On Conceptual and Technical Integrity in Psychoanalysis and Behavior Therapy
Two Fundamentally Incompatible Systems

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American psychology has long been polarized with respect to the nature and role of unconscious mental processes. If early metaphysical behaviorists steadfastly rejected both unconsciousness and consciousness, psychoanalysts resolutely continued to espouse a complex structure of unconscious mental processes (Shevrin & Dickman, 1980). At the intellectual level, it is reasonable to conclude that the mutual antagonism between behavior therapy and psychoanalysis that characterized the early development of behavior therapy stemmed in part from this dichotomy. At a more pragmatic level, there were other driving forces.

In the early days, circa 1958–1968, many words but few data were dedicated to the edict that behavior therapy was “superior.” Circumscribed studies were eagerly paraded to bolster the proclaimed advantages of behavior therapy. Later, the naive question of which form of therapy per se was more effective was abandoned in favor of comparisons of specific treatments under specific circumstances for specific purposes. For reasons that were not entirely scientific, the argument that each type of intervention

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had merit under certain circumstances became increasingly fashionable (e.g., Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1975). This, it may be speculated, led to retrenchment and a superficial easing of tensions between the two warring factions. Questions about behavior therapists—primarily psychologists—receiving third-party payments and demands that all clinicians be held accountable for and demonstrate the efficacy of their interventions could well have created a vexing predicament. On the one hand, it became increasingly apparent that generally applicable yardsticks of comparative effectiveness were not to be readily established by simple experiment. On the other hand, external agencies were accelerating their demands for scientific evidence that therapy was effective and the general public was becoming lawsuit conscious. Neither faction could comfortably endure those pressures. Implicit agreement on the expediency of shared concepts, the effectiveness of selected interventions, and the value of certain common professional tactics might well have favored the movement toward some form of integration and the joining of forces against a common external threat. The changing climate, with its increasing emphasis upon information exchange and innovation, which was encouraged by the media, also contributed to an acceptance of hybrid intervention systems and a breakdown of rigid patterns of therapy.

It is, of course, most unlikely that members of either camp will admit to the possibility of such motivations as contributing factors, and the argument for détente is usually couched in some professionally more acceptable form (see Franks & Barbrack, 1983). The debate usually revolves around the feasibility of integration at various levels, ranging from the highly conceptual to day-to-day practice.

Regardless of the possibility of harmony at more esoteric levels, the notion of some form of technical alliance is clinically enticing. It is hard to justify the rejection of any procedure that seems to offer hope to a human being in distress. But this should not blind us with respect to the basic issues. Is conceptual or philosophical integration possible? Is integration at the more utilitarian level of techniques possible and, if so, under what circumstances? Even if technical eclecticism, the application of procedures that seem effective regardless of theoretical origins, is shown to be helpful in the treatment of specific patients, under what circumstances—if any—is this likely to lead to long-term advancement in our understanding of the principles of therapeutic intervention? The position adopted here is that, in the long run, the call for rapprochement is likely to herald neither an era of scientific progress nor patient benefit (see Franks, 1982). A spirit of tolerance, if not acceptance, of two vigorously promulgated, vehemently but not rigidly defended, fundamentally different positions is advocated as a possible alternative either to destructive antagonism or futile inte-