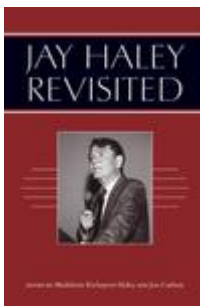


The Irony of Innovation

A review of



Jay Haley Revisited

by Jay Haley (Madeleine Richeport-Haley and Jon Carlson, Eds.)

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Reviewed by

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Jay Haley Revisited is a posthumous “highlight reel” featuring 20 of Haley’s original writings, each introduced by a renowned psychotherapist, including Les Greenberg, Jay Lebow, Braulio Montalvo, Michael Nichols, Carlos Sluzki, and Len Sperry. Each essay demonstrates well Haley’s perceptiveness, sardonic wit, and visionary perspective as architect of the brief strategic approach to individual and family psychotherapy.

Rereading some of those essays was like travelling back in time to those halcyon days of yore, when we knew we were right, because we knew who our enemy was—The Man. Like Kesey (1962) in *One Flew Over the Cuckoos Nest*, Haley provided a powerful voice that was in contrast to the more dogmatic perspectives of the day.

Reminiscence is not the only personal debt I owe Jay Haley. Although my original motivation for becoming a psychotherapist came from a fortuitous meeting with Viktor Frankl in 1960, my training in psychotherapy had been of the two rival orthodoxies of the

day: psychoanalysis and behavior therapy. My first exposure to Jay Haley came in the mid 1960s, when I came across his 1963 *Strategies of Psychotherapy*.

I still own that green-colored Grune and Stratton edition. The hardback book cover could accurately be described as dog-eared, for being reread so many times. Soon thereafter, I read with relish Haley's *Power Tactics of Jesus Christ and Other Essays* (1886) and *Uncommon Therapy* (1973). In fact, the latter led to my personal pilgrimage to meet with Milton Erickson in the late 1970s.

Given the confining thinking of my prior training, Haley's words and ability to explore psychotherapy from a novel perspective were exhilarating and scope broadening. Of course, it didn't hurt that he was taking a rebellious stance during that era of protestation.

Style and Message

Each essay illuminates his beliefs that therapy should be directive, brief, and problem oriented. Haley described sardonically what he called the "art" of other psychotherapeutic methods such as psychoanalysis (Chapter 1), nondirective therapy (Chapter 4), and supervision (Chapter 14). He also mocked the family therapy methods, teaching (Chapter 7), and supervision of his day. One of my personal favorites is Chapter 5, "How to Have an Awful Marriage," in which he gives expert advice guaranteed to mess up any relationship.

By contrast, Haley's essays praise deeply the hypnotic work of Milton Erickson and the potential for Zen in therapy. A final essay is his "Loyal Opposition" keynote address at the 1999 Erickson Conference, which may well serve as his personal professional epitaph.

Through all his tongue-in-cheek denigration of what he saw as the therapeutic establishment, he offered contrary views, refocusing the way power issues in a family were perceived—away from political correctness and toward a more comprehensive interpersonal contextual view. Indeed, two of his most significant contributions to the field were his focus on the context within which behavior in general, and psychotherapy in particular, occur and the belief that small changes that occur in a system such as a family will reverberate throughout the entire system. He preferred to view symptoms and presenting complaints as functional components of a system. Changes in the consequences to these symptoms are the preferred mode of effective relief.

It is essential to realize that the essays in this text show Haley as very much a product of and a leader in his time. Haley was able to capture in psychotherapy and family therapy some of the antiestablishment ambiance of the late 1960s. By focusing sarcastically on how to fail, he elucidated what was to him a better way to engage in effective psychotherapy: brief, problem solving, present focused, and aligned with the presenting complaint. Haley's effective therapist was directive and was the locus of change for the client's problems.

Emulating Erickson, he also relished assigning consensual ordeals to foster alterations in behavior.

Outside In

The text demonstrates clearly how Haley ironically became a consummate insider. He savored the role of interloper, holding no mental health degrees, save honorary ones, and parlayed that “uncorrupted-naïve” outsider perspective into a genre-changing family therapy methodology. As many of the experts in *Jay Haley Revisited* justifiably point out, his witty, blistering critiques of the therapeutic establishment were influential in altering the way in which therapy was viewed.

Yet, as his critical work evolved, he became a therapist and clinic director offering family systems therapy. His approach and its derivatives have influenced somewhat the way psychotherapists now operate. Many modern practitioners owe a debt to this revolutionary creator who was an influential innovator for more than a half century. This evolution is expressed both directly and inferentially from the eloquent introduction to each essay. Several of these current experts had the unique opportunity to work directly with him as a colleague or trainee.

In part because of his innovation and success, the value of *Jay Haley Revisited* is somewhat limited. Haley’s influence on contextual cues and problem solving is so ubiquitous today that students may find it hard to appreciate why he is so adamant and critical. His creative process, especially in a supervisory role, and his ability to celebrate Erickson’s innovations, especially the sense of the positive nature of the unconscious, are major contributions.

Haley loved creative solutions, paradoxical intent, innovation, and contextual process, yet all were to be delivered within a singular framework. When he posited that all patients have a problem to be alleviated in as short a time as possible, he became subject to the same criticism he often leveled. Among the contributors, Lebow and Sperry address this irony.

The Critic

Characteristically, the revolutionary shakes the foundation of the establishment but doesn’t necessarily build a new architecture. In this volume, we can see glimmerings of how Haley was not simply critical but the purveyor of a new model of psychotherapy. Of course, any novel approach that arises from the ashes of its predecessor risks becoming the enemy it had just defeated—a new dogma.

As described in his essays, the orthodoxy of the analytic establishment in the middle of the 20th century had institutionalized Freud's amazing innovations and evolving theory, apropos of pre-WWI European society, into a set of dogmatic rules. Haley warned that it was a mistake or even an ethical failing to assume that any client was a potential analysand, needing years of past-focused, insight-oriented work that required the processing of fantasy material and accessing of the unconscious in order to resolve inner conflicts.

Psychoanalysis was not alone in coming under his scorn. When it came to traditional forms of psychotherapy, Jay Haley was an iconoclast. Yet, like those he was calling into question, he, too, promoted a unitary solution for all patient needs. As experienced clinicians have long known, there is little uniformity in why clients come to therapy. Indeed, some seek rapid problem solutions—especially those dependent on third-party payers or who are limited as to number of sessions.

However, there is little doubt that some clients come into psychotherapy to find insight over time and others come to the therapist as “wise elder” to develop a process for reexamining their life without a particular preset change in mind. Finally, there are those who want an experienced partner to help them face real existential questions related to stages and events in life. Indeed, as I (Shapiro, 1986) have elaborated elsewhere, clients, like therapists, have personal theories of change.

Critiquing the Critic

Because 90 percent of the text consists of Haley's own words, it seems relevant and mandatory to evaluate how the work holds up today. Of course, it's somewhat inappropriate to be retroactively critical of work that was important in its own day. Freud's work was more right about his Victorian era at the time than it is today. We couldn't expect William James (1890) to mention the personal computer, meta-analyses, or the influence of the new media on adolescents in his classic *Principles of Psychology*. Even Newtonian theories on gravity have been revised by modern particle physics.

Rather than judge them for failing to address matters that were not present in their day, we have to examine their work within its original context and appreciate the wonderful intellect-advancing contributions they made. Indeed, Haley's body of work must be judged for its heuristics rather than for any subsequently discredited assertions, such as the double-bind theory of schizophrenia or the failure to recognize that paradoxical intention is effective only when one is dealing with client resistance, something Frankl and Erickson knew intuitively and Haley tried to codify without utilizing that construct.

The essays in this book illustrate some of the innovative ideas and novel hypotheses about individual and family therapy that have been so influential. They also underscore that Haley may be revisited effectively many times over.

However, given the emphasis on creativity and uniqueness in problem solving he cherished, I have to wonder what he would have to say about the current obsession with manualized and acronym-supported “evidence” treatments (DBT, EMDR, EST, EBT, EVT, etc.) that evolved partially out of some of his ideas. Haley’s approach demanded keen observation and understanding of the complexity of communication between therapist and client—hardly something that would be available in a manual.

Summary

According to the publisher, *Jay Haley Revisited* brings together some of the most influential professionals who introduce, analyze, and put into context some of the most interesting and significant papers Jay Haley produced. To a large extent, they are successful.

This is an interesting and enjoyable text for therapists who want to understand better the history of the golden age of family therapy and for those of us who enjoy a nostalgic walk through the evolution of our own consciousness and development as therapists. The writing is both strong and pleasurable. The humor holds up fairly well, even when Haley is attacking what today may have become essentially straw men. By contrast, it is hardly timely for recent licensees and current graduate students, unless the essays can be placed in historical context.

Yet, as much as I enjoyed reading *Jay Haley Revisited*, it left me wanting something more from the contributors. It seems appropriate in exploring the impact of an avowed outsider that the editors allowed contributors considerable freedom. Chapter introductions touch arbitrarily on the author’s personal experience of Haley or his work, offer a reflection of the field as it was in Haley’s day and how he influenced it, and estimate how the work holds up and how Haley’s work offered a springboard to professional work in diverse fields.

As engaging and informative as this smorgasbord of perspectives on Haley’s work is, however, it left me desiring a taste for something more. I was disappointed that some introductions were more tribute than exposition. There are some great minds and wonderful authors in this anthology, and I would have appreciated their perspectives as well as Haley’s.

The collection would be enhanced by an approach in which commentators address in greater detail a set of comparable core questions. How did Haley inform and influence their own work historically and currently? How may their insights inspire their students and current clinicians? How do his approaches influence their theoretical and practical therapeutic work?

Second, the editors begin the book with a very brief paean to Haley but provide no closing or summary remarks. What is the perspective of Richeport-Haley and Carlson on these choice essays and the commentaries? Over the past several years, Carlson has significantly enhanced the field by bringing forth the contributions of many standouts in

psychotherapy through films, conferences, and books. Characteristically, his interviewing expertise and perceptive questioning guide these experts to far greater clarification of their work. This would have been a major contribution here.

What's special in *Jay Haley Revisited* is a poignant understanding of psychotherapy of the times through an invaluable rerelease of 20 of Haley's unique essays. I strongly recommend this book to those in my cohort who were around during the heyday of family therapy in the 1970s. I expect it will both bring pleasure and renew some of the excitement we experienced when there were fewer constrictions and more experimentation with novel approaches to psychotherapy. Just possibly, the spirit of Jay Haley will generate a new round of intellectual and pragmatic creativity.

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