
THE MACGREGOR THERAPY AND BEYOND

by

Vivian Milroy

The MacGregor therapy - for which I am unable to provide any references - was an early form of self therapy using a tape-recorder. With this you are your own therapist. You start with a contract - with yourself naturally. No one else in the world is ever going to hear the tape you are going to record. You will record it, play it back, and then wipe it clean.

In practice you are advised - by Dr. MacGregor himself - to record a preliminary ten minutes and then play it back. You will be listening to your own artificiality, phoniness and evasions. You then remind yourself that only you are going to hear it. There is no one else to impress, hoodwink or play up to. There is only **you**. Then you start again and as openly and honestly as possible, you spill out everything that is troubling you, annoying you, hurting you, calling itself to your attention. You go into as much detail as you want: you probe as deeply as you feel able to: you uncover all the most shameful and the most socially unacceptable aspects of your life and experience. Ideally, you leave, nothing unsaid, no stone unturned,

no grisly secret unrevealed. And you also add all the good things. What you like about yourself, things you are proud of, the things that make you unique. Then you run out of tape, or breath, or of things to say. And you switch off, and relax, and probably feel a lot better. This is a good time for a cup of tea.

Then, when you feel like it, you rewind and start to play it all back. This is **you** revealing all your innermost thoughts, emotions and secrets. And this is **you** listening to you and hearing what you are hearing and feeling what you are feeling. You can just collapse into a total absorption with yourself. You do this as long as you like and as often as you like.. And when it seems the time is right, you clean off the tape. Your secrets are safe. Only you have heard them.

Unfortunately, I have no evidence about how many people have actually used this technique or how effective it is. I have lost touch with Dr. MacGregor and no one else seems to have heard of him. However I have used the procedure

myself and found it a good experience and helpful with some aspects of my personal growth. I have from time to time advised other people to use it, but I never followed up to find out whether they actually did and if they did, whether it worked for them. All I can say about MacGregor's therapy is that it sounds good, the theory makes sense - and links up with some of the theories of Intensive Journal work - and I think is unlikely to do any harm. And, assuming you have a tape-recorder, it couldn't be cheaper.

Where I have taken MacGregor a step further is in using cassette recordings as a two-way communication between therapist and client. There are a lot of people who are too isolated from urban centres, too tied up with household problems, or just too scared for a face-to-face interview with a therapist. For them, the MacGregor Mark 2 is an excellent way of communicating problems and anxieties and receiving feedback and support. The mechanics are very simple. The client is invited to share however much they feel able to on tape with the therapist. They send it. The therapist listens to it once or twice and then records his/her responses, feelings, intuitions about the client. The client plays their own part and the therapist's response and then responds to the response and adds any further explanations or revelations. When the tape is

finished, the client keeps it and a new one is started. For the past 7 or 8 years I have used this technique with five or six different clients. In most cases with satisfactory outcomes - as judged by the clients. The time scale has varied from five months to three years and the frequency of communication from once every ten days to every two months. Because the therapist can work at unscheduled times, the cost is only about a third of the kind of fees charged for a normal therapy session.

This technique has links with another well known self-help therapy - the unposted letter. This is usually suggested where there is a personal emotional antagonism and the client is advised to write a totally honest and completely uninhibited letter to the other person saying exactly how they feel and exactly what they want to do about the other person. They spare nothing: they write it all down. They say exactly what they feel. Then they are told to put the letter in a drawer and sleep on it. In the morning they can decide whether to send the letter or not. But usually as a result of having articulated all the bad feelings and directed them at the cause of the feelings, they will now feel rather better and will not need to send the letter.

So far all this has been at a cerebral, or at least verbal level. The client centered approach is tailor-made

for this kind of work but there is nothing whatever to stop the therapist bringing in other approaches. The therapist can share his/her body feelings while listening to the tape and invite the client to do the same. Both therapist and client can be aware of their breathing rhythms, posture, muscle tensions, areas of heightened feeling during the recording.

The issue of confidentiality is important. What may be assumed in the one-to-one therapeutic interview, must be spelt out in a tape communication. The contract is for no one except the two individuals ever to hear the tapes, or to divulge any of their contents.

In any therapeutic session the therapist will usually try to indicate to the client that they are in control of the situation and can stop at any time or refuse to follow any suggested line. This can reassure some nervous clients. However in the MacGregor method they feel very much safer because in the case of a tape communication they have even more control. They can stop at any time and just switch off, whether they are listening to their own part of the proceeding or the therapist's. They can feel safe at all times.

The only other therapist I know who is using this technique at the moment is Joel Badaines. I sent this manuscript off to him for his comments and addenda. This is what he said:

JOEL BADAINES' comments

I originally did "tape therapy" with a client I had already seen in individual therapy for about ten months. I'll call her Joanna. She was then returning to an isolated part of Spain. There she had explored sources of support and therapy in the area, but found none. She was enthusiastic about the idea of "taped sessions". It was up to her when she made her tape and I agreed that I'd respond in no more than three days.

She was able to talk quite freely about problems and feelings into a recorder (which some find very difficult). I listened to the whole tape, making notes on the content and affect, my reaction, suggestion and areas she might want to explore more deeply, or in sharper focus. Sometimes I'd even suggest a specific technique - fantasy - journey, visualization, empty chair, role-reversal, etc., all of which she had previously experienced in her therapy with me. I also linked present concerns re. feelings to other events or feelings which had been explored in the face-to-face therapy. Reassurances of the naturalness of her fears, or that we had expected some feelings to arise proved very supportive.

From my notes, I then made a tape which gave feedback, made "connections", suggestions, and the occasional "insight", as well as what I've mentioned above. My inputs were specifically related to items or feelings that she raised. Thus, I

might say, "when you were talking about your friend being angry, it reminded me of your reaction to when I was perceived to be angry with you . . . ". At the end all the tapes were returned to her.

I think these tape sessions were enhanced by my previous face-to-face work, and probably were quite supportive to her. Recognizing the limits (and not flooding the client with more than they can handle) are useful to keep in mind. If urgent, of course, there is always the phone,

which she did use about four times over the roughly eighteen months that we did this, on a monthly basis. It was also enhanced by a week visit to London every eight to ten months.

Frankly, it worked better than I had expected, and while it does have all the benefits you mention, it would be, for someone wanting in-depth work, a poor substitute, in part because of the time delay, and the relationship issues are more problematic because the relationship is diffuse.

Marie Odile Daulton

It is with great sadness that we have to report that Marie Odile was killed in a car accident on Friday, October 18th last. She leaves a husband, BBC producer, Hugh Sykes, also a 2-year old son Nicholas. Our thoughts and comfort go out to them both in their heart-shattering loss.

Marie Odile was a member of the editorial committee of this journal in 1982. She had just returned from America where she had qualified with Dan Miller in Organic Process Therapy. She was also experienced in primal work, gestalt and Reichian work generally. Her main interest was the spiritual aspect of transpersonal therapy.

Before that she took a Master's degree in music at Oxford. She also gained a Certificate of Education and had six years experience in adult education.

She was a warm, lively, energetic woman who put her full energies into whatever she was doing which meant that after Nicholas was born, she resigned from the Committee and concentrated all her energies on being a mother. She made many friends within the Humanistic Psychology and Human Potential movement and she will be greatly missed by all.