



MILTON ERICKSON AND CLARK HULL AT THE U. OF WISCONSIN MADISON

*Notes taken from "The Letters of Milton H. Erickson",
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Dr. Clark L. Hull was a professor of psychology at U. of Wisconsin, Madison from 1918 to 1928. He first introduced hypnosis to his psychology students in the fall of 1919. One of the students in Hull's class that year was an 18 y/o freshman named Milton H. Erickson, a farm boy from central Wisconsin.

Hull's method for inducing a trance state in his subjects during that first class was to instruct his subjects to sit in a straight-backed chair with their heads leaning back as far as possible. They were then instructed to look at the point of a pencil-like stick, which was held a few inches from the bridge of their nose. He then suggested that his subject's lids would close slowly, to breath deeply and then go sound asleep. Out of six hours work with 10-12 subjects, Hull managed to get one of his subjects named Charles to enter an excellent somnambulistic trance. After class, Erickson invited Charles and another student named George, whom Erickson noticed was very intensely watching Charles during the demonstration, to his room. There he was successful in inducing deep trances in both Charles and George and elicited from them a number of hypnotic phenomena over a period of four hours.

During that same winter and the next spring, Erickson continued to work with anyone and everyone interested in experiencing trance. During all his experiments, Erickson took careful and detailed notes, which he then presented to Hull. Hull's response was to ask Erickson to demonstrate hypnosis by hypnotizing Charles, George and some other students in the presence of all the professors and instructors in the psychology department, the philosophy department and the medical school, along with all their graduate instructors. Hull and his superior Dr. Jastrow, the head of psychology, had thought Erickson had exaggerated his accomplishments during the summer, so they imposed a protocol on Erickson for his demonstration. Erickson was instructed to hypnotize a number of volunteer students and elicit from them the same types of hypnotic behavior he'd claimed he'd elicited with Charles and George.

After Erickson had found a couple of good subjects among the volunteers and had them demonstrate many interested hypnotic phenomena, Hull, Jastrow, the medical school professors of physiology, a psychiatrist named Dr Lorenz, and Dr. Loevenhart of the pharmacology department, became very interested and began suggesting a vast array of other things they wanted Erickson to elicit in his subjects. The evening turned out so successful that Jastrow, and Hull decided to start a seminar the following September. They told Erickson to spend all his spare time carrying out hypnotic experiments throughout the next summer-always keeping very good notes.



He following September the seminars were held from 2-4pm. The first hour Erickson presented his material and then the last hour or so the graduate students would discuss what they saw. Usually the seminar lasted until 6pm and there were frequent Sunday gatherings as well. During the Spring semester the entire seminar group conducted a whole series of experiments chiefly attempting to replicate what Erickson had done the previous semester. These experiments were in large part repeated again at Yale after Hull left Madison for Stanford in 1929. Hull used all of the papers or typewritten reports the students submitted summarizing their experimental findings and the students' work became the central content of Hull's book *Hypnosis and Suggestibility*, which was published in 1933. In its day, this book was considered the only modern scientifically oriented textbook on hypnosis and Hull should be credited with having been the first to apply experimental methods to the study of hypnosis and hypnotic phenomena. Hull became angry with Erickson on a purely personal manner and ripped out of his manuscript all references to Erickson except one he misquoted. He again became angry with Erickson when a number of the students at Yale protested the lack of any acknowledgement of Erickson's assistance at both Wisconsin and at Yale. In 1964 Erickson wrote to Dr. Shor, an academic researcher in hypnosis at Harvard, in which he included a reference to Hull. He wrote Shor that he thought Hull's greatest fault as a researcher was a lack of clinical sense. He believed that a single playing of a phonograph recording of an induction would produce an equally deep trance in all subjects.

Hull eventually became so embittered that he completely washed his hands of hypnosis, and turned to the study of learning theory for the rest of his career. The underground story was that Hull disavowed hypnosis after a lawsuit connected with a Yale student. However, there were a number of other issues contributing to Hull's turning away from hypnosis. According to Erickson, Hull once sponsored a man named Benjamin Peter who, despite having dropped out his freshmen year with failing grades and incompletes, designated himself a psychologist and charged fees of \$1000 an hour back in 1940. Life magazine, Reader's Digest, Time and several other popular publications gave him rather extensive write-ups after he opened his offices

on Park Avenue in New York City. Peter used Hull's endorsement of a book he wrote to build his career. Despite Hull's attempts to distance himself from Peter, the whole incident remained an ongoing embarrassment to Hull.