

Is Psychotherapy Any Good?

A Review of evidence relating to Psychodynamic Psychotherapy and the Nature of Psychodynamic Assessment

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Introduction

This document is intended as a resource to stimulate discussion around the validity and effectiveness of psychodynamic psychotherapy¹ and psychodynamic assessment. It is written in an atmosphere of, to this writer, unhelpfully argumentative debate between 'scientific' (symptom and behaviour oriented) clinical psychology, and the more descriptive, relationship-oriented psychotherapies, in which the latter have been criticized as unscientific and lacking evidence for their practice (Surgenor 2006).

In 1952, Hans Eysenck published his famous critique, claiming that psychotherapy was no better than no treatment at all, which led someone to quip, 'Psychotherapy is an undefined technique applied to unspecified problems with unpredictable outcomes.'

It would seem that his conclusion is still current among many 'scientific' practitioners, even after decades of research that demonstrate considerable evidence for the efficacy of psychotherapy. Despite this controversy, or maybe because of it, many psychotherapists eschew scientific investigation. Psychodynamic therapists, and in particular psychoanalysts, often seem to regard the uninitiated with as much disdain as behavioural researchers have towards them for their allegedly poor science (Fonagy 2006). One consequence of this lack of co-operation between disciplines has been a poor showing of research into psychodynamic methods, compared to behavioural, symptom-oriented treatments. Thus behavioural therapists can claim to have more scientific basis for their work.

This document is a summary of summaries, using several current reviews, a few more general resources and a couple of specific articles. It is not intended to be a rigorous scientific paper, but it is, I believe, a truthful reflection of what

¹ The terms 'psychodynamic psychotherapy' and 'psychotherapy' are used interchangeably. The terms 'psychoanalysis' 'analysis' and 'analytic therapy' are also interchangeable, but indicate a particular form or forms of psychotherapy characterized by a reflective, interpretive and neutral therapist stance, and relatively long duration. This is the widely accepted definition of psychodynamic psychotherapy given by Gabbard; 'a therapy that involved careful attention to the therapist-patient interaction, with thoughtfully timed interpretation of transference and resistance embedded in a sophisticated appreciation of the therapist's contribution to the two-person field'.