

Gerhard Andersson: Innovating psychotherapy research by using the internet

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Professor Gerhard Andersson stands as a transformative pioneer in digital mental health, revolutionizing how psychological therapy reaches millions worldwide through his groundbreaking internet-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy (iCBT) research. With over 900 research papers, an h-index of 123, and recognition as Sweden's most cited psychology researcher, Andersson has fundamentally reshaped the delivery of psychotherapy by demonstrating that therapist-guided online treatments can match the effectiveness of traditional face-to-face therapy while requiring significantly less therapist time. His extraordinary career spans dual PhDs in clinical psychology and medicine, leadership of over 200 controlled trials, and mentorship of 64 doctoral graduates who now advance the field globally. Receiving the 2017 Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Society for Research on Internet Interventions and the 2014 Nordic Prize in Medicine alongside Sweden's Outstanding Psychologist Award, Andersson exemplifies how innovative clinical research transforms healthcare accessibility. Featured on Clarivate's Highly Cited Researchers list from 2016 to 2024, his influence extends beyond academia through the successful implementation of digital treatments in routine healthcare across Sweden and internationally. In this candid Genomic Press Interview, Andersson shares his unexpected journey from skateboarding punk musician to world-renowned scientist, revealing how two students' "crazy idea" about internet headache treatment in 1998 sparked a revolution that now brings evidence-based psychological care to underserved populations globally, while discussing his unique perspectives on combining clinical practice with research excellence, the future of AI in psychotherapy, and maintaining creativity through skateboarding and unplugged cover band music at age 59.

Part 1: Gerhard Andersson – Life and Career

Where were you born, and where do you live now?

I was born in the Swedish town Norrköping and now live in Linköping, which is the neighbouring town. I lived in Uppsala for many years but returned to my home county, Östergötland.

Could you give us a glimpse into your personal history, emphasizing the pivotal moments that first kindled your passion for science?

I have always been a curious person. As a kid, I had several pets, which was my main interest at the time. I was also interested in music early on and had an attitude that nothing was impossible to do or learn. I liked school and also began with "projects" at an early age. For example, as a 10-year-old, I mimed to the records of the band KISS, complete with all the makeup and clothing I had made myself. In hindsight, undertaking projects is highly relevant to research. As a kid, I also began to skateboard, and at 15, I started playing music in a punk band. I played guitar and sang.



Figure 1. Gerhard Andersson, PhD, Linköping University, Sweden.

Moved on to heavy metal and jazz in a few years. At school, some teachers noticed me and encouraged me to study, which helped me focus more on my education.

In Sweden, we had obligatory military service, and when I was 19 years old, I served 15 months in the coastal defence/navy, while also studying some extra topics in my spare time. In the military, I developed an interest in psychology and received leadership training. After that, I applied to the five-year clinical psychology program and was accepted at the age of 20. Before my military service, I had worked for a while in a factory manufacturing microwave ovens, which was also a valuable experience. I moved to Uppsala and started my education at Uppsala University. I also began playing guitar in a student big band, which primarily performed jazz and popular music. This was almost as intense as the studies, and I played gigs with other bands for more than 10 years. My interest in science was sparked during a clinical practice period in the third year of the psychology program, when I also completed my bachelor's thesis as part of the program. Together with a fellow student, I conducted an epidemiological study on adolescent depression, which was later





published and became my first scientific publication (Larsson et al., 1991, DOI: [10.1111/j.1600-0447.1991.tb05561.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1600-0447.1991.tb05561.x)). This sparked my interest in research. When I was writing my MSc thesis, I had the same supervisor, Lennart Melin, who later on became my PhD supervisor. The topics of the MSc and the PhD were hearing loss in the elderly. I also trained in audiology while doing my PhD. As a PhD student, I was eager to engage in clinical work as well and started working part-time as a clinical psychologist with tinnitus patients in the local audiology clinic in Uppsala. This became my clinical life, and I have never ceased to work at least one day each week with patients.

The clinical work involves collaborating with other professionals in teams. I see a broad range of patients in terms of ages (kids to older adults) and comorbid problems. The clinical work also led to much research within audiology and ENT. Following my PhD in clinical psychology, I did a second PhD in medicine on tinnitus, but in between, I spent one post-doc year in London (University College London) and did research on balance and dizziness. People with otological conditions like extreme noise sensitivity, tinnitus, hearing loss, and dizziness often also suffer from psychiatric conditions. When returning from London, I continued my post-doc and also lectured extensively, for example, on a topic that had become one of my interests, namely meta-analysis. My first meta-analysis was on optimism (Andersson, 1996, DOI: [10.1016/0191-8869\(96\)00118-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(96)00118-3)) and the next on tinnitus treatment. Tinnitus and meta-analysis became the topics of my first two books in Swedish. I have continued to conduct systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and have greatly benefited from collaboration with Professor Pim Cuijpers, a world-leading researcher specializing in meta-analysis. But now over to the game changer in my research.

Please share with us what initially piqued your interest in your favourite research or professional focus area.

When I returned to Uppsala after my year in London, I began supervising MSc students. They complete their final term in a five-year clinical psychology program by writing an MSc thesis. By now, I have supervised numerous MSc students and also recruited PhD students from that group. One day, when I sat in front of the computer in my office, two guys knocked on my door. They wanted to discuss their upcoming MSc and have me as their supervisor. The idea they had first sounded crazy. They wanted to test whether headaches could be treated by using the internet. I recalled studies on bibliotherapy for headache and said yes. We designed it as a controlled trial, making it one of the earliest controlled trials of internet-delivered cognitive behaviour therapy (iCBT). It was published two years after that meeting in 1998 (Ström et al., 2000, DOI: [10.1037/0022-006X.68.4.722](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.68.4.722)). One of the students became my first PhD student. This was extremely timely. I managed to secure research grants, fund numerous PhD students and post-docs, publish numerous papers, and also support younger colleagues, including those from other countries who have visited me. The list of conditions and research projects is long. This includes common mood and anxiety disorders, somatic problems like chronic pain and tinnitus, relevant psychological problems like loneliness, different age groups, cultural and language backgrounds, and methodologies ranging from qualitative research to neuroscience (Andersson, 2025, ISBN: [9781032591926](https://doi.org/9781032591926), see Figure 2). In addition, the treatment programs we have developed have been integrated into regular healthcare. It is interesting to note the importance of the two early students, and to these I must add Professor Per Carlbring, who was another early MSc student with whom I have collaborated for many years and who has made a significant contribution to the iCBT field worldwide. Several other MSc and PhD students have worked with me over the years and made important contributions to the field of iCBT, as well as to other psychotherapy orientations, such as internet-delivered psychodynamic treatment.

We would like to know more about your career trajectory leading up to your most relevant leadership role. What defining moments channelled you toward that leadership responsibility?

The first challenge was to establish a research group and provide support to its members. Then a significant step was when I applied for a Professor's chair at another university and was offered the position. That meant

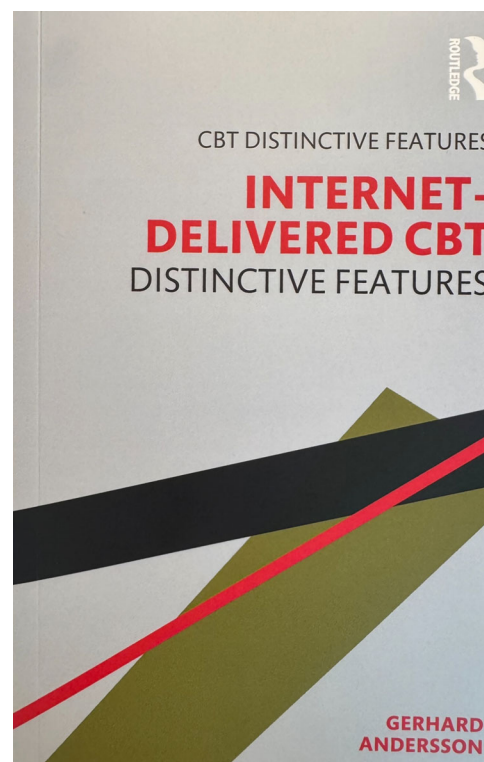


Figure 2. Cover of *Internet-Delivered CBT: Distinctive Features* by Gerhard Andersson, published by Routledge (2025). This book presents the key features and clinical applications of internet-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy (iCBT), drawing on Professor Andersson's extensive research and clinical experience in developing and implementing digital mental health interventions.

starting from scratch, but I could bring a post-doc with me. One major characteristic of my role as a leader is the ability to spot talent. This can be a first-year student who later becomes a PhD student. The capacity to support and supervise PhD students, and for many also after their PhD, has been important. I have served as main or co-supervisor for as many as 64 graduated PhDs, not only in Sweden but also in some other countries. Among those, some have now become full professors. Leadership responsibility also includes serving as the research group leader for psychology at my department, not just for my own research group.

What is a decision or choice that seemed like a mistake at the time but ended up being valuable or transformative for your career or life?

I focused on balance research for several years, and we acquired a professional balance platform that ultimately proved ineffective despite being expensive and professional. This led me to work more on the new topic of internet interventions research. In the end, that was a good move, but I was very disappointed and would most likely have continued as an experimental psychology researcher had this thing not happened.

What habits and values did you develop during your academic studies or subsequent postdoctoral experiences that you uphold within your research environment?

As a PhD student, I became interested in publishing and what happens behind the scenes. I started working as an assistant editor for a journal (later renamed *Cognitive Behavior Therapy*), then became associate editor and finally editor-in-chief for that journal. I arranged for the journal to get a contract with a publisher, and it is now one of the leading journals in CBT. I have also worked with the journal *Internet Interventions* for many years, which is a leading publication in its field. In Sweden, PhD students typically complete their PhD by publication, and the lessons learned from years as an editor have been invaluable. Another lesson is that a new journal started today can become a leading journal in the future.



Please tell us more about your current scholarly focal points within your chosen field of science.

We aim to develop and test psychological treatments delivered via modern information technology for conditions that are not well investigated yet. The concept of clinically relevant psychological problems is a perspective that expands the traditional diagnosis-focused approach. This includes using new methodologies like AI, as well as studying alternative processes like knowledge acquisition, not just symptom reduction.

What impact do you hope to achieve in your field by focusing on specific research topics?

The research will likely lead to changes in clinical practice and will also contribute to the development of new ideas and theories along the lines of a biopsychosocial approach.

What do you most enjoy in your capacity as an academic or research leader?

The most exciting part is the planning and completion of randomised controlled trials. We have conducted numerous trials and have a proven process for them, but it is always rewarding to embark on a new project. The funding situation has enabled me to take risks and try out new ideas before applying for a research grant. International collaborations, including sharing our work, are another enjoyable aspect of my work.

At Genomic Press, we prioritize fostering research endeavours based solely on their inherent merit, uninfluenced by geography or the researchers' personal or demographic traits. Are there particular cultural facets within the scientific community that warrant transformative scrutiny, or is there a cause within science that you feel strongly devoted to?

Learn by doing. Listen to the data. But also to attend to common sense. Is the research logical and in line with a sensible biological/evolutionary understanding?

Outside professional confines, how do you prefer to allocate your leisure moments, or conversely, in what manner would you envision spending these moments given a choice?

I very much enjoy my family and friends. After focusing on my career and raising my small children for many years, I picked up skateboarding again 10 years ago, and it has now become a regular part of my life, with sessions occurring 2-3 times a week (see Figure 3). I also picked up music again and play in restaurants and parties with my trio Obstipation (www.obstipation.se). We play cover songs from a broad range of genres, such as rock, pop, and Irish music, to name a few. I play guitar and sing.

Part 2: Gerhard Andersson – Selected questions from the Proust Questionnaire¹

What is your most marked characteristic?

Hopefully, being a creative problem solver.

¹In the late nineteenth century, various questionnaires were a popular diversion designed to discover new things about old friends. What is now known as the 35-question Proust Questionnaire became famous after Marcel Proust's answers to these questions were found and published posthumously. Proust answered the questions twice, at ages 14 and 20. In 2003 Proust's handwritten answers were auctioned off for \$130,000. Multiple other historical and contemporary figures have answered the Proust Questionnaire, including among others Karl Marx, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Conan Doyle, Fernando Pessoa, Stéphane Mallarmé, Paul Cézanne, Vladimir Nabokov, Kazuo Ishiguro, Catherine Deneuve, Sophia Loren, Gina Lollobrigida, Gloria Steinem, Pelé, Valentino, Yoko Ono, Elton John, Martin Scorsese, Pedro Almodóvar, Richard Branson, Jimmy Carter, David Chang, Spike Lee, Hugh Jackman, and Zendaya. The Proust Questionnaire is often used to interview celebrities: the idea is that by answering these questions, an individual will reveal his or her true nature. We have condensed the Proust Questionnaire by reducing the number of questions and slightly rewording some. These curated questions provide insights into the individual's inner world, ranging from notions of happiness and fear to aspirations and inspirations.

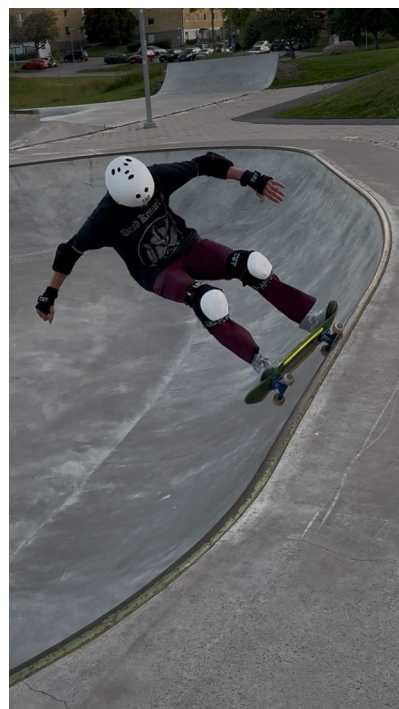


Figure 3. Gerhard Andersson skateboarding in the summer of 2025.

Among your talents, which one(s) give(s) you a competitive edge?

I am pretty good at task shifting: lecture in the morning, clinical work after lunch, and then a skateboard session in the evening; in between, some supervision in the corridor.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

I would have learned to read sheet music better. It was too easy for me to learn the tunes anyway, and I was too lazy to learn to read music (but managed to read chords in the big band).

What is your current state of mind?

Proud of what we have achieved. Happy for the things I can still do.

What is your idea of perfect happiness?

Stable interpersonal relations. That the basic needs are fulfilled. A slight positive cognitive bias. Better to believe in people than to mistrust them.

When and where were you happiest? And why were so happy then?

I have three children and a wife. My happiest moments have been with them. Then, of course, nailing a new skateboard trick or a good gig with the band, but that is just for fun.

What is your greatest fear?

Societal changes. In my country, we have not been in war for a long, long time. But not far away from Sweden, bad things happen.

What is your greatest regret?

I could have studied medicine, but then again, as a research psychologist and with a PhD in medicine, things would not be that different. Moreover, I like being a psychologist and psychotherapist.

What are you most proud of?

My children, my former PhD students, and my former MSc students, as well as looking back on a rewarding career.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Receiving the Nordic Prize in Medicine and the Swedish Outstanding Psychologist Award in the same year felt great.



What or who is your greatest passion?

Skateboarding and playing live music. And of course, my wife.

What is your favourite occupation (or activity)?

I like lecturing to students. Academia has been my life, and discussing science is also a good thing. Administrative work less so, but it is good when it is done (like rating research grant applications).

What is your greatest extravagance?

I tend not to overspend. Of course, food and drink can be worth some extra spending, but not every day.

What is your most treasured possession?

The vinyl records I kept over the years (over 800) turned out to be a great possession. Many people got rid of them, but I never did. Now I arrange vinyl testing sessions with friends, including ratings of cover, sound quality, classic song, etc.

Where would you most like to live?

In Sweden. I also like the United Kingdom, but I will stay in Sweden.

What is the quality you most admire in people?

Respectful behaviour towards persons who are below you.

What is the trait you most dislike in people?

The opposite. Being bold against people below you in terms of age, status, and other aspects like gender and education.

What do you consider the most overrated virtue?

Cautiousness, if it means being afraid of trying out new things.

What do you most value in your friends?

When we do things together, like skateboarding and playing music, but also being there when I need help.

Which living person do you most admire?

I admire the jazz guitarist John Scofield—such a great musician!

Who are your heroes in real life?

People in health care and schoolteachers.

If you could have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be and why?

B.F. Skinner. He was a highly influential yet also controversial psychologist, and I would like to hear his views on our society today.

Who are your favourite writers?

Swedish authors Stig Dagerman, Pär Lagerkvist and Tomas Tranströmer.

Who are your heroes of fiction?

Batman.

What aphorism or motto best encapsulates your life philosophy?

Always look on the bright side of life.

Linköping, Sweden

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