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An integrative framework for psychopathology and psychotherapy

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Abstract

This article presents an integrative framework for psychopathology and psychotherapy. The framework differs in kind from previous ones in that it is entirely *pre-empirical* (specifically, *conceptual* and *logical*) in character and does not represent an attempt to create a new empirical theory (cf. Newton's pre-empirical creation of a new conceptual system, which creation proved a necessary precondition for his subsequent *empirical* contentions). The present integration is accomplished in three parts. In the first of these, a *definition of pathology* as behavioral disability or functional impairment is presented and defended. In the second, this definition is used as a centerpiece to achieve a logical unification of many prominent *explanations of psychopathology* that are at present widely considered to be theoretically divergent and incompatible. In part three, established *forms of intervention* from our most influential schools of psychotherapy are shown to be both conceptually coherent and compatible in practice within the present overarching framework.

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1. Introduction

Many psychotherapists, whatever their professed allegiances, on different occasions do such “theoretically incompatible” things as correct maladaptive

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beliefs, modify deficient social skills, attempt to remove children from scapegoated familial positions, and recommend psychotropic medications. The aim of the present work is to accomplish two basic objectives. The first of these is to demonstrate that, while historically we have balkanized the business of explanation into behavioral, cognitive, systemic, psychoanalytic, biological, and other explanatory types, in reality all of these explanations may be integrated within a single coherent intellectual framework. The second objective is to show that the kinds of interventions noted above (and many more), all of which follow logically from these theoretically based explanatory forms, may be rendered coherent and compatible within this superordinate integrative framework.

In accomplishing these objectives, the present effort represents a solution to psychotherapy integration that differs radically in kind from other prominent ones such as those proposed by Wachtel (1977, 1997), Goldfried (1980, 1995), Beutler (1983); Beutler and Clarkin (1990), Lazarus (1986, 1992), and others. This difference lies in the fact that it is entirely *pre-empirical* (specifically, *conceptual* and *logical*) in character and does not represent an attempt to create a new empirical theory. Such conceptual and logical (vs. empirical) elements are very familiar and very central in other established sciences (Chalmers, 1982; Lakatos, 1974; Toulmin, 1956; Wittgenstein, 1922, pp. 67–71), but have received scant attention within psychology. Perhaps the most famous example of this is Isaac Newton's pre-empirical creations of a new conceptual framework and of the calculus (not to mention his utilization of existing nonempirical systems such as Euclidean and analytic geometry) in the creation of his "system of the framework of the world" (Berlinski, 2000).

The present article is divided into three parts. In part one, a *definition of pathology* as behavioral disability or functional impairment is presented and defended. In part two, this definition is used as a centerpiece to achieve a logical unification of many prominent *explanations of psychopathology* that are at present widely considered to be theoretically divergent and incompatible. In part three, established *forms of intervention* from our most influential schools of psychotherapy are shown to be conceptually coherent and compatible in practice within the present overarching framework. All of the above is accomplished in a way that embodies a common language, thus avoiding the highly problematic "tower of Babel" proliferation of technical languages that continues to characterize the contemporary scene. This article employs conceptual resources from Descriptive Psychology, most notably that approach's articulation of the concept of "pathology" (Bergner, 1997; Ossorio, 1985/1997).

2. Pathology as behavioral disability

The definition of "pathology" presented here, originally formulated by Ossorio (1985/1997), is not identical in its particulars to any other. However, it is a member of an increasingly prominent class of definitions in the mental health field that identify psychopathology with *behavioral disability* (or, synonymously, "functional impairment" or "dysfunction") (e.g., Spitzer, 1999; Wakefield, 1992, 1999; Widiger

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