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## THE CREATIVE PERSONALITY AS A LENS FOR THE UNION OF EGO-STATE AND ERICKSONIAN THERAPY

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### ABSTRACT

Developmental psychologists (especially followers of Erik Erikson) and Jungian psychotherapists, among others, have noted that mature/self-actualized people must balance seemingly contradictory traits in aspects of their lives. When people list too much to one extreme or the other, such as tending to express only passion or only objectivity, Ericksonian hypnotherapy can be used to enable individuals to achieve balance through two major processes, differentiation and integration. Both processes are analogous to developing 'response sets' (as they are called in Ego-State Therapy) that facilitate balance in these juxtaposed traits. Recent research into the creative/complex personality has isolated a specific set of ten dialectics that are consistent across creative/complex adults (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). A review of some of Milton Erickson's case studies illustrates how one or more of the ten dialectics is the focal point for creating response sets that will right the individual's imbalance(s).

*Key words:* Ego-State Therapy, Ericksonian hypnosis, creative personality, creativity, maturity

### INTRODUCTION

Some psychologists have argued that within each individual is a drive towards improvement, a desire to bring oneself to the highest levels possible, and a striving towards self-actualization (see Maslow, 1968, for a review). Inherent in the process of self-actualization is a drive towards increasing complexity (Maslow, 1970), and consequently to engage in its component behaviours, differentiation and integration (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1996, 1997). Differentiation is diversifying one's schemata and branching out into new areas, increasing complexity by broadening one's range of knowledge, skills, or attitudes (in the most inclusive sense of the words). Integration is rearranging and/or combining (potentially) disparate concepts and becoming more complex by putting pieces together to create an improved whole, one that is ostensibly greater than the sum of its parts.

As H. H. Watkins (1993) noted, both differentiation and integration are key processes in human development, and underlie the notion of the *ego-state*, an ordered system of behaviour and experience united by a core principle (for early work on this subject, see Federn, 1952; Weiss, 1960), such as how to act around different types of people (e.g. friends, parents, cousins). The notion of viewing the personality as a composite of discrete parts has been considered by a number of psychologists (e.g. Freud, 1923; Jung, 1969), and the process of Ego-State Therapy seeks to apply the techniques of family and/or group therapy to resolve conflicts within or between different components of an individual's personality

(i.e. a 'family' of components; for a review, see Watkins, 1993; Watkins & Watkins, 1997). In many cases, this is achieved by enabling the individual to become more complex, either by introducing a new schema that allows the ego-state to extend its current borders or branch out into new ones (differentiation), or by helping to unite and/or reorient a set of schemata and thereby reinforce or remove certain ego-state borders (integration).

Despite the compartmentalization inherent in the notion of ego-states, Jung posited that there is ideally a set of dialectics that the self must synthesize if it is to become a mature person (Fordham, 1953; Jung, 1969, 1973). This transmutation of the poles that Jung calls 'ego' (rational personality) and 'shadow' (irrational personality) into an integrated whole implies a system of dialectics in a complex individual, each of which is in a delicate balance. An individual listing too much towards either extreme (e.g. passion/objectivity) would evidence conflicts within an ego-state that would reflect failure to handle situations either properly or as desired due to an inability to access the requisite extreme. This would necessitate therapeutic intervention to stabilize that component of the self's complex system such that the individual has a balanced level of access to the use of either extreme.

Insofar as Jung did not develop a taxonomy of dialectics, the hypnotherapeutic framework has proceeded on the basis that every individual has a unique set of dialectics. But, having a taxonomy of dialectics that comprise a mature personality would create a framework that could facilitate diagnosis of areas that may need further balance and development. Moreover, it would allow the therapeutic process to be viewed in the positive light of balancing one's life and engaging in further development, both of which are positive quotidian endeavours that avoid the stigma of therapy.

#### THE MATURE PERSONALITY AND THE CREATIVE/COMPLEX PERSONALITY

Concurrent with Jung's lack of a taxonomy of the dialectics, and focus on the process of resolving the competing forces within them, is a lack of benchmarks that reflect a level of maturity that would be recognizable to others. But, research by one of Jung's contemporaries, Erik Erikson, has generated a set of benchmarks in the form of a list of stages of psychosocial development that involve the resolution of a 'crisis' dialectic (see Erikson 1959, 1968). The latter two stages consider the highest levels of maturity, namely 'generativity' (vs. stagnation) and 'integrity' (vs. despair), which (respectively) reflect passing on ideals and values to the next generation and recognizing the meaning of one's life as a function of satisfaction with one's own accomplishments (Erikson 1959, 1968). These two stages comprise at least the latter half of one's life and involve not only a process within each of the two stages, but successful completion of the processes that led up to said stages. As such, at any given point one is working not only to resolve the crisis of the current stage, but to lay a foundation for resolving the crises of future stages.

Optimally, a mature adult will resolve the crises of the last two stages by providing a unique contribution to the world in the form of a creative work that changes a field, domain, or culture (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). It has been found that there is a set of consistencies among the personalities of adults that have produced such works, which comprises a set of ten dialectics (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), which in turn suggests a set of ideal dialectics whose balance is part of the self-actualization process (see Maslow, 1970).

The ten dialectics of the mature personality (which Csikszentmihalyi terms 'complex personality') are as follows: (a) activity and rest, (b) smart and naïve, (c) playful and disciplined, (d) imaginative and realistic, (e) introverted and extroverted, (f) humble and proud,

(g) masculinity and femininity, (h) rebellious and domain-oriented, (i) passionate and objective, (j) suffering and enjoyment (see below for further explanation). In all cases, the notion of 'balancing' these dialectics is less about making an exact 50-50 split and more about the ability to use both extremes effectively (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). For example, balancing the passionate and objective aspects is not about tempering the recklessness of passion with objectivity as much as it is having the ability to be fully passionate at some points and fully objective at others. The result is an ego-state centred on the proper exhibition of attachment and detachment. But, when an individual has listed to the side of passion, it indicates a reduced/absent ability to maintain objectivity where necessary, which requires finding ways to develop and use objectivity (see 'response sets', below).

#### THE CREATIVE/COMPLEX PERSONALITY AS AN OUTCOME OF ERICKSONIAN HYPNOSIS

In addition to the possibility of using the ten dialectics as a framework of ego-states in a mature personality, the process of balancing one or more of these dialectics is frequently an intended outcome in Ericksonian hypnotherapy. Each side of the ten dialectics can be viewed as a high-order response set (Kirsch & Lynn, 1997, 1998), a group of mental associations generated from past learning and experience that catalyze the efficient and/or automatic activation of cognitive, behavioural, or role-related schemata. As Lynn and Hallquist (2004) maintain, almost all forms of therapy have the goal of establishing positive response sets that are consistent with an individual's goals and values. Indeed, much of Ericksonian hypnotherapy is designed to build such positive response sets and/or to disrupt or to reform counterproductive ones. Much of the time, these response sets fall under the rubric of one of the twenty items in the set of dialectics that comprise the creative/complex personality.

The remainder of this article will elaborate upon the ten dialectics and cite some of Erickson's case studies<sup>1</sup> as examples of how the creative/complex personality can be a framework, and consequently a diagnostic tool, for identifying and correcting imbalances between the 'ego' and the 'shadow'. Moreover, these examples highlight ways in which the process of Ericksonian hypnosis operates on ego-states, and shows the creative/complex personality as a warp upon which the two therapeutic methods can be woven.

#### ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDIES

The dialectic of activity and rest involves having vast amounts of physical energy while also protecting that energy with a significant amount of rest. While creative people can work long hours with great concentration, they also tend to have sedentary periods of rest, thus exercising control over their own energy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Erickson's case, 'Competition', exhibits this metaphorically when he helps a migraine sufferer by having his hands compete with each other to be the first to rise to his face. By highlighting the extreme tension in the man's hands during the competition, and then contrasting it by having his hands 'compete' in relaxing, Erickson enables the man to access both tension (high energy) and relaxation (low energy) and control which state he is in. By doing so, Erickson initializes a response set in the patient that allows for exercising control over his own energy, such that he can decide when to be tense and when to be at rest.

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1 For ease of access to readers, all cases were taken from Rosen (1982).

Combining a child's curiosity with an adult's knowledge of the world gives a conception of the second dialectic, namely being both smart and naïve, which Csikszentmihalyi (1996) maps onto the ability to exhibit both convergent and divergent thinking. This is illustrated by the tale 'Going from Room to Room', where Erickson asks a student how to get from the room they are in to the next room. When none of the student's answers involve leaving the property, Erickson highlights the limitations of the student's thinking by adding examples that demonstrate the naïveté of thinking that any method is viable through any set of locations, including flying around the world to get to the room's other door. The student, however, shows convergent thinking by pointing out that Erickson's creative answer overlooked several direct ways of getting to the next room that simply involve varying the locomotive technique (e.g. 'sliding on one's stomach'). As Erickson summarizes, 'We do limit ourselves so terribly in all of our thinking!'

Although a responsible adult, the creative individual also exhibits a certain recklessness, a playfulness to contrast with severe discipline (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). But discipline can be overdone, as in the case 'A Friendly Divorce', in which a husband and wife were so disciplined about their lives that their honeymoon bliss was ruined by it, which in turn tarnished their sex lives so thoroughly that they wanted a divorce. Erickson saved their marriage by having them engage in a bit of irresponsible, newlywed behaviour to enable them to enjoy sex sufficiently that they would not divorce. Likewise, Erickson helped them to overcome the rigidity of their (religious) beliefs by enabling them to experience a honeymoon independent of its supposed prescriptions. This is similar to the case 'Sin' in which Erickson helps a woman to rebel against the overbearing strictures of her religious beliefs so that she can develop a balance of maintaining her religion while still being an independent person who experiences the world around her. This is consistent with the dialectic of rebelliousness and orientation to domain, in which individuals rebel against the system and exhibit significant independence, but still remain cognizant of the boundaries that span the world in which they live ('domain'; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

On one hand, a complex person is imaginative, able to fantasize about non-existent things. On the other, the creative individual is also strongly rooted in reality and does not fly off into a permanent Neverland (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In several of his sports coaching stories, such as 'Donald Lawrence and the Gold Medal', Erickson shows how a subtle change in the way reality is perceived, or the *degree* to which reality is perceived, can allow people to envision going beyond their limitations. He cites Roger Bannister's method of beating the four-minute mile barrier by converting minutes to seconds and then shaving part of a *second* off the record. Using this analogy, Erickson helps shot putter Donald Lawrence to see his current longest distance as a mere marker to throw past instead of as an upper limit. Both Lawrence and Bannister were able to achieve unlikely feats by using their imagination while staying rooted in reality.

Though the myth of the creative personality describes a reclusive artist, a creative individual actually balances introversion and extroversion (Sawyer, 2006; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In the case 'Dry Beds', Erickson's method for helping an attractive, charming girl to control her bladder is to appeal to her potential for introversion by indicating that she would exercise control over her bladder if a stranger walked in while she was urinating. By letting her tap into an experience that would yield introverted behaviour, Erickson helps the girl to overcome her difficulties by balancing her extroverted charm with introverted shyness.

There is a certain pride that the innovative individual must have regarding past accomplishments, but there is also a certain humility that the truly complex person maintains. Balancing ambition and selflessness, the creative person is at once competitive and cooperative (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In 'Us Cripples', a medical student lost one of his legs and needed to use a prosthesis; his sense of humiliation was such that he lacked self-confidence to interact with his friends. By setting up a situation in which the injured student and the cane-toting Erickson, whom the latter called 'us cripples', would have the opportunity to take the stairs and leave the elevator for the able-bodied, Erickson establishes a degree of self-pride through identifying with the group 'us cripples'. In fact, Erickson has him *besting* the able-bodied so that he can feel comfortable around them again and be proud enough to use all of his abilities to their fullest.

Contrary to the stereotypes regarding men and women, complex individuals tend towards androgyny, showing both 'masculine' and 'feminine' sides regardless of gender (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In the case 'Vicious Pleasure', a woman who had little self-respect and a fear of sex (largely due to sexual abuse from her father) made herself completely submissive to men and was having a miserable time of it. Erickson balances her stereotypically feminine submission by noting that she 'can take a vicious pleasure in reducing [a man] to helplessness'. It is also interesting to note the combination of pain and enjoyment that is inherent in the expression 'vicious pleasure'. Critically, Erickson noted that this woman was experiencing only pain with respect to intercourse, and none of the pleasure for which sex is so frequently known, which is an imbalance in the dialectic of pleasure and pain ('enjoyment and suffering'). Moreover, since it is stereotypically the man who is dominant in sex, and also the man who is the dominant and abusive figure in this woman's life, Erickson is suggesting that the woman try on the 'masculine' role in sex. By expanding her response set and schemata by reducing a man to helplessness, she is also metaphorically overcoming the dominant figure in her life by being able to 'fight back' in the present. Thus, his suggestions have the two-fold goal of restoring the balances inherent in physical androgyny and in pleasure and pain.

Though extremely passionate about their craft, creative people are also able to exhibit objectivity to a surprising extent. It is important for them to know how good their work is, how it can or should change/develop, and so on, yet they must have a drive to create and to work (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). In the therapeutic tale 'Oats', Erickson depicts his father's acceptance of reality and love of the craft by contrasting the latter's excitement about a bumper crop with his objectivity when said crop was destroyed, and later the hope that there would be enough to feed the cattle and that better fortune would come in the future. It is a prime example of balancing hope for the future, acceptance of reality, and a love of one's vocation, come what may.

## CONCLUSION

The stories and cases above are just a few of the many examples of how therapy can try to increase complexity in people and how balancing analogues of the Jungian 'ego' and 'shadow' can facilitate the process of self-actualization. Moreover, viewing the therapeutic process as helping the client to develop a creative personality allows for establishing the concrete goals of differentiation and integration, which can be measured through monitoring the expansion of response sets within a given ego-state. Most especially, the rubric of ego-states that comprises the model of the complex/creative personality can serve both

as a diagnostic tool to look for specific imbalances in the life of the client and as a positive example with measurable goals. As demonstrated in the cases above, applying this viewpoint to the therapeutic process facilitates the union of Ego-State Therapy and Ericksonian hypnotherapy.

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