

# This Week's Citation Classic

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Eysenck H J. The effects of psychotherapy: an evaluation. *J. Consult. Clin. Psychol.* 16:319-24, 1952. [Inst. Psychiatry, Maudsley Hosp., Univ. London, London, England]

It used to be assumed that treatment of neurotic disorders by psychoanalysis or psychotherapy was instrumental in producing cures. However, there is a strong spontaneous remission effect. An analysis of reported effects of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, and spontaneous remission shows that the different varieties of treatment fail to show any better results than that produced by spontaneous remission. [The *Science Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (*SCI*<sup>®</sup>) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*<sup>®</sup> (*SSCI*<sup>™</sup>) indicate that this paper has been cited over 275 times since 1961.]

H.J. Eysenck  
Department of Psychology  
Institute of Psychiatry  
De Crespigny Park  
Denmark Hill  
London SE5 8AF  
England

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"In 1949 I was sent to the USA to study American practices of clinical psychology, preparatory to launching the first department to teach the subject in the UK, and establishing this new profession over here. As an experimentalist I was extremely critical of the unproven assumptions made by American clinicians, including the use of projective tests for diagnosis, and the use of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis for treatment. I concluded from a survey of the literature that there was no evidence for the validity of the former, or for the efficacy of the latter. This was regarded as heresy when I advanced these views in lectures all over the USA, but I decided nevertheless to publish a short paper on psychotherapy, partly in order to elicit criticisms that might prove me wrong.

"These arrived in great number, and have continued ever since; unfortunately they were based on a misunderstanding of the syllogism underlying my argument. I had

reviewed studies of neurotic disorders in which there had been no form of psychological treatment; two out of three of the severely ill patients were cured or very much improved after two years. I then argued that (1) if there is no adequate study of psychoanalytic therapy showing a better improvement rate, then there is no firm evidence that the therapy is therapeutically effective. (2) A review of existing studies showed that indeed there did not exist any such adequate study. (3) Consequently, I concluded that there was no evidence of therapeutic success for psychoanalysis (or more general methods of psychotherapy, which I also analysed in a similar manner).

"Critics argued that my paper did not prove that psychoanalysis was useless, a conclusion I had never suggested; it needed a philosopher, E. Erwin, to resurrect the correct syllogism in his discussion of the great debate.<sup>1</sup> He agreed that my conclusion was valid then, and still continues to be valid. A large-scale review of the by now immense literature by Rachman and Wilson came to the same conclusion.<sup>2</sup>

"As far as I personally am concerned the outcome was that I was ostracised by the clinical fraternity, had efforts to establish alternative methods of treatment (behaviour therapy) blocked by psychiatrists, was refused research grants by embattled psychoanalysts on grantgiving bodies, and was generally treated as an outcast and a pariah. Even friends who agreed with me privately refused to commit themselves in public, and although developments since have proved that my argument was correct, and that the new methods I advocated were demonstrably superior, denigrations and erroneous statements of the original arguments still appear in textbooks, articles, etc. Efforts were made to terminate my appointment, and quite generally I was made to feel that one does not oppose the *Zeitgeist* with impunity, however correct the argument. *Exoriare aliquis nostris ex ossibus ultor!*"

1. Erwin E. Psychoanalytic therapy: the Eysenck argument. *Amer. Psychol.* 35:435-43, 1980.

2. Rachman S & Wilson T. *Effects of psychological therapy*. London: Pergamon, 1980. 99 p.