

Correspondence

To the Editor:

I write as an anthropologist who has been doing research in Brazil, other parts of South America and the Caribbean for the past three decades. After learning many years ago from colleagues in Brazil and the media about some of the rather unusual and at times spectacular healing done there, referred to by some as paranormal, I started to investigate healers, systems of healing and the patients receiving the healing intensively. After observing dozens of healers and interviewing hundred of their patients, I find it difficult to deny that something positive is happening that science in general and medical science in particular—as we know them—are not able to explain at this time. However, I must urge those who are generating possible explanatory hypotheses, often based on limited clinical or experimental data collected in our own society, to be cautious. Hypotheses, of course, are necessary, but science further requires carefully designed experiments to test, or, in Popper's sense, falsify them. Given what anthropologists have learned about the ways human behavior is differentially shaped and patterned by diverse cultures, I further urge that not only carefully designed protocols necessary to test hypotheses, but that these protocols must include variables to control for cultural diversity.

Sincerely,

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