

**The Assimilation Model and Theory-Building Case Studies
Workshop**

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The Assimilation Model

The assimilation model is a theory of psychological change in psychotherapy. It can be used to understand the process of change within any treatment approach. It construes people as composed of parts or voices representing their accumulated experiences. It focuses on problematic experiences/voices (experiences or actions that were, foreign, distasteful, painful, traumatic) and describes a developmental sequence through which these move in successful treatment: from being warded off, avoided, or distorted, through emerging, being named and described, reaching an understanding, to becoming accepted and accessible as resources. The sequence can be clinically useful for recognizing signs of the developmental stage of problems within the treatment process and understanding what may happen next. Clinicians may then use this knowledge to adapt their treatment strategies to clients' changing requirements. The description of the sequence and hypotheses about the mechanisms of change have emerged mainly from a series of intensive case studies. The model continues to evolve as further case studies are conducted.

Aims for the Workshop

I suggest two main aims. The first is to present the assimilation model, with case study illustrations, and to discuss how the model might be clinically useful--how it can be integrated with therapists' thinking and practice. The second is to examine the process of theory-building case study research. I think many clinicians have experience that could be used to assess, elaborate, and expand theories of psychotherapy. I will argue that theory-building case studies offer a scientific approach that is accessible to clinicians and is superior to statistical hypothesis testing for many of the most interesting and important questions in psychotherapy.