

INTRODUCTION: EXAMINING INSIGHT IN PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Throughout history, the willingness and capacity to achieve personal insight has been valued as one of the most noble and meaningful features, or gifts, of human life. "The unexamined life," Socrates claimed, "is not worth living." Many of us prize, if not cherish, our ability to self-examine. How else to explain that one of the most memorable and intriguing words of the English literature might well be Shakespeare's inescapable inquiry, "To be, or not to be: that is the question," if not for our deeply held belief that we can, should, and will benefit from gaining a new understanding of who we are and why we are the way we are? Is there a better way to explain why readers (especially adult readers) resonate so deeply to the secret that the Little Prince has learned from Saint-Exupéry's fox ("what is the essential is invisible to the eye"), than to recognize the profoundly meaningful and fulfilling experiences we get from discovering new things about ourselves and others?

Self-understanding has also been viewed as a remedy for mental illness as far back as the age of antiquity. As noted by Mora (1975), the therapeutic power ascribed to words in the Greek culture is reflected by the motto "Know yourself" on the door of the Delphic temple, as well as by Heraclitus's statement, "I have explored myself." In our modern society, Frank and Frank (1991)

have argued that psychotherapy is the sanctioned method for healing through self-understanding. They noted that insight increases a client's sense of security, mastery, and self-efficacy by providing labels for experiences that seem confusing, haphazard, or inexplicable.

This book attempts to identify what is currently known about insight in psychotherapy and tries to generate theoretical and research directions to better understand this complex phenomenon. We chose to examine insight for two main reasons. First, as a process associated with the client's involvement in therapy (as opposed to an aspect of specific techniques favored by some therapists), insight seems to cut across different forms of therapy. Thus, we felt that what would be learned about insight would likely be perceived as relevant by most clinicians. We also decided to focus on insight because it is a rich and complex process that is not fully understood. Insight can vary considerably in terms of content (e.g., links between past and present, links between conscious thoughts and underlying assumptions). Insight also seems to involve several dimensions (e.g., emotional vs. intellectual, explicit vs. implicit, sudden vs. gradual). It is not surprising that, as illustrated in several chapters of this book, many definitions have been proposed for the construct of insight (e.g., *meta-awareness*, *learning of new connections*, *new understanding*). Furthermore, different factors appear to facilitate insight and numerous types of changes seem to result from it. Hence, given its centrality and complexity, we felt that a delineation and integration of what is known about insight could increase the understanding of the process of change in psychotherapy.

The book is composed of five sections. Part I focuses on theoretical perspectives. It includes chapters that describe how insight is defined and valued within four major contemporary traditions in psychotherapy: psychodynamic, humanistic-experiential, cognitive-behavioral, and systemic (i.e., couple and family therapy). This part also includes a chapter on the assimilation model, a theory of the process of change in which insight is featured as an important phase of therapy. The final chapter offers an integrative theoretical perspective by approaching insight as a common factor across orientations. Charting the rich tradition of several theories, these chapters illustrate how insight is relied on in numerous therapeutic approaches, even though these approaches might emphasize different dimensions in defining insight or encourage the use of diverse methods to foster it.

Part II is devoted to research. The first chapter of this section provides a review of the empirical literature that summarizes what has been learned from research about insight in psychotherapy. The second chapter focuses on a linguistic analysis of terms involving insight, followed by an examination of events in therapy during which clients indicated they gained insight. The remaining three chapters present different empirical methods that have been used to investigate insight within therapy sessions. They illustrate how both quantitative and qualitative methods of analyses can reveal the multifaceted

nature of insight, as well as the complexity of the various processes involved in this mechanism of change.

Part III addresses clinical issues related to insight as they are manifested in the practice and learning of psychotherapy. The first chapter provides an overview of how clients are active agents in the insight process. In contrast, the next chapter discusses the therapist's role in promoting insight. The third chapter examines the fundamental interplay between insight and action (or the synergetic relationship between understanding and behavioral change). The fourth chapter provides a reminder that insight is not just the province of psychotherapy as insight is often developed, consolidated, and destroyed between sessions. Finally, the last chapter presents a model for understanding how supervisors help to facilitate insight within their supervisees, which can then be applied to the therapy setting. These chapters demonstrate how the adequate understanding and successful fostering of insight involve different facets of psychotherapy, thereby reflecting the intrinsic complexity and importance of this clinical phenomenon.

In an effort to avoid becoming insular in our thinking and to gain a fuller perspective on insight, Part IV of the book addresses this phenomenon from perspectives outside of psychotherapy. The four chapters in this section demonstrate how social psychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and philosophy of science have indeed generated a considerable amount of theory and research that can shed light on the understanding of insight in psychotherapy. As a whole, these chapters clearly convey how several constructs and findings that have emerged from basic areas of psychology, as well as some of the epistemological challenges raised by philosophical analyses, offer exciting ideas and methods to open ways of conceptualizing and investigating insight.

Needless to say, all of these chapters provide a wealth of information about insight. In an effort to integrate such rich and complex information, we invited authors of these chapters to reflect on their experiences, read the other chapters, and begin to integrate what is known about the definition of insight, the process of gaining insight, and the consequences of insight. Part V, the final chapter of this book, is the result of these efforts. We believe it provides a window on the current state of knowledge about insight in psychotherapy, as well as a substantial number of exciting directions for future theoretical, empirical, and clinical efforts related to this process of change.

REFERENCES

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