

## Socratic method as a therapeutic discourse for mental health

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**Abstract:** The Socratic method, a form of teaching and learning developed by Greek Philosopher Socrates, who is often regarded as the first teacher in Western philosophy, has been adapted as a powerful therapeutic discourse in modern mental health treatments, particularly in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). This method involves the use of guided questioning to help individuals examine and challenge maladaptive thoughts and beliefs. Through open-ended and reflective questions, therapists encourage clients to engage in self-reflection, promoting greater self-awareness and cognitive restructuring. This method has proven effective in treating a variety of mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Furthermore, the Socratic method enhances emotional regulation by encouraging individuals to critically assess the thoughts that trigger intense emotional reactions, thereby promoting healthier coping strategies. The collaborative nature of this method empowers clients, fostering a sense of autonomy and resilience in their mental health journey. The study employed analytical method of philosophy which is a rigorous approach that emphasizes clarity, logical structure, and precision in examining philosophical concepts and problems.

**Keywords:** Socratic method, Cognitive behavioral therapy, Cognitive restructuring, Emotional regulation, Mental health

### Introduction

The Socratic method, or "elenchus", is an argumentative dialogue technique that Socrates used to probe ideas through questioning. This approach relies on guiding a discussant to a deeper understanding by questioning the validity and consistency of their beliefs. In the Socratic method, Socrates would pose questions that led others to examine their assumptions and identify contradictions or gaps in their thinking. In Plato's Theaetetus, Socrates likened this approach to "midwifery" for ideas, as it helped others "give birth" to knowledge. This technique

begins by evaluating commonly held beliefs for their coherence and consistency with other beliefs [1]. Similarly, the Socratic method involves asking probing and open-ended questions to stimulate critical thinking and illuminate ideas. This approach is grounded in dialogue between individuals or within oneself, aiming to dismantle unexamined beliefs and assumptions. In a mental health context, this form of questioning encourages individuals to explore their thoughts and emotions, often uncovering cognitive distortions that may be contributing to psychological distress [1].

Received: Nov.5, 2024; Revised: Jan.6, 2025; Accepted: Feb.21, 2025; Published: Mar.3, 2025

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55976/dt.4202513231-9>

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## Features of Socratic method

### Application of questioning as a therapeutic discourse for mental health

Questioning is a defining characteristic of the Socratic dialogue, an approach to discourse pioneered by Socrates to explore and challenge ideas through methodical inquiry. Known as "elenchus," this method involves asking probing questions that require individuals to analyze, reflect, and critically examine their own beliefs. Socrates believed that truth and self-understanding could be best achieved through rigorous questioning, which serves to expose contradictions and facilitate a deeper exploration of one's beliefs [2]. In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates famously insists on the value of self-examination, stating that "the unexamined life is not worth living" [3], underscoring his view that self-inquiry is essential to meaningful knowledge.

Socratic questioning is not only a tool for philosophical dialogue but also has significant applications in therapeutic contexts, particularly in mental health. In cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for example, Socratic questioning can be used to help clients identify and challenge cognitive distortions, such as negative automatic thoughts and unhelpful beliefs. By guiding clients to examine the evidence for and against their thoughts, therapists help them to recognize irrational or maladaptive patterns, leading to more balanced perspectives [4]. This process mirrors the Socratic method, as clients are encouraged to critically question their own assumptions and develop a more accurate understanding of their emotions and behaviors.

According to [5], therapeutic questioning involves structured inquiry that enables individuals to explore complex feelings and challenge limiting beliefs, ultimately promoting personal growth and emotional resilience. For example, a therapist might ask an individual struggling with substance abuse questions such as, "What makes you believe that using drugs is the best way to handle your problems?" or "How do your family members perceive your reliance on substances to cope?" These questions encourage the individual to critically examine their assumptions and consider alternative perspectives on their behavior. By using questions to stimulate self-examination, therapists empower clients to confront their own cognitive biases, improve emotional regulation, and develop healthier coping mechanisms [6].

Additionally, Socratic questioning in psychiatric treatment is an important tool for promoting a collaborative therapeutic relationship. This method encourages clients to take an active role in their treatment rather than passively receiving advice. In this way, clients gain a sense of agency and confidence in overcoming their own challenges. Research suggests that questioning in therapy not only enhances cognitive restructuring,

but also contributes to higher treatment engagement and satisfaction as clients feel respected and understood [7].

Ultimately, the Socratic method, with its emphasis on questioning, provides a powerful framework for therapeutic discourse. It enables individuals to dissect and challenge beliefs that may be contributing to emotional distress and provides a pathway toward greater self-awareness and mental well-being. In this way, Socratic questioning serves as both a philosophical tool and a transformative therapeutic technique, underscoring its enduring relevance in both intellectual and mental health domains.

### Dialectical method as a therapeutic discourse for mental health

The dialectical method is a core component of the Socratic method, centered on exploring ideas through structured dialogue and logical questioning. This method, developed by Socrates and documented by Plato, involves a collaborative process of questioning and answering that seeks to reveal underlying truths by critically examining beliefs. In the Socratic approach, dialectic is not aimed at winning an argument but at uncovering contradictions and refining ideas through thoughtful examination [8]. By engaging in this back-and-forth discourse, participants are encouraged to analyze assumptions, confront inconsistencies, and deepen their understanding of complex issues [5].

In contemporary mental health, the dialectical method has been integrated into various therapeutic approaches, particularly dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), a treatment designed by Marsha Linehan for individuals with borderline personality disorder and other emotional regulation challenges [8]. DBT integrates the dialectical principles of balancing opposing forces—such as acceptance and change—within a therapeutic context to help clients build healthier coping mechanisms. In DBT, therapists and clients work together in a dialectical process to validate the clients' experiences while challenging unhelpful patterns of thinking and behavior [9].

As noted, the dialectical method in DBT employs a structured dialogue similar to the Socratic approach, where therapists use open-ended questions to guide clients in exploring and challenging their automatic beliefs [10]. For example, a therapist working with an individual who is abusing drugs might ask, "What reasons support your belief that using drugs solves your problems, and what evidence challenges this idea?" or "How might your perspective change if you considered other ways to address your difficulties?" These questions help the individual examine their situation from different angles, reducing rigid thinking and fostering more adaptive emotional responses. By examining their beliefs and behaviors dialectically, clients can better understand the complex interactions between their thoughts, emotions, and actions, fostering a more balanced and adaptive

mindset.

Moreover, the dialectical method supports the therapeutic goal of self-acceptance, a critical aspect of mental health. In DBT, for example, clients learn to accept themselves as they are while also working toward positive change. This dialectical stance—holding seemingly opposing perspectives in balance—is effective in reducing emotional distress and fostering resilience [9]. Research has shown that dialectical techniques, through their emphasis on balanced thinking, enhance clients' ability to manage intense emotions, improve interpersonal relationships, and increase overall psychological well-being [10].

### **Critical thinking and reflection as a therapeutic discourse for mental health**

Critical thinking and self-reflection are essential skills in mental health discourse, supporting both clients and professionals in understanding and overcoming psychological challenges. Critical thinking is the process of analyzing and evaluating information objectively to make reasoned judgments, while reflection involves introspection and self-examination. Together, these skills enable individuals to understand their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, fostering mental resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms.

In therapeutic settings, critical thinking is applied through structured techniques that encourage clients to challenge their negative or distorted thoughts. In cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), one of the most commonly practiced forms of psychotherapy, critical thinking is used by guiding clients to question the validity of their automatic thoughts. For instance, a therapist might ask a student who is having suicidal thoughts due to poor exam performance, "What evidence supports your belief that failing this exam defines your entire future?". These questions encourage the student to look at their thoughts from alternative perspectives and help them challenge the idea that exam results are the sole measure of their worth. By encouraging critical thinking, this approach can help the student develop more balanced and realistic beliefs, reducing feelings of anxiety, self-doubt, and despair [11]. This process of critical thinking can lead to more balanced, realistic beliefs, ultimately reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression [6].

Reflection, on the other hand, allows clients to become more aware of their internal experiences and patterns. Reflective practices, such as mindfulness, involve observing one's thoughts and emotions without judgment, which can promote a greater sense of self-awareness and acceptance. In mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), clients are taught to reflect on their mental and emotional states, helping them to identify triggers and respond to them more calmly. Research shows that mindfulness and reflective practices can improve emotional regulation, reduce stress, and decrease the

likelihood of relapse in individuals with depression [12]. Furthermore, critical thinking and reflection are essential for mental health professionals, as they support the development of empathy, insight, and cultural sensitivity. By reflecting on their own biases and assumptions, mental health practitioners can provide more compassionate and unbiased care. Reflective supervision, a process in which therapists reflect on their work with a supervisor, helps practitioners to better understand their interactions with clients, enhancing the therapeutic alliance and improving treatment outcomes [13].

### **Elenchus (Cross-examination) as a therapeutic discourse for mental health**

Elenchus, also known as Socratic cross-examination, is a method developed by Socrates to probe beliefs through structured questioning. This technique aims to uncover contradictions and encourage deeper understanding by rigorously examining one's thoughts and assumptions [1]. In the context of Socratic dialogue, elenchus involves a back-and-forth process where individuals are asked challenging questions to identify gaps in their reasoning or inconsistencies in their beliefs. Socrates believed that self-knowledge and personal growth could only emerge from the practice of examining one's assumptions critically, which is why he considered the "unexamined life" to be less meaningful [3].

In mental health discourse, the elenchus method is widely employed in therapeutic approaches to help clients gain insight into their cognitive and emotional patterns. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for example, integrates Socratic questioning techniques inspired by elenchus. Therapists use questions to guide clients in evaluating the accuracy of their thoughts, helping them re-assess maladaptive beliefs. This approach encourages critical thinking and helps uncover unhelpful thought patterns, paving the way for healthier perspectives. For example, a therapist working with a student experiencing suicidal tendencies due to poor exam results and feelings of shame might ask, "What evidence supports your belief that failing this exam makes you a failure as a person?" or "Could there be another explanation for your results, such as external challenges?" By challenging the student's initial assumptions, this method fosters cognitive flexibility, enabling them to view their circumstances more constructively. This shift is crucial in building emotional resilience and reducing feelings of hopelessness [6].

Elenchus is also central to dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), particularly when helping clients with emotional regulation issues. In DBT, therapists apply dialectical techniques that balance acceptance with change, questioning clients in a way that encourages them to see different perspectives and reduce black-and-white thinking. For example, when a client experiences intense anger, the therapist may use cross-examination to explore whether the client's beliefs about the situation

are grounded in evidence, or if they might be influenced by emotional responses [9]. This process helps clients become more aware of their cognitive biases, which can reduce impulsive reactions and promote mindfulness.

Furthermore, research suggests that elenchus-based questioning enhances the therapeutic alliance, as clients often feel more engaged and respected when they are active participants in their healing process [10]. The elenchus technique supports collaboration, making clients feel that they are not being told what to think but are discovering insights through guided reflection. By facilitating self-discovery, elenchus also promotes self-efficacy, empowering clients to become more autonomous in managing their mental health.

## **Collaboration as a therapeutic discourse for mental health**

Collaboration is a crucial element of effective mental health therapy, fostering a strong, cooperative relationship between clients and therapists. This approach, sometimes referred to as a "collaborative therapeutic alliance," emphasizes the client's active involvement in their own healing process and the mutual respect between the therapist and client. Collaboration shifts away from the traditional, directive model of therapy, instead empowering clients to take an active role in their treatment and make decisions about their mental health [14]. This discourse model creates a foundation for trust, encourages open communication, and increases engagement, making therapeutic outcomes more successful and sustainable.

In therapeutic settings, collaboration plays a key role, particularly within cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), where therapists and clients work together to identify and modify unhelpful thought patterns. The collaborative process, often referred to as "guided discovery," involves exploring the client's thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, with both the therapist and the client seeking evidence for and against these beliefs. This active partnership helps clients feel empowered and invested in their treatment, which improves overall outcomes.

For example, a CBT therapist working with a student feeling suicidal due to poor exam results and overwhelming shame might ask, "What evidence supports your belief that failing this exam makes you unworthy or a failure?" or "How else might we view this situation—could there be other reasons for your results, like stress?" These questions encourage the student to critically assess their assumptions and view the situation from different perspectives. Rather than simply instructing the student on how to think, the therapist guides them to uncover their own insights, which promotes self-reflection and ownership of their recovery.

In terms of collaborating to find solutions for avoiding suicidal tendencies related to poor results and shame, the therapist might help the student explore healthier coping mechanisms [15]. For instance, the therapist could

guide the student to identify positive steps they can take to improve academically, such as breaking tasks into smaller, manageable goals or seeking support from peers or tutors. Additionally, the therapist could encourage the student to reframe their thinking about failure, helping them understand that one exam result does not define their worth or future. This collaborative process of problem-solving can reduce feelings of hopelessness and shame, build emotional resilience, and ultimately help the student gain a more balanced and constructive perspective on their situation, lessening the risk of suicidal tendencies. [16].

Collaboration in mental health therapy is a discourse that enhances client empowerment, engagement, and trust. By treating therapy as a cooperative partnership, therapists and clients can work together to foster insight, resilience, and positive change. This collaborative approach respects clients' autonomy and values, ultimately making the therapeutic process more effective and meaningful [17].

## **Stages of Socratic dialogue**

### **Initial questioning and its implication on mental wellness**

Initial questioning is a foundational stage in therapeutic discourse, particularly in mental health treatment. This phase serves as an entry point for understanding the client's unique experiences, perspectives, and concerns. Through open-ended questions, therapists can establish a safe and welcoming environment, encouraging clients to express themselves freely. Initial questioning also provides the therapist with critical insights into the client's mental and emotional state, which guides the direction of future sessions and interventions [1].

In the context of mental health, initial questioning is often structured to gather information on various aspects of a client's life, including their thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and relationships. Rather than relying on closed-ended questions that yield limited responses, therapists use open-ended questions to allow clients to delve deeply into their concerns. For example, questions like "What brings you to therapy today?" or "How have you been feeling about recent life changes?" help clients to open up, providing valuable context to their struggles [6]. This stage emphasizes a non-judgmental approach, giving clients the space to express emotions and thoughts without fear of criticism, which builds trust and fosters a strong therapeutic alliance.

In the case of an anxiety patient, therapists often apply the Socratic method during initial questioning to help the client explore their fears and anxieties more deeply. For example, a therapist might ask, "How do you think this belief about being in a crowded place affects your daily life?" or "What evidence do you have that supports the idea that something bad will happen if you go to

this event?" These questions help the patient reflect on the underlying assumptions driving their anxiety, such as the fear of losing control or being judged by others. Through this process, the therapist encourages the patient to consider the validity of their anxious thoughts and assess whether their beliefs are based on facts or distorted thinking.

By using Socratic questioning, the therapist can help the patient gain new insights and develop more realistic perspectives. For example, a person with social anxiety might believe that they will embarrass themselves in public, but through guided questioning, they may realize that they have not experienced this outcome in similar situations before. This realization can help the patient challenge their automatic negative thoughts and begin to reframe their thinking. The Socratic approach not only helps uncover unexamined fears but also empowers the patient to take a more critical, balanced approach to their thoughts, ultimately reducing the intensity of their anxiety and promoting healthier coping strategies [1].

### **Clarification of terms and its implication on mental wellness**

Clarification of terms plays a crucial role in ensuring effective communication in mental health therapy, particularly when addressing complex issues like suicidal tendencies. In the case of a client experiencing suicidal thoughts due to poor academic results and overwhelming shame, therapists must first clarify what terms like "depression," "suicidal thoughts," or "shame" mean to the client. Understanding the client's personal interpretation of these terms helps create a tailored therapeutic approach that resonates with their experiences. For instance, a therapist might ask, "What does shame feel like to you?" or "When you say you feel hopeless about your future, what does that look like for you?" These clarifying questions help the therapist uncover how the client perceives their struggles, allowing for a more personalized and effective treatment plan [18].

Furthermore, ensuring shared understanding of terms enhances the therapeutic relationship and promotes collaboration. When a client expresses the desire to "get better" or "feel less hopeless," the therapist can clarify what these goals mean to the client. The therapist may ask, "What does feeling better look like for you?" or "What would it take for you to feel less overwhelmed by your results?" This process of defining goals together ensures both therapist and client are aligned in their understanding of what success in therapy looks like. Additionally, by demystifying terms related to cognitive distortions, self-worth, or coping strategies, the therapist empowers the client to engage more deeply in therapy, fostering a sense of safety and trust, especially important for those dealing with sensitive issues like suicidal tendencies [19].

### **Critical examination and implication on mental wellness**

Critical examination according to [20] is a powerful tool in mental health therapy, particularly for clients struggling with anger issues. In cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for instance, a therapist might guide a client to critically examine automatic thoughts that trigger their anger, such as, "People always disrespect me," or "I can't control my temper." By asking probing questions like, "What evidence do you have that people consistently disrespect you?" or "Can you recall a situation where you managed your anger successfully?" the therapist helps the client identify cognitive distortions such as overgeneralization or catastrophizing. This critical examination allows the client to challenge these negative beliefs and replace them with more balanced and realistic thoughts, ultimately reducing the intensity and frequency of their anger outbursts.

In dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), the critical examination process extends to the emotional reactions that fuel anger. For example, a client might become angry in response to a perceived slight in a social setting. The therapist would encourage the client to explore whether the anger is proportional to the situation and what underlying needs or fears might be contributing to the emotional reaction. This reflection helps the client develop greater emotional awareness and regulation skills, allowing them to respond to difficult situations more adaptively. By critically examining their emotional responses and challenging unhelpful thought patterns, the client can gain better control over their anger, leading to improved interpersonal relationships and overall emotional well-being [21].

### **Refinement of ideas and its implication on mental wellness**

Refining ideas is an essential process in helping clients with anger issues, as it allows them to reframe their thoughts and emotional responses to challenging situations. In cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), a client might express the belief, "People never listen to me, and it makes me furious." Through the refinement process, the therapist would encourage the client to explore the origins of this belief and how it influences their anger. By asking questions like, "Can you recall a time when someone listened to you?" or "What evidence supports the idea that people never listen to you?" the therapist helps the client examine the accuracy of their belief. This reflection allows the client to refine their thoughts, challenging the distorted perception and fostering a more balanced view of their interactions. As a result, the client begins to reduce the intensity of their anger, learning to respond more thoughtfully and less reactively in future situations. In addition to refining the beliefs that fuel anger, [22] reiterates that this process also helps clients develop

greater emotional awareness and regulation. For instance, a client who frequently experiences anger in response to feeling disrespected might be encouraged to reflect on their triggers and the emotional responses they generate. The therapist might ask, "What do you feel in your body when you're about to get angry?" or "What other emotions might be underlying your anger, like hurt or frustration?" This process enables the client to recognize that their anger often masks deeper, unmet emotional needs. By refining their understanding of their emotional responses, clients can learn to address the root causes of their anger and cultivate healthier ways of managing their emotions. This iterative process of self-reflection and adjustment supports emotional growth and helps clients develop resilience in dealing with anger-provoking situations.

### **Conclusion or further inquiry and its implication on mental wellness**

In the realm of mental health discourse, the concepts of conclusion and further inquiry serve as critical components in promoting ongoing reflection, growth, and healing for individuals navigating their mental health journeys. Effective conclusion practices in therapy involve synthesizing insights gained during sessions, identifying key takeaways, and setting actionable goals for the future. By summarizing the main points of discussion, therapists can reinforce learning and ensure that clients leave with a clear understanding of their progress and next steps [20].

In the conclusion phase of therapy for a client battling anger issues, the therapist might ask reflective questions to help the client gain insight into their progress. For example, the therapist may ask, "What have you learned about your anger triggers in our sessions?" or "How do you plan to apply the strategies we've discussed when you feel anger rising?" These questions encourage the client to actively reflect on their emotional journey and make connections between therapy and real-world situations. The therapist might also work with the client to develop specific, actionable goals, such as practicing deep breathing techniques during moments of frustration or using cognitive restructuring to challenge the thoughts that fuel their anger. This collaborative approach helps clients transition from theoretical concepts discussed in therapy to concrete behaviors that they can implement in their daily lives, fostering a sense of empowerment and ownership over their emotional regulation.

Further inquiry plays a crucial role in helping clients with anger issues continue their growth beyond therapy sessions. Therapists may encourage clients to keep a journal where they can reflect on moments when they felt anger and explore the thoughts and feelings accompanying those reactions. This journaling practice allows the client to gain insight into the underlying causes of their anger, such as past experiences or unmet needs, and recognize patterns in their emotional responses. Additionally, the therapist may recommend mindfulness practices to help

the client stay present and manage their emotions in real time, reducing impulsive reactions. By incorporating ongoing inquiry into the therapeutic process, clients are encouraged to engage in continuous self-reflection and exploration, which deepens their understanding of their triggers and strengthens their ability to manage anger more effectively, contributing to long-term emotional resilience.

### **Materials and method**

The analytical method in philosophy is a rigorous approach that emphasizes clarity, logical structure, and precision in examining philosophical concepts and problems. This method has been pivotal in shaping contemporary philosophical discourse, particularly in the analytic tradition, which emerged in the early 20th century. One of the primary goals of the analytical method is to achieve clear and precise definitions of concepts. This focus helps prevent misunderstandings and ambiguities that can cloud philosophical discussions. As Smith [23] notes, "Analytic philosophy aims to clarify philosophical problems by ensuring that the language we use is precise and unambiguous."

Analytical method of philosophy relies heavily on logical reasoning to dissect arguments and evaluate their validity. Philosophers analyze the structure of arguments, identifying premises and conclusions to assess soundness. According to Johnson [24], "Logical analysis is central to the analytical method, as it allows philosophers to clarify the relationships between ideas and to evaluate the strength of arguments critically."

Another distinctive feature of the analytical method is its examination of language and meaning. Analytic philosophers often explore how linguistic constructs shape our understanding of concepts. For instance, Wittgenstein's later work emphasizes the role of language games in shaping our understanding of meaning [25]. Moreover, analytical method is problem-oriented, breaking down complex philosophical issues into more manageable components. This dissection allows for focused investigation and resolution of specific philosophical problems. As noted by Brown [26], "The analytical approach encourages philosophers to tackle specific problems methodically, leading to clearer insights and solutions."

According to Roberts & Smith [27], analytical method often interacts with other disciplines, including logic, mathematics, and cognitive science. This interdisciplinary approach enriches philosophical inquiry and broadens the scope of analysis. For example, the integration of insights from cognitive science has led to significant advancements in the philosophy of mind. Again, thought experiments are a common tool within the analytical method, allowing philosophers to explore hypothetical scenarios and clarify concepts. These imaginative exercises help to illustrate complex philosophical ideas and challenge intuitions [2].

## Results and discussion

The Socratic Method, when used as a therapeutic tool in mental health, has been shown to produce positive outcomes by fostering greater self-awareness, emotional resilience, and cognitive restructuring. By guiding clients through structured questioning, therapists can help clients achieve meaningful and lasting changes in their thoughts, behaviors, and mental health. Here are some key mental health results associated with the Socratic Method as a therapeutic discourse.

The Socratic Method is especially effective in helping clients identify and challenge cognitive distortions, such as black-and-white thinking, catastrophizing, and overgeneralization. By questioning the validity of these distortions, clients are often able to adopt more balanced and realistic ways of thinking. This cognitive restructuring is particularly beneficial for reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

By encouraging clients to explore and understand the connection between their thoughts, beliefs and emotions, the Socratic method fosters emotional resilience. Clients learn to regulate their emotions more effectively by gaining insight into the origins of their emotional responses. This can help reduce the intensity and frequency of overwhelming emotions, leading to better mental well-being and improved coping skills.

The Socratic Method encourages clients to take an active role in their mental health journey. By helping clients uncover their own insights and solutions, rather than relying on external advice, the method fosters a sense of self-efficacy and empowerment. This can be particularly impactful for individuals struggling with feelings of helplessness or low self-worth, as it reinforces the idea that they have the capability to effect positive change in their lives.

The deep questioning of the Socratic Method enables clients to make changes not just at the surface level but at the root of their thought patterns. By targeting core beliefs and assumptions, clients are more likely to experience lasting behavioral changes. This is particularly useful for individuals dealing with chronic mental health issues, such as recurrent depression or addiction, as the Socratic approach provides them with a robust framework for self-reflection that they can continue to use to prevent relapse. Through structured questioning, clients develop problem-solving and decision-making skills by learning how to evaluate situations more objectively and critically. The Socratic Method promotes cognitive flexibility, which is essential for adaptive thinking in complex situations. This can be especially helpful for clients facing life challenges, such as relationship issues, career decisions, or major transitions, as it empowers them to make well-informed, balanced choices.

Socratic questioning encourages clients to examine their beliefs, assumptions, and motivations on a deeper level. This process increases self-awareness, helping clients

uncover underlying issues that may contribute to their mental health struggles. The resulting insights often lead to "aha" moments, where clients gain new perspectives about themselves, their past experiences, or their relationships. This enhanced self-awareness is fundamental for personal growth and healing.

The Socratic Method is a central technique in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), which has been empirically validated as effective for treating anxiety and depression. By helping client's question and replace negative automatic thoughts, the method can significantly reduce symptoms associated with these conditions. Clients learn to respond to their anxious or depressive thoughts with a more objective and compassionate mindset, which can reduce rumination, worry, and depressive symptoms over time.

Socratic questioning can improve communication and empathy by helping clients examine their assumptions and interpretations in relationships. For example, clients who hold rigid beliefs about others may learn to question these assumptions and adopt more open and empathetic perspectives. This can lead to healthier interactions and improved relationships, both personally and professionally. The Socratic method encourages clients to explore multiple perspectives and interpretations of their experiences, which fosters cognitive flexibility. This adaptability helps clients better manage life's unpredictable challenges, such as loss, change, or trauma. By learning to shift their perspective, clients can become more resilient and able to navigate difficult situations with greater ease.

The Socratic method, as a therapeutic discourse, yields significant positive results in mental health treatment. By helping clients examine and transform their beliefs, develop insight, and foster adaptability, the Socratic approach addresses both the symptoms and underlying cognitive patterns associated with mental health conditions. The result is often a more empowered, resilient, and self-aware individual, capable of sustaining mental well-being through ongoing self-reflection and adaptive thinking.

### Weaknesses of Socratic method as a therapeutic discourse for mental wellness

Although the Socratic method can be a valuable tool in therapeutic discourse, it is important for therapists to be aware of its limitations and to adapt their approach based on the needs and readiness of each individual client. A balance between Socratic questioning and other therapeutic techniques may enhance the overall effectiveness of treatment. For instance, some clients may have deeply rooted emotional issues that are not easily addressed through questioning. The Socratic method relies on cognitive engagement, which may not adequately address the emotional or relational aspects of certain mental health conditions, such as trauma or severe anxiety. The effectiveness of the Socratic method depends on

the therapist's ability to ask appropriate and sensitive questions. Misinterpretation or poorly framed questions can lead to confusion, frustration, or defensiveness in clients, potentially hindering progress. Additionally, Socratic method places significant emphasis on logical reasoning and critical thinking. This focus may overlook the importance of emotional expression and intuition in the therapeutic process, which can be vital for clients who benefit from more experiential or emotion-focused therapies. Furthermore, the success of the Socratic method largely depends on the therapist's skill in facilitating the dialogue. Inexperienced therapists may struggle to navigate the nuances of questioning, which can limit the method's effectiveness.

## Comparison between Socratic method and Tullio Maranhão's Therapeutic Discourse

Tullio Maranhão's Therapeutic Discourse focuses on the use of dialogue as a means of personal transformation, where the therapeutic process centers on reflective, collaborative conversations between the therapist and the client. Maranhão emphasizes that therapeutic discourse is not merely a means of intellectual inquiry, as in traditional philosophical contexts, but a relational process that encourages clients to explore their emotions, life stories, and self-concept. The therapist, in this approach, acts as a facilitator, guiding the client through a process of self-discovery and emotional healing, rather than imposing external judgments or intellectual conclusions [28]. This approach highlights the importance of empathy, active listening, and mutual understanding in fostering therapeutic change.

When working with a patient battling alcoholism, the Socratic method and Tullio Maranhão's Therapeutic Discourse would each approach the problem from different angles. For example, using the Socratic method, a therapist might engage the client in questioning their beliefs and attitudes about drinking, such as: "What is it that you believe alcohol does for you?" or "Can you think of times when drinking caused harm in your life?" These probing questions aim to challenge the client's beliefs about alcohol, encouraging them to critically examine the consequences of their actions and recognize the contradictions in their thinking, such as the belief that drinking provides relief despite its long-term negative effects. The ultimate goal is to lead the client to intellectual clarity about the unhelpful patterns of behavior related to their alcoholism, helping them arrive at rational conclusions about the need for change.

In contrast, Maranhão's Therapeutic Discourse would focus more on the emotional and relational aspects of the client's alcoholism. The therapist might ask reflective questions such as: "What feelings or situations make you feel the urge to drink?" or "How does drinking affect your relationships with those closest to you?" These questions aim to help the client explore the deeper emotional

triggers that lead to their drinking habits and how alcohol is used as a coping mechanism. Maranhão's approach is not about refuting the client's beliefs but helping them uncover the underlying emotions, life stories, and self-concept that contribute to the addiction. The therapist in this model adopts a more empathetic, collaborative stance, providing a supportive space where the client can explore their experiences and emotions without judgment, aiming to facilitate emotional healing and personal transformation through self-awareness.

The key distinction between these two approaches lies in their focus. While the Socratic method uses critical questioning to intellectually challenge the client's beliefs about alcohol, helping them understand the rational consequences of their actions, Maranhão's Therapeutic Discourse focuses more on the emotional experiences and personal narratives that shape the client's addiction. The Socratic method tends to be more directive, with the facilitator guiding the dialogue toward intellectual clarity, while Maranhão's approach is more egalitarian, with the therapist facilitating a non-judgmental, reflective space that empowers the client to discover their own emotional insights and healing process.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Socratic method serves as a powerful therapeutic discourse in mental health, fostering self-exploration and critical thinking among clients. By employing structured questioning, therapists can guide individuals to examine their beliefs, assumptions, and emotional responses, facilitating a deeper understanding of their mental health challenges. This method promotes cognitive restructuring, enabling clients to challenge negative thought patterns and develop healthier coping strategies. Additionally, the collaborative nature of the Socratic method enhances the therapeutic relationship, creating a safe environment for open dialogue and reflection.

Furthermore, the Socratic method's emphasis on clarity and precision in language aids clients in articulating their thoughts and feelings, which is crucial for emotional regulation. As clients engage in this reflective process, they gain insights that empower them to make informed decisions about their mental health. The versatility of the Socratic method also allows it to be integrated into various therapeutic modalities, including cognitive-behavioral therapy and group therapy settings, further enhancing its applicability.

Overall, the Socratic method not only enriches the therapeutic discourse but also contributes significantly to improving mental health outcomes, fostering resilience, and promoting personal growth. Its focus on inquiry and dialogue ultimately supports clients in their journey toward self-discovery and healing.



## Author's contribution

The author emphasizes on the importance of Socratic method as a therapeutic discourse for mental health by highlighting its fundamental role in fostering self-reflection and critical thinking. Furthermore, the author demonstrates how guided questioning can help clients to uncover and reframe unhelpful beliefs and the capacity of Socratic method in strengthening the therapeutic alliance, promote emotional regulation, and empowering clients to develop problem-solving skills to overcome maladaptive behaviors.

## Funding

The study has not received any funding from any source.

## Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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