

An Answer to the Skeptics:

Response to "Can We Tap Away Our Problems?" Skeptical Inquirer, July/August 2000
Open letter to: Mr. Gaudio and Mr. Herbert,

By Steven Barger
November 22, 2000

Please understand that I am not in any way an official spokesperson for Dr. Callahan, or Thought Field Therapy. I have recently read your article in Skeptical Inquirer magazine. Your article is not really a true critical examination of Thought Field Therapy. First, you misrepresent the actual claims of Dr. Callahan, leading to several straw-man arguments. In fact, the thrust of your "critical analysis" of TFT is to show that the explanation for the phenomenon that Callahan claims occurs, is psuedo-science, and then lump him in with all the frauds and charlatans that Skeptical Inquirer debunks all the time.

It's essential to separate the entire critical analysis of TFT into two questions, which you confuse, in your article. First, is there, in fact, an extraordinary-seeming phenomenon which occurs at least 80% of the time (when using specific TFT algorithms), which can be brought about by any "inquiring skeptic" who chooses to learn and to test the TFT techniques; a technique with which the individual is able "to eliminate most negative emotions within minutes"?

The second question, assuming that the first question is demonstrated to be true, is; what is the best explanation of this amazing-seeming phenomenon? Is it repeatable by others? Obviously, if there is no testable, reproducible phenomenon that occurs after following the TFT protocol, then there is literally nothing to be explained. You would need to go no further, because at that point, if you don't get the results predicted by Callahan, you can consider his claims properly "debunked". Callahan does, rationally and logically, have the burden of proof, not the attempted "debunkers".

However, if you do get this phenomenon, Callahan still has further "burdens of proof". That's when we critically examine his explanations for the phenomenon. How do we know it's not just a placebo effect, suggestibility, hypnosis, or some other cause? Spontaneous remission? Any reasonable counter-explanation for the phenomenon needs to be laid to rest by Callahan-the burden of proof is still Callahan's. If not met, his claims can then be considered properly "debunked".

Regarding Psychological Reversal: You completely and totally misrepresent Callahan's claims. You do accurately state Callahan's definition of the term, "psychological reversal", but you then imply very strongly that PR is Callahan's "escape clause", his "blame the client" excuse for why the treatment would have worked, if the client just didn't have those self-sabotaging attitudes and behaviors! (Which is, of course, a common tactic of frauds and charlatans, ("it was your 'lack of faith' that kept the treatment from working", etc.). You have Callahan's actual claims completely wrong, and then you proceed to blow down your straw man, by referring to "post hoc reasoning and attempts to ignore disconfirming evidence by creating uncorroborated explanations of TFT failures". You need to get absolutely clear on this concept, to understand the actual claims of TFT.

Psychological reversal, it is claimed by Callahan, is one phenomenon that stops a TFT treatment from being immediately effective, after doing the prescribed tapping sequence once. Assuming that you are tapping on the correct locations, in the proper order of tapping, and are thinking about your problem, PR is the most likely explanation. But: (And this is what Callahan actually claims), all this

means for the client is that they need to do additional tapping, before then re-doing the original sequence, which then usually will work. So, for example, if you and I were both being treated for, say, a life-long phobia, and you were psychologically reversed and I was not, it might take me five minutes to completely and permanently have my phobia eliminated, but it might take you six minutes, or ten minutes, to completely eliminate yours. The point is, whether or not Callahan diagnoses you as having PR or not, your phobia will be eliminated, just like mine. It just might take an extra couple of minutes. That is what Callahan claims.

You wrote, "Callahan proposes the existence of a phenomenon termed "psychological reversal" to explain instances in which TFT fails to work". You are just dead wrong! Callahan claims that when PR is present, it can be corrected for, with just a short, extra treatment. You are jumping the gun to write off any TFT treatment that takes a couple of extra steps for one client that another client doesn't need, as a "failure", as another opportunity to "increase demand characteristics of the therapy". I will outline for you a simply way to control for that. First, however, get this clear: Nowhere does Callahan claim that he gets his amazingly high success rate, strictly from just one single "holon", (i.e., running through the algorithm just once). Even a cure or amazing improvement that takes seven minutes or ten minutes, instead of five, is still, if true, very amazing!

If you think it's all "abracadabra", and that if you just tap on someone long enough, they'll tell you what you want to hear, you can try this simple experiment yourself. Just make up a "placebo" algorithm, pick some friends or colleagues, and have them just start tapping, and keep tapping, until they report improvements. Go ahead! You and they will get tired soon enough, and you'll eventually quit. The original problem that you had them thinking about will still be there. Callahan is not going to consistently be getting 80%-97% success rate from openly skeptical strangers, by placebo, suggestion, or demand characteristics. Not consistently! You can easily duplicate his successes yourself, if you just follow the quick and simple to learn TFT protocol.

In your article, you quote Karl Popper, "the hallmark of a science is falsifiability". If you would only gather some of your openly skeptical friends, and actually try TFT, you'll be then able to report for yourself whether you get the kind of results that Callahan claims, or not. It's so easy to just make up a placebo algorithm, to control for all these possible "non-specific", alternate explanations. Even high school science classes could replicate these simple experiments. Things that would tend to show Callahan's claims as false would be: no benefit in either group, (placebo algorithm vs. correct algorithm), or similar benefits in both groups. (If the placebo group benefited about as well as the other group, this would suggest that something other than the correct TFT treatment was responsible for the success).

An experiment, focusing specifically on phobias would be very simple. Just have a stepladder available for people with fear of heights, a harmless spider or two for the spider-phobic, an elevator for the elevator phobic, a small closet for the claustrophobic, a bath tub full of water for the water phobic, etc. try a placebo treatment, then the real treatment. Your results, whatever they are, will either tend to substantiate Callahan's claims, or show them to be "not proven". If "not proven", we can consider TFT "debunked".

Actually, I'd recommend that you use the staff of "Skeptical Inquirer" magazine, or the Fellows of CSICOPS's executive council, as the test subjects! You claim that the developer of EFT, (a derivative of TFT, not associated at all with Callahan), a Mr. Gary Craig, claims that a placebo algorithm may be impossible. You are absolutely correct in concluding that, " this position

conveniently renders Craig's theory unfalsifiable and therefore outside the realm of science." Correct, but this has nothing at all to do with the claims of Callahan and TFT. Callahan claims that tapping on the exact spots, in the precise order, is essential. If I could just tap anywhere and get emotional improvements, what would I need Callahan and TFT for? (I've tried; it doesn't work!) Don't play "guilt by association". Mr. Craig and his EFT is not a representative of Callahan or TFT. Callahan's claims are falsifiable, and reproducible, so he most emphatically is still within the realm of science.

Since Callahan will claim that even militant skepticism is no impediment to a positive result, and since it only takes minutes to learn and do an algorithm treatment, you really have no excuse for not doing it (!), if your goal is to carefully, intelligently, and critically examine TFT. If you say that you know that TFT doesn't really work, then I'll say that you really haven't put it to the test.

If you tested TFT, you could say all the "abracadabra's" you wanted to, to the placebo group, while saying, "I'm sure that this nonsense won't work", to the experimental group, thus leaving the real treatments to have to work, if they do, in spite of negative suggestibility! Do you have other suggestions, to even better control for "non-specific" effects? Maybe you could contact Callahan, and ask him to find someone locally who has trained under him, to observe your experiment, just to confirm that you are doing the actual algorithms, correctly.

In your response to Callahan's letter to the editor, on page 62 of the current issue of SI, you still show that you simply do not understand Callahan's concept of PR. Nowhere does Callahan EVER claim that his amazing success rate (80% for algorithms), always occurs on the first series of tapping. (Sometimes it does, often it doesn't). The success rate that Callahan claims for TFT is, success after one whole, complete treatment, which may include, for some people: psychological reversal treatment(s), neurological disorganization treatment, therapy localization; and, in a minority of cases, removal of an "energy toxin", (as defined by Callahan). If you still are not clear on the meaning of these terms, read *Stop the Nightmare of trauma*, (Callahan, 2000), in which his terms are clearly and carefully defined; (check the glossary).

Only after Callahan has been allowed to try his entire protocol, without success, can a treatment be counted as a failure. Thus, in your letter responding to Callahan's letter, the woman with the tee shirt ended the treatment session with Callahan without letting him actually try his entire TFT protocol. If I went to a medical doctor, and I walked away from his or her office before he or she was finished examining me, and then labeled the doctor as a quack, because I never got better, what is the rationality of that conclusion?!

The author of the letter to the Editor that follows yours makes a similar logical error. Because one particular algorithm did not, all by itself, work for him, he concludes that TFT is quackery! Only if after checking for PR, or neurological disorganization, and/or energy toxins, (not to mention, making sure that he's doing the correct algorithm for his problem, or using therapy localization), and treating appropriately, without success, can TFT be considered a failure, in this case. This is only logical. Test Callahan's actual claims, not your misreading of his claims!

The last sentences of Callahan's letter to the Editor, and of your reply to his letter, both refer to Galileo. Callahan: "Does this sound somewhat like the scientists of Galileo's day who reportedly refused to look through his scope?" Yours: "In the end, Galileo convinced the 'skeptics' by providing scientific proof of his assertions, not simply his testimony." Don't you see the absurdity

of your response? Yes, Galileo convinced the skeptics by providing scientific proof, not simply his testimony-but his scientific proof consisted of-getting scientists who initially refused to, to finally,- just look through the damn telescope!

There's something passive-aggressive about scientists who criticize and dismiss TFT as based on mere "anecdotal" evidence and testimonials, like it's some kind of "faith healing", or something. The efficacy of TFT most emphatically does not rest on mere "anecdotal" reports. Your claims that it does, is simply false. Saying that it's all just "anecdotal" does not make it so!

If I tell you that a treatment will work, and give you anecdotes to illustrate how amazing it is, and tell you exactly how you or anyone can quickly and easily replicate my treatment, and get similar results, then my claims can no longer be dismissed as "merely anecdotal". Anecdotes and testimonials are used by many fringe, pseudo-scientists as their only "proof", because anecdotes and testimonials are not testable and falsifiable. TFT is testable and falsifiable by any independent scientist or intelligent layperson, and Callahan lays out exactly how! Anything that is testable and falsifiable is, thusly, no longer "merely" anecdotal!

If TFT's critics simply refuse to take up the challenge, to "look through the telescope", that's not Callahan's fault! If he's offered you the means to test his claims, and you just stubbornly refuse to do it, you can not any longer rationally claim that his therapy lacks proof. Your amazing resistance to just do it and simply report your results, is passive-aggressive, because as long as you refuse, you can, in willful ignorance, keep screaming, "not proven! - no evidence!-etc., etc."

Reality is objective. The universe is real, and follows natural laws, discoverable by empiricism and reason. Scientific truth is not defined as: whatever the consensus of the vast majority of scientists say is true. Scientific truth is whatever is actually and verifiably true, regardless of whether the scientific establishment accepts it or not.

If the scientific establishment keeps repeating to Galileo, "we refuse to look through your scope, until you prove to us first, that there's something out there to see"(!), their bull-headed, stubborn refusal to just look through the damn telescope, and just honestly report what they see, does not, in any way, lessen the truth-value of Galileo's claims.

Furthermore, insistence on seeing independent, controlled studies first, before you as a scientist would even consider spending even five or ten minutes to test TFT on yourself or any openly skeptical acquaintance, amounts to: "Nobody else in the scientific establishment will look through your telescope, so I won't, either!" I guess I still had the old-fashioned, romantic notion about scientists, that they were only concerned about a dispassionate pursuit of testable and verifiable facts, conforming their theories and models of how the universe actually operates, to fit all the verifiable facts. That would mean, if the testable and verifiable facts contradicted old theories, you changed your old models of how the universe operates, to account for these new facts. You don't close your eyes, and refuse to look!

You may remain skeptical about the theoretical explanation behind TFT. Your belief in "chi", "thought fields", or "perturbations" is not necessary. That's fine by me. What you cannot, in all intellectual honesty, doubt is that a lawful, repeatable, relatively easy to duplicate amazing benefit occurs very highly consistently, on any population of test subjects that you care to try TFT on; even militant skeptics! Furthermore, you cannot, in all intellectual honesty, find any currently known or

accepted theory that can successfully explain these results. You'd have us believe that nearly all those people are either easily suggestible, conforming to the pressure of "demand characteristics of the situation" and expectation, or getting a "placebo" benefit. No placebo is that consistently effective!

To any intellectually honest person who is willing to replicate the tests, there can be no doubt: Thought Field Therapy is just exactly what Callahan claims it is. It has been proven!

Now, I expect that this will likely cause you some massive cognitive dissonance. Even if you reject Callahan's specific theoretical explanations, certainly only a revolutionary, radical new understanding of some kind, of the entire field of psychology, can fully explain all these new facts.

My hope is that Callahan will choose to publish this letter on his website, as an open letter, and as an open challenge to you; and I would ask Skeptical Inquirer to do the same. I challenge any honest, open minded skeptic to first read your article in its entirety, Callahan's letter to the Editor, your response, and then my letter here, and then judge just who is using rational, critical thinking skills in their arguments, and who is not!

The back cover of my issue of Skeptical Inquirer reads, in part, that CSICOP, the organization that publishes SI, "Does not reject claims on a priori grounds, antecedent to inquiry, but examines them objectively and carefully". I am still waiting for that careful objectivity from Skeptical Inquirer, regarding Thought Field Therapy.

How soon might I expect either your thoughtful, careful rebuttal to this letter, or, perhaps, a complete public retraction of your entire original article? Hope to hear from you soon!

With warmest regards,

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