

Eysenck critique 1

The field of psychology has endured many critiques during its clinical and academic history. Perhaps one of the most memorable criticisms emerged from an article by Hans Eysenck entitled, “The Effects of Psychotherapy: An Evaluation.” The publication of this article in the 1950’s sparked a huge debate among those involved with any aspect of psychology. Over fifty years later, Eysenck’s article is still being discussed in regards to his many claims and the effects that they had on psychology.

Throughout his article, Eysenck makes a variety of both direct and implied claims regarding the use of psychotherapy as a form of treatment. Perhaps one of Eysenck’s most obvious claims states that psychotherapy is not an effective method of treating mentally ill patients. According to Eysenck, seeking the help of a general practitioner helped patients to “improve to the extent of seventy-two percent” (Eysenck, 1952, p. 332). This figure is much higher than the forty-four percent success of those in psychoanalysis (Eysenck, 1952). In fact, Eysenck goes on to claim that the less psychotherapy one received the greater their improvement rate. This implies that the patient who never has psychotherapy is actually better off. As expected, Eysenck’s had caused many implications and consequences based on their validity or lack thereof.

If there was any truth behind Eysenck’s claims, the practice of psychoanalysis would be useless and perhaps even harmful to patients suffering from neurotic illnesses. In turn, this would call for a restructuring of the clinical practice of psychology. Patients would no longer have the option of psychoanalysis and would need to be treated by alternate methods. In addition, there would be abandonment of virtually all psychiatry and psychology clinical positions. Patients who received psychotherapy in the past would probably need to be re-evaluated to determine if they actually reached recovery.

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Learning that all of the time and effort he or she put into therapy was a waste could throw off a patient's current state of well being and cause the patient to regress into a pre-psychotherapy state. With all of these negative implications for psychology, many may not want to believe there is truth behind Eysenck's words.

Of course it is important to consider the alternative option that Eysenck claims are false. In doing so, the world of psychology could continue to confidently use psychotherapy as a treatment. As a result, there would be an increase in the number of patients utilizing psychotherapy as a treatment method. Accepting psychotherapy as the preferred choice of treatment for mental illness may encourage others to show more respect to those with this diagnosis. Spreading the positive effects of psychotherapy will only help to strengthen the field of psychology.

Eysenck's study also has many strengths. One of the first strengths in Eysenck's methodology is his attempt to create a baseline and a common unit of measure from which the effectiveness of psychotherapy could be evaluated, for Eysenck, the common unit of measure refers to the therapists' viewpoint of whether the patient was improved, slightly improved, or not improved. This will help others to better understand the data, compare it to other known studies, and possibly even replicate Eysenck's material.

Looking at the table of studies that Eysenck compares reveals another strength, a good sample size. According to the table there are a large number of studies, which included a big participant pool from which Eysenck could draw his conclusion (Eysenck, 1952).

Another strength is his acknowledgment that his study does not entirely discourage psychotherapy, which implies that there may be a need for more research. As stated in

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his assessment of the studies, Eysenck states that “the figures quoted do not necessarily disprove the possibility of therapeutic effectiveness” (Eysenck, 1952, p. 323).

Despite these strong points, many weaknesses are also present. Eysenck’s study fails to consider three major psychological diagnoses such as schizophrenia, manic-depressive, and paranoia. The exclusion of these states can be considered a major weakness because psychotherapy could be a very positive treatment for them. One can not truly decide the fate of psychotherapy if one chooses not to consider all types of mental illness. Another weakness is Eysenck’s focus only on results or statistics that support his conclusion. This is displayed in Eysenck’s omission of the “slight improvement” statistics in his psychotherapy effectiveness results. This allows him to give more credence to the idea that psychotherapy is ineffective and therefore supports his claim. Finally, Eysenck did not complete any study of his own and relied solely on the literature of others to reach his claims and conclusions. Although this method is effective, it does not take into consideration any misinterpretation of data or conclusions that the authors of the papers Eysenck reviewed may have committed.

When all of these strengths and weaknesses are combined, they hold many implications for Eysenck’s conclusion. Considering the limited number of strength and their inability to make a truly convincing argument, one should not rely on them to make a sound conclusion. Despite disagreeing with Eysenck’s conclusion, the weaknesses suggest that an alternative conclusion should be drawn. Based on this idea, one can suggest that Eysenck’s conclusion is false due to the overwhelming evidence presented in the weaknesses of his methodology. At the very least, one should request a more in-depth look at the figures before assuming the veracity of Eysenck’s conclusion.

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By only focusing on the information that Eysenck reviews, this article provides a supportive argument for the failure of psychotherapy to show any improvement in the patients who receive such treatment. With out any knowledge of research methods, one would not think to look beyond the information that Eysenck is presenting. Large headlines and meaningless statistics grab the attention of many people and create a stir. This is a very dangerous trap set by many clinicians and scientists. Once the public hears conclusions such as Eysenck's they often forget everything else and will believe everything that he claims. Having this much influence over the public would also make this article a large part of the academic and clinical psychology field as well.

Obviously the claim that psychotherapy is not effective would cause an uproar among many clinical psychologists. With one small article, Eysenck managed to undermine all of the hard work that had gone into building the use of psychotherapy as an effective treatment method. In response to this article, the psychology field would need to spend unnecessary amount of time defending the use of psychotherapy and its effectiveness. In an effort to defend psychotherapy, clinical psychologists would need to develop a number of tools to measure the benefit of the therapeutic relationship they have with their patients. These new evaluation tools would also need to show the effectiveness of psychotherapy as an appropriate intervention for treating some mental illnesses. Knowing how crucial psychotherapy is to psychology, it is easy to understand the influence of this article. As with any research article, it is always important to look at it from all angles before reaching any definite conclusions.

Resouces

Eysenck, H.J. (1952). The Effects Of Psychotherapy: An Evaluation. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 16, 319-324.