CHAPTER 6

DAVANLOO’S SHORT-TERM DYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY
A CROSS-THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF CHANGE MECHANISMS

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INTRODUCTION

Short-term dynamic psychotherapy, or STDP (Davanloo, 1978, 1980), is an intensive form of psychoanalytically based therapy that appears to provide a powerful treatment package for effecting change in severe, long-standing maladaptive behavior. The innovative quality of Davanloo’s approach, however, seems to warrant careful study from a broader and more integrative theoretical perspective than psychodynamic theory alone, for STDP appears to incorporate cognitive behavioral maneuvers and principles of learning woven into the fabric of the treatment. Of course, this was not Davanloo’s intent, but in his quest for effective techniques (examining his own videotapes over a 20-year period) he appears to have isolated certain mechanisms that bear resemblance to operant, respondent, and cognitive techniques.

A learning theory basis as an alternative explanation for psychodynamic change has been suggested for many years (Dollard & Miller,
1950; Fenichel, 1945; Pavlov, 1927). More recently, Wachtel (1978) has provided an indepth exploration of areas of convergence and divergence between psychoanalysis and behavior therapy. A growing number of integrationist theorists are referring to such mechanisms as conditioning, stimulus control, reinforcement, and extinction as agents influencing therapeutic change in general (e.g., Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982) and specifically in STDP (Western, 1986). Relevant to this discussion is a set of procedures called “covert conditioning,” which uses principles of learning to alter the frequency, intensity, and duration of internal responses; that is, thoughts, feelings, and images (Cautela, 1977; Cautela & McCullough, 1978). Although Cautela does not apply his covert conditioning principles to psychodynamic issues, these mechanisms appear to occur in STDP; that is, the influence of reward, punishment, and extinction on psychodynamic issues as presented in thoughts, feelings, and images. By examining this psychodynamic treatment in the light of other theoretical perspectives, it is hoped that comparisons may become evident that would not be deduced from psychodynamic theory alone.

The main elements of STDP involve two steps; first, a form of cognitive restructuring and second, a desensitization through exposure to conflictual inner experience. This chapter will discuss these elements in terms of common change mechanisms (e.g., Goldfried, 1980; Rice and Greenberg, 1984) and how they may be operative in behavior change. A case illustration and clinical examples will be provided to begin to operationalize the theoretical constructs. Following the discussion of the STDP techniques, hypotheses and research questions will be suggested for testing the relative effects of these different theoretical components, for specific patients under specific conditions.

CASE ILLUSTRATION

Picture a therapy session in progress. The therapist and the patient are sitting facing each other with a videotape camera recording the process. The patient has come for STDP treatment for help with anxiety following being fired. He has not been able to seek another job and instead has been working in a position far beneath his capacity for several months. Following a thorough assessment of the anxiety to rule out the need for medication, the therapist asks for a specific description of the incident which elicited the anxiety.

PT: Well, Jim called me into his office and told me I wasn’t needed anymore. It didn’t make any sense. I had just been given a raise and a promotion the month before. They always liked my work. I