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Why Do Psychological Treatments Work? An Analysis of the Learning Processes That Underlie or Explain Clinical Change [¿Por qué funcionan los tratamientos psicológicos? Un análisis de los procesos de aprendizaje que subyacen o explican el cambio clínico]

Chair: Tomas Jesus Carrasco-Gimenez (Universidad de Granada)

MARÍA XESÚS FROJÁN PARGA (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)



María Xesús Froján Parga has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and is a full professor of psychology at the *Universidad Autónoma de Madrid* (UAM). She has directed the doctoral program *Science of Behavior* at UAM since 2001. She is also a researcher and a teacher. Her research focuses on the analysis of verbal behavior in typically developed adults during clinical interaction. She has been funded as principal investigator by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology since 1997. Through her research, Dr. Froján attempts to identify the learning processes causing clinical change during psychological therapies. She has published her work in a range of well regarded international journals including *Behavior Therapy*, *Psychotherapy Research*, and *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*. She is also the author of hundreds of presentations at national and international conferences. Dr. Froján is the director of the advanced training program on behavior modification at the Madrid Therapeutic Institute (ITEMA), where she is also active as a clinician. Finally, she is the clinical behavior analysis representative at the board of ABA Spain. [Información biográfica \(en español\)](#)

Abstract: In spite of the many efforts invested over the years, it remains unclear what are the behavioral processes leading to change in clinical psychology interventions. The research conducted by my team on behavioral processes and clinical change has emphasized five core assumptions: (a) functional analysis is an adequate model of assessment for clinical psychology, (b) verbal behavior during clinical interaction can be analyzed in terms of operant and respondent mechanisms, (c) the clinical situation is a natural context in which problem behavior occurs as it would outside the session, (d) behavioral mechanisms responsible for change can be promoted through the therapeutic relation, (e) private (cognitive) behavior has the same properties as overt behavior and can be studied in the same way. We suggest that psychologists engage (or at least try to engage) a sequence of learning processes (Pavlovian as well as operant) that occasion the occurrence in the client of novel behaviors, more adaptive and less problematical. These learning processes involve largely, but not exclusively, the verbal interaction that takes place during the therapeutic session. This conceptualization of clinical intervention as the channeling of learning processes in a therapeutic context has motivated the contextual therapies that have renewed the landscape of behavioral interventions in the last two decades. **[Resumen:** A pesar de los grandes esfuerzos invertidos a lo largo de los años, continúa sin aclararse cuáles son los procesos conductuales que llevan al cambio en las intervenciones de psicología clínica. La investigación llevada a cabo por mi equipo sobre los procesos conductuales y el cambio clínico ha puesto el acento en cinco postulados centrales: (a) el análisis funcional es un modelo adecuado evaluación para la psicología clínica, (b) la conducta verbal durante la interacción clínica puede ser analizada en términos de mecanismos operantes y respondientes (c) la situación clínica es un contexto natural en el que los problemas de conducta ocurren tal como lo harían fuera de la sesión, (d) los mecanismos conductuales responsables del cambio pueden ser fomentados a través de la relación terapéutica, (e) la conducta privada (cognitiva) tiene las mismas propiedades que la conducta manifiesta y puede ser estudiada del mismo modo. Sugerimos que los psicólogos conecten (o al menos traten de conectar) una secuencia de procesos de aprendizaje (tanto pavloviano como operante) que provoque la ocurrencia en el cliente de nuevos comportamientos, más adaptativos y menos problemáticos. Estos procesos de aprendizaje implican en gran medida, aunque no exclusivamente, la interacción verbal que tiene lugar durante la sesión terapéutica. Esta conceptualización de la intervención clínica como la canalización de los procesos de aprendizaje en un contexto terapéutico ha motivado las terapias contextuales que han renovado el panorama de las intervenciones conductuales en las dos últimas décadas.]