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### *Efficacy, Effectiveness And Expertise*

*The American Psychologist*. (December, 1995)  
Article on *The Consumer Report Study*.

Seligman (APA, December, 1995), who has been a champion for the support of "efficacy studies" as the foundation for the specific treatment for specific dysfunction paradigm, offers an excellent discourse concerning the effectiveness of psychotherapy as reported in *The Consumer Reports* study of the effectiveness of psychotherapy (1995, November). Seligman makes the point that this survey study has changed his view of the way to study effectiveness. Within this framework, he suggests that studies of specific treatment for specific dysfunction (which he terms, "efficacy" studies) do not consider the realities of therapy. Seligman's gracious conclusion that "efficacy" studies ". . . are very useful for deciding whether one treatment is better than another treatment for a given disorder. . ." suggests the very restrictive nature of such studies. These results by virtue of the research designs seldom go beyond the internal validity of the studies. His conclusion is well stated: "The efficacy study is the wrong method for empirically validating psychotherapy as it is actually done, because it omits too many crucial elements of what is done in the field." In other words, by the nature of the methodological designs and their inherent constraints (e.g., control studies, exclusive and manualized treatments, random assignment, limited treatment times, single diagnoses), many crucial elements of the actual practice of psychotherapy in the field are ignored.

Seligman suggests the model of *The Consumer Reports'* survey as a viable model for serious investigation of the effectiveness of psychotherapy. By virtue of its realism, this model moves away from Seligman's previous emphasis which he termed, the "gold standard" represented by "efficacy" studies. Here, the major focus is upon the therapists' expertise of specificity in psychotherapy doubly reinforced by the expertise of empirical validation.

However, Seligman falls prey to his initial bias of the "gold standard" when he suggests a combination of models and ". . . that the Consumer Reports survey compliments the efficacy method . . . (and) can be combined into a more ideal method that will best provide empirical validation of psychotherapy." In his discussion of the flaws in this survey, his overlay of the two models implies the "premium" of specificity, the common characteristic of empirical validation studies, which he previously identifies as leading to an ". . . illusory conclusion in psychotherapy." Seligman further attaches himself to this illusion when he does not consider the continued findings which reject differential effectiveness and specificity (including *The Consumer Report* study). The *Consumer Reports'* finding refuting the assertion ". . . of the usefulness of specific techniques for specific disorders . . ." is supported by conclusions of current reviews of psychotherapy efficacy and effectiveness (Duncan & Moynihan, 1995; Lambert, 1992; Lambert, Shapiro & Bergin, 1986; Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1986; Stubbs & Bozarth, 1994). The

properties of therapy as practiced in the field certainly suggest that there are common properties at work among the assorted therapies and the varied therapists that result in equivalence of outcome for the clients regardless of the approach (Arkowitz, 1992; Lambert, 1992; Luborsky, Singer, & Luborsky, 1976). This entire suggestive conglomerate is buttressed with several general conclusions of reviews of scientific method studies of psychotherapy efficacy and effectiveness. The reviews suggest that most of the variance of effective outcome is accounted for by relationship variables (30%) and client extratherapeutic resources (40%) with the variable of approach/technique accounting for no more than placebo effect (15% each) (Cited in Duncan & Moynihan, 1995). Results of our (Stubbs and Bozarth, 1994) qualitative study examining over four decades of psychotherapy effectiveness research lead us to bluntly assert that: "In general, the direction of research toward greater specificity is ill founded in relation to logical or interrelated ties with research findings."

This "scientifically" supported illusion of specific treatment for particular dysfunction is predicated upon the therapist as expert as well as a bid for the market place for psychological treatment (APA Task Force, 1993). As such, the true variables of effectiveness are apt to be incestuously hedged upon even by the most dedicated inquiries for truth about treatment effectiveness.

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