ERICKSONIAN HYPNOSIS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

As you complete this learning area, you should understand and be able to explain…

- Milton Erickson and his background
- The indirect approach to hypnosis
- Erickson’s hypnotic techniques

SUGGESTED READING

- Uncommon Therapy - Jay Haley
- Patterns I: The Hypnotic Techniques of Milton
- Erickson - Richard Bandler & John Grinder
- Phoenix - D. Gordon & Maribeth Myers-Anderson

RESOURCES

- Your Class Lesson
- Workbook and Notes
- Your Tutor

LEARNING APPROACH

The recommended approach to learning this area is to review the information contained in this chapter of your Student Workbook, practice an arm raising using Ericksonian techniques, and practice the Ericksonian techniques of indirect suggestion.
INTRODUCTION

Milton H. Erickson, MD (1901 – 1980) was a pioneer in the field of hypnotherapy. He is widely recognized as the father of modern hypnosis and brief strategic therapy, and did more to legitimize the field of hypnosis in the modern era than any other practitioner. He was both a Psychiatrist and a Psychologist. He was the founding President of the American Foundation of Hypnosis. Erickson was also a pioneer in the field of hypnosis for the deaf by using nonverbal methods of communication.

Erickson had polio when he was seventeen and was told that he would be disabled for the rest of his life. However, during the course of his illness he noticed how the small babies in his family learned to move their hands and legs, and he modeled these behaviors in an attempt to cure his disabled body. He spent the next year learning how to tell the position of his arms and legs and was able to walk again, even to the point of being able to control his limp. Although unaware of it at the time, he was utilizing hypnotic principles to cure himself. Due to his intense observations, he was made aware of acute sensory perception at the level of non-verbal communication, and this helped him later in inventing non-conventional “Ericksonian Hypnosis.”

At eighteen, he enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in both Medicine and Psychology. He took a seminar in hypnosis from Clark Hull, and became fascinated with the subject. By the fourth year of college, he had gained a reputation as a hypnotist.

Dr. Erickson’s work was the inspiration and foundation for such innovative therapies as Bandler and Grinder’s NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming), and Steve de Shazer’s Solution Talk Therapy, the interactionalist approach of Haley, Watzlawick, Fisch, et al at M.R.I, brief therapy, and the refined use of metaphor, paradox, confusion, therapeutic tasks, reframing, and many other advances. Naturalistic and conversational hypnosis as well as strategic interaction, metaphors, tasks, and the personal qualities of the therapist are the major therapeutic tools.

Erickson felt that the key to being a good therapist was to be a good observer, perceiving that the client knew at some level what was needed to bring about the required resolution. Ericksonian hypnosis and Psychotherapy represents a flexible, individualized approach which accepts and utilizes the client’s unique experiences, processing style, and frame of reference. Erickson believed that the unconscious mind was a repository of wisdom and experiences from which personal resources could be accessed and mobilized. This line of thinking contributed to his development of the use of indirect, or inferred inductions.
INDIRECT APPROACH

Milton Erickson presupposed that clients have the resources and answers they need within themselves. Therefore, the indirect approach to therapy is a vehicle that binds the therapist and the client in the process of co-creating a context for change.

The traditional approach to therapy favors the use of direct suggestion which could be used by experts to tell observed subjects just what they should do to improve from the problems they bring to the office.

Indirect suggestion, on the other hand, is presented so that a client will identify that portion which is of subjective value and apply it to the process of retrieving and associating experiences needed to reach the current goals. Indirect suggestion assumes an active and participating client with a certain innate wisdom. The therapist learns from the response of the client when to elaborate the presented ambiguity in even more helpful ways.

In the indirect approach, the individual will respond better if they are given options and are not told what to do. The indirect responses work well if they feel they are making their own decision (inferred comments vs. literal commands).

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>TRADITIONAL THERAPY</th>
<th>EMERGENT THERAPY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Use of Suggestion</td>
<td>Direct, authoritarian</td>
<td>Indirect, permissive</td>
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<td>Indirection, Metaphor</td>
<td>If done by a client it is an indication of primary process, a sign of client regression</td>
<td>Resource retrieval, allowing client to create a unique response, an experiential context which helps build a bridge for learning</td>
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<td>Meaning of Symptom</td>
<td>Internal conflict, not well defended</td>
<td>A communication about developmental needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>Due to insight, ego strengthening, internal conflict resolution</td>
<td>Development of a new relational pattern and creative response to environment</td>
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Based on an “indirect” or more permissive approach, resolution of the problem would reflect loss of the symptom, development of adaptive relationships with those persons in the current social environment, and the acquisition of new skills for handling developmental demands.


Ericksonian Hypnosis 2.4

ERICKSONIAN PRINCIPLES

Erickson advanced the traditional model of hypnosis by following a series of principles. They are used to build a specific set pattern that the subject can experience. Some of these principles include, but are not limited to:

1. Guide Attention

When working with your client you want to guide the attention to increase their internal experience. “As you listen to my voice you notice the shifting focus of your eyes and the altered rhythm of your breathing?” Also, you want to guide the attention to an experience of the immediate moment for the purpose of increasing or decreasing perception of the experience.

2. Build Responsiveness

Using the indirect suggestions from the Milton Model Language Patterns, the subject will later respond fully to minimal cues.

3. Utilize confusion to disrupt the conscious mind

Confusion is a part of the induction of hypnosis whether or not the operator realizes it. When an operator is inducing hypnosis they are going through a three step process:

a. Pacing the experience
b. Using confusion to disrupt the conscious action
c. Patterns the new unconscious response you want the client to have.

This is the essence of giving suggestions. “That’s right. You don’t think you’re in a trance yet because you have not asked me the question that will let you begin now to go into trance and just how soon will you notice the shifting focus of your eyes? Should it be a light trance or would going deeper make you feel more of a difference?”

4. Guiding the Associations

To guide their thinking process by getting the client to access a memory and the notice the new associations or reframes that might be useful. Many learning’s can be gotten from the past events.
5. Promote Disassociation

By discussing the client is doing more than one thing at a time. “What is it like to be here and there at the same time?” The behavior should be experienced in an automatic disassociated way so the client can notice the arm coming up and have the experience of not consciously doing the movement.

METAPHOR

A distinctive part of Milton Erickson’s therapy was his use of teaching tales which, through shock, surprise or confusion – together with generous use of questions, puns and playful humor – helped people to see their situations in a completely new light.

Erickson used metaphor as a method of “indirect intervention” from early on in his work. Metaphor offered ambiguity for the client to develop his or her own unique response to a particular problem. As early as 1944 Erickson used a complex story to help stimulate a client’s neurotic mechanisms, utilizing what he called “fabricated case histories” to help relieve symptoms. Ultimately, the system or metaphor that he developed included the client and activated their creative potential.

MILTON MODEL LANGUAGE PATTERNS

Through intense study of Milton Erickson’s language patterns, the co-creators of NLP, Richard Bandler and John Grinder, put together a description of the hypnotic language patterns developed by Erickson.

The Milton Model is an unspecified and vague way of using language designed to bypass conscious resistance by making statements that sound specific yet are general enough to be an adequate pace for the listener’s experience.

1. MIND READ

Claiming to know the thoughts or feelings of another without specifying the process by which you came to know the information.
“I know you are wondering…” “You are curious about hypnosis.”
2. **LOST PERFORMATIVE**

Value judgments where the performer of the value judgment is left out.  
“And it’s a good thing to wonder…” (Who says it’s a good thing?)

3. **CAUSE & EFFECT**

Where it is implied that one thing causes another.  
“You make me angry” “That makes me happy”

   a. The weakest kind of linkage makes use of conjunction to connect otherwise unrelated phenomena.  “You are listening to the sound of my voice, and you can begin to relax.”

   b. The second kind of linkage connects statements by establishing a connection in time.  “During, while, soon, when, such as, as you…then you…, if…then”  “So as soon as you notice your breathing becoming more rhythmic, then you will…”

   c. The third and strongest linkage uses words actually stating causality.  “Because you’ve made the first step of coming in for therapy, then that allows…”

4. **COMPLEX EQUIVALENCE**

Where two things are equated – as their meanings being equivalent.  
“That means…”

5. **PRESUPPOSITION**

The linguistic equivalent of assumptions.  
“You are learning many things…”

6. **UNIVERSAL QUANTIFIER**

A set of words having:

   a. a universal generalization and  
   b. no referential index

Words like: always, every time, never, ever, nobody. Etc.  
“And now you can go all the way into a trance.”  
“Every thought that you have can assist you in going deeper into a trance.”

7. **MODAL OPERATOR**
Words which implies possibility or necessity, that indicate lack of choice such as: should, must, have to, can’t, won’t, etc.

“Have you noticed that you can’t open your eyes?”

8. NOMINALIZATION

Nominalizations are words that take the place of a noun in a sentence, but they are not tangible; they cannot be touched, felt or heard. Words like curiosity, hypnosis, learning, love, etc. are nominalization. They are used as nouns but they are actually process words. In the following example, the nominalizations are in bold.

“I know that you have a certain difficulty in your life that you would like to bring to a satisfactory resolution...and I’m not sure exactly what personal resources you would find most useful in resolving this difficulty, but I do know that your unconscious mind is better able than you or I to search through your experience for exactly those resources.”

9. UNSPECIFIED VERB

No verb is completely specified, but verbs can be more or less specified. If a hypnotist uses relatively unspecified verbs, the listener is again forced to supply the meaning in order to understand the sentence. Words like do, fix, solve, move, change, wonder, think, sense, know, experience, understand, remember, are all relatively unspecified.

10. TAG QUESTION

A question after a statement, designed to displace resistance.

“Can you not?”

11. LACK OF REFERENTIAL INDEX

A phrase which does not pick out a specific portion of the listener's experience.

“One can, you know…”

12. COMPARATIVE DELETION (Unspecified Comparison)

Where the comparison is made and it is not specified as to what or whom it was made.

“And it’s more or less the right thing…”
13. PACE CURRENT EXPERIENCE

Where client’s experience (verifiable, external) is described in a way which is undeniable.
“You are sitting here, listening to me, looking at me (etc)…”

14. DOUBLE BIND

Offers the illusion of choice.

“And that means that your unconscious mind is also here, and you can hear (phonological ambiguity) what I say. And since that’s the case, you are probably learning about this and already know more at the unconscious level than you think you do, and it’s not right for me to tell him, learn this or learn that, let him learn any way he wants, in any order.”

15. CONVERSATIONAL POSTULATE

The communication has the form of a question, a question to which the response is either a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’. If I want you to do something, what else must be present so that you will do it, and out of your awareness? If allows you to choose to respond or not and avoids authoritarianism. Often they contain Embedded Commands.

“Do you feel this… (punctuation ambiguity) is something you can understand?”

16. EXTENDED QUOTE

“Last week I was with Richard who told me about his training in 1983 at Denver when he talked to someone who said…”

17. SELECTIONAL RESTRICTIONAL VIOLATION

A sentence that is not well formed in that only humans and animals can have feelings.

“A chair can have feelings…”

18. AMBIGUITY

a. Phonological
b. Syntactic

Where the function (syntactic) of a word cannot be immediately determined from the immediate context.
“They are visiting relatives.”

c. Scope

Where it cannot be determined by linguistic context how much is applied to that sentence by some other portion of the sentence.

“The old men & women…”
“The disturbing noises and thoughts…”
“The weight of your hands & feet…”

d. Punctuation

“I want you to notice your hand me the glass.”

19. UTILIZATION

Utilize all that happens or is said.

Client says: “I am not sold”
Response: “That’s right you are not sold, yet, because you haven’t asked the one question that will have you totally and completely sold.”

ADDITIONAL MILTON MODEL PATTERNS

PRESUPPOSITIONS

Presuppositions are linguistic assumptions. The way to determine what is presupposed and not open to question in a sentence is to negate the sentence and find out what is still true.

Presuppositions are the most powerful of language patterns, when used by a communicator who presupposes what he or she doesn’t want to have questioned. Give the person lots of choices, and yet have all the choices presuppose the response you want.

Some examples of presuppositions that are useful in hypnotherapy are:

1. Existence
   The simplest kind of presupposition.

2. Awareness
Words like: know, aware, realize, and notice, etc. can be used to presuppose the rest of the sentence.

3. **Time**
   Such clauses begin with words such as: before, after, during, as, since, prior, when, while, etc.

4. **Adverb/Adjective**
   Such words can be used to presuppose a major clause in a sentence. “Are you curious about your developing trance state?” This presupposes that you are developing a trance state: the only question is whether you are curious about it or not.

5. **Ordinal**
   Numbers: 1st, 2nd, 3rd… “It might not be until the 3rd time until you realize just how confident you are.”

Stacking many kinds of presuppositions in the same sentence makes them particularly powerful. The more that is presupposed, the more difficult it is for the listener to unravel the sentence and question any one presupposition. The following is an example of the use of many presuppositions stacked together: “And I don’t know how soon you’ll realize the learning your unconscious has already made, because it’s not important that you know before you’ve comfortably continued the process of relaxation and allowed the other you to learn something else of use and delight to you”

**INDIRECT ELICITATION PATTERNS**

This group of patterns is particularly useful in getting specific responses indirectly, without overtly asking for them.

1. **Embedded Commands:** Rather than give instructions directly, the Hypnotist can embed directives within a larger sentence structure. “You can allow yourself to begin to relax.”

2. **Embedded Questions:** Questions, like commands, can be embedded within a larger sentence structure. “I’m curious to know what you would like to gain from hypnosis”

3. **Negative Commands:** When a command is given in its negative form, the positive instruction is generally what is responded to. For example, if someone says, “Don’t think of pink polka dots” you have to think of pink polka dots to understand the sentence.
INDIRECT FORM OF SUGGESTION IN ARM RAISING

REMEMBER: The indirect response works when the subject is led to believe he or she is making his or her own decisions (inferred comments vs. literal commands)

You can lean back in your chair and relax your body while you give YOUR attention to YOUR hands placed on your thighs.

(The therapist models to provide nonverbal cues. Both hands rest slightly on the thighs without touching each other.)

And now you NOTICE the feeling and texture of your slacks in the tips of your fingers. Now if YOU SENSE the texture of your slacks in your fingertips, it will probably remind YOU of other experiences, of other feelings you have had. Now as you continue…to sense this feeling, the texture of the cloth with your fingers, IT IS INTERESTING FOR YOU TO NOTICE your hand getting lighter and lighter. PERHAPS you will feel your hand getting lighter, lighter and lighter.

Now I don’t know which finger is going to want to move first. And after your fingers start moving, you will probably begin to feel your wrist lifting. As your wrist lifts YOU WILL NOTICE your elbow bending. As your elbow bends IT IS CURIOUS TO NOTICE that your wrist will lift higher, higher and higher.

And as it lifts higher and higher, your eyelids may begin to lower as your hand and wrist lift higher. And as your hand lifts higher, PERHAPS it will move towards your face. And as your hand comes closer to your face, it will PROBABLY move slower, until you are ready to take a deep breath and closer your eyes and go into a deep trance.

Your hand is moving slowly towards your face, but you won’t go into a trance until your hand touches your face. IN ALL PROBABILITY you will not be able to recognize the trance for some moments. AS YOUR HAND LOWERS INTO YOUR LAP, YOU HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING that it signifies you will continue to go deeper into a trance.