

Change

What is change? The fourth addition of the American Heritage Dictionary describes it as "interchange; to exchange for or replaced with another, to be or cause to be different; alter" (2001, p. X). Agnes (1999, p. 245) echoes this definition: "to cause to become different; alter, transform; convert." Interestingly, there is no definition for change in Reber's Dictionary of Psychology. Gendlin describes change as an internal process that shifts bad and unproductive feelings to feelings, which enhance and sustain satisfaction in life. (1978, pp. 10-16). Change occurs as one examines one's felt sense, which shifts as one can see the holistic picture of one's experience emerge out of his specific type of self-examination.

No matter how it is defined, change is the currency of psychotherapy, and any form of endeavor that seeks to alleviate suffering or enhance the human condition. Change appears to be elusive, and yet it is ubiquitous. Change appears to manifest instantly, and yet exists as a temporal process. Behavioral shifts resulting from the change process are the brass ring of psychotherapy. (Yalom, 1995, p.1).

Yalom contends, however, that "... therapeutic change is an enormously complex process that occurs through an intricate interplay of human experiences, which I will refer to as 'therapeutic factors'." (1995, p.1). For Yalom, change requires an interplay, not with just the self, but with others, because change reveals itself via shifts in interpersonal functioning. People cannot change without seeing themselves revealed through the eyes of the social group, because they wear internal blinders.

Watzlawick, et al maintain that real change (second-order change), cannot occur without considering that it results only as one moves into the meta-organizational level of the process, directly addressing the system at its open-end rather than wrestling with polarities that keep the system cycling in a closed loop. Anything less

is merely first-order change or *no change at all*. They contend that (1974, p.77):

Mythologies die hard, and the mythologies of change are no exception. With change such a pervasive element of existence, one might expect the nature of change and of the ways of effecting it should be clearly understood. But the most immediately given is often the most difficult to grasp, and this difficulty is meant to promote the formation of mythologies.

Many schools of thought discuss change from their various perspectives, arguing about the best way(s) to garner change. Some get so lost in their epistemologies that the change process itself falls prey to erudition. Whole institutions arise out of this never ending analysis, as scholarly as it may be, and facilitation of the change process nearly ceases to exist. The books for this course contain lots of information about the *results* of the change process, but not so much about the process itself. They either present and discuss broad, sweeping concepts or individual, disconnected details. As Greenberg points out (in Beck and Lewis, 2000, p. xiii):

Limited attention in psychotherapy research... has been paid to the initial steps of observation of the process of treatment and its measurement. In fact, intensive, rigorous observation of how change takes place in groups has probably been the most sorely neglected. Investigators need to observe the process of change to provide practitioners with the kind of explanation of how change takes place, an explanation that goes beyond prediction and involves a new understanding of what actually occurs.

Yalom work hard to create clarity, but only a few books, like Gendlin's *Focusing*, address the change process per se, giving us insight into the best approach for facilitation. There may be good excuses for this oversight, after all, as Watzlawick, et al point out, change may be such a complex process involving such complex systems and such complex interactions of multiple systems that it is hard to track and get a handle on.

Each author cited here focuses on different aspects of what they consider to be the change process, emphasizing and describing their chosen aspect. For example, Yalom discusses in tremendous detail interpersonal relations and group cohesiveness; Shaffer and Galinsky present ideas on mirroring and insight; Katz

emphasizes encountering the self and self-awareness' role in growth; Beck and Lewis tell us how to measure changes resulting from therapeutic processes; and the Corey's put forth many ideas on effective facilitation of the group psychotherapy process from the standpoint of generating, supporting and maintaining the optimal atmosphere for change, as suggested by apparent results.

Watzlawick, et al refer to efficacy. They question the efficacy of any method of garnering change that does not try to solve the right problem. Admitted and proud Brief Therapists, they contend that any successful change must be of the second-order content, especially when it comes to complex behavior systems. They like in the human and his internal and external environment to a system, of the open-ended kind. Most attempts to solve behavioral issues and increase satisfaction in life are the kind that really make no difference, because the language of change is the language of *what* not *why*. Discovering the *what* requires *movement* from the first level of logic to the meta- level. Watzlawick and colleagues remind us (1974, p.p. 23-24):

A system which may run through all its possible internal changes (no matter how many there are) without effecting a systemic change, i.e., a second-order change, is said to be caught in a *Game Without End*. It cannot generate from within itself the conditions for its own change; it cannot produce the rules for the change of its own rules.... second-order change is introduced into the system from the outside and therefore is not something familiar or something understandable in terms of the vicissitudes of first-order change. Hence it's puzzling, seemingly capricious nature. But seen from outside the system, it merely amounts to a change of the premises (the combination rules in terms of Group Theory) governing the *system as a whole*.

Despite Yalom's contention that Brief Therapy as a less than stellar reputation for efficacy (1995, p. 275), he presents their same notion using different words. His contention that interpersonal involvement in the group setting leads to intra-personal involvement sets the stage for second-order change. By changing the intra-personal mindset via a viewing and experimenting with alternative ways of behaving, one creates the atmosphere for changing one's internally set rules of

behavior.

Yalom mistakenly criticizes the notion of second-order change when what he really takes issue with is Brief Therapy's claim of a shortened timeline for change. (1995, p. 276). He emphasizes that it takes time for change to occur, at least 12 months to two years. After all, change is a process and processes have a temporal dimension. He apparently thinks that Brief Therapy does not consider at all the temporal aspect of the change process. However, Watzlawick, et al agree that temporality plays a role. They claim that a certain level of analysis must take place to identify the right problem to solve. Yet the process should not take light years once one determines which problem is the real problem. When one addresses the right problem, change occurs rapidly. (Watzlawick et al, 1974, pp. 81-83).

The actual moment of the behavioral shift, however, exists in the "here and now", a point about which all agree. Yalom illustrates with (1995, p. 142):

There will be frequent excursions into the "there and then" -- that is, into personal history and into current life situations. In fact, these excursions are so inevitable that one becomes curious when they do not occur. It is not that the group does not deal with the past: the crucial task is not to uncover, to piece together, and to understand the past, *but to use the past for the help it offers in understanding (and changing) the individual's mode of relating to the others in the present.*

For change to occur, we'll must bring the "there and then" into the "here and now", creating a reframing environment using skills develop subsequent to the "there and then" circumstance. This bringing of fresh resources creates a new lens through which to view the problem and is often enough to generate change. The more mature self of the "here and now" steps in for the less mature self who experienced the "there and then" and couldn't quite handle it. Reframing is much easier with maturity at the helm.

Groups can bolster the confidence of the individual, becoming and asked her

resource to aid the reframing process in the "here and now." Burman says it this way (2004, p.278):

Hence, dominant representations, such as the maternal metaphor, as an amateur primordial merging can be regarded as a group achievement rather than as a psychic starting point. Not attending to the more permeable, positing of the outside/inside boundary has consequences for our analysis of the 'here and now' versus 'then and there' relationships.

Second-order change in the "here and now" occurs as the result of the somatic experience of "there and then" in the "here and now." (Gendlin, 1978, p.45). The somatic experience handle enables the changer to confront the "there and then" headlong thereby diffusing its power in the "here and now." This is the main principle behind all techniques of semantic processing. One technique that is used quite successfully is the felt-sense-based approach known as Focusing. Gendlin explains (1978, p.160):

Real learning can only occur in dialogue with one's body.... feelings seem like in her things, strong and often unchanging. To reveal that healing is not a fan, one must sense beyond it. It is different to sense the whole of the situation as a not yet clear body sense. Feelings often conflict with reason. Many feelings are *less* wise than reason, yet reason alone is rarely enough to change us, or rely on. The holistic felt sense is more inclusive than reason. It includes the reasons of reason as well as what made the feeling and much more. That holistic sense can be lived further and has its own directionality. It is your sense of the whole thing, including what you know, have thought, have learned. It includes both what you think you "ought" and what is not yet resolved. Thought and feeling, ought and want, are not now split in it.

This form of semantic processing uses the felt sense to facilitate reframing. Reframing moves the changer into the meta level, so thoroughly detailed by Watzlawick, et al.

Katz addresses the issue of temporality. "The process [of growth] can be seen as having two major phases-preludes and paths. The former deal more with issues in personality and occur at a more psychological level; the latter deal more with the

essential core beneath personality and occur at a more spiritual level. In a prelude phase, a person may realize he can change, but growth remains more a possibility than a reality. As one works with a path, over a long period of time, growth becomes realized. A person begins to journey into more transpersonal or spiritual realms." (1993, p.14).

I relate to prelude as the desire to change and path as the taking of the actions necessary to garner the change and cement it. Perhaps growth is what Watzlawick, et al's second-order change amounts to; a letting-go of old ways of doing things, replacing them with newer, more functional and workable ways. Katz goes on to say that "Dramatic one-shot experiences too easily lead to nostalgic recollections rather than change. Insights generated during these intensive periods must be worked on in daily life if they are to affect one's life." (1973, p.15). And if "the change is to be favorable and enduring, individuals must start acting with wisdom." (p. 13).

The concept of growth suggests that change manifests as a continuum of shifts that evolves the human into more spiritual being. This notion implies that psychological change exists for an ultimate purpose. Psychological struggle and lack of interpersonal satisfaction appear as barriers to spiritual growth but rather act as an impetus: if humans need to evolve, they must also have an aspect of their psychology that compels them toward spiritual evolution.

If psychological change exists for this ultimate purpose, it becomes part of a greater system. Entropy ultimately claims all systems. Watzlawick, et al speak of *movement* from a lower order of regulation and organization into a higher order. (pp. 90-91). This mirrors Prigogine's notion of entropy and salvation from entropic forces. An input of energy (movement to the meta level) saves an entropic process from falling into the precipice of chaos.

Similarly, for change to occur and endure, (to decrease the risk of behavioral recidivism), there must be enough energy pumped into the change process, amping it up, so to speak, thereby pulling the process (person) into a greater or higher state of organization. Yalom speaks to this, in his own way, when presenting and discussing the aspects of group process that generate insight, change behaviors and anchor those changes. The interpersonal affects the intrapersonal over time and with repetition. The group therefore acts as a sounding board and a mirror, thereby generating energy for movement to the meta level, an amping up of the process.

Burman, in her paper about boundary objects, reports on the efficacy of boundary object relations as the amping up or organizing factor in group process. In essence: the group serves as a generator of boundary objects which concretizes the roles of the various actors/participants, serving then as a container for or screen onto which experience is felt and projected, thereby facilitating change in the "here and now." (2004, p. 368). Organization via projection.

Barwick advocates his own brand of inputting energy into disorganization. "Yet the witness must not only witness, but speak. If the silent witness cannot be encouraged to speak in a group, the therapist must. It is only the process of an ever-evolving dialogue between witnesses that transforms what otherwise might be stoic resignation in the face of further "desolation", into the promise of real change." (2004, p. 126).

Yalom agrees that the witness and mirroring aspects of group work make more information available to the client as to their own behavior and the impact that behavior has on others. (1995, p.261). This aspect of the Foulkes' Model of Three may very well be an important organizing principle. Weinberg, et al point out that "People listen to one another recounting the traumatic event and help identify the faulty assumptions that developed following these experiences. This challenges

the changes in the assumptive world, such as feelings of helplessness, shame and guilt." (2005, p. 192). Watzlawick, et al also contend that the observer is a necessary adjunct for change. They suggest that the therapist's crucial role is to help their clients see their way to the higher order, facilitating that achievement by assigning tasks that break through the behaviors generated by attempts to change but that are locked in by trauma and resistance. (1974, pp 104 & 112).

Depending on the school to which a particular practitioner subscribes will determine his or her willingness to accept a more complex explanation of the change process or one that is simpler and easy to navigate. Each school of thought in psychology has a bias toward their own formal epistemologies. If we depart from the notion that one school has all the answers and go for the actions that do indeed create the atmosphere for second-order change, then we will most likely experience ongoing success. Ultimately, it matters not what one calls the various aspects of the process, just that these aspects are understood, embraced and facilitated.

So, at its most fundamental level, what does the change process entail? Yalom presents his 11 therapeutic factors that create the atmosphere for change (p.1); Gendlin describes six action steps the changer implements sequentially to create somatic shifts that lead to reframing (pp. 43-45); Watzlawick, et al lay out a four step procedure that produces change (p. 110). I suggest the following:

1. The changer must have a desire to change. Usually, this requires that the discomfort of staying the same is greater than the fear of changing.
2. The changer must perceive a need for change and out of that create an intention to change. They must perceive their life as being somehow deficient and dissatisfying. The edge created by dissatisfaction becomes an impetus. This impetus must remain throughout the process because change is work and without fuel, work cannot be performed for any sustained period of time. Committing to the process becomes essential: resistance can often times be formidable.
3. The changer must become aware of barriers to change. This is where the discovery or uncovering process comes in handy. But paralysis from analysis must at all cost be avoided.

4. The changer must move to the meta level via an act of reframing. Reframing essentially leads to acceptance of *what was* in the "here and now." Acceptance implies a letting-go; a surrendering of resistance. The release of resistance is, by and large, a somatic event: one must experience it. Often the changer feels a sense of unburdening or relief when successful.
5. The changer then settles in with the change. This act cements the reframe. Different methods use various tools to cement change.

Reframing generates change. Of all the steps, reframing remains the most important. In the absence of desire and intent, reframing can spontaneously create a change, system-wide. How often do we see one person in a system intentionally changing only to find all the others in the system change, *even when they had no desire or intention to do so?* "Reframing operates on the level of meta reality, where, as we have tried to point out, change can take place even if the objective circumstances of the situation are quite beyond human control." (Watzlawick, et al, 1974, p. 97).

And, "What turns out to be changed as a result of the reframing is the meaning attributed to the situation, and therefore its consequences, but not its concrete facts -- or as the philosopher Epictetus expressed it, as early as the first century A.D., 'It is not the things themselves which trouble us, but the opinions we have about these things.'" (Watzlawick, et al, 1974, p. 75). Reframing constitutes a change in mindset. That is all. Change requires nothing more and nothing less.

Despite the organizing principle present in relationships cultivated in group psychotherapy, the changer remains solitary in their changing even as they utilize the group as part of their change process. As Barwick puts it "If our doubts are greater than our faith, we are likely to take refuge in the 'cultivation of illusions': a retreat into neuroses of the isolation and individualism, predicated as they are on Oedipal illusions of quasi-merger." (2004, p.125). The group becomes a hedge against doubt. Ultimately, and paradoxically, the greatest awakening is that which allows one to fully see oneself truthfully, as the solitary being who remains solely responsible for one's experience and to feel okay in the face of this important

insight.

An atmosphere that greases the wheels of the change process will make the achievement of this all important insight possible. Any format, from individual psychotherapy, as Watzlawick, et al suggest, to group therapy, as Yalom suggests, to the do-it-yourself form proposed by Gendlin, will potentially work, if all the right ingredients are there.

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