



RETHINK

YOUR

SHRINK

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For my father

A great humanitarian who taught me to care for the world.

Foreword

I am delighted to be the physician chosen to write this foreword. As a holistic MD, I spent the first half of an exciting medical career teaching that thoughts and emotions can be causal factors in physical illness. This was my psychosomatic medicine practice at one of our country's first holistic health centers back in the 1970s. The second half has been spent telling people that physical illness often presents with mental symptoms. This was my thyroid practice at The

Preventive Medicine Center of Marin. Thus, I have continually focused on what I thought was the delicate interplay between mind and body.

This remarkable new book takes those concepts to a much needed next level. Dr. Sam Von Reiche presents what first appears to be a series of single topic chapters. In actuality, she is weaving a beautiful tapestry that reveals why the old distinction between mind and body is itself the problem. Health experts who talk about “interactions” between these two systems are *missing the larger point*. It is not a case of two systems interacting. It is all one system.

Dr. Sam is like Copernicus, suggesting that Earth is not the center of the universe. To get humankind out of thinking in the old earth-centered way took hundreds of years. To get yourself out of thinking in the old mind-body way only takes reading her extraordinary self-help guide.

Another gift of *Rethink Your Shrink* is the many options the author offers for emotional well-being beyond medication and talk therapy. Any one of these 10 approaches can make a noticeable difference in your life. Combining two or more of

them into your own personalized mix could well create a major breakthrough for you.

Why take the extra time and energy to explore another new approach? It's because YOU ARE WORTH IT. You deserve

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more than just “getting by.” You deserve the chance to live up to your full potential of accomplishment, creativity, and happiness.

The following chapters will show you the way to a delightfully new and better realm. As a doctor exploring this field for over 35 years, I wholeheartedly recommend it to you. May you finally find the joy and peace of mind that is your true birthright.

Richard Shames, MD

Author of *Thyroid Power*

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Introduction

I wish a book like this had been written 40 years ago, back when I was a complete disaster. Already depressed and anxious for years by the age of 17 and too fat to fit into a normal size, I headed off to my Ivy League dream college wondering how the hell I was going to survive. Freshman year convinced me beyond a doubt that I had some deep emotional issues and needed help. Even my mother, full of denial that her precious superstar daughter could have mental problems, finally had to admit something was really wrong with me.

The B+ I got in political science was probably what pushed me over the edge. That, and my British boyfriend's departure to attend college at Oxford. I grieved day in and day out in my spartan dorm room at Princeton, crying to James Taylor and Simon and Garfunkel. I eventually plunged into a very dark, self-destructive mode, starving, vomiting, and purging.

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I half-heartedly planned suicide so my parents would finally realize that my autistic sister was not the only one in the family who couldn't cope.

I finally started seeing a psychiatrist and began to explore why I was the way I was—why I loathed myself, why I always chased some elusive perfection that brought only momentary relief if and when I reached it. I became more acutely aware of how dysfunctional my family was. How sad and dismal my childhood really was. I had known these things for years, but therapy helped to validate them for me. I felt a little more OK because my issues made sense in the context of where I came from. And for that I am eternally grateful. Even more importantly, it gave birth to my desire to pursue a career in

clinical psychology.

Funny thing, though, I pretty much remained a disaster throughout my twenties and thirties, despite years of insight oriented “talk therapy” with reputedly excellent psychologists

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and years of doctoral level training of my own. Even at the point of having built a successful career in private practice, I was secretly convinced that I was unfixable myself. Still super-anxious and depressive, still eating-disordered, only now slender and obsessed with dieting rather than starving and purging, I resigned *myself to helping others when I couldn't be helped.*

Perhaps you have wondered why mental health professionals don't use or even recommend treatments and strategies beyond talk therapy and meds. A principle known as Cartesian Dualism is partly to blame for this colossal error:

Rooted in Greek philosophy, Cartesian Dualism treats mind and body as completely separate entities rather than one integrated whole (as in the holistic approach). Although this paradigm has been completely debunked by areas of medical

research such as psychoneuroimmunology (studying the direct impact of the mind on the immune system), it

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continues to exert a very destructive impact in the mental health field. *The arbitrary separation of mind and body is the single biggest mistake most psychiatrists, psychologists, and mental health professionals make today.*

Depression alone affects 40 million people in the U.S. and only one of three or four respond well to antidepressant drugs. According to Irving Kirsch, author of *The Emperor's New Drugs*, the most widely used antidepressants are “at best weakly effective for relieving symptoms of depression and do not fully correct disrupted brain chemistry.” And what about the host of side effects antidepressants often cause even if they do work? Most people I know (including me) would choose being depressed over weight gain and sexual dysfunction.

Various studies have rated the United States as the most unhappy industrialized nation in the world in recent years. While there are myriad reasons for this startling truth, it is

clearly time for new and better answers in the mental health field. This book is about the best alternative solutions to talk therapy and medications that I have discovered over the past 20-some-odd years. I will give you the basic facts and plenty of research supporting the effectiveness of each approach, as well as examples of how these treatments and strategies have changed both my clients' lives and my own. Some of this you can learn and practice in the privacy of your own home. Some you can access with the help of a qualified practitioner.

Woven through each chapter is also my own story about an “unfixable” person who finally figured most of it out. I owe this success to the same tools I am grateful to pass down to you. I have always insisted that the public doesn't know enough about the real lives of psychologists and psychiatrists, born of a certain mystique going back to the days of Freud. Shrink never talk about themselves, right?

The fact is, if I hadn't been so lost and *so fucked up*, I definitely wouldn't be the healer I am today, sharing these amazing

finds with you!

If you are suffering from chronic mental illness or significant trauma, you will likely find most of these alternative approaches helpful. But I would also strongly recommend you seek treatment from a qualified licensed psychologist or psychotherapist. You may also benefit from a good psychiatrist who can prescribe medication. Antidepressants, mood stabilizers, and antipsychotics can be absolutely necessary, even lifesaving. It is very likely that these options have already been recommended to you, and that you have tried one if not all. It is also likely that if they were wholly successful in remedying your symptoms or problems, you would not be reading this book. It is my hope that after reading *Rethink Your Shrink*, you will no longer see traditional talk therapy and medication *as your only choices*.

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Finally, for the many who struggle with the kind of stress, depression, grief, or host of other issues that are part of the human condition, nothing in the world is a substitute for the guidance and support of someone who truly cares. In many

situations, family and friends are not enough. This is particularly true as the world is living through the most frightening and uncertain pandemic of modern times. Not only are our health and well-being threatened by COVID-19, but so are our interpersonal connections, the education of our children, and our financial futures.

Living and practicing in northern New Jersey, a mere 20 minutes from the nation's one-time epicenter of U.S. COVID-19 cases in New York City, I have observed an enormous upsurge in anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) symptoms and depression among many clients and friends alike. Feeling overwhelmed with stress, loneliness, distractibility, and even paranoia have sadly become the “new normal” for millions, at least for now. It is no surprise that

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the sale of mood stabilizers, antidepressants, and anti-anxiety meds have escalated in the midst of this crisis.

It is during this unprecedented upheaval in our communities, our country, and our world—the fallout of which promises to be felt for decades—that the alternative approaches to meds

and therapy I present in this book can prove especially valuable. But I have also witnessed—and personally experienced—an intensifying need to connect with someone or something that feels safe in order to make sense of it all. Therapy with the right person can serve this very real purpose right now—even if it’s conducted remotely. The fact that therapists today are busier than ever suggests that psychotherapy is playing a vital role both in how we cope with the corona crisis and how we will recover long term.

When in doubt, during COVID and beyond, make an appointment with an experienced, licensed therapist to explore whether psychotherapy can help. These days consumers read reviews for everything from doctors to

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mechanics, and they are critical in choosing a mental health practitioner. Make sure to choose a therapist who is solution focused and interactive. He/she should be open to holistic mental health approaches, even if not well-versed in them.

Most importantly, the right therapist should be someone who inspires you to believe you can and will feel better, who will expertly guide you *to become a better YOU*.

Here's to your health, happiness, and peace of mind, at last!

Dr. Sam Von Reiche

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A Is for Acupuncture

Ancient treatment for modern angst

Kara was sure she was going crazy. A 45-year-old woman with a keen, creative intellect and a big personality, she had

suffered with chronic anxiety since childhood. This had progressed to severe daily panic attacks in the last several years that left her drowning in fear and despair.

Kara's mother Dina had been physically and psychologically abusive, beating her with closed fists, belts, and even a shoe that she hurled directly at Kara's face as a young child. The 7-year-old's eye was injured so badly she had to go to the hospital, prompting a call to child protective services. On top of all the abuse, Kara was neglected, too. There was often not enough to eat at home because her mother rarely went to the grocery store, and Kara felt ashamed of her outdated clothes.

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One of Kara's most vividly disturbing memories was when Dina ripped one of her few favorite Kmart T-shirts down the middle, screaming as they crossed the street because she thought it was too tight.

Her father was too passive to protect Kara from the abuse and traveled a lot for work, so she grew up feeling trapped, fearful, and alone. As a teenager, Kara became angrier and began fighting back to protect herself; at one point, she punched her mother so hard that the beatings finally stopped.

Despite her success as a well-known photographer, Kara inwardly remained that frightened and angry child. She carried her painful memories locked inside her body, where they continued to make her feel unsafe. She had all the symptoms of post-traumatic stress: the intrusive thoughts and memories of her abuse, and the intense fear and hyperarousal of her nervous system, still driven to protect her from danger.

These were triggered by all kinds of situations, but especially when she had to interact with her aging mother, a

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pathologically narcissistic and anxiety-ridden woman who had no support other than Kara. Once again, Kara felt trapped, believing she had a responsibility to care for Dina, now 71 years old.

Kara was progressing after our first two visits, but suddenly took a dive. She arrived at the next session so frantic and wired it was difficult to get her words out. I explained to her that even solution-focused psychotherapy is heavily weighted toward verbal interaction and conscious thought. I suggested that we needed to calm her nervous system down as well,

because it was constantly mobilized to protect her. I strongly recommended she make an acupuncture appointment with an awesome colleague of mine—an idea Kara was very relieved and hopeful to hear about.

Not one to delay, she left my office and went straight to the acupuncture center. Acupuncture felt like what she described as a “magic pill” that calmed her so much she actually began laughing on the table that day. Kara described feeling like she

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could finally “take a deep breath,” like she could function again. She states: “Acupuncture accesses your body in a way that speaking can’t.”

Americans generally put needles in the same category as stomach pumps or root canals. And for the 10% with a needle phobia, getting a shot or having blood drawn can result in abject terror. “Mommy, am I going to get a shot?” young children ask quivering, throwing desperate glances around the waiting room like convicts being escorted to the electric chair!

But for the 3 billion people living in modern China today,

needles are No Big Deal. In fact, acupuncture is the primary modality of medicine practiced there for 3,000 years and used for the treatment of every ailment in addition to wellness care. Like many Eastern treatments that gained influence in the West in the '60s and '70s, acupuncture gained legitimacy in the United States with an article written by the *New York Times* journalist James Reston in 1971. Despite his initial

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skepticism, he had experienced major pain relief as the result of acupuncture following an emergency appendectomy.

My love affair with acupuncture began rather reluctantly in 1995, when I tried it for one of my agonizing three-day migraines. A girlfriend drove me for two and a half hours to see this Korean woman as I sobbed in the back seat, wrapped in a blanket. While talking to me at top speed in a thick accent I could barely understand, the acupuncturist (curiously) began needling the top of my head. When she was done with me, I looked like a human incense burner! My friend Edie showed me the smoking needles with her compact mirror, not knowing whether to laugh out loud or call the fire department. But 40 minutes later, that unrelenting 10 on a

scale of 1-10 headache was nearly gone, and I was completely blown away. How could something so crazy, *so National Geographic*® actually work?!

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How It Works

Simply put, acupuncture corrects imbalances to the body's qi (pronounced chee), or life force energy. This qi moves through passageways called meridians (areas of the body with high neural activity), which connect the organs of the body. Controlling the flow and balance of energy between yang (hollow organs like the stomach) and yin (solid organs like the lungs) is believed to help prevent and treat disorders and diseases. Acupuncture is used to correct these imbalances in the qi by placing ultrathin, thread-like needles at specific points associated with each issue.

So, what do these needles actually do? A major hypothesis based on current research is that they affect the body's neurohormonal pathways. Specific needle points stimulate

specific nerves, which in turn send signals to the brain. The brain then releases neural hormones such as beta Endorphins. These hormones increase the patient's pain threshold and they feel less pain, both physical and emotional. Acupuncture itself doesn't directly release feel-

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good chemicals to reduce pain, inflammation, and stress, but it works higher up the chain by triggering the pituitary gland to produce the extra hormones, among other things. Another hypothesis supported by both animal and human studies is that acupuncture reduces pro-inflammatory markers, or proteins in the body including TNF and IL-1 β , to decrease both inflammation and pain.

By now, the majority of educated healthcare consumers are familiar with the benefits of acupuncture for acute and chronic pain. A large-scale study involving 18,000 patients underscored this fact, and 3.1 million Americans have tried it in the past decade. Even rather traditional doctors are no longer discouraging its use; it is now commonly prescribed for pain and infertility, as well as the nausea and fatigue associated with both chemo and pregnancy. Yet relatively few

people know how effective acupuncture is for depression, anxiety, stress reduction, and insomnia. In fact, acupuncture makes no distinction between physical and emotional issues, as they both originate from an imbalance of qi. Acupuncture

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is believed to have an inhibitory impact on the brain's limbic system, which governs emotion. It has been used as a successful treatment for psychological problems in China, Japan, and Korea for thousands of years!

The Proof

In research conducted at UCLA's medical acupuncture program, a meta-analysis of eight randomized controlled studies compared a total of 477 participants suffering from depression. Acupuncture reduced the severity of their symptoms significantly on both the Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression and the Beck Inventory. The authors concluded that patients receiving acupuncture showed improvements equivalent to those taking antidepressants.

Similarly, in a 2018 systematic review of 13 studies using acupuncture to treat anxiety disorders by researcher Diogo Amorim and his colleagues in Portugal, the authors found

significant evidence that regardless of the style, acupuncture reduced anxiety symptoms. These authors concluded:

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“Overall there is good scientific evidence encouraging acupuncture therapy to treat anxiety disorders, as it yields effective outcomes, with fewer side effects than conventional treatment.”

Acupuncture is also effective for stress reduction in those not specifically diagnosed with depression or anxiety disorders. In a double-blind study by Dr. Shu-Ming Wang and his colleagues at Yale Medical School, bilateral auricular acupuncture (needling points on the ear) was clearly more effective than the placebo acupuncture (using non-therapeutic points) in inducing feelings of relaxation for its 55 subjects. In another study done by Patricia Reilly and her team at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Massachusetts, auricular acupuncture was determined to be “helpful in reducing the stress and anxiety of 37 medical providers, including physicians and nurses.” Acupuncture was even shown to decrease stress levels in lab rats, as measured by lowered heart rate and blood pressure and lowered catecholamine plasma

levels.

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I regularly refer my clients to acupuncture for the treatment of depression, anxiety, stress reduction, and insomnia, and get excellent results. Based on my own experience and theirs, I highly recommend an acupuncturist trained in both TCM (Traditional Chinese Acupuncture) and Kiiko style, named for Kiiko Matsumoto, a renowned Japanese acupuncture authority. Kiiko style reflects the integration of TCM with new Japanese empirical data. The practitioner palpates specific areas of the body to decide exactly where to place the needles at each session, rather than relying on pre-established patterns, as is often the case in TCM.

Despite some people's apprehension about needles, those used for acupuncture are extremely thin. Most are surprised at how painless a process it is. Even young children can benefit from acupuncture without a problem, and several of my clients have brought theirs in for treatment after seeing the remarkable results for themselves. While it can be challenging to lie fairly still on a massage table for 30-40 minutes, most report feeling deeply relaxed after a short

period of time. Many acupuncture patients actually fall asleep during the treatment.

It would take a few more years to heal my migraines completely, but my world changed the day I tried acupuncture for the very first time. Not only did it eventually become my primary medicine, but I started to investigate an array of alternative treatments for my other (already chronic) medical issues. I eventually applied these approaches to my work as a psychologist and found that clients receiving acupuncture and/or other complementary treatments in addition to (and sometimes as a substitute for) psychotherapy reported greater mental and emotional improvement in much less time. Counseling that had previously lasted one to two years could be completed in two to six months.

Although rather astounding, Kara's results with acupuncture are actually quite typical. To maintain her results, she has continued to go for weekly sessions and views it as an integral part of her healing process. It has not only calmed her

nervous system but is also opening up her energy centers (chakras), which were previously blocked. Given Kara's trauma history, she feels it works best for her when coupled with psychotherapy.

In a vision she had during acupuncture, Kara saw her heart as a "beautiful crown jewel in a box surrounded by satin." While she isn't ready just yet to stop guarding that jewel altogether, Kara is well on the path to peace.

Anthony's Story

Anthony's story is even more miraculous. He was an attractive, well-put-together man of 28 who came to me with severe social anxiety. Anthony would begin to sweat profusely when speaking to people in social situations, especially attractive women. His hand was even damp when he hesitantly shook mine in the waiting room. He assumed the sweating was the result of social anxiety because it did seem to get worse when he would speak to someone he did not know well. Anthony was so self-conscious that he had been unable to date since college.

himself with water, and then speak to strangers to get over his fear of sweating in social situations (a form of desensitization called Exposure and Response Prevention, or ERP). This technique may seem a bit out there, but is actually standard fare in current anxiety treatment. Anthony said this had helped quite a bit, but that his anxiety symptoms returned shortly after he stopped the treatments.

I explained to Anthony that I thought *his social anxiety was actually coming from his sweating problem*, rather than the reverse. I believed that the origin was not an anxiety disorder at all but simply resulted from his difficulty coping with a chronic and embarrassing medical issue. While he already knew that traditional medicine had very few proven solutions for sweating, I was reasonably sure acupuncture could fix whatever imbalance lay at the root. Anthony was skeptical but desperate (the best remedy for skepticism!), so he agreed to try it.

It turns out that excessive sweating is a problem that acupuncture alleviates very successfully; in fact, *how* a person

sweats is considered an important area of focus in Chinese medicine. According to the acupuncturist's assessment, Anthony's problem originated from a Yin deficiency; this deficiency created a "virtual fire" resulting in warm, sweaty palms and soles as well as excess perspiration elsewhere. After only three acupuncture treatments, Anthony contacted me to say his sweating problem was already under control, and that his social anxiety had all but vanished. He was astonished and grateful, and admittedly, even I was a bit floored!

Anthony has never needed therapy again. "Losing" a client this way is one of the greatest feelings in the world!