

Book Review / Compte rendu

Nolan, P. (2012). *Therapist and client: A relational approach to psychotherapy*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN: 978-0-470-01953-5, 230 pages

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ABSTRACT

Patrick Nolan's book *Therapist and Client: A Relational Approach to Psychotherapy* is a practical guide to an integrative relational approach, which synthesizes a range of approaches from relational psychoanalysis to humanistic therapies and body-oriented work. The author thoroughly reviews findings from attachment, developmental, and neuroscience research to provide a firm empirical basis for his approach. The book is filled with numerous detailed case examples illustrating the intersubjective aspects of therapy. This valuable guide offers a wealth of innovative ideas for psychotherapists of all levels to deepen their understanding of the healing power of the therapeutic relationship.

RÉSUMÉ

L'ouvrage de Patrick Nolan, intitulé *Therapist and Client: A Relational Approach to Psychotherapy* [Thérapeute et client : une approche relationnelle à la psychothérapie], est un guide pratique d'utilisation de l'approche relationnelle intégrative, qui synthétise diverses approches à la psychanalyse relationnelle en passant par les thérapies humanistes et le travail psychocorporel. L'auteur examine en profondeur les résultats de la recherche sur l'attachement, le développement, et la neuroscience afin de fonder son approche sur une solide base empirique. L'ouvrage présente de nombreux exemples de cas détaillés qui illustrent les aspects intersubjectifs de la thérapie. Ce précieux guide propose aux psychothérapeutes de tous les niveaux une foule d'idées novatrices leur permettant d'améliorer leur compréhension du pouvoir de guérison de la relation thérapeutique.

Therapist and Client: A Relational Approach to Psychotherapy is a practical and sophisticated guide to an integrative relational approach to psychotherapy. The goal of this book is to provide principles for maximizing the therapeutic potential of the therapist-client relationship. Nolan draws on findings from neuroscience, attachment, and developmental research to provide a firm basis for his integrative approach. The rich content of this volume, which reflects his clinical experience and dedication, is full of evocative case examples that vividly summon the sense of being with him in session. The book consists of seven chapters that successively deepen understanding of the therapeutic relationship and its healing potential.

The first chapter highlights the key findings from infant research and neuroscience to illustrate the centrality of relationships to psychotherapy. Nonverbal processes such as reciprocity, rhythmic coupling, and matching, which characterize infant-mother exchanges that build secure attachment and facilitate healthy development of the infant, are also relevant to understanding the therapeutic relationship and change.

The author carefully examines some of the long-held assumptions in developmental concepts in psychoanalytic theories in light of findings from developmental research, and then proposes revisions to accommodate the plasticity of human development, capturing the two-way nature of the therapeutic relationship.

The second chapter lays out various relational concepts. The author's view of the therapeutic relationship consists of striking a balance between two interrelated elements to adjust the quality of relational experience to what is optimum for the client and the therapeutic situation. For example, therapists create a balance between an existential encounter in the here-and-now and psychodynamic regression. The former values exploration of an individual's potential within an "I-Thou" relationship. The latter involves regressive dependence—when therapists deliberately engage in a developmentally necessary relationship for the client. Maintaining balance between experiencing and observing, experiencing and reflecting, and attunement and separateness all help therapists remain engaged in the relational experience while regulating and managing what happens in the relationship.

In Chapter 3, the author extends our ordinary understanding of the therapeutic relationship by introducing concepts such as potential space, play, and creativity, as originally put forth by Winnicott (1953). Therapy is a place where clients reach a new level of understanding, a more authentic way of experiencing and communicating, and a greater sense of vitality. In order to realize these, therapists and clients jointly create the potential space of therapy pervaded by openness and playfulness to maximize the potential of the moment. There are many forms and different expressions of play in psychotherapy, from wordplay and toying with images and dream motifs to joking or game playing.

In Chapter 4, the author defines and explores the intersubjective experience. Intersubjectivity is the world co-created by the therapist and the client, where a rich new focus and possible pathways for client change are created. Therapists need to maintain an evenly suspended attention with an open and receptive stance to allow potential space to arise. This stance frees us from being overly preoccupied with theories that may intrude at the expense of newly emerging experiences that are significant to the client.

Chapter 5 introduces a body-mind perspective that allows therapists to address the whole person, encompassing the interactions between therapist and client more fully. Five body-mind modes that therapists need to attend to are (a) bodily sensation, (b) emotions, (c) cognition, (d) imagination, and (e) motor activity. By attending to all five modes, we can work with a wider range of in-session events, maintain focus on the here-and-now of the session, and help clients regain vitality and playfulness while building ego.

Chapter 6 provides specific principles of working relationally with fragile and traumatized clients who cannot fully regulate their experience. The relational principles include establishing a clear therapeutic frame and the provision of a safe, supportive, and nonthreatening environment while staying empathic and emotionally present to the client. In order to prevent retraumatization, it is important to focus on supporting their strength and competence in managing the traumatic memory.

The final chapter is a guide to conducting relational psychotherapy focusing mainly on early sessions. It describes four main levels of therapy. The first is counseling and support, in which sympathetic, nonjudgemental listening helps to increase client self-awareness. The second is intermediate work, in which clients explore issues deeply, rather than finding immediate solutions. The third is deep work, in which the transference work becomes prominent and unconscious motives and anxieties are worked on in the here and now. The fourth is ego support, which involves the therapist's active and directive stance in working with fragile clients. The author provides a detailed description of the relational stance of flexibility, openness, experimentation, and optimal responsiveness.

Nolan's integrative approach does the utmost justice to the most uniquely human aspects of our relational existence and the interpersonal nature of psychotherapy, with support from advanced research findings. Research that links process variables to outcomes in psychotherapy has consistently demonstrated that the therapy relationship makes substantial and consistent contributions to client success, regardless of theoretical orientations: it shows that the therapy relationship accounts for improvement just as much as does the particular treatment method. The last two decades have produced a large volume of research on the working alliance, which consists of therapist-client collaboration and emotional bond. Researchers are now seeking ways to extend this understanding by focusing on corrective relational experiences, which Nolan delineates in this book so scrupulously. His integration of concepts such as potential space, play, and creativity with theories of the therapeutic relationship is unique and inspiring and shows new direction for psychotherapy research.

The book is recommended for both students and experienced practitioners looking to widen and deepen their understanding of the therapeutic relationship. This reviewer would have appreciated more concrete discussion on how Nolan's ideas can be incorporated into problem-solving approaches, which many counsellors adopt. It would be beneficial to have specific training recommendations for increasing our sensitivity to intersubjective phenomena in psychotherapy. Nonetheless, this is a solid synthesis that will be valuable as a viable alternative to more mechanized treatments focusing on problem solving and skill acquisition.

Reference

Winnicott, D. (1953). Transitional objects and transitional phenomena. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34, 89–97.

About the Author

Shigeru Iwakabe is an associate professor at the graduate school of humanities and sciences at Ochanomizu University in Japan. His main interests include psychotherapy process research, emotions in psychotherapy, professional development and training of clinicians, and cultural and social issues in psychotherapy.

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