

years. It was clear that his symptoms were a reaction to the loss of a relationship and that he was not clinically depressed.

“I’ve been over this many times in therapy,” he said. He had trouble tolerating any separation from his girlfriends. Whether they were gone for a weekend or he was traveling for work, the result was always the same: a painful state of dysphoria and anxiety.

He could even trace this feeling back to a separation from his mother, who had been hospitalized for several months for cancer treatment when he was 4. In short, he had gained plenty of insight in therapy into the nature and origin of his anxiety, but he felt no better.

What therapy had given this young man was a coherent narrative of his life; it had demystified his feelings, but had done little to change them. Was this because his self-knowledge was flawed or incomplete? Or is insight itself, no matter how deep, of limited value?

Psychoanalysts and other therapists have argued for years about this question, which gets to the heart of how therapy works (when it does) to relieve psychological distress. Theoretical debates have not settled the question, but one interesting clue about the possible relevance of insight comes from comparative studies of different types of psychotherapy ---- only some of which emphasize insight. In fact, when two different types of psychotherapies have been directly compared ---- and there are more than 100 such studies ---- it has often been hard to find any differences between them.

Researchers aptly call this phenomenon the Dodo effect, referring to the Dodo bird in Lewis Carroll’s “Alice in Wonderland” who, having