

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Smith, M.L., Glass, G.V., Miller, T.I. *The Benefits of Psychotherapy*, Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.

Reviewed by:

Dennis Payne  
University of Victoria

I found this to be a superlative text for both the practitioner and the researcher in the field of psychotherapy. The volume begins with two chapters that focus on previous critiques of psychotherapy. The classic reviews by Eysenck (1952, 1961) and Rachman (1971) are found wanting in criteria both individuals condemn researchers for omitting. Other reviewers, notably Luborsky, Singer and Luborsky (1975), more closely approximated the standards championed here by Smith, Glass and Miller. The authors are particularly interested in the components of a review which like the steps in an empirical study enable us to understand, evaluate and replicate. The mainstays, therefore of a review, like a study, are: hypotheses, population and sample, measurement, analysis, and conclusions. The important difference is in the subject matter, i.e. studies versus subjects.

A fundamental proposition of the authors which is implied by the different subject matter of a study and a review is that they require a different analysis. Studies according to design need particular analysis, reviews by virtue of being studies of studies deserve an analysis of analyses, i.e. meta-analysis. This is the key element guiding the contribution of these authors and they take issue with the important objections to any meta-analysis. In order to remain a review rather than a

summary, space here does not permit a full description of the argument. However, the objections listed may be the very ones held by the reader here who may be tempted to dismiss the text without some explanation of the authors' position.

The crux of the text's meta-analysis is that various studies pertaining to a particular topic, here the effectiveness of psychotherapy, can be compared by determining the relative effect size, ES, of any particular study. Effect size is calculated by subtracting the mean score for the control group on the outcome measure and dividing by the standard deviation of the control group. The statistical rationale for this procedure is dealt with in detail – in theory and some calculations in chapter three and in more detail in appendix seven which preserves the readability of the text while explaining how the actual effect size was calculated when some data had to be approximated, as it was not always reported.

The first objection to meta-analysis addressed by the authors is the contention that it makes no sense to integrate the findings of different studies as this is like mixing apples and oranges. The kernel of their response is that this is appropriate if one sets out to study fruit. A second objection is that the meta-analysis approach advocates low standards of judgement of the quality of studies. The counter to this argument is that there is negligible difference between "good" and "bad" studies when considering the psychotherapeutic effect. Furthermore, in the past reviewers have impeached this or that study for not meeting their most fond experimental criteria. I believe the writers successfully argue that while there are few if any studies that meet everyone's

criteria, several "imperfect" studies can converge on a true conclusion. Would-be critiques are forced to invoke an explanation of multiple causality (i.e., the observed difference can be caused either by this particular measurement flaw, or this particular design flaw, or this particular analysis flaw, or...). The third objection addressed here is that this approach lumps studies into gross categories and fails to separate treatments that ought not to be grouped. The response to this criticism is that knowledge, itself, comes from the search for meaningful generalizations. This necessitates grouping different things together according to the common qualities they have in common rather than their differences. The fourth objection deals with the shortcomings in the literature (selective reporting, incorrect primary analyses, insufficient data, etc.). The authors go to great lengths to deal with these problems in their analysis and their methods are explained in satisfactory detail leaving this reviewer believing that their allegiance is: "To science first, not to psychotherapy."

Smith, Glass and Miller devote chapter four to a description of the methods of the psychotherapy meta-analysis. They include the description of and the criteria of: population definitions, sampling and search procedures, classification of studies, and analysis of data. The theoretical and practical implications outlined in this chapter enable the reader to gain a further insight into the quality of the authors' labour.

The remaining chapters report the actual findings of the meta-analysis review. Again there is not enough space here to detail these findings, but a list of the topics covered together with the central conclusions will hopefully suffice to whet the reader's appetite. The reviewers report their data on the effectiveness of different types of psychotherapy, and beginning with the effects of eighteen different types they group them into three classes: psychoanalytic therapies; behavioral therapies; and developmental therapies. Therapies are equated by a regression analysis to control for reactivity of outcome measures. The authors report their data for a number of therapy variables, including: effect of therapy for different kinds of clients and presenting problems, group, individual, and other modes of therapy, effect of duration of therapy, effect of therapist training and experience, effect of therapy for different settings, effect by studies conducted at different times and published in different sources, effects for different

methods of evaluation (experimenter blinding, experimenter allegiance, client solicitation; internal validity). The authors' conclusion is that psychotherapy is undeniably effective. Estimated for all types of therapy, client and outcome, the average effect is 0.85 standard deviation units, an estimate based on 475 controlled studies. The effect of 0.85 standard deviations means that an applicant for therapy who is no better off than average (i.e., is at the 50th percentile) in psychological well-being, compared to all those who have not received psychotherapy (control group), rises to the 80th percentile as a result of therapy. Several other questions surrounding the effects of psychotherapy are addressed. One particularly notable finding is that experimental rigor was positively related to the size of effect produced. This conclusion hopefully lays to rest the allegation that poor quality research methods account for the positive outcomes observed.

In addition to the psychotherapy review, the authors also reviewed the effectiveness of drug therapy with the same type of meta-analysis. Only the broadest conclusions of that work are reported here, but the reader is assured of the same degree of critical evaluation of that literature if that is where his/her interests lie.

The authors' final chapter presents their conclusions and discusses their implications for practice, training and research. Their four general conclusions are: 1.) Psychotherapy is beneficial, consistently so, and in many different ways. Its benefits are on a par with other expensive and ambitious interventions, such as schooling and medicine. The benefits of psychotherapy are not permanent, but then little is. 2.) Different types of psychotherapy (verbal or behavioral, psychodynamic, client-centered, or systematic desensitization) do not produce different types or degrees of benefit. 3.) Differences in how psychotherapy is conducted (whether in groups or individually, by experienced or novice therapists, for long or short periods of time, and the like) make very little difference in how beneficial it is. 4.) Psychotherapy is scarcely any less effective than drug therapy in the treatment of serious psychological disorders. When the two therapies are combined, the net benefits are less than the sum of their separate benefits.

In conclusion this volume, including complete bibliography, addresses fundamental issues in psychotherapy research and practice with readable style and empirical sensitivity.