

THE EARLY DAYS: REMEMBERING WILLIAM S. KROGER, M.D.

Michael D. Yapko.

In this year in which we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH), it is appropriate to reflect on how ASCH came to be formed and to remember those who helped give this new organization shape and substance. While the primary catalyst for ASCH's development was Milton H. Erickson, M.D., he did not create the organization entirely on his own. There were other important figures in the fledgling field of hypnosis at the time that also deserve recognition for providing perspective as well as intellectual and material support. In this short article, I will focus on the contributions of one man in particular who played a significant role in the origin and course of ASCH's development. That man was William S. Kroger, M.D., an obstetrician-gynecologist who was widely known and respected for his seminal contributions to the fields of hypnosis and psychosomatic medicine.

In the middle of the last century, the network of qualified professionals who had an active interest in hypnosis was a small one. The earliest advocates of hypnosis included such medical, psychiatric and dental luminaries as William S.

Kroger, Milton H. Erickson, André Weitzenhoffer, Jerome Schneck, Milton V. Kline, John G. Watkins, David Cheek, Jacob H. Conn, Herbert Spiegel, Harold Rosen, Edith Klemperer, Irving I. Secter, and Seymour Hershman. In fact, in 1949 many of these leading figures collaboratively helped organize the first professional hypnosis society, the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis (SCEH). Dr. Kroger was a vital force as a co-founder of SCEH, and remained dedicated to it throughout the remainder of his professional life, often appearing at SCEH annual meetings.

SCEH satisfied the needs of many, but not everyone. There were those who thought that the criteria for membership for SCEH were too restrictive, excluding clinicians who could meaningfully participate in and contribute to the field despite not being researchers or authors. Though he was a member of SCEH, Milton Erickson spearheaded the formation of a new breakaway society that would allow a broader membership and therefore, hopefully, have a greater influence on a variety of professional domains.

Address correspondences and reprint requests to:
Michael D. Yapko, PhD
PO Box 487
Fallbrook, CA 92088-0487
Email: michaelyapko@roadrunner.com

Dr. Erickson's plan to form a new organization was met with strong reactions from the members of SCEH. At what was described by William Kroger's wife, Jimmy (personal communication), as a boisterous meeting in Chicago, arguments were heard and a vote was taken as to whether SCEH would support the formation of a new and obviously competitive society. There were many members who were quite angry about the plan to divide the professional hypnosis community in this way, and it became an issue of loyalty as to who supported who as individuals and who supported what as goals for the organizations and for the field of hypnosis. Political friends and enemies were made that night in Chicago.

When the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH) split off from SCEH in 1957, Dr. Kroger was not exactly pleased, but he accepted the inevitability of differences in peoples' focus and views on requirements for membership amongst professionals. His personal preference was for SCEH remaining the one and only professional hypnosis organization, but he advocated for a gradual loosening of the SCEH restrictions for membership that was in line with Milton Erickson's goals for forming ASCH (Jimmy Kroger, personal communication). It was a diplomatic blending of both views Dr. Kroger attempted to advance in that meeting, but it was a view that obviously did not prevail. Thus, ASCH was born amidst controversy and acrimony. Once the decision to form ASCH was made, Dr. Kroger was enough of a realist to accept the aims and means of ASCH. His pragmatic nature led him to serve as an ASCH co-founder as a result. He supported ASCH, and often served as a faculty member at their meetings as well. In that same year, 1957, Drs. Erickson and Kroger taught hypnosis together in a cruise ship educational seminar. They remained friendly colleagues in the earliest days of ASCH despite their original political differences. Dr. Kroger invariably put the merits of hypnosis well ahead of organizational politics.

Widening the Playing Field

In April, 1955, the British Medical Association (BMA) took the huge step of formally approving

hypnosis as a legitimate treatment for symptoms deemed "neurotic" at the time, as well as for pain associated with surgery and childbirth. The BMA even went so far as to recommend that all physicians and medical students receive some training in hypnosis! Soon after the formation of ASCH, in September, 1958, the American Medical Association also issued a formal statement recognizing the medical benefits of hypnosis and recommending that instruction in the concepts and techniques of hypnosis be included in medical school curricula. This was an extremely important moment for the community of professionals interested in hypnosis, and especially for Dr. Kroger, whose demonstrations of hypnosis for childbirth and surgery were crucial in changing the minds of many physicians previously hostile towards hypnosis. Two such demonstrations, both filmed in the 1950s and thus of great historical value, are featured on the DVD accompanying the recently released 2nd revised edition of Dr. Kroger's classic textbook, *Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 2008). (Another surgery performed under hypnosis by Dr. Kroger was featured in an article called "Hypnosis for Surgery" in *TIME* magazine, December 17, 1956. This article is available online at www.TIME.com.) Filming surgeries involving hypnosis as the sole anesthetic clearly puts one's skills and reputation in harm's way, but Dr. Kroger didn't even flinch. This is the courage of a pioneer on open display.

Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis literally defined and shaped the entire field of hypnosis for more than two decades by serving as the definitive textbook on the subject. Dr. Kroger, through this book and his teaching seminars for ASCH, helped guide the transition of hypnosis as a field from initially being considered sheer nonsense to eventually being a credible and effective means of clinical intervention. Dr. Kroger was indeed a pioneer in his explorations of the relationship between mind and body, emotions and symptoms, attitude and disease, and hypnosis and empowerment. To say he was instrumental in helping develop both direction and focus for the domains of hypnosis and behavioral medicine is an understatement.

A Brief Biography of William Saul Kroger, M.D. (1906-1995)

William S. Kroger, M.D., started life with an adversity: He was born dead and had to be revived. It was an irony in the best sense that the obstetrician who revived him, Dr. Joseph B. DeLee, would later become one of his most esteemed mentors and colleagues. Dr. Kroger was reminded by his mother more than once as a child that it was a physician who saved his life from the start and that being a physician was, in essence, a calling he should listen to. He would eventually not only become a physician, but like Dr. DeLee, an obstetrician/gynecologist with a passion for hypnosis and psychosomatic medicine.

Dr. Kroger went to high school in Evanston, IL, and graduated with the class of 1924. He then went to Northwestern University and received his premedical degree (B.M.) in 1926. He received his medical training at Northwestern Medical School, and obtained his M.D. degree in 1930. He served as an intern/extern at the St. Francis Hospital in Evanston, and completed his residency in obstetrics, gynecology and neuroendocrinology at the Chicago Lying-in-Hospital and Chicago Maternity Center under Dr. DeLee.

Dr. Kroger learned early on that there was much more to medicine than the physical body. He'd already had some formal academic exposure to hypnosis as an undergraduate through Dr. J.B. Morgan, the Chairman of the Psychology Department at Northwestern and the author of a major textbook on abnormal psychology. Well before that, at only age 13, he had been exposed to hypnosis in a dramatic fashion that greatly impressed him. His father, Charles Mendel Kroger, owned a fur store in Evanston. To stimulate business as well as interest in the local business owner's association, his father hired a professional hypnotist as a publicity gimmick. The hypnotist induced hypnosis in his flamboyant female assistant, who was then buried in the ground for two days before being brought out of hypnosis. Dr. Kroger was fascinated by this extraordinary display of dissociation and catalepsy, and promptly began testing out his own hypnotic skills on neighborhood kids! His

recounting of this story in the interview in Appendix A of the revised 2nd edition of *Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis* is an amusing recollection of his highly unusual entrée into the world of hypnosis.

Dr. Kroger's interest in psychosomatic medicine developed along another parallel plane. In 1926, the year he received his B.M. degree, he had taken his fledgling interest in psychoanalysis and furthered it by joining a psychoanalysis study club (which later became the Chicago Institute for Psychoanalysis). He underwent his own formal analysis, and although not a psychiatrist, continued to take coursework and pursue an expertise in analytic concepts and methods under Franz Alexander, a student of Freud's. These experiences served his later work in the domain of psychosomatic medicine well.

By 1937, Dr. Kroger had begun publishing in the area of psychosomatic gynecology, and in 1940 he joined the faculty of the University of Illinois Medical School where he taught courses on hypnosis and psychosomatic medicine. He also opened an office and began seeing patients privately. Apparently the only doctor in the Chicago area using hypnosis in a medical practice, he continued to refine his ideas and methods over the course of the next decade. As he reported it, he was "laughed at, ridiculed, vilified and abused" for his use of hypnosis (see his comments in Appendix A of *Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 2008). At the time, his fellow physicians just didn't tolerate its use very well, and Dr. Kroger was constantly, in his words, "fighting a crowd" in order to prove the merits of hypnosis in medical practice.

In 1950, Dr. Kroger joined the faculty of the Chicago Medical School, where he became an Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology. He also helped establish the Psychosomatic Clinic at Mt. Sinai Hospital in Chicago and became its first Director. To be practicing and teaching hypnosis, psychosomatic medicine, sex therapy and psychiatry in 1950 was far from usual. It was in the next year, though, that Dr. Kroger's work reached a new zenith. From 1941 to 1951, he had been advancing his knowledge of endocrinology and neurobiology and

was deeply influenced by a general systems philosophy. He was able to assimilate a broad array of data and clinical experiences into a textbook he co-authored with Dr. S. Charles Freed called *Psychosomatic Gynecology, Including Problems of Obstetrical Care*. Dr. Kroger, in reviewing his career with me, called *Psychosomatic Gynecology* the “most significant work I ever did.” He was very proud of its multidisciplinary approach, and especially how complete and even visionary the book was in some respects. Many agreed because it was reviewed in major medical journals and hailed as an authoritative text and even an instant classic. The fact that the book included more than a little psychiatry and hypnosis not only didn’t seem off-putting to Dr. Kroger’s medical colleagues, but seemingly had the opposite effect: It argued persuasively that hypnosis appeared to have merit in medical practice.

Ultimately, Dr. Kroger authored 12 books and more than 150 articles. He also wrote many forewords and introductions to other books, including the classic re-issue he made possible in 1957 of James Esdaile’s extraordinary 1850 text, *Mesmerism in India*, which Dr. Kroger re-titled *Hypnosis in Medicine and Surgery*.

Esdaile’s descriptions of more than 2,000 major surgeries (including amputations) done with hypnosis as the only anesthetic (before chemical anesthesia had been invented), is compelling.

From 1960 until he retired in 1994, Dr. Kroger maintained a private clinical practice in Beverly Hills and Palm Springs, California. Palm Springs was also his retirement home.

Dr. Kroger made great contributions to the fields of hypnosis, sexuality, psychosomatic medicine, and obstetrics and gynecology.

Trained in the days before medical specialization, doctors were often remarkably diverse in their range of knowledge and skills, and this was certainly the case with Dr. Kroger. He was fascinated by emerging technologies and their potential contributions to the healing arts. He even authored a piece in 1966 that was well ahead of its time on the subject of biomedical engineering! But, all through his career, there was one aspect of his work that remained constant: His respect and appreciation for the merits of hypnosis. To the community of hypnosis professionals in both SCEH and ASCH, Dr. Kroger will always be considered a visionary and founding father.

REFERENCES

- Kroger, J. (personal communication, December 16, 2007).
 Kroger, W. (2008). *Clinical and experimental hypnosis* (rev. 2nd ed.). Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.