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THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MILTON ERICKSON TO MODERN CLINICAL HYPNOSIS

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Roxanna Erickson-Klein, Ph.D., has a lifelong interest in health care inspired by her father, Milton Erickson. She learned both as a subject of his hypnotic explorations and from his mentorship of her own clinical career. Since 1982, she is on the board of directors for the Milton H. Erickson Foundation and an active member of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. Erickson-Klein is a Registered Nurse and Licensed Professional Counselor in private practice who has authored books and articles about Ericksonian therapy. She is currently engaged in the digitization of her father's primary written works for dissemination at www.erickson-rossi.com.

Dan Short, Ph.D., has been interested in suggestion and interpersonal psychology since childhood, when he developed intense interest in the hypnotic effects of certain childhood games. His introduction to two of Erickson's daughters, and subsequently the Milton H. Erickson Foundation, occurred shortly after college graduation, resulting in close connections with others who have been key contributors to the exploration of Erickson's works. Short served as Editor of the *Milton H. Erickson Foundation Newsletter* for five years and was selected as project manager to preserve the holdings of the Milton H. Erickson Foundation Archives. While transferring the audio content from reel-to-reel to digital format, Short was immersed in hundreds of hours of analysis. The 1500 hours of unique recordings of Erickson involved two years, working eight hours a day to organize materials. During this time, Short watched videos of Erickson's hypnotic demonstrations, listened to Erickson's words, transcribed many recordings, and made connections between the overarching ideas.

Erickson's Theoretical Framework

Erickson's fascination and bold exploration into the nature of hypnosis were both innovative and expansive. A hallmark of his long career as a psychiatrist, spanning an interval of over half a century, was his ongoing inquiries, investigations, and communications about the potential of hypnosis to promote therapeutic change. The methodology pioneered by Erickson was instrumental in the transformation of paradigms of clinical practice, helping to usher in new eras of both brief therapy and modern hypnosis.

During this period, there was a great deal of progress in societal values, in the arts, and in science. A metaphor Erickson often alluded to was that during his lifetime (1901–1980) man’s ability to fly progressed from the Kitty Hawk (1903) to men walking on the moon (1969). When he made this statement to students, Erickson’s intent was for listeners to automatically engage in self-reflective orientation. The strategic use of comments and circumstances to stimulate experiential inner search was part of the way Erickson taught hypnosis.

While his deep interest in human behavior began in childhood, Erickson’s explorations into hypnosis began in college, an era in which Sigmund Freud’s ideas held a dominant influence on psychology and psychiatry. Erickson was additionally influenced by the writings of William James (Short, 2020) and the work of Arthur Noyes (1940), whose textbook, *Modern Clinical Psychiatry*, he kept on his office shelf throughout his career. Noyes emphasized that psychiatry must recognize man as a “unitary reacting biological organism” (p. 7). Erickson’s ambition to bring hypnosis into the practice of medicine was a commitment made early in life and from which he never deviated. While repeatedly at odds with researchers, at no time did he waver from his respect for scientific methodology as the optimal tool to advance professional understanding.

Looking at his work from the perspective of his publications, various trends are revealed. Within his first decade of practice, Erickson began to challenge the central ideology of psychoanalytic practice. His explorations into suggestive therapeutics and the advancement of clinical hypnosis continued from the mid-1920s until his death. Erickson’s own style of practice gradually shifted from a traditional style of direct suggestion to development of open-ended, permissive techniques (Erickson & Erickson-Klein, 1991).

Though he enjoyed teaching throughout his career, during the final decade of his life (1970–1980), Erickson sought to engage the interest of younger psychotherapists who could continue investigations into the nature of hypnosis. Following his death, a large number of professionals who had studied with him emerged as “Ericksonians” and began to teach their own perspectives of key ideas central to his work (Hilgard, 1992).

Hypnotic Rapport and Therapeutic Alliance

Contemporary meta-analytic studies have shown that the quality of the therapeutic alliance, empathetic capacity, and genuineness are predictive of successful outcomes in psychotherapy (Ardito & Rabellino, 2011). The same emphasis on quality of relationship is reflected in Erickson’s attention to hypnotic rapport, which was manifested as a deeply felt connection – experienced by his patients and students alike.

Erickson’s ability to establish strong rapport is shown as his daughter-in-law, Helen, described meeting him as “an experience that altered my way about thinking about learning, about my potential and about myself” (Erickson et al., 2006, p. 17). In this nursing textbook, Helen Erickson explicitly describes the way Milton Erickson entered her world (modeling) and facilitated her own growth into a broader world view (role-modeling). Erickson’s innovative approach to building a strong therapeutic alliance is further detailed in numerous sections throughout this chapter.

Integration of Hypnosis in Therapy

Erickson distinguished between the waking state and the hypnotic state, and intentionally integrated both into his therapeutic work (Erickson, 1958/2008). He advocated

for professionals to learn to identify naturalistic trance states and to strategically capitalize on these moments. In a 1966 lecture, Erickson stated that, “the [hypnotic] technique in itself serves no other purpose than that of securing and fixating the attention of patients, creating then a receptive and responsive mental state, and thereby enabling them to benefit from unrealized or only partially realized potentials for behavior of various types” (Erickson, 1966). Thus, Erickson emphasized the goal of hypnotherapy is to move beyond the limitations of the conscious mind to the creativity of the unconscious mind (Gilligan, 2002).

Framing hypnosis as a distinct phenomenon, Erickson (1961/2010) wrote a six-page definition of hypnosis for the Encyclopedia Britannica. Within, Erickson states, “hypnosis is a unique complex form of unusual but normal behavior which can probably be induced in all normal persons under suitable conditions” (p. 27). When asked to define hypnosis in teaching seminars, author Roxanna remembers he frequently offered a succinct explanation, “Hypnosis is a dissociation of the conscious mind from the unconscious mind.” In a later discussion with Ernest Rossi, Erickson expresses that trance is “a deep state of inner absorption ... resorted to in order to cope with a problem that was apparently overwhelming for his conscious mind” (Erickson & Rossi, 1977/2008, p. 197).

Trance and Suggestion

Noting that Ernest Rossi was Erickson’s closest collaborator, author Dan Short asked Rossi which written work best summarized Erickson’s views on hypnosis. Rossi replied that *Hypnotic Realities* was the greatest exposition of Erickson’s ideas. This work states that the purpose of trance is to focus an individual’s attention inwardly to help alter habitual attitudes and belief systems associated with “everyday consciousness” (Erickson & Rossi, 1976/2010, p. 225). Throughout, Erickson repeatedly identifies therapeutic trance as being characterized primarily by feelings of comfort, limited awareness, and heightened expectancy. Recent neurobiological research suggests that comfort and relaxation help facilitate sudden insights, solving problems without use of conscious deliberation. As insight researcher John Kounios puts it, “If you want to encourage insights, then you’ve got to also encourage people to relax” (Lehrer, 2008, p. 40).

The relevance of relaxation to trance, and learning in general, is of interest to researchers and clinicians alike. Even so, the field of hypnosis remains polarized by the “state versus non-state” debate, which traces back to disagreements between T.X. Barber and Milton Erickson over the meaningfulness of trance behavior. While a majority of clinicians view Erickson as the person who set the standards of modern hypnosis (Baker, 1988; Rodolfa et al., 1985), many researchers argue that distinction should go to Barber (Gauld, 1992). To better understand their differences, we turn to a transcript of a face-to-face debate between Erickson and Barber.

During this panel discussion, Barber’s basic argument was that if trance is a defining feature of hypnosis, then trance phenomena should not occur outside of trance. However, his research had shown hypnotic phenomena can be easily obtained with un hypnotized individuals (no trance) given sufficient motivation and positive expectancies (Barber, 1961). For example, Barber posited that hypno-catatonic behavior is nothing more than giving a special label to a person sitting rigidly in a chair. In Barber’s words, “The only research we need to do on ‘catalepsy’ is to show that it can readily be duplicated by a motivated person, and hypnotic subjects are usually very motivated” (Erickson, 1960/2010, p. 329). Barber’s

implication was clear – clinicians, such as Erickson, were unwittingly manipulating their client’s motivations, attitudes, and expectancies with trance having no bearing on responsiveness to suggestion. In Barber’s words, “I am bothered by Dr. Erickson’s formulations because I get the impression that there is magic being attributed here that does not promote scientific understanding or investigation” (Erickson, 1960/2010, p. 328).

To address this criticism, Erickson replied, “I believe that the hypnotic subject can, in the trance state, do something besides please Dr. Barber. I think he can use his own behavior for his own purposes and do it in his own way. He doesn’t lose his capacity to behave to please himself” (Erickson, 1960/2010, p. 329).

Three decades prior, Erickson had reported a lack of relationship between depth of trance and suggestibility. To the contrary, Erickson found that individuals demonstrating deep trance behavior were sometimes more resistant to suggestion (Erickson, 1932/2010). What Barber failed to recognize was that Erickson did not use trance to achieve greater compliance, but rather to stimulate unconscious intelligence (Short, 2022).

Furthermore, Erickson rejected the premise that positive outcomes achieved with hypnosis must be exclusive to hypnosis. As Erickson had already explained, “I have known people who *never went into hypnosis*, but who went to a movie because they had a severe headache, forgot their headache during the course of an interesting movie ... and perhaps didn’t remember the headache until the next day” (Erickson, 1960/2010, p. 321). Again, to explain that amnesic behavior is not exclusive to hypnosis, Erickson stated, “I believe that the hypnotic subject can do in a trance state the same sort of things he can do in the waking state. I might introduce someone to a dozen other people. At the end of that time, by virtue of having directed this person’s attention first to Mr. Jones then to Mr. Green, to Mr. Brown, etc., and after I had finished the 15th or 16th introduction, I could ask him, ‘Tell me, what was the name of the first man, the second man, the third, the fourth, the fifth?’ We would readily appreciate how rapidly a person can forget something, especially when his attention is constantly redirected” (Erickson, 1960/2010, p. 326).

Recognizing that for researchers in attendance, the term “trance” was often associated with mystical ideology, Erickson sought to explain his position using different terminology, “You alter a person’s state of awareness by the conditions associated with, and the character of, the stimulation which you offer along with the inner behavior of potentials in that person. I do not think that I am in error to give the general term ‘state of awareness’ to the memories, ideas, and emotions characterizing a person at a given time, nor do I consider this a ‘mystical appellation’” (Erickson, 1960/2010, p. 326). Succinctly, Erickson later wrote, “Of significant importance to the author in furthering his awareness that waking state realities were quite different from the realities of the hypnotic state” (Erickson, 1967/2008, p. 89). Returning to the book mentioned earlier in this section, *Hypnotic Realities*, it is reasonable to conclude that Erickson was less concerned with altered states of consciousness than with altered states of reality.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The argument has been made that Erickson’s use of hypnosis to advance the flourishing of human consciousness has deep roots in the psychology and philosophy of William James (Short, 2020). This is reflected in Erickson’s pragmatic approach to problem-solving as well as his embrace of dynamic dualism. At the center of this perspective is the belief in an unconscious mind and a conscious mind that possess different resources and serve different

functions, any of which can and should be utilized in therapy. These Jamesian psychodynamics involve embracing unseen processes of reorganization, reassociation, and adaptation – the opposite of Freudian psychodynamics. Above all else, Erickson insisted that therapy should recognize a person's capacity for innate healing and growth. Thus, he taught that the use of hypnotic suggestion should be permissive enough to address the human need for freedom and the exercise of self-determination. These ideas can be traced back to James who argued that freedom of choice must be the starting point in any attempt to influence others. In James's own words, "The first thing to learn in intercourse with others is noninterference with their own peculiar ways of being happy, provided those ways do not assume to interfere by violence with ours" (Short, 2020, p. 2).

In the interval after Erickson's death, an echo of his ideas emerged which inspired students expressing differing viewpoints to define his innovative approaches. Despite a series of attempts among Ericksonians to reach a concordance, perspectives remain as individualized as the approaches Erickson promoted. While some key elements have been generally agreed upon and even operationalized (Short, 2021a), the very nature of his work is a non-standardized and highly individualized experiential process.

Erickson's Top Six Contributions to Hypnosis Practice and Theory

Attempts to encapsulate Erickson's approaches in definable or operationalized concepts are as elusive as working with a translucent Rubik's cube. Efforts to isolate principal contributions become a perceptual window, seen from many different perspectives, each interconnected to other aspects of Erickson's work. Leading Ericksonian scholars (e.g., Lankton, 2010; Zeig, 2019) have identified the concept of utilization as central to Erickson's ability to generate a strong therapeutic alliance. Accordingly, Erickson describes utilization as the integration of the "subject's own attitudes, thinking, behaviors and aspects of their of the reality situation, variously employed [within therapeutic interactions]" (Erickson, 1959/2008, p. 301).

This chapter focuses on central areas in which Erickson's contributions influenced broader structures; we offer descriptions of six fundamental building blocks from which Erickson's unique explorations clearly impacted the way hypnosis is understood and practiced today. Along with the innovations, new paradigms began to emerge, all of which revolve around a fulcrum of utilization by engaging the client's subjective and situational resources.

Naturalistic Approach

One of Erickson's most celebrated innovations in hypnosis is his method of conversational hypnosis, essentially the practice of hypnosis without the use of formal trance induction or awakening (Short, 2018). Erickson operated from the premise that hypnotic states are a common information processing capability containing universal value for learning and problem-solving.

What Erickson called "the naturalistic approach to hypnosis" differs significantly from traditional premises of hypnotizability (i.e., not everyone is responsive to hypnosis). In Erickson's words, "there is an imperative need to accept and to utilize those psychological states, understandings, and attitudes that each patient brings into the situation. To ignore those factors in favor of some ritual of procedure may and often does delay, impede, limit, or even prevent the desired results. The acceptance and utilization of those factors, on the

other hand, promotes more rapid trance induction, the development of more profound trance states, the more ready acceptance of therapy, and greater ease for the handling of the total therapeutic situation” (Erickson, 1958/2008, p. 269).

As demonstrated in the following case example, trance states are a spontaneous, natural response to collaborative engagement when (1) both parties agree on the problem to be solved, and 2) existing response tendencies are given structure through highly appealing hypnotic suggestions. In this case, the parents brought Erickson their own opinions about the problem of their angry, enuretic son. Erickson recognized that the boy had been dreaming of owning a dog. So, he utilized the desire to design his approach, telling the young boy to “see a dog over there.” The child responded, “But there is no dog over there.” Erickson then increased his “intensity of expectation,” by simply stating, “Yes, that is right. But I want you to just SEE the dog, over there,” as he pointed to an empty spot. This induced a visual hallucination (Erickson, 1952). Connecting this altered state of reality to a larger therapeutic agenda, Erickson told the child, “I don’t think that you or I have to tell your parents anything. In fact, maybe it would serve them just right for the way they brought you here if you waited until the school year was almost over. But one thing is certain, you can just bet that after you’ve had a dry bed for a month, they will get you a puppy just about like little Spotty there, even if you never say a word to them about it. They just have to!” (Erickson, 1958/2008, p. 267). The actual puppy was delivered by the boy’s father 31 days later.

With Erickson’s naturalistic approach, the qualities of spontaneity and individual uniqueness are integrated into the methodology of hypnosis. One of clinical psychology’s most recent paradigm shifts is the slow transition away from mechanistic models of logical positivism which prioritize technique and standardization, over a wholistic model prioritizing human connection. In support of this shift, studies have shown that the quality of relationship is the greatest predictor of success in psychotherapy (Ardito & Rabellino, 2011).

Individualization

Clark Hull, a distinguished behaviorism researcher, published the first textbook on controlled hypnotic experimentation (Hull, 1933). As an undergraduate, Erickson was invited to present his own research to Hull’s graduate hypnosis seminar. As a young student, Erickson initially accepted Hull’s structured procedural approach (Fromm & Shor, 1979, p. 33). However, as Erickson’s exploration of hypnosis broadened, a schism emerged between Erickson’s commitment to individualization and Hull’s commitment to logical positivism and standardized treatment procedures.

Weitzenhoffer (1957) observed that, “According to Erickson hypnosis is a highly individualistic process because it is a function of intrapersonal (or intrapsychic) relationships and of the interpersonal relationships, they themselves are contingent and dependent upon the former. Every individual has a unique personality, and his behavior, including that of the trance-inducing situation, is a function of his personality, the time, the situation, and the purposes which are served. Thus, it is invalid to assume that under identical conditions of administration, identical suggestions must invariably yield identical responses in different subjects or in the same subject at different times” (pp. 269–270). Likewise, Short (2019, p. 27) comments, “Because each person is an individual, each session is a unique creation. When therapist and client first meet, they create a relationship that did not exist before. In this new system, each will influence the other in potentially unexpected way.” The information Erickson gathered during communication (both verbal and non-verbal) was utilized

in an individual manner specific to the person and his or her needs at that specific point in time.

Unfortunately, individualized care does not lend itself well to operationally defined, evidenced-based approaches to treatment. Erickson's commitment to the necessity of activating unique individual inner resources created stumbling blocks to clinicians who seek reimbursement in a field dominated by evidence-based therapies as well as for researchers needs for standardized protocols. It is only during the last five years that the development of operationally defined evaluations of Ericksonian approaches has begun to bridge the gap between the pragmatic needs of research and the individual attention and creativity required for tailored approaches to hypnosis (Short, 2019).

Experiential Arousal

Erickson's experiences as an adolescent, rehabilitating from ravages of polio, led to a thousand-mile Mississippi River canoe journey which challenged the limits of his physical capacity. This odyssey served as a benchmark for the powerful combination of conscious aspirations and unconscious capabilities (Erickson, 1922/2018). Erickson challenged himself to restrain from directly requesting assistance using a multitude of indirect ways to stimulate curiosity in others. His indirect communication methods attracted the attention of volunteers to assist him in individually unmanageable portages. Erickson's determination to overcome limitations imposed by polio served as an experiential metaphor that helped frame his future. This journey modeled the process of discovering hidden potential as one seeks to exceed apparent limits of immediate circumstances.

Erickson's subsequent undergraduate research with Clark Hull involved investigations of automatic writing, hand levitation, and kinesthetic imagery as various means of trance induction. Each technique involved direct or imagined physical activity (Erickson, 1961/2008). Erickson continued his investigations into the nature of the mind body interface in the 1940s, publishing articles in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine*. His pioneering exploration of hypnotic deafness and hypnotic color blindness increased his appreciation for inextricable links of the body and mind (Erickson, 1943/2010).

Having demonstrated hand levitation techniques in his college studies, Erickson continued using hand levitation with frequency. In the 1950s, he went on to develop the My Friend John technique in which a positive hallucination involved hand levitation in a hallucinated companion. His own explanation about hand levitation techniques emphasize its utility for induction, trance ratification, and in particular to enhance dissociation (Erickson, 1961/2008).

A dramatic demonstration at Stanford Laboratory of Hypnosis Research during the 1960s clarified that experience is an intrapersonal process. Erickson's demonstration involved a man who reported no sensation in his hand when touched. Also, while positioned in front of him, he hallucinated his hand to be resting in his lap (Hilgard, 1992, p. 72). In a discussion about ideomotor feedback, Erickson notes that the key element of initiating motor activity, real or imagined, is a means of fixating and focusing the individual's attention on inner experiential learnings and capabilities. Erickson (1945/2008) explains:

... the subject is told that, as he goes to sleep, his hand will gradually and involuntarily begin to lift up in the air. This he may not notice at first, but when he does become aware of it, he will find himself tremendously interested and absorbed in

sensing and enjoying that effortless, involuntary movement of his hand and arm. Thus, the subject is given the opportunity of observing his hypnotic response as a personal experience that is occurring within himself. There follow suggestions that soon the direction of the hand movement will change, that he is to be greatly interested in discovering what the new direction may be. This suggestion does result in an alteration of the hand movement, an alteration recognized by the subject as not determined in direction by specific hypnotic suggestions but determined by the continuing processes within himself as a hypnotic subject. This gives him a growing realization of his active participation in a progressive intrapsychic experience in which he plays an undefined but definite directive role governed by forces within him. (p. 39)

While hypnosis is by nature experiential, the utilization of physical activity within the trance state amplifies the opportunity for dissociative effects that can then be integrated into therapeutic objectives. Over the years, Erickson developed a reputation for assigning tasks to his clients that sometimes involved moderate to intensive physical exercise, including hiking up a nearby mountain. As suggested in the discussion of Erickson's canoe journey, the integration of vigorous activity into personal improvement began early in his life. As he developed his professional style, with hypnosis at the center, he also explored incorporation of numerous ways to engage physical and emotional responses.

Shock and surprise are techniques liberally integrated into Erickson's repertoire of approaches. While there are distinctions between physical movement, and emotional responses, they may serve a similar stimulation. Erickson describes his work eliciting surprises in this way, "all that I hope to know in most such experimental situations that I devise is the possible general variety of psychological processes and reactions I would like to elicit, but do not know if I shall succeed in so doing, nor in what manner this will occur. Thus, as the subjects respond in their own fashion, I promptly utilize that response" (Erickson, 1961/2008, p. 328).

In his clinical explorations, Erickson found that various physiological interrelationships and interdependencies seemed to vary substantially between individuals without a direct relationship to hypnotic suggestion. Erickson posited that, "it may be that the primary task in the therapy of various psychopathological conditions may be dependent on an approach seemingly unrelated to the actual problem" (Erickson, 1943/2010, pp. 17–18).

Seeding and Incubation

Some of Erickson's most striking contributions to the practice of hypnosis continue to germinate beneath the field's collective awareness. While most who study Ericksonian hypnosis are familiar with the concept of seeding (gradual exposure and subsequent elaboration of new ideas in advance of utilizing them for therapeutic purposes), few fully appreciate the value of incubation – the strategic practice of patiently waiting for ideas to grow outside of conscious awareness. Both constructs relate to the element of time, an essential component of growth and maturity.

In Erickson's case studies, there are examples of him patiently waiting 1–2 hours in silence, as the patient sits motionless in a trance state (Erickson, 1954). This makes no sense within the context of traditional hypnosis, where the hypnotic procedure depends on repetitiously suggesting new attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors to the client. Erickson expanded hypnosis from

suggestive applications to include process work (Short, 2021b). As stated by Erickson, “I don’t think the therapist does anything except provide the opportunity to think about your problem in a favorable climate” (Zeig, 1980, p. 219).

Using the analogy of a gardener: Erickson planted seeds in the form of evocative ideas that were intentionally obscured from conscious review during an incubation period. As unconscious processing of these ideas took place, Erickson patiently waited to see what would grow. Erickson’s pause enabled clients to create their own solutions – in their own way, in their own good time (Rossi, 1973). As Erickson put it, “You should enjoy the process of waiting ... There is nothing more delightful than planting flower seeds and not knowing what kind of flowers are going to come up” (Erickson & Rossi, 1979/2014, p. xiv).

An essential point made by Erickson is that, “it is possible that hypnotherapy can take place entirely at an unconscious level without the patient (and sometimes even the therapist) knowing the ‘why’ of the cure” (Erickson & Rossi, 1979/2014, p. 165). This Ericksonian principle seems strange and unrealistic from a Freudian perspective. Freud’s approach was founded on the philosophies of the 18th- and 19th-century enlightenment, which squarely equates conscious reason with human progress.

Though not opposed to conscious insight, Erickson relegates it to a secondary position, emphasizing the value of unconscious incubation. As Erickson states, “And then the results of that unconscious functioning can become conscious. But first they have to get beyond their conscious understanding of what is possible” (Erickson & Rossi, 1976/2010, p. 10). Similarly, cognitive scientists now argue that successful performance on tasks that require creative recategorization is best accomplished by downregulation of the cognitive control regions. One study found that when individuals were induced to allow their minds to wander, they showed an improvement of 40% compared to their baseline level of creative performance. This was achieved by simply saying, “move the problem to the back of your mind” (Baird et al., 2012). When considering the value of a relaxed, self-absorbed trance state, it is interesting to look at the neurological studies of Bowden and Jung-Beeman who argue that effortful thought interferes with insight because focused concentration favors the left hemisphere, causing the right to become less active (Bowden et al., 2005; Bowden & Jung-Beeman, 2003).

In addition to conscious surrender and relaxation, a third crucial element in preparation for insight is time. At least one study found that longer unconscious thought has led to better decisions than brief unconscious thought (Dijksterhuis, 2004). Though this line of research remains controversial due to small sample size (Nieuwenstein et al., 2015), using the greater power of meta-analysis, Sio and Ormerod (2009) found that longer preparation periods gave a greater incubation effect and that incubation works best for problems that require creative solutions (divergent thinking).

From a competency-based perspective, growth-oriented change is achieved by inviting the client to exercise choice and creative problem-solving – often at unconscious levels. Whether it is the problem-solving step of defining the problem, identifying a solution, or solution implementation, at all stages of the process, Erickson sought the involvement of the client’s unconscious intelligence (Short, 2021b).

Utilizing Resistance

Erickson broadened the identification of meaningful hypnotherapeutic responses to include resistance to suggestion. To help others understand this critical paradigm shift, Erickson

used the analogy of a car stuck in a ditch. He pointed out that only by rocking backward can you obtain the momentum needed to move forward (Erickson & Haley, 1985, p. 306). While logic tells us that to achieve success we must avoid failure, history shows that only those who have willingly embraced failure go furthest in accomplishments. Similarly, to succeed at hypnosis the clinician must be willing to fail.

Viewing resistance as a legitimate starting point for progress, Erickson found ways to get his clients to commit to “discharging” their resistance. For example, one individual announced that he wanted to be treated with hypnosis but then insisted that he could not be hypnotized. This position represents a contradictory attitude not only to hypnosis but also to the whole of therapy – otherwise the client would have requested a form of therapy that he thought would work well. For this reason, we should recognize that Erickson’s response was not only limited to the process of induction but also to the client’s responsiveness to therapy as a whole.

Erickson (1976/2010, p. 221) commented to the patient, “There is, of course, a possibility that you can be hypnotized.” Then he predicted, “There is more possibility that you can’t be hypnotized.” Paradoxically, Erickson seems to be suggesting failure rather than success. Next, Erickson observed that there were three additional chairs in the office. Again, he speculated that if hypnosis were attempted in each of these chairs, the induction would probably fail more times than it succeeded. For the induction, Erickson, indicating a different chair, said, “Now let’s try this chair. If you fail in this one, there is still the possibility that you can go into trance.” After trying three chairs, unsuccessfully, the patient entered a spontaneous trance in the fourth chair. In other words, Erickson removed all performance pressure and turned failure into an asset (Erickson & Rossi, 1976/2010, p. 221).

This same strategy could be applied to posthypnotic suggestion. Imagine that you had a client struggling with sleep issues who after sleeping easily, in response to hypnosis, expressed tenacious concerns that he would not be able to achieve the same results at home. The expectation of failure can be accommodated by saying, “This is a learning process. I will give you therapeutic suggestions each visit. However, it may not work until after the third or fourth visit. But with each failure, I believe you will come closer and closer to success.” This sounds easy. But for most of us it is reflexive to resist resistance, perhaps politely countering the previous client’s concern with, “After doing so well here, I’m sure you can do it at home.” Such a well-intended statement does not accept the client’s position. In contrast, when you are willing to account for failure in the predictions you make, two important things occur: (1) performance pressure is greatly diminished, and (2) a process of unconscious goal striving is initiated (Short, 2021b). Just as happiness is not obtained by avoiding unhappiness, confidence is not obtained by avoiding risks.

Erickson role-modeled enthusiastic discovery as he observed person’s real-time responses. With his astute observations, he integrated what he learned about the individual, their motivation, their readiness, and their participation in the hypnotic process to individualize his approach with them. Fully accepting the individual’s doubts and uncertainty, he utilized that energy to gradually shift to a process of discovery by offering confidence, enthusiasm, hope, and just enough guidance to mobilize and sustain adaptive internal processes.

Individuation

Reinforcement of self-organizing change is a pillar seen in Erickson’s earliest case comments and amplified as therapeutic brevity and present/future orientation emerged as

hallmarks of his work. The idea of individuation involves assumptions of self-responsibility and a capacity for ongoing adjustments over time. Favoring individualized, self-defined, assessments of health and functionality, Erickson's clinical approach departed from a standard-based system of compliance with societal norms.

Rather than seeking understandings or explanations that make rational sense, Erickson focused on creating an atmosphere within which the client could successfully adapt to living life in a meaningful and satisfactory manner, specific to their individual needs. The therapeutic style that evolved over Erickson's decades of clinical work was above all else pragmatic and highly efficient. Tangible progress was often achieved without insight. Erika Fromm and Ronald Shor (1979), known for their psychoanalytic approaches to hypnotherapy, described Erickson's work figuratively, "Erickson enters the world of the patient's neuroses with him and with clinical artistry and intuitive understanding of non-rational dynamics rearranges definitions and symptoms to make the neuroses more successfully adaptive" (p. 33).

In a paper titled, *The Burden of Effective Psychotherapy*, Erickson describes three cases in which hypnosis rapidly and effectively brought resolution to problems that these patients had already failed to resolve using traditional psychotherapy. These cases illustrate that it is each person's creative inner work that brings forth adaptive growth. Self-direction, reinforced by Erickson's suggestions, fostered the acceptance of self-responsibility for needed changes (Erickson, 1964/2008).

In some of Erickson's case stories, he is very specific such as this suggestion made to an athlete, "I told him in a trance state to feel all of his muscles, to get acquainted with his body" (Erickson, 1979/2014, p. 62). Sometimes, his suggestions were so elusive the listener didn't recognize the activity as being an assignment such as looking for the boojum tree in the botanical garden. The commonality is that Erickson had a deep trust in the patient's unconscious mind to work through what was needed in a personalized way and in the service of the individual personality.

Whereas many of Erickson's case consultations were time-limited in nature, he did not shy away from working with severe mental illness. The case of John (Zeig, 1985) is an example of guidance of one of Erickson's long-term clients through major life adjustments. The patient, having spent a significant part of his youth confined to mental hospitals, set his own goal at living alone in an apartment. After several years of adapting to the responsibilities of independent living, which included daily check-ins with Erickson, John was encouraged to adopt a pet dog. Arrangements included the dog residing at Erickson's home/office with John assuming responsibilities for daily care. Thus, John's (scarce) happy childhood memories of walking a pet were utilized. In addition to promotion of social contacts, the responsibilities demonstrated John's capacity to care for a living being and develop a friendship. Related assignments included John working with someone to construct a doghouse and periodic vet visits. Over the years, these activities broadened John's base of friendships. Despite a significant underlying mental disorder, John adapted successfully to satisfactory self-care and independent living.

Cases, such as this one, are outside of mainstream practice but emphasize the degree of dedication Erickson brought to his work with clients. Whereas the standards of confidentiality are more pronounced today, Erickson communicated a profound respect for the safety and integrity of patients' needs that also went beyond the mainstream. Erickson stipulated, "The essential necessity of safety of the patient remains paramount. It is essential that the subject feel protected if his full participation in hypnotic work is expected.

The subject has a strong need for protection of infringement of his rights and privacy” (Weitzenhoffer, 1957, pp. 272–273).

Erickson’s ability to work within each person’s own frame of reference required a deep sense of respect for individual integrity and freedom of choice. He also had solid commitments to the welfare of society and to the advancement of knowledge. Having done studies in criminal behavior (Erickson, 1927/2008), and having participated in war efforts to interrogate enemy soldiers, Erickson debated with colleagues that hypnosis cannot be used to suggest criminal behavior contrary to the individual’s internal self-directives (Estabrooks, 1943, p. 189). Erickson took a definitive stand that such directives would be impossible, stating, “I feel strongly that you can get a person to do in the trance state at most only what he is willing to do in the waking state, but usually even not that much in the manner of offensive behavior” (Erickson, 2000, p. 204).

Erickson focused his work in hypnosis on the responsibilities of professionals in healing arts and on the process of healthy adaptation to individual needs and circumstances. His prolific writings of case consultations and his clinical exploration illustrate that all health professionals have a role in advancing science by challenging what is known and not yet known, continuing to work in the direction of promoting health and well-being with resources available today.

Core Competencies in Ericksonian Therapy

In support of Erickson’s work as a conceptually distinct therapeutic approach, the *Principles and Core Competencies of Ericksonian Therapy* was spearheaded by Dan Short in 2016 to establish whether Ericksonian therapy is based on a coherent and consistent set of principles. The goal of this undertaking was to provide researchers and practitioners with a practical skill set most closely associated with performance as an Ericksonian therapist.

In collaboration with an international assembly of experts on Erickson’s work, Short conducted a qualitative study (with subsequent quantitative validation) that resulted in a series of foundational principles for practitioners seeking mastery in Ericksonian therapy. The core skill sets that were able to reliably distinguish a competent Ericksonian therapist from other practitioners include tailoring, utilization, strategic, destabilization, experiential, and naturalistic (Short, 2021a). An operationalized treatment manual and accompanying teaching videos made by leaders in Ericksonian therapy are freely available (Short, 2019).

As with Erickson’s overall influence on hypnosis, these core elements can be adapted to most individual circumstances and to a host of cultural differences. They can be taught and objectively measured in clinical practice. Ericksonian Core Competency principles position professionals to further investigate and practice the ideas central to Erickson’s work in a changing cultural climate.

Future Implications for Training and Professional Development

A worldwide communication network today brings opportunities to share knowledge and compile information from others in an unprecedented manner. With this opportunity comes challenges associated with expanding expectations and responsibilities. Mental health concerns are rising in urgency around the world related to the COVID pandemic

aftermath and risks of future uncertainties. The availability of technology fostered rapid adaptation to internet-based delivery of hypnotherapeutic services (Palsson et al., 2022). Not only did internet-based teaching become popular but it was also demonstrated that virtual global outreach is feasible, achievable, and rewarding.

The last few years of communication development have enabled individuals and organizations to build relationships in other countries, offering extensive and unique forums for us to learn about cultural as well as regulatory differences. Professional organizations, such as the International Society of Hypnosis (ISH), have succeeded in bringing together divergent perspectives with recognition for the value of working together and a convergence of energy and resources. For example, recently the Milton H. Erickson Foundation joined with the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, the ISH, and other major hypnosis organizations to form a task force for establishing efficacy standards for clinical hypnosis. Nine selected researchers from Hungary, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Italy developed ten specific recommendations and up-to-date guidelines for applied practice (Kekecs et al., 2022).

Clearly, we need to utilize cultural developments, resources, and circumstances of today, which offer glimpses of what will be needed for future adaptation. The most capable learners reach back in time to foundations of knowledge, while seeking to address immediate challenges and anticipate needs of the future. Erickson's innovations, struggles, and triumphs, expressed through his own primary works, offer a multifaceted perspective of working with clients in an individualized manner.

As beneficiaries of the past, each of us must do our own small part to advance the works of our predecessors. Milton Erickson was clearly dedicated to an ongoing effort, over the fullness of his career, to promote and advance a better understanding of clinical psychology's oldest healing tradition – hypnosis. In studying his primary works, in the context of time, we gain appreciation for the magnitude and breadth of his contributions. As one reflects upon his communication with professionals, colleagues, mentees, and students, the legacy he left is considerable. At the time of his death, Erickson had created what Jeffrey Zeig, Director of the Milton Erickson Foundation, refers to as streams of intellectual heirs that continue to influence upcoming generations of psychotherapists (Zeig, 2019, p. xiii). In other words, each student of Erickson has a unique perspective – a constellation of personal knowledge, culture, experiences, and circumstances.

A close examination of Erickson's works reveals a consistent pattern of carefully crafted integration of experiential activities, changing frames of reference, and intrapersonal self-reinforcement in service of amplification of each person's own ability to self-determine a path to healing (Gilligan, 2002). Similarly, the co-creation of outcomes is an ongoing process within the client that is only partially guided by the therapist. This approach involves utilization of the client's unique perspectives, behaviors, and resources to facilitate needed or desired change (Lankton, 2010, p. 353).

Erickson's great faith in the ability of people to draw upon personal resources was one of his greatest attributes. In his own words, Erickson stated, "It isn't so much what the therapist does, it's what he gets his patients to do" (Cheek, 1994, p. 16). Central in Erickson's writings is the idea that nurturing clients to take self-responsibility for their own growth and development is not only an element of therapeutic necessity but also of successful hypnotic suggestions (Gilligan, 2002). As we join our colleagues from different backgrounds, from different nations, from different perspectives, and together learn from the legacy of this singular contributor, Milton Erickson, we enter the opportunity to

co-create an experience that will benefit us all. Working together as an international community, uniting differing cultures, and historical efforts, we are given the opportunity to express our doubts, differences, and hesitations. Now is the time for us to ponder shared understandings as we appreciate the natural evolution of hypnosis as it finds its own place in the art and science of medicine.

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