

Ericksonian Hypnotherapy - a permissive approach

Irina Holdevici

Titu Maiorescu University, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

Hypnosis can be described as representing a state of modified consciousness, produced by repeated stimuli. Most of the specialists define hypnosis as an induced state, usually in an artificial way, similar to sleep – but at the same time different from a physiologic point of view; this is about a state characterized by increased suggestibility, which is responsible for inducing to the subject, more easily than in a normal state, a series of sensorial, perceptive, motor and memory changes.

Hypnosis, from the point of view of Ericksonian therapists represents a process of communication between the two people involved. This process involves utilizing latent psychological availability. Latent availability of a person (or resources) consist mostly of past experiences, emotional states or forgiven ability, which once they are actualized, they may generate modifications at the level of memory, perception, sensations, affective states, so that the subject will be able to put to action new behavioral models (Zeig, & Gilligan, 2013).

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Corresponding author: Irina Holdevici

Phone number: -

E-mail address: nicoletalixandru@yahoo.com

I. ERICKSONIAN HYPNOSIS

The XXth century has been marked by hypnotherapeutic approaches proposed by Milton Erickson (1901-1980). In this context the particularity of therapeutic suggestions specific to the Ericksonian approach have the meaning of producing deeper modifications on the memory and thinking levels.

Another specific feature of Ericksonian hypnosis is the permissive character which is firmly different from the classic, more directive hypnosis (Lynn, & Kirsch, 2014).

Instead of telling the client what he or she will feel or do in the state of trance, the therapist proposes more possibilities of change. This permissive and non-authoritarian demarche will be better accepted by oppositional clients who express psychotherapy resistance (Schirado, 1979).

Ericksonian hypnosis is also characterized by the fact that the subject is no longer considered a passive person upon which the therapist works, but they play an active role, while psychotherapy sights helping the client activate their own latent resources. Once such resources – of conscious or unconscious nature are accessed, they can be utilized in order to find solutions to current issues (Zeig, & Gilligan, 2013).

Hypnosis will do become a procedure of evoking and utilizing psychological contents which the client already possesses are less of a programming of a strictly defined course of action which needs to be applied (Smith, Barabasz, & Barabasz, 1996).

Therapeutic intervention methods, the level of non-directivity, verbal formulas, metaphors, stories, content of hypnotic scenarios represent elements which the individualized therapeutic process is built on (Holdevici, 2017).

II. ERICKSONIAN ELEMENTS AND TECHNIQUES

An interesting element of Ericksonian hypnotherapy is represented by the principle of utilizing (Zeig, 1998).

Psychotherapeutic process, along with hypnosis, gains a natural aspect. This implies that if a client spontaneously puts to actions a certain behavioral model, it will be used in order to capture and redirect attention to inducing trance (Holdevici, & Crăciun, 2017). Suggesting the client the fact that he or she will be increasingly absorbed by his internal experiences, the therapist will stop him from “fighting” and opposing trance.

The Ericksonian therapist trusts the latent resources and availability and mostly provides the adequate context of manifesting them. Lankton (2014) considers that the hypnotic trance is not only present during the therapies in which hypnosis is directly involved, but also within other

types of therapies, because of the communication models which favor trance and a process of focusing the subject's attention upon one's own inner experience.

Milton Erickson elaborated several less usual techniques of hypnotic induction. One of them is the technique of confusion, which has proven to be more effective especially for the resistant subjects, who excessively try to analyze what is happening during the induction and are not focused on what is asked of them (Lankton, 2014; Erickson, & Rossi, 1981; Matthews, 2000).

The technique implies administrating a series of instructions difficult to comprehend. It includes non-significant information, verbs at different conjunctions and other elements meant to create confusion up to the point in which the client will be open to accept any logical direction of the speech, which makes them modify expectations and react to suggestions given by the therapist (Gilligan, 2013).

On the other hand Ericksonian hypnosis represents a way of special communication through which the client will find his or her own answers and not the therapist (Erickson, 1980). The client is encouraged to describe their own problem in analogous terms. Such an approach will have a flexible character, allowing the therapist to accept all apparently absurd fantasies and appraisals of the client as precious information based on which change can be built (Edgette, & Edgette, 2013).

This metaphoric definition of symptoms and problems gets the patient out of the area of medical language they are not familiar with, suggesting at the same time that change is possible and giving concrete benchmarks and landmarks leading to it. Also, the metaphoric approach offers a proper frame in order to create the positive therapeutic alliance.

Hypnosis represents a dialogue in which non-verbal communication plays a very important role. Milton Erickson considered that the hypnotic ritual has a misleading character and lacks intrinsic value, being more of a support or vehicle of the therapeutic message. Hence, suggestions are not more than pretext in order to trigger subjective experiences of the patient, thus accepting or refusing them, expressing their autonomy (Lankton, 2008).

Milton Erickson did not pretend that his patients should be completely cured as a result of therapy, but they were mostly supported to overcome certain difficult stages of their existence (Erickson, & Rossi, 1981).

Patients, during psychotherapy, obtained new knowledge regarding them, knowledge which allowed them to become independent and not access the therapist's help except the times they confronted were different (Lynn, Laurence, & Kirsch, 2015).

This discussion, often prolonged, represents a preparation stage during which the therapist takes action in a discreet way, without letting the client notice. This regards the so-called informal or conversational hypnosis, which does not emphasize the ritualized aspects of

the method, following obtaining the state which Milton Erickson described as the “daily trance” (Erickson, 1959).

The mentioned author embraced this type of informal hypnosis whose practice still involves good knowledge of the formal hypnosis. These aspects less known of the informal hypnosis usually surprise the patients which expect a spectacular induction meant to induce exceptional states. Many of them ask how long it will take to get hypnotized and if the results are already visible (Yapko, 2013). The Ericksonian approach also implies letting go of the classical diagnosis which labels the client, supporting the therapist in seeing the patient from a new point of view.

Most of the times, the significant elements and information regarding the patient’s problem are already presented, as the therapist does not do but notice them and associate them so that the therapeutic change should take place (Lynn, & Sherman, 2000).

III. CONCLUSIONS

Milton Erickson emphasized that recognition of the symptoms causes or of the patient’s problems does not automatically lead to healing, but the diagnostic of psychosomatic disorders may emphasize the capacity of the patients to establish connections between cause and effect, between spirit and body (Holdevici, 2010). Hypnosis works as a kind of catalysis which leads to action or a dissolvent which destroys symptoms; by combating their elements in a different way, the two functions can be connected. We must point out also that hypnosis supports the client in readjusting to a more suitable functionality, at the right moment and trigger the right action.

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