



## Empathy Versus Synchrony

We say that empathy creates change, but it's really synchrony that does it.

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*“The term neural synchrony... refers to how the brains of people carrying out an activity together will start to behave in the same way.”* — **Morten Pedersen**, technologist

### Mysteries

There are mysteries about how things work, some of which are crucial. The central mysteries provide insight into other questions, and reveal deeper questions that no one has yet asked.

The central mystery in physics is the way fundamental objects behave both like waves and particles, but never at the same time. This is the foundation of cosmology, physics, chemistry, geology, and biology and we know the universe would not “work” if this were not the case, but we don’t understand why this is, or know how it works. The best we have is quantum theory, but the theory can’t explain this.

In politics, as far as I'm concerned, the fundamental question is why people fail to understand their problems. Why do people repeatedly accept, endorse, and even die for explanations that are nonsensical or wrong?

Some people make progress in understanding culture by applying thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, but most people don't. Why are the problems of groups unfathomable to individuals? If there is something keeping people stupid, what is it?

Psychotherapy is remotely related to psychology. Psychotherapy works to change the nature of mind; it addresses itself to the mysteries of individuals. Psychology is an institution focused on academic questions of a political nature. Psychology has always been political.

Psychotherapy is to psychology as spirit is to religion. The distinction is unclear to most people, and the similar names and professional overlap confound the two, but once you're involved in the field, the differences become clear. As a practitioner of clinical counseling, which is another word for psychotherapy, psychology is of little use.

The central problems of psychology are therapeutically unimportant, and will remain unimportant as long as psychology remains logical and dogmatic. At least religion fosters cultural unity. In comparison, psychology's research culture is insignificantly small.

How people change is central to psychotherapy. It's often said that you cannot change another person. I often point this out to my clients. The truth is that you can, but it's not done using any formula and it's unpredictable.

We know experience changes people, and experience is somewhat under our control. Travels, adventures, family, relationships, and cultural exposure enlarge a person's understanding and modify their personality. A cloistered, isolated life leads to dumb, inflexible people. We can cause people to change, but we can't predict how they'll change.

## **The Keys in Psychotherapy**

In 1957, Carl Rogers (1957) proposed that the success of psychotherapy depended on what's now called "unconditional positive regard." Today, this is defined as showing complete support for and acceptance of a person no matter what that person says or does. This distortion of Roger's idea percolates through much of psychotherapy, undermining its foundations.

What Rogers meant, and which he could not get therapists to understand, was that people are the best experts on their lives and experiences. It's not that the therapist must accept their client's conclusions, it is that the therapist must recognize that only the client has the power to change.

What you unconditionally accept is not that the client is always right—even they don't think so or they wouldn't ask for help—what you unconditionally accept is that only the client has the authority to change. In other words, that the therapist has neither power nor answers.

It's therapists' inability to accept their ignorance that has led to the twisting of Roger's suggestion into something that preserves the therapist's self-image. It leads to the perception that therapists are manipulative and untrustworthy.

Using the misunderstanding that acceptance changes people, therapists maintain the fiction that they have knowledge, authority, and control. In truth, they have these in no greater measure than anyone else, and in less measure than their clients.

## **Psychotherapy's Mystery**

You don't need to know how people change in order to support change. The idea that you need to answer question number one before approaching question two throws most therapists off track. This is a common mistake in applying reason to an unreasonable process.

In most circumstances where you want to change someone else's opinion, you first ask why they believe what they do. Then, you'll proceed to explain why your ideas are better. It's reasonable to assume that people's ideas are based on reason. They're not. They're based on feelings, and feelings are not reasonable.

Psychotherapy's first and second mysteries are how people change and how to facilitate change. Psychology tries to answer the first question but has not. This leaves those therapists who follow psychology in the dark. Being in the dark is not acceptable to most therapists who need to feel that they're valuable. These therapists may turn to encouraging aphorisms, such as:

*"We cannot change anything until we accept it."*

*"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change."*

*"What is necessary to change a person is to change their awareness of themselves."*

These aphorisms are circular and don't tell you how to do anything. The only one worth remembering is Irvin Yalom's, "A different therapy must be constructed for each patient because each has a unique story." Still, I cannot subscribe to the word "construct" because it implies some best therapy, and that a therapist can construct it.

It's my experience that the most effective change follows when I "construct" nothing. Instead, I follow each client in their unique path of unpredictable change.

A change in personality involves a complete rearrangement affecting intellect, emotions, and neurology. The process is chaotic, and there is no more a proper therapeutic structure than there is a proper shape of a cloud or a volcano's eruption.

## **Empathy**

While no therapeutic structure is proper for all situations, some are generally useful. Empathy is one. Empathy is an imagined feeling of similarity. It enables one person to think they feel what another

person feels. An empathic connection is only as effective as it is true and, with divergent or disabled people, the illusion of empathy doesn't go far.

What empathy accomplishes, if it accomplishes anything, is resonance. If what you and another person imagine are largely the same, then you can join each other in exploration without relying on reason or language.

You may still speak, but the language may be your own, with its own structures and meanings. You may speak in ways that are emotional, angry, or dispirited. If there is a resonance, then you will hardly need to explain yourself. Each person will understand the feelings of the other.

## Synchrony

When resonance works both ways, so that each understands the other, there is synchrony. Synchrony means that you move together. You move beyond language and reason in a way that allows you to feel the same things. Since it is changes in feelings that lead people to change, synchrony is generally useful. I think it is essential to any successful therapy.

Synchrony is not a method or concept, it's a state of mirrored engagement. It relies on shared resonance, and that cannot be assumed. There are some things you may not resonate with, such as anger, trauma, or violence; maybe you do or maybe you don't. If you do resonate, you can maintain synchrony. If you don't resonate, the synchrony is broken.

Some people are welcoming. Resonance is comforting and two-way resonance will develop from trust. Others are oppositional or paranoid. They find resonance threatening and synchrony threatens them even more. I experience this with some psychopaths and schizophrenics. These are evasive people who cannot emotionally connect.

Breaking down the barriers to synchrony is a process of psychological reconciliation. It is a collapse of barriers. If these are merely intellectual attachments, such as to your work or your sense of obligation, then their break may cause minor disturbance. But if these barriers lie at the foundation of your personality, identity, or self-worth, then getting past them will cause a psychological or even psychotic breakdown.

The concept of synchrony comes from neurofeedback therapy (White 2022; Silva 2024). You can see brain waves synchronize across one person's brain, and we can infer that a similar emotional process happens between people.

*“Almost nothing is known about the brain activities of two individuals while those individuals are engaged in a social interaction.”* — **Guillaume Dumas et al.** (2011)

I have not heard anyone else refer to synchrony as a psychotherapeutic tool, and I have not seen any direct experimental evidence of it. Experiments are starting to be done. Little has been done so far (Galbusera et al. 2019; Behrens et al. 2020; Konrad et al. 2024), but inter-brain synchrony is being recognized (Dumas et al. 2011).

This slow start is because neither psychologists nor psychotherapists know much about the neural aspects of psychology. The emerging ideas about the coupling of people's brains and thoughts are outside the introspective model of psychotherapy. As a result and as is typical, these new ideas are largely ignored.

The High Priests of psychotherapy once were psychiatrists. They were therapists once, but their training is now limited to anatomy and pharmacology. Neither of these have much to do with psychotherapy. For that reason, the field of psychiatry is collapsing into a kind of therapeutic irrelevance maintained by legal authority and the pharmaceutical industry (Pender 2022).

## **Becoming Synchronized**

What people need to know, clients and therapists, is that you can change your nervous system to become more adept at synchronizing. You might say that neural training can make an anxious, suspicious, or depressed person more open and trusting. How far this can go is not yet known. We don't know whether neural training can have a positive effect on the more serious maladjustments of psychopathy and schizophrenia.

I have applied neural training to sociopaths with little result, but that was before I had all the tools that I have now. Also, my relationship with sociopaths has mostly been personal and not professional, and that limits what can be accomplished.

I have not been able to neurally train my schizophrenic clients. That's partly because I work remotely and the tools for remote neural training are still in their infancy. These limited tools and the difficult relationship one has with schizophrenics make progress difficult. Still, under the right circumstances, I suspect neural training would also benefit people in these complicated situations.

This will change over time. The neural training technology is here and it is affordable. Training hardware is available from Interaxon and Divergence Neuro. But the gap in knowledge is so wide that few therapists or clients are prepared.

Your nervous system does not change by itself. Cognition must change too, or the neural changes will reconfigure in accordance with the old thinking patterns. It's necessary to start softening one's concepts and preconceptions in order to facilitate neuroplasticity.

This is the purpose of my book, *Operating Manual for Enlightenment, Recreating Your Mind*. The book addresses the basic components of personality: intellect, emotion, perception, and neurology. Its goal is to turn the reader's mind toward a different concept of integration. The book is available in digital, audio, and printed forms.

To take a step beyond objective science, I believe you must become involved in changing yourself. You must learn what makes you tick.

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