

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG, 2010

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## Abstract

Larsson, B. P. M. (2010). *Therapists and their patients: Similarities and differences in attitudes between four psychotherapy orientations in Sweden*. Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

The aim of this thesis was to illuminate the possibilities and obstacles for therapists of different orientations to communicate and cooperate better. Data was collected using a questionnaire named VEP-Q. Similarities and differences in attitudes between licensed psychotherapists of four orientations - working with adults in individual therapy - were surveyed. In all 416 therapists, defining themselves as a psychodynamic (PDT), cognitive (CT), cognitive behavioral (CBT), or integrative eclectic (IE) therapist, were compared. In addition a client version of the VEP-Q was developed and distributed to patients of a subsample of these therapists. **Study I** describes similarities and differences between the therapists regarding (1) background factors, (2) focus in psychotherapy, (3) attitudes towards psychotherapy as art/craftsmanship, (4) scientific outlook, (5) what characterizes a good psychotherapist, and (6) how psychotherapy ought to be pursued. The therapists had very similar attitudes about the therapeutic relationship and rather similar attitudes about which effects psychotherapy ought to obtain. The greatest differences were related to psychotherapeutic techniques and views on scientific issues. In **Study II**, a factor analysis regarding items about how psychotherapy ought to be pursued was conducted, resulting in three scales; a PDT, a CBT and a common factor (CF) scale. In addition to theoretical orientation, variables such as gender and basic professional training influenced how respondents answered the VEP-Q. In **Study III**, the aim was to investigate if psychotherapists misjudge other orientations following a pattern from group psychology: overrating positive aspects in their own group and having prejudiced attitudes towards other groups. The study showed that psychotherapists can correctly evaluate therapists of their own orientation, but exaggerated the differences between their own and other orientations in a prejudiced way. In **Study IV**, patients' preferences about how psychotherapy ought to be pursued were compared on a PDT, a CBT and a CF scale. The patients had rather similar preferences irrespective of their therapists' orientation or which theoretical orientation they themselves preferred. The patients' preferences were also stable after having been in psychotherapy for at least ten sessions. However, clients with a PDT therapist considered the PDT scale as more important than clients in other orientations did, and women rated the CF scale as more important than men did. The clients' preferences were also compared with the therapists'. While the clients' ratings centered around the scales' midpoint, the therapists' ratings differed more, and they often had higher ratings on the scales than the clients did.

The general conclusion is that important differences between theoretical orientations in psychotherapy remain, but the extent of these differences are exaggerated, and the phenomena of ingroup/outgroup thinking among psychotherapists is one explanation for this exaggeration.

*Key words:* psychotherapy, theoretical orientation, psychotherapist attitudes, client attitudes, questionnaires, prejudice, preferences, integrative psychotherapy

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# Therapists and their patients: Similarities and differences in attitudes between four psychotherapy orientations in Sweden

Billy Larsson  
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2010

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi, som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs universitet kommer att offentligen försvaras fredagen den 21 maj, 2010, kl 13.00, sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor emeritus Bengt-Åke Armelius, Department of Psychology, Umeå University.

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This thesis consists of a summary and the following four studies:

- I. Larsson, B. P. M., Kaldo, V., & Broberg, A. G. (2009). Similarities and differences between practitioners of psychotherapy in Sweden: A comparison of attitudes between psychodynamic, cognitive, cognitive-behavioral, and integrative therapists. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 19(1), 34-66.
- II. Larsson, B. P. M., Kaldo, V., & Broberg, A. G. (in press). Theoretical orientation and therapists' attitudes to important components of therapy: A study based on the 'Valuable Elements in Psychotherapy' Questionnaire. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*.
- III. Larsson, B. P. M., & Broberg, A. G. (2010). What psychotherapists with different theoretical orientations think about each other: The role of prejudice. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- IV. Larsson, B. P. M., Kaldo, V., & Broberg, A. G. (2010). Similarities and differences in preferences between Swedish clients in four different psychotherapies: An explorative and prospective study. Unpublished manuscript.



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