

The Couples Hypnotic Dance: Creating Ericksonian Strategies in Marital Therapy

by Carol Kershaw

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The Couples Hypnotic Dance is a thoughtful and readable text in which the psychotherapeutic and hypnotic approaches developed by Milton H. Erickson are applied to marital therapy.

The text begins with a clear foundation. It describes the goals of marital therapy as twofold: To alter unproductive, painful or limiting interacting sequences and to expand the interactional repertoire of the couple.

Kershaw briefly acquaints the reader with the work of Erickson, and with the broad range of naturalistic and formal hypnotic techniques associated with him. She utilizes Erickson's basic premise that the unconscious mind is a repository of untapped resources, and initiates expansive reorganization from within the reality of the patient. Kershaw's numerous examples emphasize the use of the unconscious to build conscious interventions and to help expand the client's constrictive resources.

Basic assumptions of Erickson's work, gleaned from a variety of primary and secondary sources, are delineated in a clear and articulate manner. Kershaw's background as an educator shines through with the logical sequence and polished presentation of materials.

Application of hypnotic strategies begins with observation of a couple's pre-existing recurring interaction patterns. Kershaw identifies this naturalistic process with the term "hypnotic dance" and demonstrates how this mutually entrancing pattern co-creates the couple's reality. Utilizing the partner's propensity for entrancing each other as the framework, Kershaw assists the

clients in learning to use their "dance" in mutually and maritally beneficial ways.

Kershaw's work is richly embellished throughout with a variety of literacy references as well as case reports from her private practice. Methods of developing a working hypothesis for intervention are presented by way of a sample assessment questionnaire, and augmented with a discussion of marital stages of development. Kershaw covers a broad range of marital dysfunctions, and specifically addresses the areas of childhood trauma and psychosomatic issues. Trance induction strategies may serve as useful guidelines to the therapist who wishes to integrate these methods into his or her own professional repertoire.

The publication is directed toward professional marital therapists. Training in hypnosis and a background in the work of Erickson would be beneficial to deriving full benefit from Kershaw's ideas. The text does not, nor was it intended to, stand alone, but does provide formidable adjunct support to the professional who wishes to become fluent in the use of hypnosis in marital therapy.

The weakness of the work includes a few vague references to physiological phenomena such as immune response variations within the alter-personalities of a multi-personality patient. Incomplete case reports also leave the reader wondering what happened next. A mystical element lingers and is even punctuated by the far-reaching literary references.

I was disappointed that the work did not more firmly ground the reader in scientific studies on hypnotic phenomena. Kershaw's ability to work within a rather complex framework is not wholly counterbalanced by her ability to communicate her ideas in a clear manner. Although much of Erickson's work was multidimensional, effective interventions often can be achieved from a simpler direction. It would be most unfortunate if therapists who are not fully conversant with Erickson's work were discouraged into thinking that complexity is akin to effectiveness.

Overall, the powerful elements of this accomplishment far outweigh the deficiencies. Kershaw has shown herself adept at synthesizing Erickson's methods with the needs of a changing society, one considerably different from the times in which Erickson himself practiced. By so doing, she will help to keep Ericksonian approaches vibrant and germane to contemporary society.

The Couples Hypnotic Dance contributes a refined balance of the artistic elements of Erickson's work with the more mechan-

ical infrastructure. I highly recommend this book to professionals who are interested in broadening their skills to include Ericksonian methods, as well as to health professionals who already are versed in the work of Dr. Erickson. There is much to be learned from the presentation of Carol Kershaw.

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