

**The influence of the Mental Research Institute:
*A Conversation with Wendel Ray and John Miller***

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Key Points

1. The renowned Mental Research Institute is recognized as one of the most famous institutions where the innovative ideas in interactional thinking, brief psychotherapy, family therapy, systems theory and communication theory originated.
2. The influential paper *'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia'*, written by the pioneers of the MRI, launched family therapy as a discipline.
3. Watzlawick, a key early figure at MRI was of the opinion that 80%, of what we communicate is in analogical nonverbal communication.
4. Regarding communication/interactional theory, Watzlawick highlighted three core ideas which are central to his conceptual approach; avoiding negation, understanding what indicative and injunctive language is, and using it to speak in the client's language.
5. The double bind hypothesis articulated by Bateson and colleagues is seen as a continuum of human experience of communication, a pattern of learned helplessness.

The Mental Research Institute (MRI) located in Palo Alto CA, founded by Don Jackson in 1959, is recognized as one of the most renowned institutions in the world where trailblazing ideas in interactional thinking, brief psychotherapy, family therapy, systems theory and communication theory originated and where the first formal training program in family therapy took place. The MRI served as a 'go to' meeting place for some of the most influential early family therapy figures including Gregory Bateson, Don Jackson, Jay Haley, Virginia Satir, Richard Fisch, Jules Riskin, John Weakland and Paul Watzlawick. It functioned as a nucleus for cutting edge psychotherapy research and practice. Within the MRI walls the founders engaged in discussion, presented creative models, developed

innovative projects and interactional systemic approaches to understanding and improving human relationships. Seminal books and papers were produced and ground-breaking theoretical concepts such as family homeostasis, family rules, relational quid pro-quo, and the theory of the double bind were collaboratively developed. The influential paper *'Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia'*, authored by Bateson, Jackson, Haley and Weakland launched family therapy as a discipline. (MRI.org). The mission of the MRI includes the promotion of scientific research based on new ways of looking at how people behave, with the aim of benefiting the human community worldwide through training, clinical and consultative services through its commitment to extending a tradition of innovation and openness towards new paradigms of change (Weakland & Ray, 1995).

The following paper is extracted from my conversation in May 2022 with Wendel Ray and John Miller which took place via zoom. Wendel sits in Louisiana Monroe, John in Shanghai, China, and I am in Perth, Australia. In this conversation, Wendel and John discuss their deeply personal experiences at the MRI, the key MRI figures who influenced their practice and teaching and also briefly discuss their 2021 publication on the three central concepts in teaching and learning.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

I would like to set the scene by highlighting the vision statement of the MRI "*Stronger together. No man is an island. No woman exists independent of her family, culture, friends and living conditions. No child is free from emotional influence. No problem can be solved in isolation*" (MRI, 2022). This encapsulates the focus of our work as family and systemic therapists.

My two guests have been influenced by the principles and practices as well as the spirit of the Mental Research Institute and its pioneers and are now influencing new generations of systemic practitioners.

Dr. Wendel Ray is a clinical social worker, a licensed psychotherapist, marriage and family therapist and supervisor who holds a PhD in marriage and family therapy and systems theory. He's a professor of family system theory in the marriage and family therapy program at the University of Louisiana-Monroe (ULM). He's a former director of the Mental Research Institute, as well as a former member of the MRI brief therapy center, and the MRI strategic family therapy project. He's also director of the Don D Jackson Archive and continues to serve as an MRI Senior Research Fellow. He has authored over 100 journal articles and book chapters, as well as 10 books translated into eight languages. Wendel is frequently invited to lead seminars on systems theory and brief therapy across North and Central America, Europe, and Asia, his area of interest is in systems theory and the application of communication theory, to understanding human behavior and interaction in promoting constructive change. In addition to teaching, he continues to maintain a private practice (ULM, 2022).

Dr. John Miller holds a Master's in couples and family therapy, and a PhD in Child and Family Development specializing in family therapy. He is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and an approved supervisor. He has been in clinical practice for the past 25 years having worked in China for the past 10. John is a professor of therapy in both the US and China. His approach considers the context in which problems occur and the relationships between people involved. He embraces a wellness approach and encourages clients to explore existing strengths and resources. He's a former US Fulbright senior researcher scholar to China (2009 – 2010) and former research associate of the Mental Research Institute, former President of the Oregon Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. He has served on the Board of Directors of the American Association family therapy, and he's director of the Sino-American Family Therapy Institute. John has presented in many conferences around the world (SIMHA, 2022).

Deisy Amorin-Woods

We have often met up at international conferences, the last one of which was in Aberdeen, Scotland in 2019 organized by the International Association of Family Therapy. That was just before COVID, the pandemic that shook the world! That was the last in person international conference for us all, it seems.

I wanted to converse with you both, about the Mental Research Institute, its history and your collaboration on the communication/interactional and constructivist theory. I would like to know about your individual experiences and involvement in the MRI and the birth of your relationship and collaboration.

Wendel Ray

I started by reading papers that were published by members of the MRI. I was fortunate enough early in my studies to really get steeped in general system theory. Gregory Bateson's work fascinated me as anyone who delves into it might say, and that led to pursuing training with different people in the world (and it's less so perhaps today) but at that time, it was pretty clear that the Mental Research Institute (MRI) was the wellspring of so much. With all deference to the east coast of the United States, Nathan Ackerman and other people, Carl Whitaker said let us stay in the middle of the country. MRI had Gregory Bateson, it had Don Jackson, Virginia Satir, John Weakland, the MRI brief therapy center or group, Paul Watzlawick, Dick Fisch and others. Once I began training there, I became addicted. Basically, I kept going back for more and more training. This is from about the late 70s. The ideas are just so useful. I was really delighted to hear when you were describing John Miller that his emphasis is on context, the nature of relationships. Much of that kind of way of thinking is rooted in the work of the of the early researchers at the MRI!

John Miller

I agree with all that Wendel was talking about. Really, I got into this because I was Wendel's student actually a long time ago, 30 years! There is a story to it, I'm not even sure you know, this story, Wendel, I was at his university, and I had been a social worker. Wendel was originally a social worker, still is. I had worked for an orphanage in Louisiana and because I had a psychology background, I tried to use an individual psychology lens to help the kids that I was working with there in Louisiana and found it frustrating. So, I returned to school to get a Master's degree. Again, it was an individual psychology approach. Then I actually wandered into one of Wendel's family therapy lectures. My psychology understanding, I felt, really let me down in a way. It did the best it could, but it didn't help me make sense of things. Wendel's discussion was about these ideas, actually, the MRI ideas, and I changed my major immediately to the chagrin of the psychology department, I immediately moved over to that degree and have known Wendel ever since. Indeed, I learned a lot from that program back then that I still apply even now in China. They're very useful ideas.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

What was exclusively something that changed your mind John? You're saying the shift between the individual way of working and systemic thinking? And what was it about Wendel specifically? What was it about him, his approach, his style of teaching? What was he sharing with you as a student that led you to become enamored with that notion?

John Miller

Well, there are so many things to say, and you've seen Wendel present before, so it's never boring. That was one thing, of course, but the other is, it made complete sense about the way the things I had seen working with the kids, and then throughout the rest of my career, about how to make sense out of people's behaviors. Your original quote, from the MRI, no person is an island, you know, I think that's a line from Jackson who put that article in my hand. It's the beginning of one of his articles where he made that point that these things are interconnected. You take a kid, what they did in that time and age was a kid would misbehave in certain way, they would take him out of his family, they would take them out of his community, they'd ship them off to a group home somewhere. I would work with these kids for a non-trivial amount of time, sometimes a couple of years, and they pretty quickly just become little kids and get better. Then at some point we would say "*you're released, and you go back home*", and that's the tragic thing. It would happen over and over again. Where a week or two weeks go by, and whatever it was that got them in there would get them in there again. It was almost as if that whole two years, I wasn't sure what we had done until I met Wendel. Then he put all these things in my hands. Now that made sense about how it was a problem like that would return, if you didn't address the system in which the child was in it was sort of futile, in a way.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

That sounds so interesting... a great insight into the benefits of systemics thinking, the birth of your relationship, through the connection to the MRI Institute! In more recent times, tell me about your current collaboration and partnership because I know you've done quite a bit together. You've recently collaborated on a paper published last September on the three central concepts of Teaching and Learning from Paul Watzlawick (Miller & Ray, 2021). Do you mind sharing something about it?

Wendel Ray

I seek John out. I don't want to make him blush or anything, but if I get an opportunity, if we're at a conference or something, or if I learn that he's going to be at a conference, I'll make it if I can, to go there. He's very bright and just has a natural way about him that is, I think, conducive to healing. Let's put it that way. I'm a fan of John's! I do think that there are certain ideas that derive that I've got laid down. I'm sure there's many, many places, one can pick things up. Using as one example, the Milan teams' positive connotation is an incredibly useful idea. My thought is that (at least for me) one of the ways I retrained myself in life was to not only *read* these ideas from the earlier articulators of systems logic, but to embrace them to the point of trying to *live* them. I failed to mention before that I was a cop. I was a policeman in the Air Force and had the good fortune of getting in a serious accident and nearly dying, which completely changed the trajectory of my life. So, I had to learn something that I could do sitting in a chair, and that put me in an ideal position of becoming a counsellor. Then, thank God, I was surrounded by people who knew me. I'm thinking of a particular person, Dr. William Saxon. I don't know where I would be if I hadn't had Dr. Saxon as my teacher, my mentor, and his wife! My God, I'm having such fond memories of Bill and Ramona Saxon! Nothing can take the place, once you get interested in throwing yourself into the literature, and then trying to live what it is you're learning, as you don't blame others. Looking at the situation that people are having depression having to deal with in their circumstance, figuring out how to talk to them in a way that they can understand what you're saying, which translates into "*speak the client's language*".

Deisy Amorin-Woods

A life changing experience indeed... and what an introduction... what about your collaboration, how that arose?

Wendel Ray

John left our program, and went to Virginia Tech. Great University, great reputation, great faculty. Then when he went to the University of Oregon, he invited me to come there which just further deepened our relationship. Fortunately, at least from my point of view, it led us to continue to this day to have serious conversations about clients, about how to make sense of what's happening in a person's life, and that led to the paper that we that we published fairly recently. Focusing on just three fundamental ideas from Paul Watzlawick but really, it's the Mental Research Institute group.

Avoiding negation, understanding what indicative and injunctive language is, and using it to speak in the client's language (Miller & Ray, 2021).

Deisy Amorin-Woods

Fundamental ideas in communication ... how did your collaboration originate and evolve to become the partnership that it is today with this last paper?

John Miller

Wendel and I started a conversation when I walked into that lecture hall 30 years ago, that never really stopped. We have had just a wonderful time, but it has never seemed like work. Confucius says, *"find a job you love, and you never work a day in your life"*. That was always our work together. We did it because we wanted to, so that never really stopped. The ideas of Paul (Watzlawick) and the MRI, which Wendel just mentioned, were always laced through our conversations which to me seemed to be quite revolutionary, compared to what I had learned before in the academy about how to treat certain problems. Sometimes I am asked the question, *"Well, those ideas were really, the 50s 60s and 70s, isn't that dated?"* I answer, no, not at all. Here in another continent, in China now, I find them equally as relevant every day to practice across cultures. That's how it started for us and trying to apply these ideas, not only across the United States, but in different parts of the world, Wendel has also been here to China several times. He and I also go to Cambodia, where we've done some work with the university there, and all those ideas from the MRI and Paul (Watzlawick), were relevant, and could find application in those places. It says something about their transferability.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

It's great to hear the respect that you have for each other. It's nonhierarchical... there's openness and receptiveness, and also you're welcoming of each other's perspectives and your sharing of ideas. Some people tend to hold on to their ideas, others want to share them, and for the two of you it's evident how much you like to share those ideas. This helps me understand the history and core purpose behind the MRI and your connection. I like the notion of how you evolved from your beginnings as a social worker working with orphanages John. Seeing the limiting individualized approach, sending children back into their environment which remained the same, and observing the story repeating. Then, through these learnings you realized systemic thinking made sense, and the manner in which Wendel conducted the teaching, made it so real and digestible? Sometimes people just speak disconnected, big words in academia, and you lose people, you lose the students, particularly when they come from different cultures....that's a reality I, myself have encountered, my students come from all over the world, from diverse cultures, many from the horn of Africa, and speak diverse languages, and I feel you need to find a common place... find a common language, as

you both alluded earlier with the fundamental ideas, speaking the client's language, the student's language... that's the kind of interaction that is important. Your background as a policeman, and your serious accident nearly losing your life. Wendel, that's truly life changing... and the way how systems thinking helped you personally and professionally!

Wendel Ray

I don't advise it for others! I spent a year of my life in the hospital. You talk about a learning experience! That's a whole different conversation. Having to learn how to walk and talk and again. That's how cruel people can be, usually unintentionally. I've had some good opportunities to learn. Let me just say one more thing, since it's in my mind. Looking back, I don't want to repeat it, there is value to having everything taken away from you. I had no brain activity for 3 months. It's like a reset. It turned out that no matter what the situation, one can just learn, learn, learn. If you're in it and even if you fight it, you're learning. You're learning the ups and downs, pluses, and minuses of arguing with things. Looking back at it at the time, I thought my life had ended. I have not even begun yet and thank God for not being able to function for a while, and then having to come back from that.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

Incredibly profound Wendel, thank you for sharing your transformative story. It seems to me when listening to you about this challenging time in your life, when you thought you had lost your life... you had to re-learn... start from the beginning, it was almost as if you were 'born again'. Then through that, you realize the value of things that we take for granted such as walking, taking... of communication. An understanding of going at a slow and gentle pace. I'm sure, throughout the year that you were in hospital rehabilitating, it would have come slowly, little by little, which takes me back to the teaching... Perhaps that's why John was fascinated by you... your approach, because in you almost losing your life, in being reborn again, it gave you the ability to slow down your pace, this reflected on your teaching.... starting from basics, facilitating learning, thus seeing it from the perspective of the students.... and so, your students, just like John, were able to really connect with that.

John Miller

Definitely. Oh, yes.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

We've talked about those concepts that guided the current system of practice, that originated from the MRI, as you both mentioned; Jackson, Weakland, Fisch, Bateson, Satir, Minuchin, Watzlawick to name a few. I would like to know about your specific experiences of these influencers

how it came to be that you felt immersed in their learning and knowledge which became sources of food and guidance professionally and also personally?

Wendel Ray

Listening involves more than just your ears and waking up and paying attention with your eyes and with everything is important, realizing that we are all the same species. This is bigger than species as far as I'm concerned. There are differences culturally, and they're important. We all live in relationships and while the kind of impasses or situations one might find oneself in differ, of course, there's some similarities across cultures, and even between cultures that are that are worthy of thinking about and paying attention to as you walk around on the face of the earth. One of my serious influences, I wish I could call him my teacher, but he was dead before I ever even came into the field was Don Jackson who said that *"we all are doing the best we can all the time"*. And why would it be otherwise? When we'd rather be in pain, or we'd rather avoid pain than to be in pain. I'm paraphrasing now... Well, that really profoundly struck me. It throws out the window this, from my frame of reference, the un-useful idea that somehow, we're different from each other. If one actually believes that, then you end up acting on it. Looking back and saying, *"what in the world did I just say?"* *"How is it that I find myself involved in this manner?"* *"I didn't even realize it until I actually participated in constructing the dynamic that's going on"*. That's unfortunate, this idea that we're all part of 'it', the 'it' being the nature of interaction, that everything emerges out of that. We actually can do something even if it's not to participate in the way that everyone's in the way that you feel like you're being positioned to interact. You can still have 'agency', you have some capacity to modulate or moderate. Everything, anything, and you are part of it anyway, with no thinking about what are the consequences other than let's do no harm. Let's do our best to at least do no harm.

John Miller

I think you were asking about what the influences from the MRI are particularly, well, Wendel opened all the doors for me there. I really began with Wendel, to tell the truth he was where we studied that stuff. He put those ideas in my hands and he had other students that I'm very close with as well. Jason Platt is one, when the three of us get together, we can stay up all night talking about these ideas. So, I don't really have one that I would just hold up. I just what I found about them in the way Wendel interacted with us who were initially his students. This was the same way I saw when he introduced me to the people at the MRI that were still there about 15 or 16 years ago. I can see that they had that kind of collaboration as well. I remember the day I met Paul Watzlawick. Wendel, introduced me, of course, and we were working on a project there. I had flown down the Palo Alto from Oregon. I walked up to Watzlawick, who was just a man on a pedestal to me, and so I expected that hierarchy to be there. But it was not at all what he was like. He was the most genteel man, and so friendly. The first thing he did, he walked up to me, (and he was 80 something then), he

walked up to me, and he had a paper in his hand, and he said, “*John Miller, I've heard so much about you from Wendel, and I just wrote a paper*”. Now he's 80 years old. He just wrote a paper and said, “*I've submitted it to a journal, and I would love it, if you would read it and let me know what you think*”. Wow, there was so many lessons in him doing that, that he regarded me as a colleague immediately when he didn't have to in any way. They asked him why he was writing a paper in his 80s. It was for his own purposes. I went to his office, and we talked for hours. I expected the biggest office, you know, I'd never seen such a very small office full of paper. The man worked in his office every day; I would imagine because he loved the ideas. Now Wendel has got a lot more stories about Watzlawick, he knew him very well. That was my impression. Wendel you and I have talked about that since. He was just kind from the very beginning. One thing we wanted to write about him was this idea of avoiding negation as a way to go about helping people. The way we ended up working together and the reason we wrote this paper is because we felt like, while there were many things said about Watzlawick, we had this chance to teach with him, when online classes were just really beginning to happen. This was about 16 years ago, and Paul couldn't fly at the time because of his health. However, we could bring him into the classroom, which he really wanted to do, and he did it for free. We tried to pay him at my own university. He didn't want to take anything; he just was very interested in continuing to interact with students. Wendel and I organized that with several universities across the United States. So, we had several years of teaching this class with him to graduate students from across the United States. These were three ideas that emerged again and again, as he discussed therapy and the way he thought about therapy and how to help people. We thought they had been articulated, and in some places, but not fully in the way we wanted to. Wendel was really the master of condensing them into descriptions that we could use for the paper. We tried to put as many examples in that paper of him using those three central ideas as we could.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

I am curious about the professional background of the early pioneers and systemic thinkers, the majority coming from psychiatry, though, not all of them, of course, there was some diversity, Satir came from social work, Bateson from anthropology and Haley had a postgraduate in Communication. Perhaps that may have been the reason why Bateson invited him to the ‘communication research project’, because of this background which then led to the sharing of ideas, extensive writing collaboration and the creation of influential works leading to family therapy being born. This highlights the notion that diversity in collaboration is significant and the more one collaborates with different thinkers, ideas, cultures, and contexts, we get a much richer outcome in research, teaching and practice and writing. You have explained how the central concepts came to be, would you like to say something about the ‘communication research project’ or communication as an interactional tool?

Wendel Ray

Earlier, John, used the word that I love, *naivety*. I think that if one is interacting with someone that you had no experience with at all, ever, then it is absolutely useful to embrace being naive. You don't know this person, you don't know the 'rules of the road', so to speak. So being naive is engaging with others on the idea that you are in a new land, and you don't know the way. I think this is a really helpful idea, this idea of being naive and embracing it.

John Miller

You mentioned about culture. I mostly work in China these days. Regarding cultural differences, to me the ideas Wendel introduced me to and that were articulated by the folks at the MRI; Jay Haley, and Paul Watzlawick who was a focus of our paper, it speaks to their utility, and that they're equally as useful. I have found in the Chinese context and Southeast Asian contexts, where Wendel and I do some work and with perfect clarity, and utility. Remember, there's a line from *Pragmatics of Human Communication* which was one of the major books that Paul Watzlawick, helped author, we actually translated it into Chinese (Watzlawick, Beavin Bavelas, & Jackson, 2011). It's one of the central textbooks here for the practice of family therapy. So, lots of Paul Watzlawick's influence continues, even to this day in this completely new environment in China. Communication is where it's at. As you try to understand people, and that's the medium by which we express, it's the handle, other things are esoteric in some ways. I find that I get around China, although my Chinese is terrible. Watzlawick at one point said "80%, of what we communicate is in the analogical nonverbal communication", and that's completely true. Wendel and I in our travels around the world have seen this in other cultures that we tend to get along fine. After a while I forget that I don't speak the language of whatever country we're in because I think we took to heart the idea that people show you who they are, that you can figure out what's going on, given the context. As Wendel was talking about before, that all behavior makes sense, if you understand the context, and especially when you go to other cultures, you have to hang on to that idea. Context is everything. Another idea that I use all the time here in China, which is a line from Bateson, sort of like it's a story, I think you have to understand the American idiom of this, the origins of the story, which is 'doing'. Two kids on a playground, one says; "you're stupid"! Then the other one says; "it takes one to know one". Bateson had this famous comment; he said, "that's not exactly true, it actually takes two to know one". He had some meaning about it, but that was multivariate, the meaning I took from it was that you don't really know the culture you're in. You don't really know it intimately until you leave it and immerse yourself in another and then return as I've had and Wendel's had, Wendel's travelled around the world many times. I feel we both talked about it, that the glory of travel, that you mentioned, international issues, and global issues in this, is that you learn how arbitrary some of the decisions you make. The ways of living that you have here in China and Southeast Asia, and the decisions in other cultures that we've been to make you realize you're in when you go back home and you realize, "oh, how arbitrary it is

that we've decided to live life this way". It's another testament to the power of context, which is all about what the MRI was about for me.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

I was going to name some of this too, I wanted to ask you about China, John, so I am glad you brought it up as I am always curious about the intersection of culture people living in and touched by two or more cultures. Personally, I've lived within two cultures. I was born in Peru, and while I came to Australia 30 something years ago (twice as long here than in my native country), I have not lost my connection with culture and language and I continue to proudly wear my accent with 'gusto'. I feel there's traces of me... the Peruvian traces that live within me, that are there latently, which impact in the way I communicate.

I've developed this model called '*Mi-culture*' (Amorin-Woods, 2016a, 2016b; Amorin-Woods, 2020), as a multi-lingual therapist, I work extensively with people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the majority of the couples I see are cross-cultural, and the majority of my students are from CaLD backgrounds, quite rich, diverse groups, and just like you both have indicated, I feel an important element in all of this is 'communication'...I often use one of Satir's inspired quotes "*communication is to a relationship what breath is to life*" (Satir 1976). Communication is the medium of interaction, and language is the medium of communication. That's particularly critical when working with cross-cultural couples, and referring to primary (original, primal) and secondary language. Sometimes in these interactions a partner may be saying something (using 2nd language) but they may not be connecting at a deep emotional level as if they were in their primary language. Communication can make it or break it. It can connect us or disconnect us, or...it can assure us or confuse us, like in the case of the '*double bind*' theory.

Tell me about your interaction and cultural intersection working and teaching in China John, how has that cultural transition been? Are the students speaking English in your class, or are they speaking, Mandarin? Are you teaching them in English? I'm curious about your experience living in China over the last decade?

John Miller

Sure. Wendel has been here too and contributed, he's come here to teach, and I'm thankful for that. I would say one thing about China and China's unique area for the field of family therapy. China did not have a tradition of mental health counselling as we think of it. There is no actually translatable word for therapy, as we understand it. Up until about 16 years ago, when I first started coming, and not because of me, necessarily, Virginia Satir had come in very early on and had a tremendous influence, as had Salvador Minuchin. I worked with Minuchin a bit before he passed away. Sal told me, he said, "*Well, John he said the 20th century was the purview of family therapy in the Western world, but*", he said, "*without a doubt, the purview of family therapy in the 21st century is going to be*

in Asia, specifically China". He had come here and done quite a bit of work. He was very supportive of my coming here. He wanted to come but his wife Pat said, "*Oh, no, Sal, you could not*". She didn't permit him essentially because of the airline flight, but I would have brought him if he wanted to come because he very much enjoyed it here in the same way I do because there's this brand new chance. The Chinese culture had a chance to choose a mental health discipline of the many that are out there, social work, psychiatry, psychology, and so on. One of my job's was to come in and explain what the various options were to them. They immediately said, "*Well, of course Family. Why would you do it any other way?*" To them, it was quite puzzling that we actually had this dizzying array of other choices. To them, it seemed completely logical, because in the Chinese context, family is everything. Family is central, even over the individual many times and community context is important.

The other part of that is in the Chinese context, the teacher is very important. I'm the teacher here, and Wendel is my teacher, and in the Chinese way that this is what they call filial piety (Xiao) or a lineage sort of approach. It was very important for them to meet Wendel and understand him. I guess I made sense to them and once they met Wendel and of course, they very much enjoyed his lectures here.

Wendel Ray

I certainly enjoy going to different cultures. China is so enormous geographically and population wise place that one needs to have some sense of curiosity and being humble, because one is really putting oneself at a disadvantage if you think you know, things that you don't know. Who knows if this COVID gets under control in a blink of an eye upon invitation, I'll come and pester John, anytime.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

I want to go back to your discussion on 'naivety'. I also strongly value the importance of being humble and naive, because we cannot know everything about the culture of a family and if we assume that is the case, we're actually disadvantaging the person, family, group. It happens a lot with Aboriginal people in Australia. We attempt to acquire cultural appropriateness through cultural awareness training...organizations are required to conduct cultural awareness training. I've recently written an inter-disciplinary paper regarding this (Amorin-Woods et al., 2021). We talk about the misconception and conclusion people arrive to "*okay, I've attended today's cultural awareness training, so I know everything there is to be known about that culture*", but that's not possible. I have lived in Australia doubly longer than I have in South America, I've attended many cultural awareness training days, but I cannot disrespectfully presume I know everything about Aboriginal people (First Nations), so, as you were both alerting to regarding naivety, I believe we need to engage in a

continuously naïve learning process. I often say to my students, “*culture knowledge has no expiry date, you never cease to learn, you continue to learn and process*”.

I’ve really appreciated all the points you have made. I would think that you would use different applications of communication in practice and teaching. There will be some elements that may not be overt, but nonetheless, I am hoping that our conversation will be captured by other practitioners in our field, from different contexts and cultures and from different training institutions, etc.... So, what message would you like to send to other family therapists around the globe? About the MRI, about their influence, and about your collaboration? There might also be some students watching this. What would you like to say to them?

Wendel Ray

My students suffer from my love of the ‘early’. It’s not that earliest the 1950s where they weren’t only talking 50 years ago, so they’re new, really, in some great respect. The ideas that are in those early papers are just profound and absolutely relevant to living and breathing on the face of the earth at this moment. Two ideas that are to me related, that jumped up and I wrote them down are ‘non-normative’ and ‘non-pathological’. The ideas from the early times in this group on the West Coast of the United States, at least really embrace this idea that, “*Who do you think you are to see?*”, “*What is common to your experience as normal?*” And if you’re in another situation and another circumstance with other people, and it’s different than whatever, your limited experiences is of them, then wow, we are paying for the that arrogance, basically. If it isn’t what I think it is, then it’s wrong somehow or it’s incumbent upon me to not learn it, and instead try to eradicate it. That’s crazy! There are some basic ideas articulated. My thought is, don’t avoid the early literature. Read it. Think about it! One of the papers, many say launched our discipline, is a paper called *Toward A Theory Of Schizophrenia* (Bateson, Jackson, Haley, & Weakland, 1956). I read it often, at least once a year and, and I ask my students to read it. Then I act as though they have because it’s good and comes up in our interactions, if I’m behind a one-way mirror watching therapy, as an example. That’s just one example of a body of literature, that’s a dance with good ideas. This is not to say to not to read current material, of course or getting in an opportunity to write and contribute, Do! The idea of non-normative non pathology jumps in my head, even to this moment. How I could conduct myself not only as a counsellor, but as a human being, without in some way, perhaps using different words, embracing those ideas. If you look for pathology, by golly, you’re going to find it. It’s as much as how you’re looking at it as anything else that you think you’re seeing, that’s involved in that pathology. Pay attention and have some sense of that there’s consequences to how you conduct yourself in the situation, as much as whatever it is you think you’re seeing, and the behaviour of others.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

Thank you, Wendel...., John?

John Miller

I couldn't answer any better than that, I agree completely. Of course, you know, I love these ideas. As I said before, I think they were really revolutionary ideas and still are really new around the world. I noticed some of the things you wrote to us about what we might talk about the global condition, and COVID, and so on. I think these ideas are applicable to really a global understanding of the world and the way people work. Back to Jackson's comment that no one is an island. I think that certainly, you'd asked about this with the virus. I am currently under lockdown, in Shanghai here, which is their method of dealing with it, but it's in this environment, all behaviour makes sense. In context, the context really matters, and you really can't 'island' off. I think what a virus will sort of teach you, you know, is that you can't sort of lock out the world. The world finds its way to interconnect. Essentially, the world is highly interconnected and those are some of the ideas that the MRI people have totally understood from systems theory and applied directly to the practice of therapy, as I said initially about working with an individual child with a problem is a very limited way of helping them as I did in the orphanages without understanding the context in which they're coming from and doing something about that. That has application not just to family therapy, but to everything in a way, it has great utility to understanding things like economics, like the way viruses work, the way global economies work, and so on. Everybody's paying attention to these days.

Deisy Amorin-Woods

Indeed, given the global pandemic and its implications, we had to reinvent ourselves, see and be in the world in a different way, interact differently, we were expected, unrealistically, to 'be an island'. It saw us adjusting. It also takes me to Wendel's experience and about learning, being reborn almost, relearning how to accommodate and adjust to all these constant changes that come from different angles, yet highlighting the meaning and importance that interaction and communication is for us. One thought I've come up with, influenced by Bateson's ideas is "*We are collective, interconnected, interdependent beings. We need each other to survive, develop and thrive*". The global pandemic has stopped us from connecting, yet we desperately need to. We need to find different ways, just doing this very thing today. I couldn't come in person to the States or to China to meet you, but fortunately we could find alternative ways to hold this conversation.

Thank you both so much! I'm really very appreciative of your time, your openness, in sharing your ideas and experiences and your transformative journey, inspired by the MRI. I do hope that we'll be able to catch up soon!

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