

Why Psychotherapy Appears to Work (Even When It Doesn't)

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The Huffington Post:

One of the classic papers in the history of psychology is Hans Eysenck's "The Effects of Psychotherapy: An Evaluation," published in 1952. The London-based psychologist examined 19 studies of treatment effectiveness, dealing with both psychoanalytic and eclectic types of therapy in more than 7000 cases. His overall conclusion was damning: The studies, he wrote, "fail to prove that psychotherapy, Freudian or otherwise, facilitates the recovery of neurotic patients. They show that roughly two-thirds of a group of neurotic patients will recover or improve to a marked extent within about two years of the onset of their illness, whether they are treated by means of psychotherapy or not."

Eysenck noted, somewhat wryly, that these findings are encouraging for the neurotic patient—but not so welcome from the point of view of the psychotherapist. He also predicted that therapists would react emotionally to his proof, based on their strong feelings and beliefs in their effectiveness, concluding: "In the absence of agreement between fact and belief, there is urgent need for a decrease in the strength of belief, and for an increase in the number of facts available."

He was right about the emotional reaction, although it probably would surprise him to know that it persists even today. The number of available facts about scientifically validated treatments has increased dramatically in the 62 years since Eysenck's evaluation, yet many therapists still insist that their informal clinical observations and intuitions are proof enough of therapy's power.

Read the whole story: [The Huffington Post](#)

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