

Dear Serkan,

Thank you for your excellent and controversial question! And thank you, too, for your kind comment! I really appreciate it.

I can only give you my opinion; please keep in mind that I am generally very skeptical, because of my training in research early in my career, and often I am wrong. So for what it's worth, here's my take on it. EFT (Emotional Freedom Therapy) and TFT (Thought Field Therapy) involve tapping on various locations on the body to treat various psychological disorders. Does this treatment method work? It is my opinion that these treatments only have placebo effects.

However, the placebo effect confuses therapists and the general public alike, and attributing your favored school of therapy to placebo status is sometimes irritating to the believers who are intensely committed to these types of treatments. I will briefly explain. Let's say you announce a powerful and remarkably safe new treatment for depression, an antidepressant you have called "placebin." You offer to treat one million depressed Americans free of charge, just to prove how safe and effective Placebin is. But you don't tell people it is just an placebo, a pill with inert ingredients and no active chemicals.

How many depressed people will be "cured" within three to five weeks of their treatment with "placebin?"

The answer is 35% to 45%. And these people will go on national television shows exclaiming about how helpful the medication was, and how it changed their brain chemistry, their feelings, their thoughts, and their energy and motivation. They will swear on a stack of bibles that it was the pill that "cured" them. There will be hundreds of thousands of testimonials from the true believers, and they will be convincing because, in some sense, they WERE helped.

But it wasn't the Placebin that helped them. They improved because they *believed* that this new treatment would help them. So right away, they felt increased hope, which is a true antidepressant. And then they began to think and behave more positively--which also lessened their depression and convinced them that the pill was "working." So they got into a cycle where positive expectations boosted mood which further boosted positive expectations. Essentially, they cured themselves, but attributed the recovery to the Placebin.

You can come up with any goofy treatment, and it will appear to work for some people if you can get people believing in it. And people want to believe that there is something magical and easy, like tapping on your left eyebrow, or your sternum, or whatever, to cure your depression, your fear of heights, your OCD, or whatever.

At workshops for mental health professionals I used to say that you could even invent some new goofy therapy, like ear tugging, and claim it would cure depression and other psychiatric problems, and if you could convince people it was effective with some

theoretical explanation, it would have a nice placebo effect. For example, you could explain that there was an imbalance of pressures in the inner ear that triggered emotional distress, and that the ear tugging balanced things out. And it would be easy to start your own new "school" of therapy that way.

Oddly enough, a couple years later a medical doctor who was attending one of my workshops approached me during the break, excited about a new therapy he'd just been trained in, and exclaimed it had more than a 90% cure rate for most psychiatric disorders. He had brochures and instructions on how to do it from the training he'd received, and he wanted permission to distribute these brochures at the workshop. And what was this fantastic new therapy? it was called "Ear Tugging Therapy!"

What was it that P. T. Barnum said?

Well, there's your cynical answer. I apologize to followers of EFT and TFT, as I'm sure that some of you will be convinced my post is a: wrong; b: unfair; and c: disrespectful.

New therapies evolve almost weekly. Many individuals want to create and market their own "school" of therapy. Any many therapists are looking for some simple, formulaic treatment they can use for depression, this or that anxiety disorder, and so forth. There are two questions to ask about each new approach. The first is--is this approach more effective than treatment with a placebo? For example, in testing the tapping therapies, you could have one group that gets tapping in the so-called "correct" area (such as the left eyebrow), and another group of patients who get tapping in some different area (such as the right eyebrow.) If this were a well controlled, objective, double-blind scientific study conducted by independent therapists with no allegiance to this or that outcome, you would almost certainly discover that treatments like EFT and TFT are no more effective than placebo.

And here's the second question: Would those who are promoting and marketing these new treatments care about your study? I am convinced that the answer, sadly, in most cases is no. True believers are usually not convinced by science. That's why the costly and time-consuming outcome studies are often not even attempted--because the promoters may live in an alternate universe with so-called "alternate facts."

Here is one last point. Therapists will typically dismiss, ignore, or explain away patients who do not respond. For example, they may tell themselves the patient was "resistant" if the tapping or whatever they're using didn't work.

In addition, therapists tend not to notice patients who drop out of therapy, and only think about the ones who remain in therapy. So they don't notice their true effectiveness. And most do not even measure symptoms at each session, so they rely on their own highly inaccurate judgments. That's why in TEAM-CBT we base the treatment on data, and test patients in multiple dimensions at the start and end of every therapy session. I am convinced that science-based, data-driven therapy will be the way of the future, but there will be much resistance to this massive change in the delivery of mental health, just as the Catholic church resisted the Copernican Revolution for 100 years.

Finally, let me give you a personal example. When I was a teenager, I had the fear of heights, but got over it using Exposure (Flooding). With the encouragement of a teacher at my high school, I stood at the top of a tall ladder for about 15 minutes. Although it was terrifying, after 15 minutes, my fear suddenly disappeared. Then I LOVED going up on ladders and doing things at great heights.

But then I went for many years without going up on heights, just because I had no reason to do so. And as result, my fear of heights returned. The lesson to learn is that once you've defeated a fear, keep after it using repeated exposure, because phobias can return.

During a workshop, I mentioned this, and at the end when I was packing up my computer and such, a couple approached me and said they had a fantastic treatment for any kind of fear, and it worked more than 95% of the time. They explained that my fear of heights was related to some trauma that was located somewhere in my body, and that it had to be treated with some kind of "body work" that involved tapping and pressure points and so forth, and would I want them to show me how it worked?

I said sure, so they asked me to lay down on some mat and they did tapping and other massage type things, mentioning I had this or that trauma stored in this or that location, and after a short period of time pronounced me cured. It was extremely appealing--pleasant and quick. Wow, I thought, this is great, I'm cured!

That evening, a group of us went out to dinner, including the couple who had "cured" me. In the meantime, I checked out my fear of heights by looking over a railing on the fifth floor of the hotel. Yikes! It terrified me.

At dinner, I mentioned there had been no effect whatsoever of their treatment, and that I was still afraid of heights. They seemed totally undeterred, and went on proclaiming to everyone about how fabulous their body work treatment for phobias was!

Finally, let me say once again that I am simply expressing my own opinion, based on my experience and my own biases. I often have strong opinions that may offend some individuals.

Feel free to disagree, and remember that I am often wrong. So take it with a grain of salt.

David