Psychotherapy Research

Special Issue
“Therapeutic Relationships in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Theory and Recent Research”

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The therapeutic relationship in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can be defined as comprising both generic elements of alliance, empathy, expressed positive regard; as well as those that are specific to CBT: collaboration, empiricism, and Socratic dialogue. Collaboration, for example, is a concept that is adopted in a range of modalities but in CBT refers to active shared teamwork and is enhanced by therapist’s solicitation of client input to discussions, shared decision making, solicitation of client feedback, and a focus on responsivity to client contributions. Therefore CBT-specific relational elements may be distinguished from an agreement on goals and tasks of therapy, in the context of a therapeutic bond, while also being related to those agreements.

The therapeutic relationship in CBT requires adaptation and variation for each client-therapist interaction. For example, empathic understanding of the client and effective interpersonal style are central in assessments of therapist skill in CBT. There is also an expectation that the therapist tailors the qualities of the relationship in CBT, such as the degree and type of empathy. Such adjustments are based on the evolving cognitive case conceptualization and facilitate client engagement with techniques. Such adjustments can also directly facilitate change in cognitions, such as pervasive beliefs about others that have their origins in early life development and attachments (e.g., tailored therapist solicitation of feedback from the client reinforces to the client their opinion is important, but for another client it could trigger pressure and suspicion of the therapist’s motives). Therefore, every technique in CBT exists within a relational context and can be facilitated by the therapist’s responsiveness to the client, and of course there is a potential for the technique to positively or adversely influence the full array of relationship processes that are common to all psychotherapies and those that are specific to CBT.

Despite considerable interest in the delineation of in-session processes in CBT, the science is still emerging. The goal of this special issue is to examine the features of CBT in respect of the therapeutic relationship using advanced research designs and applying statistical models. The aim of this special issue in Psychotherapy Research is to feature empirical studies or review manuscripts that introduce innovative research methodologies, as well as clinical intervention studies.

This call is for empirical studies addressing research questions such as:
• How do core elements of the therapeutic relationship covary in CBT (e.g., expressed empathy and its relation to alliance, collaboration, and empiricism)
• How do distinctive features of the therapeutic relationship influence other in-session processes within CBT? For example, does the extent of collaboration during a session affect the client's willingness to engage in homework assignments at the end of that same session?
• How do relationship-based interventions (e.g., motivational interviewing and Socratic dialogue) influence other aspects of the relational process (e.g., alliance)?

Example of innovative research include the following:

• Experimental research on the effect of manipulating therapist behaviors (e.g., such as initial motivation to engage);
• Client and therapist factors that serve as moderators of process-outcome relations.

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