



Visions and Inspirations: Learning From Leading Psychotherapy Researchers

A Review of

*Visions in Psychotherapy Research and Practice: Reflections From
Presidents of the Society for Psychotherapy Research*

by Bernhard M. Strauss, Jacques P. Barber, and Louis G.
Castonguay (Eds.)

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For over 40 years, the Society for Psychotherapy Research (SPR) has been actively advancing the scientific study of psychotherapy. Founded by David Orlinsky and Kenneth Howard in 1969, the society's mission was to bring together multidisciplinary and international psychotherapy researchers under one group. Since its inception, SPR has championed a value of antielitism, welcoming novice and developing researchers to its doors. The ethos of inclusivity may be a reflection of the era when SPR was originally founded in America, a time of brewing political awareness and antiauthoritarianism. In any case, in his introduction to the text, David Orlinsky described that it was with a strong sense of conviction that he and Ken Howard set out to challenge the attendance practice in place in psychotherapy conferences at the time. Rather than having select invitations issued based upon nominations by established professionals, all psychotherapy researchers were welcomed to attend the initial meeting. They were welcomed to join SPR in the spirit of developing a vibrant atmosphere of curiosity and cooperation.

SPR's members originate from countries across the world. By the 1980s, the organization had expanded across the Atlantic to include researchers in the United Kingdom and Continental Europe. In 1993, the society saw an expansion to South America with the first conference in the region being held in Mendoza, Argentina followed by Santiago, Chile. SPR continued growing, and regional groups in Italy and Australia were founded more recently.

Visions in Psychotherapy Research and Practice: Reflections From Presidents of the Society for Psychotherapy Research is a collection of reflections by past presidents of SPR collected from their presidential address to its members. Each chapter is written by one of 20 presidents of the association extending from 1991 to 2001. Following each presidential address, they have written a commentary that considers their speeches in light of the

contemporary state of the field. On whole, the book provides an overarching understanding of the evolution of many central concepts in the field of psychotherapy research today.

Because the core of the book is based upon oration, the tone tends to be more personable than many academic articles. At the same time, the concepts discussed are sophisticated and the discourse assumes familiarity with the central concepts in the field of psychotherapy research. We think it would be of interest to both novice and experienced psychotherapy researchers, and it could become a useful auxiliary textbook for graduate students in psychotherapy research classes.

Unlike many psychotherapy associations, the society celebrates diversity in psychotherapy orientation. The presidents of SPR have included leaders from across a wide range of psychotherapy orientations including Aaron Beck, Leslie Greenberg, and Horst Kächele. This interchange has drawn leaders in the field of psychotherapy integration, such as Marvin Goldfried and Louis Castonguay. Indeed, these figures have been presidents of the society and their chapters in the book provide a snapshot of where the field had been and where it is heading from the perspective of a variety of traditions. The reader is presented with research stemming from various theoretical orientations ranging from cognitive-behavioral, emotion-focused, psychodynamic and integrative perspectives.

Each presidential address motivates the reader to maintain an openness and curiosity about concepts that are relevant to the contemporary study of psychotherapy today such as outcome, process, interpersonal interactions, client characteristics, and therapist effects. The book can be read as a guide on how to become a creative productive researcher as many of the authors describe their own processes of development. Not only are the authors interested in advancing their own methods and ideas, but they often describe learning from one another to deepen their understandings and approaches. This collaboration and crediting of others conveys the pluralistic stance that SPR has held and continues to hold regarding the science of psychotherapy, valuing a wide range of research foci.

In addition, *Visions in Psychotherapy Research and Practice* showcases the multiplicity of methods used in psychotherapy research. Indeed, a running theme through this collection of SPR presidential addresses is the need for research that is inclusive of quantitative and qualitative approaches as well as their integration in order to produce a complete science of psychotherapy. The plea for inclusivity is positioned in contrast to the current context of political and economic forces dictating funding opportunities, and critiques of restrictive standards of the push for empirically supported treatments that emphasize randomized control trials at the cost of valuing other discovery-focused methods. The reader should expect to be exposed to a wide range of methods specifically designed for psychotherapy research such as task analysis, dream analysis, hermeneutic single-case efficacy design, core conflictual relationship themes, structural analysis of social behaviors, and the incorporation of neuroscience into psychotherapy research. The need for research that seeks to bridge the research and clinical world via practice-oriented research is presented as another alternative model of research.

From a historical perspective, the commentaries made by past presidents reflecting upon the remarks they made during their address are fascinating. They model for the reader how knowledge and research methods shift and grow. They engage in constructive dialogues with their past selves, which can take the form of both increased enthusiasm and reconsideration. Rather than disconnecting the present from past, and falling into the error

of presentism, this dialogical framework demonstrates for the reader the importance of continually refining research practice and theory production.

Their reflections remind us that theories and empirical findings are not ahistorical and timeless, but they arise and receive recognition in relation to the needs and forces at play in a given period. This book draws attention to perennial questions that still remain unanswered and unexplored despite changing trends in psychotherapy research practices, and it presents possible directions that warrant consideration. Drawing from the chapters, the editors recommend a wide range of future research agenda including:

- The development of transdiagnostic psychotherapies and mechanisms, reflecting the growing skepticism about current diagnostic practices.
- Tailoring therapies and interventions towards clients' complex presentations rather than just their problem or diagnosis.
- Transcending school-based approaches of psychotherapy training by developing integrative training models that emphasize common factors or principles of change.
- Expanding dialogue with other disciplines such as neurobiology, anthropology, sociology, and basic sciences.
- Growing attention to intense and long-term psychotherapy as alternatives to brief and manualized treatment for complex problems and marginalized populations.
- Consideration of sociocultural views of psychotherapy and the effects of society and culture in a globalized world.

Researchers can find inspiration in this work to move forward in any number of directions.

An advantage of having so many authors who are established researchers is that they are free to express their reservations candidly. The text frames a number of cautionary concerns that echo through many chapters and are based upon the wisdom of these pioneers. For instance, researchers are encouraged to approach research with knowledge of the history of psychotherapy research and practice. There is a concern that the rich understanding generated in past research is lost when researchers focus only upon contemporary literature. In addition, researchers are encouraged to develop an understanding of diverse epistemologies so that they may understand a wide range of qualitative research methods that would enable them to explore many questions. Also, they are warned of the dangers of having their research programs driven by politics or funding sources, especially when they lead to the neglect of social, cultural, and inter and intrapersonal factors. Notably, Les Greenberg concludes his chapter with a powerful reflection upon the social psychology of knowledge in which he argues that

in psychotherapy research, power involves privileged access to and controls of resources (grants), communication (publications), and positions (tenure). The power group essentially suppresses diversity and the promise of innovation by extremely conservative criteria of what constitutes science. . . . It is this lack of a level playing field that is a problem, not arguments about the logic of causation. (p. 25)

He recommends that psychotherapy research move from promoting empirically based treatments and instead develop an understanding that is founded upon the study of moment-by-moment change in session. These cautions point to the importance of SPR as an organization which has encouraged collaboration between emerging and senior scholars; which has embraced multiple epistemologies, orientations, and methods; and which, from its very inception, has tried to recognize and circumvent barriers that limit psychotherapy researchers' access to resources, to recognition, and to community.