

## The Shadow Side of the Great Psychotherapists

*Timothy C. Thomason*

---

The great psychotherapists provide us with models for how to practice our work as counselors and psychologists, but it is important not to think of them as infallible guides. By learning something about the personal quirks and failings of some of the greatest psychotherapists in history we can develop a more sophisticated understanding of their lives and work. This article describes some lesser-known facts about the lives of Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, Albert Ellis, and Milton Erickson. The ethical challenges and mental disorders experienced by the great psychotherapists illustrate the need for all counselors and psychotherapists to seek help when needed.

Keywords: great psychotherapists; biography; history

### Introduction

The great Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung called the dark side of the human personality the shadow; he used the word as a metaphor for primitive, negative, or socially disvalued emotions and impulses like rage, selfishness, lust, and power strivings. Whatever we consider evil or unacceptable in ourselves is repressed and becomes part of our shadow (Jung, 1973). To become a healthy and whole human being it is necessary to accept the shadow side of oneself. Recognizing and owning our negative impulses gives us the ability to make conscious choices about how we will behave in the future.

It is tempting for counselors and psychologists to idolize the great people who created the major approaches to psychotherapy. Freud, Jung, Rogers, Ellis, and other theorists were truly remarkable, innovative thinkers, and they deserve our admiration and respect for their valuable contributions. At the same time, we would do them a disservice if we thought of them as gods or gurus rather than as fallible human beings. The great psychologists were mortals, not myths, and, like all of us, each of them had a shadow. A realistic understanding of the great psychotherapists includes knowing something about their personal lives, their personality quirks, and their limitations and failings. This helps makes them into whole human beings rather than simply historical figures in textbooks.

Many people have cautioned against investing too much in teachers who are, after all, just human beings. In the Hebrew Bible, Daniel (2:31-43) cautioned that even prominent people have faults, which he called feet of clay (even a statue that appears strong will fall if it has feet made of clay). The Buddhist teacher Linji advised “If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!” (Kopp, 1982, p. 188), meaning that thinking of the Buddha as a deity is a delusion that must be destroyed to become enlightened oneself. Similarly, one could say “If you meet the psychotherapy guru on the road, kill him.” That is, learn what is valuable, but do treat him or her like a deity or saint.

The field of psychotherapy has been susceptible to the temptation to deify our

---

Timothy C. Thomason, Ed.D. is a Professor in the Educational Psychology Department at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona. Correspondence regarding this article should be sent to Timothy C. Thomason, P.O. Box 5774, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ, 86011. E-mail: Timothy.Thomason@nau.edu

founders. When the great psychotherapists were developing their theories there was little empirical research to guide their work. Freud, Jung, Adler, and the other pioneers based their theories mainly on their own limited personal experiences with a small number of clients. Little research on how people change was available to the psychotherapists who came after the psychodynamic thinkers. The theorists who became influential were often those who had great personal charisma and worked hard to popularize their work.

Regarding the history of psychotherapy, according to Cummings and O'Donohue (2008):

Since the psychology profession had no scientific base, we had nothing else with which we could prove to the world that our work was psychotherapeutically credible and worthy of respect other than to quote the Great One, be it Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Karen Horney, B. F. Skinner, Carl Rogers, or Albert Ellis. It worked, and the public followed us in worshipping at the shrines of those we had elevated to near sainthood. (p. 39).

Lilienfeld said "What concerns me is the hype, the talk about changing the world, this allure of the guru that the field of psychotherapy has a tendency to cultivate" (cited in Carey, 2008, para. 7). The proper role of the teacher is to facilitate the growth of the learner, not to be the object of worship. As evidence-based psychotherapy becomes more popular, less significance will be placed on the personal characteristics of individual therapists (Messer & Gurman, 2011). Therapists today need to know which techniques tend to work for most clients with specific disorders (such as exposure therapy for panic attacks), rather than how the great therapists of the past used their own personal charisma as leverage to help their clients change.

It should be noted that it may not be useful to judge the great psychotherapists by current standards of social and political correctness. They lived in societies that were quite different from today, and their ideas and attitudes reflect the thinking of their times. For example, when some of the great psychotherapists were practicing there were no national professional organizations and no generally accepted ethical standards for psychotherapists. This does not excuse their ethical lapses, but it helps put their behaviors in perspective. Similarly, when some therapists were developing their theories, misogyny and various overt forms of discrimination against women were common, so their admitted treatment of women as sex objects would probably not have been seen as unusual at the time. One of the benefits of studying the lives of the great psychotherapists is that it helps one appreciate how some aspects of the practice of therapy have changed (and improved) over the decades.

This article describes certain little-known aspects of the lives of Carl Rogers, Fritz Perls, Albert Ellis, and Milton H. Erickson. There are, of course, many other great psychotherapists who are not included in this review, and a study of their lives would also be enlightening. In particular, there are many books that examine the lives of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung (e.g. Bair, 2003; Ferris, 1997; Gay, 1988; Jung, 1973). In this article the term "psychotherapists" is used as an umbrella term for the great theorists and innovators of psychotherapy, who were members of various professions.

### **Carl Rogers**

Carl Rogers had a profound impact on the field of psychotherapy. A survey of over 2,000 psychotherapists revealed that he was rated the most influential of all

psychotherapists, even more so than Freud (Cook, Biyanova, & Coyne, 2009). Rogers's ideas about the importance of empathy and the core conditions for a therapeutic relationship have permeated the fields of counseling and psychotherapy to the point that they are often taken for granted. Rogers had a few simple ideas that he spent his life disseminating: listen to the client, be respectful and nonjudgmental, be empathic, and help clients find their own solutions (Cohen, 1997). Because of Roger's towering stature in the history of counseling and psychotherapy, it can be somewhat surprising to learn some little-known details about him. Late in his life Rogers wrote that "People think I'm a guru, almost a god . . . . I am very human, have many faults" (Cohen, 1997, p. 218).

Carl Rogers grew up in rural midwestern America in a home with close family ties and a very strict religious atmosphere (Rogers, 1961). He was a rather sickly child, shy and often the target of jokes and teasing. He learned to read at age four and became a voracious reader. The family moved from Oak Park, Illinois to a farm when Carl was in high school. He was shy and sensitive but worked hard and did well in school. He only had one date in high school and had no intimate contact with women until he was in his twenties (Mindess, 1988). Rogers entered the university at age 17 and majored in scientific agriculture. Regarding his inner life during his teenage years, Rogers wrote "My fantasies during this period were definitely bizarre, and probably would be classed as schizoid by a diagnostician, but fortunately I never came in contact with a psychologist" (Rogers, 1980, p. 30).

In college Rogers became active in the Christian youth movement, and at 19 he spent six months in China as a delegate to the World Student Christian Federation Conference. The experience opened his mind to cultural diversity and liberalized his religious views. He decided that Christ was not a deity but a man (Mindess, 1988). Rogers retained his parents' moral values but rejected their repression and judgmental outlook. When he returned from China Rogers married Helen Elliot and they moved to New York, where Carl attended Union Theological Seminary and later Columbia Teachers College. In 1928 they moved to Rochester and Carl began his career as a psychologist (Mindess, 1988).

Kirschenbaum's 2007 biography of Rogers revealed many aspects of his life that were not previously well known. For example, in the 1950s Rogers worked with the U. S. Central Intelligence Agency on various secret projects. He was given information on Soviet Premier Nikita Krushchev and asked to analyze his personality and recommend how to deal with him. He also consulted on research on psychological methods to influence human behavior. As a patriotic American, Rogers saw no reason not to help the CIA, and psychiatrist Martin Orne and psychologist B. F. Skinner also consulted with the CIA. One of the Agency projects under Rogers' purview, MKULTRA, was meant to study how people can be influenced and controlled, so that soldiers could be trained to resist brainwashing. It included studies of Communist defectors, the use of prostitutes to blackmail informants, and the use of LSD and other mind-altering drugs for interrogation, persuasion, and mind control. Some of the research participants were not aware they were being experimented upon and did not give informed consent. It is unclear how much Rogers knew about the more ethically dubious projects of MKULTRA. Years later Rogers said that he believed the CIA was doing legitimate research at the time, but that he looked at it differently later (Kirschenbaum, 2007). Given the standards of the time,

Rogers's involvement with the CIA could be seen as honorable, but with hindsight Rogers should have refused to participate in any unethical research practices.

Revelations about Carl Rogers' sex life have surprised some people, perhaps due to the contrast with his fatherly image in the "Gloria" film, which is routinely shown in counselor training courses (Shostrum, 1965). While he was apparently faithful to his wife Helen for most of his life, when he got older Rogers experienced a sexual reawakening. At age 75 Rogers wrote that he felt as sexual in his interests as he was at 35, though his ability to perform had declined. In his diary he wrote "I begin to think I have only a few more orgasms left in my life" (Kirschenbaum, 2007, p. 459). Around this time he began having extramarital affairs. Rogers wrote in his diary in 1979 (at the age of 77) that he and his wife had not had sex in nearly ten years. He still felt significant sexual interest (although he suffered from erectile dysfunction) and he engaged in sexually intimate relationships with several women (Kirschenbaum, 2007).

Cohen (1997) based much of his biography of Rogers on unpublished notes, letters, and essays that Rogers donated to the Library of Congress. These documents provided a wealth of information about Rogers' intimate relationships (and of course Rogers knew these materials would eventually become public). On some level Rogers must have wanted his legacy to include a full picture of his personal life.

Rogers wrote about his romantic and sexual reawakening in his diary. In his 70s he fell deeply in love with a married woman in her thirties named Bernice who was a participant in one of his therapy groups. They embraced soon after meeting and met later in Rogers' hotel room, where he tried to seduce her; "I told her I'd like to share my crazy fantasies about her and I did" (Cohen, 1997, p. 210). They embraced and kissed, but Bernice refused sex. A few days later, during a therapy group session, Rogers felt depressed and wept, and Bernice sat by him and held his arm while he held her bare leg. Rogers experienced extreme emotional ups and downs in this relationship, and he realized he needed counseling, but he put off seeking help. Finally he took a Valium and a drink of vodka and went to see a counselor. He wrote "I feel deprived of all the sexual relationships I might have had outside of marriage" (Cohen, 1997, p. 214). Rogers met with Bernice many times and they were emotionally close, but she never agreed to have a sexual relationship with him. During the four years of this relationship Rogers gave Bernice \$5,500 worth of checks as gifts (Cohen, 1997).

Rogers talked to his wife Helen about his attraction to other women, and he also talked in his workshop groups about the dilemma of whether to have affairs. Eventually his wife said she would allow him to have his sexual affairs, and Rogers felt less guilty. After Helen died, Rogers developed loving, sexual relationships with three women and maintained all three relationships simultaneously for the next several years, and also had a few other brief passionate liaisons (Kirschenbaum, 2007). Rogers wrote in his notes that although he was not interested in getting married again, he did want a loving sexual relationship with a younger woman (Cohen, 1997).

Perhaps Rogers' involvement in such relationships should not be too surprising, considering his interest in alternatives to marriage which he explored in his book *Becoming Partners* (1972). In this book Rogers argued that we should have the freedom to be experimental in partnerships, including engaging "in practices which federal, state, or local laws would class as illegal" (p. 213). He wrote that we should relieve alternative types of sexual partnerships of "moral reproach and criminal action" (p. 214). He said

the old fashioned names for these practices (including adultery, fornication, lewd and lascivious conduct, homosexuality, and soliciting) “are, frankly, ridiculous” (p. 214).

Rogers’ book *Becoming Partners* (1972) is also notable because in it Rogers violated the confidentiality of his daughter Natalie and her husband Larry. He wrote about their marriage in the book and included confidential details without their permission. In the book he called them Jennifer and Jay, but they and their friends recognized them easily in Rogers’ detailed description, and were shocked and furious; Rogers apparently never responded to their request for an explanation of the breach of confidentiality (Cohen, 1997).

Biographical research by Kirschenbaum (2007) has revealed that Rogers had a serious alcohol use disorder. He used alcohol to help him relax in social settings, usually drank in private, and the public was unaware of the problem, although his son later said that Rogers had many of the classic signs of alcohol dependency. Rogers admitted that he usually had eight to ten drinks per day, and eventually he drank close to a bottle of vodka per day. By the mid-1970s Rogers was alcohol dependent. Rogers’ daughter Natalie often advised him to either control his drinking or check himself into a substance abuse clinic (Cohen, 1997). He recognized that he had a problem, and worked at cutting back on his drinking, but his difficulty with alcohol lasted the rest of his life (Kirschenbaum, 2007).

Although he was an atheist, Rogers had some interest in the paranormal. In 1977 he traveled to Brazil to conduct workshops, and while there he visited several Brazilian spiritualists, psychics, and clairvoyants. He was interested in these experiences, although he did not feel they actually proved anything about the paranormal. In his 1980 book *A Way of Being* Rogers wrote about his interest in psychic phenomena such as precognition, clairvoyance, human auras, and out-of-the-body experiences. He was impressed by anecdotal reports of reincarnation and life after death. In the months prior to his wife Helen’s death in 1979, “she and I visited a thoroughly honest medium. There, Helen experienced, and I observed, a ‘contact’ with her deceased sister, involving facts that she could not possibly have known. The messages . . . came through the tipping of a sturdy table, tapping out letters . . . I could only be open to an incredible, and certainly non-fraudulent experience” (Rogers, 1980, p. 90).

In addition to his sessions with mediums at their home, Rogers and his wife also had Ouija board sessions with a psychic. In one séance the medium appeared to channel Carl Jung, who told Rogers that he worried too much about Helen and after she died he would be free to finish his mission for humanity (Kirschenbaum, 2007). After Helen died in 1979, her friends had a séance with the same medium, and they supposedly contacted Helen in the afterlife, who answered many questions and reported that her dying had been peaceful and without pain (Rogers, 1980, p. 91). These experiences left Rogers with an interest in paranormal phenomena and the belief that humans may have a spiritual essence that survives death and sometimes incarnates in a human body.

Rogers’ interest in the paranormal and his involvement with psychics and mediums disappointed some of his associates. According to Kirschenbaum (2007), Richard Farson thought that Rogers was gullible and gave New Age gurus too much credit, but Rogers’ daughter Natalie described him as skeptical but interested and open to new experiences. Although toward the end of his life Rogers felt more open toward the idea that people may have a spiritual essence, he never had a classic religious experience,

he never said he believed in a God, and he said that religions were more divisive than helpful (Kirschenbaum, 2007).

Rogers wrote about his mismanagement of a young female client he saw in therapy in Chicago who he described as borderline psychotic, on the edge of schizophrenia (Rogers & Russell, 2002). He said she pushed his buttons, and he became convinced that she was making him psychotic. She felt that two or three sessions of therapy per week were not enough, and she began going to his house in the mornings to sit on his doorstep. She demanded warmth and acceptance and became hostile if Rogers seemed less than fully accepting. Rogers wrote “I handled her badly” and her intense hostility “completely pierced my defenses . . . . I recognized that many of her insights were sounder than mine . . . . Gradually I realized I was on the edge of a complete breakdown myself . . . . I had to escape” (Rogers, 1967, p. 367). He asked a colleague to take over the client on an hour’s notice. “She, within moments, burst into a full blown psychosis, with many delusions and hallucinations . . . . I went home and told Helen that I must get away, at once. We were on the road within an hour and stayed away two or three months . . . on our ‘runaway trip’” (Rogers, 1967, p. 367). Rogers and his wife escaped to a cabin an hour from the city, where they remained in semi-seclusion. He had intended to seek therapy for himself immediately, but he felt better when he was out of town. When he returned to Chicago he entered psychotherapy with Nathaniel Raskin (Milton, 2002). Rogers’ family considered this episode a serious nervous breakdown (Cohen, 1997).

Rogers described another incident with a client that would probably strike contemporary psychotherapists as unusual. In a session with a female client who was very distressed he asked if she would like to hold his hands. “She said, yes. And then, as she began to kind of sob and was shaking all over, it seemed to me she was acting very much like an infant, so I said ‘Would you like to sit on my lap?’ And she said ‘No, I don’t think so.’” And that was fine with Rogers (Rogers & Russell, 2002, p. 282). It is difficult to imagine a psychotherapist doing this today, but apparently it did not seem improper to Rogers at the time.

Carl Rogers believed that to become self-actualized one must strip away the false fronts used to present oneself to the world and become one’s true self. The mask of the persona must be discarded in the interest of truth. “Neither the Bible nor the prophets – neither Freud nor research – neither the revelations of God nor man – can take precedence over my own direct experience” (Rogers, 1961, p. 24). In his published and unpublished writings Rogers revealed himself, faults and all. His determination to figure out his own philosophy of life and make a difference by helping shape the field of psychotherapy is admirable. His positive contributions are not diminished by his failings.

### **Fritz Perls**

Fritz Perls, one of the founders of Gestalt Therapy, had one of the most colorful personalities of all the great psychotherapists. In addition to his theoretical wisdom, dramatic therapeutic skills, and personal charisma, he was known for sometimes outrageous personal behavior. Perls’ theory of how to do psychotherapy was a direct outgrowth of his own personality; for example, he enjoyed the reactions he got when he was socially inappropriate, and he used radical honesty as a therapeutic technique to wake people up to what they were doing (Gaines, 1979).

Perls valued being open, honest, and direct, both in his personal life and in his approach to psychotherapy. He admitted that he was often confrontational and even obnoxious in his social interactions. For example, he told a woman who attended one of his workshops “With most people during long workshops, I like them more and more. You I like less and less” (Gaines, 1979, p. 306). He could be brutal, but he saw his directness as an essential part of his personal and professional style.

It would be easy to accuse Perls of having misogynistic attitudes. In his autobiography (Perls, 1969) he described many examples of how he reacted spontaneously to clients in therapy depending on what he felt they needed. For example, there was a woman in a therapy group who was being physically aggressive. She charged Perls and nearly knocked him over. He wrote “Then I let her have it until I had her on the floor” and told her “I’ve beaten up more than one bitch in my life” (Perls, 1969, p. 94). Perls wrote “And there are thousands of women like her in the States. Provoking and tantalizing, bitching, irritating their husbands and never getting their spanking” (Perls, 1969, p. 94). With another female client, he felt she was taking out her aggression on herself, so he told her to choke him instead. She “meant business” and choked him so hard he almost lost consciousness before he could break free (Perls, 1969, p. 95).

Perls was very open about his frequent use of psychoactive drugs such as LSD; after his first LSD trip he said “I’m certainly a lot more crazy than I imagined” (as cited in Shepard, 1975, p. 89). In 1959, prior to the rise of the psychedelic movement, Perls used Sandoz LSD on a weekly basis (Shepard, 1975, p. 89). It should be noted that LSD did not become a legally controlled substance until 1966 (Padwa & Cunningham, 2010).

Perls had a high opinion of his own significance as a theorist and psychotherapist. He compared himself to Freud, and stated that Gestalt Therapy would save mankind. His autobiography (1969) states “The crazy Fritz Perls is becoming one of the heroes in the history of science” (n.p.) and “I believe that I am the best therapist for any type of neurosis in the States, maybe the world” (n.p.). Perls took on the persona of a guru; he had a long white beard and hair and wore beads, sandals, and flowing robes when he lived at Esalen Institute in Big Sur in the 1960s. He conducted numerous therapy groups and training workshops. Some Hollywood people, such as Jennifer Jones, were attracted to the new human potential movement and drove up the coast to Esalen to experience encounter groups and gestalt therapy. Jones held a party at her Hollywood home in 1966 that was attended by Rock Hudson, Glenn Ford, James Coburn, Shirley MacLaine, Natalie Wood, and Dennis Hopper, among many others (Kripal, 2007). Carl Rogers and Fritz Perls also attended the party, and Rogers showed a film on encounter groups and offered to lead a group right there. At the same time Fritz Perls was outside by the pool conducting a gestalt session with actress Natalie Wood. At one point Perls told her “You’re nothing but a spoiled brat” and he bent her over his knee and spanked her. She escaped his grasp and left the party. Actress Tuesday Weld sat in the hot seat next, but also got offended and stormed out (Kripal, 2007).

Perls was well known for his lack of sexual inhibitions. Shepard’s (1975) biography provided several examples. Once, when sharing his doubts about his masculinity with his therapy supervisor, the supervisor finally said “Well take out your penis. Let’s have a look at the thing” (p. 38). Perls did, and they talked about its size and decided it was adequate, putting Perls’ concern to rest. Later in his career Perls challenged conventional expectations about therapeutic boundaries, including the taboo

against sexual intimacy with clients. He wrote that when he comforted a female client in distress, sometimes he would fondle her hips and breasts (Perls, 1969). He described himself as a polymorphous pervert; he enjoyed seducing women, but often women would seduce him. In the late 1960s he wrote “I like my reputation as being both a dirty old man and a guru. Unfortunately the first is on the wane and the second ascending (Perls, 1969, n.p.).

When Perls was 65, he fell in love with one of his married clients, Marty Fromm. He usually gave her a friendly kiss at the end of each session, but one time the kiss became erotic. She got angry and told him “I need a therapist, not a lover, and she left the room (Shepard, 1975, p. 82). However, a few sessions later they became lovers. Her therapy sessions continued (paid for by her husband) and she even began cooking for Perls and doing his laundry (Shepard, 1975). Perls’ behaviors in both his personal life and his therapy challenge conventional expectations about appropriate behavior. Yet he is generally considered one of the patriarchs of psychotherapy (Corsini & Wedding, 2008).

### Albert Ellis

Albert Ellis was one of the most famous and provocative of all psychotherapists. His model (Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy) was developed independently from the Cognitive Therapy model of Aaron Beck (Ellis, 2010). These and related models, known today generally as cognitive behavior therapy, are the most widely practiced forms of psychotherapy (Messer & Gurman, 2011). Ellis claimed to have seen more clients than almost any other therapist in the world (Ellis, 2010). Norcross (2010) described Ellis as one of the most influential and controversial psychotherapists in history, and stated that Ellis’s innovations will outlive him for centuries.

Dobkin (2005) noted that while Ellis was an undisputed giant of twentieth-century psychology, he could “also seem like the kind of shrink who confirms nonbelievers’ worst suspicions about therapy: “Wait a minute, that guy’s crazier than I am” (para. 6). Ellis died in 2007 at age 93, but his autobiography was published in 2010 (Ellis, 2010). Norcross (2010) described Ellis’s autobiography as a provocative, uncensored, R-rated romp laced with expletives, shocking revelations, and unpleasant truths, and noted that some of the stories in the book may shock some readers.

Ellis was very frank about his high sex drive, and he had no interest in monogamy; he wrote books with the titles *The Case for Promiscuity*; *Sex Without Guilt*; *Nymphomania*; and *Women: How to Handle Them* (Ellis, 2010). Ellis wrote that he was addicted to frotteurism beginning at age 15; he “sought out crowded trains, standing room in the back of movie theaters, crowded elevators, and other places where I could rub my midsection against women’s backsides and hips and soon get delicious orgasms . . . . Over the years, until I had ‘regular’ sex with consenting partners, I had hundreds of frotteur-incited sex adventures” (Ellis, 2004, p. 126-7). Ellis considered himself one of the most active frotteurs in New York City (Ellis, 2010). “Did I commit any ‘really’ immoral sex acts? To be honest, I certainly did. A few? No, many. In fact, hundreds” (Ellis, 2010, p. 302).

To his credit, Ellis did feel some shame regarding his illicit sexual activity. Late in his life he wrote “I am now, when I think about it, guilty about my acts. I have remorse for what I did . . . . I deplore the sin and accept the sinner” (Ellis, 2010, p. 303). “I knew that frotteurism was wrong – that it is sometimes nonconsenting” but “Subway sex was

the cheapest and easiest sex I ever had, and I continued it into my twenties . . . . But in some ways it was great: no fuss, no obligations, no time wasted, no having to put up with the inane conversation of most women, no pregnancy, no disease, no boredom” (Ellis, 2004, p. 127). Ellis confessed that he often enjoyed sexual fantasy and brief encounters more than mature relationships with women; he lamented that after a one-night stand, a woman could become a problem, “especially if she was stupid, drunk, or boring” (Ellis, 2010, p. 298). He praised his last wife, Debbie Joffe, for her beauty and sexiness, adding “And she doesn’t need to talk for hours after lovemaking!” (Ellis, 2010, p. 301).

Regarding his intense interest in sex, Ellis told an interviewer “I frankly acknowledge that I am a heterosexual ‘pervert’ . . . . Technically, you could say that I am fixated upon or fetishistically attracted to the younger females” (Krassner, 1999, p. 33). At times, Ellis may be seen as providing too much information, but his over-sharing was part of his personality. In his autobiography, Ellis described the details of his sex life with dozens of women. It may be difficult for the reader not to cringe while reading his (not particularly well-written) graphic and explicit descriptions of, for example, having sex with three women in a single day. Also, it is questionable whether readers need to know that he named his penis “Oscar.” Ellis (2010) described eight different methods he used to prolong intercourse and delay ejaculation, including using two prophylactics to deaden sensations and thinking unsexy thoughts about politics or psychotherapy.

Ellis enjoyed discussing what he considered to be irrational ideas about sex. For example, he said “In terms of being a taboo, incest is just as nonsensical as any other taboo” (Krassner, 1999, p. 31). When asked by an interviewer if he would have sex with his own sister if they were marooned on a desert island, Ellis said “I would almost certainly copulate with my sister and let the chips fall where they may . . . . under the hypothetical conditions you give, why not?” (Krassner, 1999, p. 33). He added that he would not advise anyone to commit incest because of the practical disadvantages, and said that his behavior in the desert island scenario would be different if there were other females available or if there were any risk of legal consequences.

Ellis deliberately fathered three children with his ex-wife, Karyl, while she was married to another man, who never knew he was not the father of the children; Ellis confessed that he ignored and neglected the children for many years (Ellis, 2010). Ellis has also admitted to having sex with some of his female patients, although only after treatment had ended (Dobkin, 2005).

The danger of Ellis’ openness about his personal life is that, as Norcross (2010, n.p.) wrote about his autobiography, “Psychotherapy clients and the public are likely to be engaged but, unfortunately, may come away with a strengthened perception of psychologists as sex-obsessed crackpots.” It would be easy to condemn Ellis for his misbehaviors, or to describe him as narcissistic or misogynistic, but perhaps he should be admired for being more honest and open about his foibles than most people. As his autobiography makes clear, Ellis was, at the same time, a fallible human being and a creative pioneer of new and effective psychotherapy techniques. It is remarkable that the man who had such obvious personal issues was also one of the greatest innovators in the history of psychotherapy.

### Milton H. Erickson

Milton Erickson was known for being a master hypnotherapist and the father of brief strategic approaches to psychotherapy (Masson, 1988). Although Erickson's therapeutic methods were not studied in research contexts, many of his case studies were collected and described in books (Haley, 1986; Rosen, 1982) and have been very influential. Today the Milton H. Erickson Foundation publishes his books, sponsors training workshops and the Evolution of Psychotherapy conference, and has transformed Erickson's Phoenix home into a museum. The process of turning Erickson into an icon of psychotherapy has been accomplished.

Various criticisms have been leveled at Erickson regarding his way of doing psychotherapy and his attitudes toward women. He often used his charisma and his immense skills at influencing clients to direct them to change. He was the first major therapist to propose that responsibility for therapeutic change lies with the therapist, rather than with the client (Haley, 1985a). He believed that the role of the therapist is to use direct and indirect suggestions and instructions to influence the client to change.

In a case described by Haley (1986), Erickson saw a prudish young woman who was distressed because she considered herself fat and unattractive. He told her that he considered her extremely attractive sexually, and that she would be even more so if she lost some weight. Following this intervention, the woman lost weight and fell in love with an older man. Another female client complained that she had never had a date. Erickson thought she was attractive but poorly dressed and groomed, so he told her he could help her, but she would have to promise to do whatever he asked her to do. After she agreed, he critiqued her weight and appearance in detail and ordered her to clean herself, use makeup, take dance classes, and see a beauty counselor. He told her "you have a pretty patch of fur between your legs. Now go home, undress, get in the nude, stand in front of a mirror, and you will see the three beautiful badges of womanhood. . . you cannot forget them ever again" (Haley, 1986, p. 93). According to the case report, the woman improved her appearance and within a year she got married.

Haley (1985b; 1986) described a similar case. One of Erickson's clients was a shy girl who had many fears and inhibitions. She knew a boy she wanted to marry, but was afraid to travel to visit him. One of Erickson's interventions was to tell her to bring the shortest pair of short-shorts imaginable to her next therapy session. He told her she could either wear them to the session or she could undress and put them on in his presence. She wore them to the office. Next he told her that he would discuss sex with her, and if she did not listen she would have to take her shorts off and put them back on in his presence. In a subsequent session he directed her to confront her sexual fears by undressing in front of him: "I had her show me her right breast, her left breast, her right nipple, her left nipple. Her belly button. Her genital area. . . . I had her turn around slowly. She dressed. I dismissed her" (Haley, 1985b, p. 128). This was meant to make her more comfortable with her body and the idea of sex. After she was able to travel, wear shorts, undress in front of him, and talk about sex, he ordered her to get married within the next two weeks. As usual, the story had a happy ending.

In another case (Haley, 1986), a female client went to see Erickson because she scratched her breasts and stomach until they bled for no apparent reason. Erickson told her that he could cure her in less than thirty seconds. He told her that the next time she wanted to scratch her nipples she should come to his office, expose her breasts, and

scratch them in front of him. According to Erickson, the woman said she would never do it again, and was cured instantly (Haley, 1986). O'Hanlon (1999) noted that Erickson often told female clients to expose their bodies to him as part of treatment, but he never reported having male clients do the same thing.

Many of Erickson's stories about his cases read like fairy tales in which an ugly duckling is transformed into a beautiful princess in a single interview (Masson, 1988). One objection to the stories is that they cannot be documented or verified. Readers are justifiably skeptical about anecdotal reports of rapid cures of mental disorders, especially when there is no mention of follow-up. For example, Erickson reported a case where he cured an inhibited woman of social phobia simply by telling her once "Get off the pot, or shit" (Zeig, 1985, p. 141). In another case he saw a couple who had quarreled every day of their married life. According to Erickson, after he told them "Haven't you had enough of quarreling? Why not start enjoying life?" they "had a very pleasant life" (Rosen, 1982, p. 55).

Common criticisms of Erickson's approach are that it is difficult to learn, there are no clear treatment guides, there is little research to support it, the techniques are superficial, and the approach is too authoritative and directive (Lankton, 1990). Clients are often deceived about the process of therapy, and they are not able to give informed consent to therapy (Eisner, 2000). Even Erickson's supporters admit the potential ethical concerns about the degree to which the approach is manipulative, but they reply that all therapists are manipulative to some degree, and that clients come to therapy wanting to be manipulated to change their problematic behavior (Zeig & Munion, 1999).

While Erickson's approach to psychotherapy is intriguing and has been very influential, it may well be that the successes he had with clients were due to his interpersonal style, his personality, and his rapport and charisma rather than his therapeutic techniques and interventions. Like some other great psychotherapists, it may be that he was pretty much the only person who could be successful using his methods. In addition, ethical concerns about the manipulative nature of his approach and his improprieties with female clients suggest that some of his therapeutic techniques should be avoided.

### **Conclusions**

Given the space constraints of an article, it is only possible to describe a few aspects of the lives of a few of the great psychotherapists. Fortunately there are good biographies of all of the great psychotherapists, and some of them also wrote their autobiographies. Reading these books can put flesh and blood on the dry bones of theory.

Some of the great psychotherapists preferred not to talk about their personal lives very much, but others were very open about their less than desirable traits and failings. Those described in this article placed a high value on honesty and transparency in communication, and sometimes revealed things that could put them in a bad light. For example, Carl Rogers left 140 boxes of his papers to the Library of Congress, knowing that biographers would read them and write about his failures and conflicts (Cohen, 1997). Perhaps contemporary psychotherapists should admire the great psychotherapists for their forthrightness rather than condemn them for their all-too-human failings.

According to Mindess (1988), putting all our faith in the guidance of the great psychotherapists is chasing a mirage. Of course we can learn from them, but in the end

we must find our own solutions. An attitude of respectful skepticism will enable us to consider their suggestions while realizing that their truths may work for them, but not necessarily for us. The great theorists challenge us to create our own identities and our own approaches to psychotherapy. When Carl Rogers was asked about his many followers who call themselves “Rogerians,” he said “I really feel sorry for them . . . I try very hard not to develop disciples, but I can’t control them” (Mindess, 1988, p. 129).

Jung’s insight that it is necessary to integrate the shadow side of oneself into consciousness is relevant to the study of the lives of the great psychologists. The ego and the shadow come from the same source and balance each other; “to make light is to make shadow; one cannot exist without the other” (Johnson, 1991, p. 17). This paradox is embodied in the title of this article: these psychotherapists were great, and they each also had a shadow. It could not be otherwise, since all humans have a shadow. The fact that they were not perfect should not lessen the significance of their contributions to psychotherapy. Rather, our appreciation of these men and their ideas is deepened when we understand that they were not deities, but human beings.

In the long span of history, these therapists will be remembered for their contributions rather than their personal quirks or odd beliefs. Even so, a study of the shadow sides of the great psychotherapists gives us a more well-rounded understanding of their personalities, their lives, and their work. An understanding of the personal challenges they faced also illustrates the need for all counselors and psychotherapists to experience their own psychotherapy. This is the best way to learn how to acknowledge and deal with one’s shadow side rather than repress it. Psychotherapy should be a part of every counselor’s and therapist’s personal wellness plan.

#### References

- Bair, D. (2003). *Jung*. New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company.
- Carey, B. (2008, May 27). Lotus therapy. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/27/health/research/27budd.html?gwh=D6B318E86D3F9E635A5098A75DA4D95E&gwt=pay>
- Cohen, D. (1997). *Carl Rogers: A critical biography*. London, UK: Constable.
- Cook, J. M., Biyanova, T., & Coyne, J. C. (2009). Influential psychotherapy figures, authors, and books: An internet survey of over 2,000 psychotherapists. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 46(1), 42-51.
- Corsini, R. J. & Wedding, D. (2008). *Current psychotherapies* (8<sup>th</sup> edition). Belmont, CA: Thomson.
- Cummings, N. A. & O’Donohue, W. T. (2008). *Eleven blunders that cripple psychotherapy in America*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Dobkin, M. (2005, October 31). Behaviorists behaving badly. *New York*, 38. Retrieved from <http://nymag.com/print/?/nymetro/news/people/features/14947/indexx2.html>
- Eisner, D. A. (2000). *The death of psychotherapy*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Ellis, A. (2004). *Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy: It works for me – it can work for you*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Ellis, A. (2010). *All Out!* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Ferris, P. (1997). *Dr. Freud*. Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint.
- Gaines, J. (1979). *Fritz Perls here and now*. Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts.
- Gay, P. (1988). *Freud*. New York, NY: W. W Norton.

- Haley, J. (Ed.) (1985a). *Conversations with Milton H. Erickson, M.D.: Vol. 1*. New York, NY: Triangle Press.
- Haley, J. (Ed.) (1985b). *Conversations with Milton H. Erickson, M.D.: Vol. 2*. New York, NY: Triangle Press.
- Haley, J. (1986). *Uncommon therapy*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Johnson, R. A. (1991). *Owning your own shadow*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Jung, C. G. (1973). *Memories, dreams, reflections*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Kirschenbaum, H. (2007). *The life and work of Carl Rogers*. Ross-on-Wye, United Kingdom: PCCS Books.
- Kopp, S. (1982). *If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him!* New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Krassner, P. (1999). *Paul Krassner's impolite interviews*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.
- Kripal, J. J. (2007). *Esalen*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lankton, S. R. (1990). Ericksonian strategic therapy. In J. K. Zeig & W. M. Munion (Eds.), *What is psychotherapy* (pp. 363-371). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Masson, J. M. (1988). *Against therapy*. New York: Atheneum.
- Messer, S. B. & Gurman, A. S. (2011). *Essential psychotherapies*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Milton, J. (2002). *The road to malpsychia*. San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books.
- Mindess, H. (1988). *Makers of psychology*. New York: Insight Books.
- Norcross, J. C. (2010). All AI Ellis!. *PsycCRITIQUES*, 55(38), np. DOI: 10.1037/a0023814
- O'Hanlon, W. (1999). Not strategic, not systemic. In S. O'Hanlon & B. Bartolino (Eds.), *Evolving possibilities* (pp. 45-49). New York: Routledge.
- Padwa, H. & Cunningham, J. *Addiction: A reference encyclopedia*. Goleta, CA: ABC-CLIO.
- Perls, F. S. (1969). *In and out the garbage pail*. Lafayette, CA: Real People Press.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Rogers, C. R. (1967). Carl R. Rogers. In E. G. Boring & G. Lindey (Eds.), *A history of psychology in autobiography, Vol. V* (pp. 343-384). New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Rogers, C. R. (1972). *Becoming partners*. New York, NY: Delacorte.
- Rogers, C. R. (1980). *A way of being*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Rogers, C. R. & Russell, D. E. (2002). *Carl Rogers: The quiet revolutionary*. Roseville, CA: Penmarin Books.
- Rosen, S. (Ed.). (1982). *My voice will go with you*. New York, NY: Norton.
- Shepard, M. (1975). *Fritz*. New York, NY: Dutton.
- Shostrum, E. L. (Producer). (1965). *Three approaches to psychotherapy, Series I* [Motion picture]. Available from Psychological & Educational Films, 3334 East Coast Highway #252, Corona Del Mar, CA 92625.
- Zeig, J. K. (1985). *Experiencing Erickson*. New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.
- Zeig, J. K. & Munion, W. M. (1999). *Milton H. Erickson*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.