

How People Change & Grow Creative Consciousness Interview with Kathryn Rossi, Ph.D.

By Giovanna Celia
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In your experience what helps people to change?

It may sound simplistic but the first ingredient for change is when an individual realizes they are suffering and uncomfortable. This first motivation for change is what we call the 1st of 4-Stages of the Creative Process. When people reframe their suffering into a creative challenge it is immediately easier to focus on the process rather than fear or hopelessness about being stuck in life's current difficult challenges. In Eastern Philosophy this suffering is called *duhka* and we as psychotherapists believe that future suffering is avoidable by working through the normal and natural polarities of the mind that are sometimes called, "the opposites." We need to release what needs to be released to develop new consciousness and frames of mind (Rossi & Rossi, 2011b).

Looking at the causes of suffering is Stage 2 of the Creative Process, or *samudaya* in Sanskrit. Most people need courage to stay with their discomfort and genuine realization of "I don't know?" long enough to transcend and make sense of what caused the problem in the first place. This is where psychotherapists can really help. If we are genuinely honest with ourselves, neither

the client nor therapist initially knows what to do with difficult problems in Stage 2. The client would not come to see us if they knew what to do! Our job as therapists is to help the client negotiate their own unique way to resolve their issues. We facilitate the answer to their problems by helping people discover it for themselves! Milton Erickson was very clear that the Burden of Effective Psychotherapy¹ (Erickson, 1964) lies with the client, not the therapist. Wouldn't it be wonderful if more therapists understood this? We cannot solve everyone's problem. We can only help people find their own creative solutions! There would be a lot less therapist stress and burnout if everyone knew how to operate by this principle.

The experience of Aha! insights happens in Stage 3 of the Creative Process. It often appears so quickly that sometimes if you blink you miss it! This is when the client offers a tender shoot of a new flowering insight coming up from the growing edge of their mind/brain. Often their initial insights are seemingly simple but deeply relevant. For instance at the 11th International Ericksonian Congress in Phoenix, Arizona, December 2011, a woman discovered the origin of her migraine headaches at age 11 came from unfortunate insensitivity of her mother. Now 50 years later her Aha! discovery is: "Maybe I should stop hating my mother?" The entire audience was in tears responding to the simple beauty and truth of her declaration. We all knew and could deeply feel that she found a genuine ingredient for change. In Eastern Philosophy this is called *nirodha*—*a deep stilling of turbulent waters*.

It will undoubtedly take some time for her to integrate this new knowledge and apply it to her everyday life. This is what Stage 4 of the Creative Process is all about. Eastern Philosophy calls

¹ For Ernest Rossi's commentary on *The Burden of Responsibility in Effective Psychotherapy* please go to our opening page at www.ErnestRossi.com.

this *mārga*—or being on your life’s path. We all intuitively recognize when we walk in the center of our own path and it feels wonderful!

So you see Giovanna, I believe strongly in the 4-Stage Creative Process! The 4-Stage Creative Process is a psychobiological ~90-120 minute unit of time when our natural abilities to solve problems become manifest as a personal chronobiological experience in everyday life (Rossi & Rossi, 2008b). The amazing wonder of this is that it happens often all by itself 12 times a day both in waking life and in sleep. Our free book on our website *The New Neuroscience of Psychotherapy, Therapeutic Hypnosis and Rehabilitation: A Creative Dialogue with our Genes* (Rossi & Rossi, 2008a, www.ErnestRossi.com) offers more details of the 4-Stage Creative Process. Our esteemed colleague Salvatore Iannotti was kind enough to translate it into Italian, which is also on our website.

Is the Psychotherapy Conducted by a woman different from Psychotherapy conducted by a man?

Yes! My gene expression as a woman is naturally different that my husband’s even though we live and often work together (Rossi, 2009). My husband, Dr. Ernest Rossi, and I work together with some clients when it is appropriate. We are currently working with a client, for example, who was diagnosed by previous therapists as having a so-called “conversion disorder” where her legs constantly shake. Neurologists cannot find anything wrong with her. Other therapists have no idea of what to do and this has been going on for more than 5 years! I immediately noticed how she severely clutches her toes to the point where they look deformed. She can barely walk. This fascinated me! Why would anyone cramp their toes in pain like that?

Directly after our 1st session I tried it myself, clenching my toes. Guess what? After a few minutes my legs started shaking too! I could only take shallow breaths. Wow! Imagine that! I created severe anxiety in myself just by clenching my toes! I knew then, at least in part, that she would not get better until she learned to relax her toes. I have a 35 year background in doing body therapies. I am a certified Yoga Instructor so I knew how to guide her through this new behavioral change. It turns out that if you chronically clench your toes you will shorten you instep without realizing it. You will cramp your calves, and your femur bone will jam itself into your hip socket making it difficult to walk. It is impossible to take a comfortable deep breath!

After my insight we changed her diagnosis to PTSD as this seemed more accurate and has a better prognosis for cure. In fact when we asked her which diagnosis she would like to have she chose PTSD instead of Conversion Disorder! I like to give people choice in their diagnosis when it is possible. It is a wonderful way of empowering people to solve their own problem in their own way.

How did you connect yoga and psychosocial genomics in your therapy work?

I began practicing yoga 3 ½ years ago after a traumatic brain injury. I had severe headaches, tremendous emotional labiality and lost my short term memory for about a year. I learned so much about how the brain/mind works during this period of self guided rehabilitation. You would think that psychologists would understand emotions given our long training. But in fact I found new insights that went beyond my academic training. In the center of our brain is the limbic, or emotional system, and it touches EVERYTHING! What gives rise to our emotions? It is our body senses along with the neuronets around our hearts and stomach that communicate directly with the Prefrontal Cortex of our brain or what was called the 3rd eye in ancient yoga.

Inside our bony skull about 100 billion neurons swim in a fluid that has consistency of gelatin and egg whites. Trillions of synaptic connections run between these neurons to all the lobes of the brain. It has been estimated there are more synaptic connections in your brain than the stars in the sky. That's not bad for a little over a kilo of brain weight!

When my 9 kilo surfboard whacked my head in Panama the blow was so severe that hundreds, thousands or perhaps millions of neurons had their synaptic connections destroyed. I'm lucky to be alive and functional today! Gene expression activated within nearby stem cells replaced dying nerve cells and created new brain connections for my brain healing. I knew I was hurt and would never be the same. One of my best first thoughts: "Well, perhaps I could be better than I was before!" actually was a mind map for future healing. (Rossi, Erickson-Klein & Rossi, 2008a, Rossi & Rossi, 2011a).

Yoga was the first therapy available to me on the remote island in Panama where I suffered the brain trauma. I knew at the very least I had to work with my body so I would not freeze traumatic memories in my neck and spine. One of the best yoga teachers in the world, Dave Oliver (www.DavesAstangaYoga.com), took compassion on me. Fortunately he was highly skilled in the exercises I could do to facilitate my recovery. Five days after my injury, standing on the yoga deck looking at the sunset over the Pacific Ocean, dolphins jumped, turtles swam and birds dove for food. I turned to Dave and said, "I think I'm in the top 10% of my consciousness right now!" He smiled and said, "That's why people do yoga." I now experienced a few minutes each day pain free. Clearly yoga would be included in my future healing.

If neuroscientists are correct you need novelty, enrichment and exercise to grow your brain throughout your entire life (Rossi & Rossi, 2009). The experience of yoga contains all 3 of these ingredients. Physical exercise is only 1/8 of yoga practice. Later Dave began a yoga school in Arizona and I was in his first class. The Erickson family and the Erickson Foundation invited me to stay at “The Little House”, Milton Erickson’s office, while I was in yoga training. For 6-12 hours a day, 6 days a week, I participated in this “Yoga Teacher Training”. It was a fantastic brain rehabilitation program for me. Everything was new learning. We all know learning a new language is great for brain growth. Sanskrit is the language of yoga and Dave’s wife Cheryl is an expert teacher. Speaking it is like having a party in your mouth.

Even though I still had no short term memory at the beginning of this Yoga training I trusted that showing up every day with a good attitude and doing my best would provide my brain with enough novelty, enrichment and exercise to regrow and to reconnect the neurons of my brain—what is now called “brain plasticity.” With the additional help of acupuncture with a gifted NMD, Carlos Santo (www.drcarlossanto.com), I eventually lost my headaches and regained my short term memory. Everyone knew I needed to grow my brain. They understood that I was not “stupid” but needed to be taught the same thing over and over day after day. It is critically important to have people around you who have positive eyes to see what you can be rather than the bundle of raw nerves and emotions that I often was during my rehabilitation.

I also relied on art, beauty and truth! These humanities facilitate the correlates of neurosciences novelty, enrichment and exercise. If I had to grow and restructure my brain then by golly it was going to fill myself with art that I enjoyed (Rossi & Rossi, 2008b)! My best friend, Lee Lawson, is a fine artist and her work touches me to my core (www.LeeLawson.com). I spent hours each day mind-melding with her transformative paintings. Her famous painting *My Mother’s Garden*

helped me imagine my brain neurons growing as strong as tree trunks. *The Song of the Sea* encouraged me to sing my own unique song and walk my own unique path. It is so vital to find your own voice and speak your own truth.



Song of the Sea & My Mother's Garden © by Lee Lawson

Of course, as a psychotherapist you use what you know to advance therapy. Yoga philosophy and exercise is often very helpful for clients along with meaningful art. Today I share ancient yoga stories and movements as an aid for clients to find their own story and courage. The warrior (Vīrabhadrāsana A, B & C) can be extraordinarily helpful for people who need to learn to let go of what they do not need any more to make room for the “new”. The ancient story of Vīrabhadra is too long to share here but it is quite beautiful and transformative. Essentially the warrior teaches courage, action and reframing ones point of view.

	<p style="text-align: center;">Vīrabhadra The avatar warrior</p> <p>A. Swords of Courage & Intent</p> <p>B. Action</p> <p>C. Reframe</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> om</p>
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The Warrior Detail © by Lee Lawson

How will Psychotherapy change in the next years?

Most of what therapists do today in psychotherapy is at least 100 years old. For the next generation of therapists “evidenced based psychotherapy” will be required. The only true measure of evidenced based psychotherapy will be though understanding how genes turn on and turn off in response to therapy. If no genes are activated brain plasticity and growth is not possible. As costs of this new science become affordable everyone will be want to participate in it. I think this is a win-win for both therapists and clients. Clients will understand their responsibility and get direct feedback of their progress and therapists will have real evidence of how effective they truly are for the first time in history.

In our study with you and your husband, Mauro Cozzolino, Ph.D., along with his extraordinary team of researchers at the University of Salerno, we documented how the 4-Stage Creative Process can turn on gene expression and brain plasticity (flexibility of mind) with a single session of therapy (Rossi, et al, 2008, Atkinson, et al., 2010, Rossi et al, 2011a & b).

Preliminarily, we know that genes associated with chronic inflammation are turned off, cellular oxidation is reduced and stem cell healing is turned on. Essentially this means that stress is reduced, we will live a longer life, and that our building blocks—stem cells—can replace damaged neurons and tissues.

What would do you suggest to a young woman psychotherapist?

Be yourself and recognize your unique gifts and potential contributions! Great psychotherapists learn theories and techniques in their academic forms taught by great professors. Once you understand these academics well enough then you can modify these theories and techniques to make them your own. It is very important to learn your own boundaries and develop comfort expressing yourself graciously with good humor. You will excel as long as you always support the client's need for creative growth. Avoid dual relationships.

What is it like to live with an extraordinary man and psychotherapist like Ernest Rossi?

You make me laugh out loud with joy, Giovanna! Ernest is extraordinary but sometimes in ways he does not understand. He is lucky to have me as his wife to help him with this problem! When we married Ernest asked me to be “The Guardian of his Solitude” which means to protect his creativity. I asked him to be “A Permanent Playmate.” We honor these vows every day!

We wake up every morning to share our dreams and early morning thoughts over coffee so we can honor our individual growing edge of new consciousness. When we are in a muddle we often lift 2 fingers to indicate that we may be in a difficult Stage 2 of the Creative Process. We communicate when we need to take a healing break and rest throughout the day so there can be peace in our domestic kingdom, and laughter and love in our hearts.

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Brief Professional Description of Kathryn L. Rossi, Ph.D.

Kathryn L. Rossi Ph.D. is a Founding Director of the Milton H. Erickson Institute of the California Central Coast (MHE-CCC). She has edited, authored, or co-authored more than 15 books and 25 scientific articles.

Along with Ernest Rossi and Roxanna Erickson Klein she received the 2008 Hilgard Award for Best Theoretical Paper: *The Future Orientation of Constructive Memory: An Evolutionary Perspective on Therapeutic Hypnosis and Brief Psychotherapy*.

Dr. Rossi is a Professor at the Neuroscience Institute for Psychotherapists of Solopaca, Italy, and Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Vice President for *The Ernest Lawrence Rossi Non-Profit Foundation for Psychosocial Genomics Research*. She is a board member for the Erickson Foundation Archives and Press in Phoenix, Arizona and is an Advising Board Member of The Simonton Cancer Center.

Dr. Rossi casts a wide net of in-depth studies in the fields of psychology, therapeutic hypnosis, neuroscience, art, music and yoga. Her current areas of interest are how to integrate yoga, art, beauty and truth into creating new consciousness on a psychosocial genomic level. She is a Registered Yoga Teacher (RYT 500).

A psychologist in private practice in Los Osos, California, Dr. Kathryn Rossi also conducts workshops and consultations internationally as well as through SKYPE and other Internet video activated (VoIP) services.