe that this chapter offers a good glimpse of what is currently known about CEs, as well as potentially fruitful suggestions to address some of what still needs to be known about them.

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