

Orders of Change

In therapy, change can occur at different levels, and can be classified as either first-order or second-order change.

First-order change refers to changes that occur at the surface level, such as changes in behavior, thoughts, or emotions. These changes are often short-term and specific to a particular problem or issue. For example, a person might seek therapy to address their difficulty with anger management, and through therapy, they may learn techniques to better manage their anger and have fewer outbursts. This would be considered first-order change, as it is a specific and immediate change in behavior.

First-Order Change

Here are some examples of first-order change that might occur in therapy:

- **Changing a specific behavior:** A person might seek therapy to address a specific problem behavior, such as procrastination or substance abuse, and through therapy, they may learn techniques or strategies to help them change that behavior.
- **Changing negative thought patterns:** A person might seek therapy to address negative thought patterns, such as negative self-talk or automatic negative thoughts, and through therapy, they may learn techniques to challenge and change those thoughts.
- **Managing emotions:** A person might seek therapy to address difficulties with managing their emotions, such as anger or anxiety, and through therapy, they may learn techniques to better regulate their emotions.
- **Improving communication skills:** A person might seek therapy to improve their communication skills, such as assertiveness or active listening, and through therapy, they may learn techniques to communicate more effectively.
- **Increasing self-care:** A person might seek therapy to improve their self-care practices, such as exercise or nutrition, and through therapy, they may learn strategies to prioritize and implement self-care behaviors.

First-order change can be important and valuable in helping a person to address specific problems or issues, and can often be achieved relatively quickly. However, it is important to recognize that first-order change may not address deeper issues or patterns that contribute to the problem and therefore may not lead to more enduring or transformative change.

Second-Order Change

Second-order change, on the other hand, refers to deeper and more fundamental changes that occur at the level of the person's identity or worldview. These changes are often longer-term and more generalizable to other areas of the person's life. For example, a person might seek therapy to address feelings of low self-worth, and through therapy, they may come to understand and challenge the

underlying beliefs and patterns of thinking that contribute to their low self-worth. This would be considered second-order change, as it involves a more profound shift in the person's sense of self and how they relate to the world.

Here are some examples of second-order change that might occur in therapy:

- **Changing core beliefs:** A person might seek therapy to address deep-seated beliefs about themselves or the world that are causing them suffering, such as beliefs about their worth or lovability, and through therapy, they may come to understand and challenge those beliefs, leading to a shift in their identity and worldview.
- **Developing a new sense of self:** A person might seek therapy to address a sense of disconnection or lack of purpose in their life, and through therapy, they may develop a deeper understanding of their values and goals, leading to a greater sense of meaning and connection to the world.
- **Changing patterns of relating to others:** A person might seek therapy to address patterns of relating to others that are causing them difficulty, such as codependency or avoidance, and through therapy, they may learn new ways of relating that are more authentic and fulfilling.
- **Overcoming traumatic experiences:** A person might seek therapy to address the effects of a traumatic experience, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and through therapy, they may gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the trauma and develop new ways of coping and living with the aftermath.
- **Transcending limiting beliefs:** A person might seek therapy to address limiting beliefs that are holding them back in life, such as the belief that they are not capable or deserving of success, and through therapy, they may come to understand and transcend those beliefs, leading to greater personal growth and fulfillment.

Second-order change can be more challenging and may require a longer-term commitment to therapy, but it can also be more enduring and transformative, as it involves a deeper understanding of oneself and the patterns that shape one's experiences.

First-order change can be important and necessary, especially in the short term, but second-order change is often more enduring and transformative. This is because second-order change involves a deeper understanding of oneself and the patterns of behavior and thinking that shape one's experiences, which can then be applied to other areas of one's life.

Therapies that aim for second-order change often focus on helping the person to gain insight into their unconscious motivations and patterns of thinking, and to develop new ways of being and relating to the world. These therapies may include approaches such as psychoanalytic therapy, depth psychology, or experiential therapies.

In summary, first-order change refers to specific and immediate changes at the surface level, while second-order change refers to more fundamental and enduring changes at the level of the person's identity or worldview. Both types of change can be important and valuable in therapy, and the appropriate focus will depend on the individual's specific needs and goals.

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