

# A Pilot Study of Rosen Practitioners' Experiences Receiving a Modified Form of Rosen Method Bodywork in a Garden Setting

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## *Abstract*

This study investigates a modified form of Rosen Method Bodywork (RMB) in which sessions last only 30 minutes, clothing is worn and a blanket is used during sessions, there is an opening question for the clients and at the end, an invitation to stroll around in a garden setting at a rehabilitation hospital. Seven RMB practitioners volunteered to receive this modified form of bodywork and compare it with an ordinary RMB session. The practitioners completed questionnaires before and after each of the sessions they received; the modified session and the typical session. A main question of this study was to ask whether this modified session could contact a client's holding (muscle tension), barriers to feeling, and memories, the core of what occurs in a typical RMB session. During the modified session, all practitioners reported that they were able to make contact with their holdings and barriers and none of the participants mentioned anything about the clothing or blanket creating an impediment during the session. Instead, one practitioner reflected that this approach seemed "less demanding."

Based on the responses of these practitioners to the modified RMB session, one conclusion of this study is that this modified form of Rosen Method worked as well as a typical one-hour Rosen Method bodywork session in which the client does not wear clothing. Five out of seven practitioners were satisfied with the session and found the 30 minutes sufficient. Most of the practitioners found that strolling around in a garden setting directly after the session had an impact, deepening their own body awareness. These experiences may be due to the opportunity that nature provides for conscious and unconscious reflection: a wordless way of being that may tap into inner healing energies, revealing a flow of emotions and sensations. On the contrary, two out of seven practitioners described strolling around in the garden as not helpful. One even found the garden environment disturbing. More research is needed to examine the different parameters of a RMB session that impacts the inner processes which allow touch, trust, and healing, as well as the processes that unfold within the relationship between the client and therapist, and their relationship with the environment.

## INTRODUCTION

### Rosen Method Bodywork

Rosen Method Bodywork (RMB) was developed by physiotherapist, Marion Rosen, who had a true gift in how she was able to connect with forgotten and hidden memories through a unique form of touching the client's body. Rosen learned through developing this work over the years that Rosen Method touch could have a great impact on how people lived their lives. In 1978, she started the first training group, which was the first step in bringing this profound work to the world (Rosen & Brenner, 2003).

In RMB, we use a "listening" touch that makes contact with the body (Rosen & Brenner 2003, p. xiii). The quality and manner of touching are crucial in RMB: a soft touch that signals to the person, "I am here for you," and that allows the practitioner to be with the person in an undefended, open and receptive way. This form of touch can bring awareness to body tensions. These body tensions (holdings) are physical expressions of our emotional attitudes. RMB creates the opportunity for an unconditional meeting to take place, which can open up clients to an experience of suppressed and hidden feelings. When this occurs, the client's breathing changes. By touching with receptive, listening hands, we create the space for this awareness to arise from inside the person. The body's response to the truth of the client's experience is the key to this work. The story that clients tell, on the contrary, may lead them away from their awareness of the body's experience (Rosen & Brenner, 2003).

A RMB session often takes place in a peaceful surrounding with no disturbing views or noises which may detract from the sensory awareness of the client's own state of mind and memories (Bertherat 1976; Wooten 1995; Hendricks & Hendricks 1995; Copper, Marcus & Barnes, 1999). A bodywork session lasts for approximately 60 minutes. Clients disrobe to a level of comfort for them, lie face-down on a massage table, and a blanket or sheet is used to cover them. The therapist folds the blanket down and puts her hands on the client's bare skin. The first touch is an important connection, and it needs to be direct so that a bond can be established. When this happens, as Marion Rosen has described, the touch can seem like a sword cutting through and finding the core of the tension, the holding.

A holding can express many things: a holding back, a holding down, or holding oneself together. When trust is established between the Rosen Method practitioner and client, a state of surrender can emerge where defences are able to melt away and the client's "authentic" feelings can emerge. This process is observable as changes in body tension, unconscious movements, change in the breath, shifts of facial expression, and often a revealing of an insight. This work is about transformation to become a more authentic, true you (Rosen & Brenner, 2003), and as a process, revealing new forms of bodily and emotional awareness.

### The Education and Training of a Rosen Practitioner

The training and education of Rosen practitioners in Sweden are carried out by Axelsons Gymnastiska Institut and consists of classes and practicums. The basic training takes about 3 years and includes:

One introductory course of two days, two course weekends of two days, seven intensive courses of seven days, anatomy for Rosen students (divided into two periods of five days), three RMB treatments, three supervisions between the fifth and seventh intensive courses, and three interviews / conversations with teachers. The internship period begins after the successful completion of basic training and takes approximately 1 ½ years.

The internship training includes: 350 client treatments, 23 individual bodywork treatments for the intern by trained Rosen practitioners, approximately 45 hours of instruction in private, in groups, and in individual

calls. Additional courses / coaching can in some cases be required before certification.

An International Certificate is obtained from the Rosen Institute upon completion of the training.

### The Modified Bodywork Sessions

The modified form of RMB described in this article was developed in the context of the author giving RMB treatments to out-patient clients in a rehabilitation hospital. Because of the limited time available for RMB sessions in each client's treatment program, the RMB session time could not be any longer than 30 minutes. Because the RMB treatment room is located in a garden setting, this work also became an opportunity to, in a conscious way, observe if the garden environment might serve as a continuation of the process that emerged during the session. The intention was to create space for the process that may start within the session to continue outside the session room in the safety of a peaceful garden setting.

These modified bodywork sessions are different from an ordinary Rosen session, in some distinct ways. The differences are:

1. Because these sessions occurred in a rehabilitation hospital where patients had treatment goals, the client was asked before getting on the massage table: "*what do you want me to do today?*"
2. The practitioner follows the client's wishes and concentrates on that area just as in an ordinary RMB session. If the client's body does not respond to the touch in that area, the practitioner moves her hands elsewhere, again as in an ordinary RMB session.
3. The session lasts 30 minutes.
4. The client keeps his/her clothes on.
5. In order to explore the effects of the garden setting, a suggestion is usually given to the client as he/she prepares to leave the room: "*stay with whatever is going on inside you, take a walk in the garden and do whatever you need to do.*"

A primary question arose; could the practitioner reach through to the core of the barrier of suffering and holding and allow the client the possibility of connection with his/her true self during the session (Rosen & Brenner, 2003) despite the client remaining clothed and being covered with a blanket or sheet, and despite the fact that the session was only 30 minutes long? Another question that came up was: How did the garden environment contribute to the experience of the session?

As an attempt to answer these questions, a study was initiated in which trained RMB practitioners received an ordinary RMB session and then, some weeks later, a modified session as described above. Because the RMB practitioners who participated in this study all had substantial experience receiving RMB sessions themselves as well as completing the lengthy training that is involved to become a certified Rosen Method practitioner, they would have the expertise to discern differences between the two types of sessions.

### Nature and Its Possible Impacts on Human Beings

This study incorporates the use of the natural environment and holds the RMB session in a garden setting. Theories from different scientific fields have discussed how nature and the use of the natural environments are a supportive, healing force acting in an unconscious way in people, a process that is often described as "wordless communication" (Ottosson, 2001; Bjerre, 2003; Ottosson & Grahn, 2008). Kaplan &

Kaplan (1989) theorizes about how our brain takes in and processes information and that when natural environments are experienced, a safe and secure state of "spontaneous attention" occurs. In this more attentive state, we have an inflow of sensory input and a possibility for "brain recovery."

Ulrich (1999) asserts in his findings that humans need a safe, protected, lush and bright surrounding. He believes that there is a basic human need to experience our surroundings as signalling "no danger." When feeling safe and secure, our stress level decreases. It all happens in an unconscious way. Bucci (2003) suggests that gardens and natural environments offering a high diversity of sensory input can function as a catalyst and create an inner process, a change of emotional reaction and action. Ottosson & Grahn (2008) discuss this nature – human communication as a communication which occurs in a pre-linguistic language, an emotional tone, which reaches and corresponds to inner needs. There are continuous background emotions (Damasio, 2011) being processed with sensory input and responses. When these emotions support the person's needs, an opening to an inner communication may occur. When the human can attune with the environment, a more authentic feeling of "I" can arise; an experience of an inner-self (Bjerre, 2003).

The experience of an inner-self is the basic connection to well-being. When experiencing this connection, it widens the awareness and brings the possibility of peace and satisfaction with oneself. To understand one's emotions and needs through the awareness of the body is understood as the basis for self-confidence, trust, and the ability to take care of oneself and one's needs – both physical and mentally (Rosberg, 2000; Lundvik Gyllensten et al, 2010).

This inner process, an opening between the conscious and the unconscious, may also take place in RMB sessions. In a session, tension or a holding in the body is recognized. The holding represents the physical and emotional consequences of life experiences, often containing feelings and forgotten memories. When the tensions are touched, experienced and made conscious, the holding pattern in the body changes (Rosen & Brenner, 2003). Neuroscience describes this on-going inner process as an enormous number of changes in the body's chemical profile, which goes on prior to the feeling and the experience of the feeling (Damasio, 2011). This experience seems to link to an opening between the conscious and the unconscious in the processes of perception, reflection and activity.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

This pilot study explores and theorizes about the comparison of ordinary Rosen sessions and modified sessions:

1. In what ways is the experience of a 30 minute session different from an ordinary 60 minute session?
2. Is it possible to make contact and find the core holding and reveal memories, despite clothes on, in a 30 minute session?
3. Did "clothes on" or "clothes off" make a difference and/or have any impact in the experience of the sessions?
4. Does being in the garden environment following the session have an impact on the experience of the modified session?

## METHOD

As an attempt to gain more knowledge on these questions, a pilot study involving RMB practitioners as participants took shape. They were invited to receive and compare the effects on themselves of an ordinary RMB session with this above-described modified session. Participant-practitioners were recruited for this study at a meeting in the southern region of Sweden for RMB practitioners. Fifteen RMB practitioners attended the meeting. They were all invited to participate and those who chose to do so signed up by email. Emails and phone calls about the study were also made to six other Rosen practitioners in the region, with an invitation to participate in the study. Eleven Rosen practitioners signed up and were given times to complete the sessions. Four of the practitioners dropped out or cancelled their session time for reasons such as "too tired," "too long of a trip," or "changed my mind." It is unknown why the rest of the invited practitioners chose to reject the invitation. Six female and one male Rosen practitioner took part in the study and were between the ages of 50 and 69 years old, with the average age being 60. The practitioners had been practicing RMB between one and twelve years.

Those who signed up received a confirming email or letter that suggested times to schedule the 30 minute session. The design of the study was that each participant received two sessions, one ordinary Rosen session and one 30 minute session with clothes on in a room adjacent to a garden setting at the rehabilitation hospital. The questionnaires were sent to them by email or letter. Before and after both sessions, participants filled out questionnaires about the sessions and their experiences at the time. They would start with an ordinary Rosen session and about a month later come to the 30 minute "clothes on" session. The 30 minute session was given to all participants by the same practitioner/physiotherapist (the author) and there was no cost. For the 60 minute session, the participants paid for and chose their own practitioner.

A questionnaire was used with open-ended questions about their experiences from the two sessions. All questions were to be answered in their own words, except two self-estimation questions using a VAS scale (a 10 cm line with no markings on it) with the end points None (0) and Very large (10). The two questions were: "Did you experience any difference between the two sessions?" and "Did you experience the garden environment to be of any help to you?"

## RESULTS

What did the practitioners experience in the two different kinds of sessions? The results are formed out of the answers in the questionnaires.

The first question to answer after the two sessions was: "How did you experience the (ordinary or 30 minute) session? (Table 1).

Looking at what differs in the answers regarding the two different sessions (Table 1), there are more direct comments on the experience of the touch and sensation of the hands and the type of contact or connection that was felt, in the answers on the 30 minute session. The seven practitioners' comments on the ordinary session all describe satisfaction with the session and it seems they had experienced a pleasing session. Two out of seven experienced the grip in the 30 minute session as "too deep", lacking, or not achieving full contact.

Practitioner	"How did you experience the ordinary session?"	"How did you experience the 30 minute session?"
1	Peaceful but with effects afterwards	Focused, directly on, felt love, hope for myself
2	Good	Very good...dared to go deep, dared to stay, felt held and supported by the environment of the garden.
3	Extremely deep. It was great to meet in the deep tensions.	A joke, to be so detached from the body, wanted more time.
4	A good treatment. The whole body was involved.	Less demanding when clothes on, never before felt the hands talking with me.
5	Distinct touch from the beginning...The silence made me talk about my needs...the therapist was responsive.	Clear hands. Grips a little too deep. Lacked the soft break...to feel in...
6	Presence in the hands...space for me... Clarity and presence.	Liked to be clearly met... warm, present hands. Entirely good.
7	Allow the touch of the body to be... met myself and became aware of what was going on inside of me. A larger breath ... relaxation.	It was a very direct way of approaching the body. Strong good hands but deep, full contact did not occur.

Table 1. Comments from each participant from the question "How did you experience the session?"

What did the participants answer to the question about their experience of the 30 minute session with clothes on reveal? The question was: "Describe in your own words what you experienced during the session." (Table 2).

Practitioner	Describe what you experienced during the 30 minute session"
1	The holding in my hip is an old feeling, memories arise
2	Deep feeling of no trust, only tensions, a feeling of being split
3	Warm hands on a heavy tired body...confirming the "always there" feelings of fright and being afraid
4	Reborn
5	A feeling in the body of abuse ... no contact... it was there, but could not be felt...pain
6	Felt my holding, my fighting, fight-sorrow-regret.
7	A significant amount of force is holding an old structure of silence

Table 2. Comments from each participant from the question "What did you experience during the 30 minute session?"

They all expressed being in contact with sensations of physical holdings, feelings and some expressed a relief from being able to stay with these feelings. No participant wrote anything about (or had comments on) having clothes and blanket on, except one who experienced another way of being met than the ordinary way: *"Less demanding when clothes are on."* The answers suggest that the clothes and the blanket did not "impede" the ability to experience contact with barriers and holding. There were comments on going too deep and this can be interpreted as the touch *going too deep*, rather than too much pressure because of clothing.

"What impact did the 30 minute session have on your experiences?" The findings in the written answers from each participant differ. Two out of seven wanted longer sessions but five of the seven were satisfied and felt the time was sufficient. Written comments from the participants who wanted more time were:

*"The session was so good so I wanted to have more time"  
 "An effective keyhole technique...."*

Did the practitioners experience any difference between the two sessions and if so, what was the difference? One practitioner marked “*almost no difference*” (number close to 0) and six marked “*very large difference*” (number close to 10). (Table 3).

Practitioner	What was the difference?	10 = very large difference and 0 = no difference
1	Prefers the 30 minute session: To be in an environment where nothing disturbs. The garden gives space for me and my thoughts	9.2
2	Prefers the 30 minute session: more directed, effective, nothing “not necessary” is done.	8.9
3	No difference	1.2
4	Prefers the 30 minute session. The garden, the energies. Never before experienced hands talking to me.	7.8
5	Prefers ordinary session: The touch is physically deeper in the ordinary session	7.2
6	Prefers 60 minute session. The difference was the clothes. Nice with contact directly on the skin.	7.8
7	Prefers 60 minute session. Above all, having a complete Rosen session and after that be left in peace.	9.7

Table 3. Differences between the two sessions and what was different?

A follow-up question to the previous question was: “What treatment would you prefer to get next time?” The answers were that three would prefer the ordinary session and three the modified 30 minute session (see Table 3).

Finally, there were two questions about the garden setting of the 30 minute sessions. The first question was, “How did you experience coming out into a garden setting after the session?” The answers are shown in Table 4.

Practitioner	How did you experience coming out into a garden setting after the session?
1	So nice! A privilege to have the possibility to experience this!
2	Shaky. As new eyes and a new world. Being aware of my own solitude and still being in myself.
3	Terrific. It was like the garden was a reflection of what was going on inside of me.
4	Wonderful, the scents, the sounds, the wind. I became more present..
5	What I experienced, coming out in the garden, was a sense of gratitude and reward.
6	Very nice. A little chilly. Important to have clothing for the weather. A greenhouse, wonderful oasis. Saw wood anemones which were huge. Great with the wind, the sounds and scents.
7	Each of them was good experience, but it felt like an outside disturbance. When I had just gotten help to open up inside, it felt like I was in a competition with an external stimulus.

Table 4: The written answers to the question: “How you experienced coming out into a garden after the session?”

All practitioners went out in the garden after the session and all but one expressed a positive response to this experience. Three of them also put words on an inner communication: "*Being aware of my own solitude and still being in myself; it was like the garden was a reflection of what was going on inside of me*", and "*became more present*".

The final question was: "Did you experience the garden environment as helpful to you?" Five stated that the garden had been a great or very great help and two said they had experienced only a little help or no help at all.

## DISCUSSION

An ordinary session often begins with observing the whole body and touching in order to listen to and be guided by the response or non-response in the body and breath. Out of these responses, the session begins to unfold. The modified sessions also followed this pattern. Rosen Method practitioners were chosen to be participants in this study because they have experienced a large number of sessions and thus they know what to expect in an ordinary RMB session.

The modified sessions studied here had been developed for and offered to new clients in the setting of a rehabilitation hospital, since they seemed to gain from this approach. Because the main question of this study was to compare the modified sessions with ordinary RMB sessions, these clients could not be used because they were not familiar with an ordinary 60 minute RMB session. Thus, RMB practitioners were chosen because their expertise with Rosen Method would offer more insight into the differences between each type of session.

### **The Inviting Question**

Instead of the whole body observation that occurs at the start of an ordinary RMB session, the modified session started with a question: "*What do you want me to do today?*" The practitioner was then invited to decide where "*the touch is needed*" in relation to the client's answer. What impact does this have on the session? It might have high value to "*involve*" the client and invite them to take an active part in the session with such an inquiry (Rosberg, 2000). The question, directed inwards, may draw the client into her present-moment experience, and a possibility to begin to feel body awareness. This invitation can be one part of why the 30 minute session reached the holding and barriers and memories arose. By involving the participant, the session begins before the client gets on to the table. The clients/patients trust in oneself, being the owner of body and own will, is shown to be of importance in all healing processes (Rosberg, 2000). In an ordinary RMB session, however, a similar process may occur. The practitioner, while observing the body, may ask a question such as, "*how are you doing today*," or "*what has occurred since I last saw you*." Whether such introductory questions have an impact in ordinary RMB has also not been studied.

### **Clothes and Blanket**

The quality and way of touching are crucial in Rosen Method bodywork – an open and unconditional meeting (Rosen & Brenner, 2003). It seems that despite clothes and blanket on, the practitioners who received these sessions did reach contact to and experience their inner self. The practitioners made notes on the quality of the touch and ability to be met but they did not express that the blanket or clothes acted as an impediment to such connection. Due to their written responses, the clothes and blanket did not prevent

the possibility of contact with holdings and feelings.

In the ordinary session, the client may have a blanket on at the start of the session, but it is folded down so that touching can be done on bare skin. "The participant is invited to experience their whole body and experience the soft, listening and connecting touch" (Rosen & Brenner, 2003), and a slow "dropping in." One client, however, experienced another way of being met than in the "ordinary" way, saying that the session was "*Less demanding when the clothes were on.*" This provokes an interesting thought that, due to the client's needs, the clothes and blanket may provide shelter and protection. This shelter may even be necessary to some, in order to dare "stay in contact" with arising feelings and memories which sometimes are painful and hard to face. Again, even in ordinary RMB sessions, some clients choose to leave all or some of their clothing on in order to create their own sense of safety.

What differs in the written answers in the modified session compared to those in the ordinary session was that there were more direct comments on the hands and the contact. This could be because the touch felt different than usual and offered another kind of experience. The two sessions differ in a distinct way of touch on bare skin or no touch on bare skin. A question arises – is the bodily contact in the modified session of another kind than in the ordinary session? And if so, what impact may this have in the sessions and client?

One practitioner commented that "*Never before have I felt the hands talking with me.*" It awakened curiosity. This may be an expression of a communication between the hand and the body, not through skin receptors, but perhaps through contact via deeper layers of receptors.

One knows that skin receptors, gentle touch on bare skin, create a "highway" to the brain as sensory input (Uvnäs-Moberg, 2000), expressed by one of the participants as: "*it is nice with the contact directly on the skin.*" Gentle, soft touch may release hormones of oxytocin, signalling us to relax and feel calm and at peace (Uvnäs-Moberg, 2000). With clothes on, this may not occur in the same way. One of the practitioners, for example, felt the clothes on touch as more direct, "*effective, nothing 'not necessary' is done.*" The touch on bare skin may set a focus on this sensory input in the session. Without the bare skin, the touch may involve sensory input coming from other anatomical structures. The contact may be experienced in a more "naked" way. This may point out how important it is to be aware of how different ways of touching may determine the outcome of a session.

## The Duration

Most (85%) of the practitioners did not experience the 30 minute session as "too short" in the sense of reaching contact with holding, barriers and memories. It may be pointed out that practitioners are used to having sessions. They may, in an unconscious way, open up to what is coming; the possibility to connect and experience the inner self, even within a 30 minute time period. Despite this, three out of seven preferred the longer ordinary 60 minute session but three out of seven preferred the 30 minute session combined with the garden setting. If the participants had been new clients with no experience of bodywork, they may have experienced the modified session in a different way.

## The Surrounding

Environmental science recognizes there is an unconscious communication between humans and nature

and humans seem to choose and seek natural environments (Korpela & hartig, 1996; Ulrich 1999; Ottosson, 2001; Annerstedt & Währborg 2011). This means that nature provides for conscious and unconscious reflection: a wordless way of being that may tap into inner healing forces.

The session ended with a suggestion: "*Stay with whatever is going on inside you, take a walk in the garden and do whatever you need to do.*" The purpose of this suggestion was to keep the inner connection from the RMB session open and to invite a possible communication with the garden/nature (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Ottosson, 2001; Grahn & Stigsdotter, 2009). This is something that is not done in an ordinary session. The surrounding is not often a garden, park or natural environment. So, coming out into a garden setting, staying in contact with whatever was going on inside, was a new experience. After spending time in the garden following the session, the practitioners described their communication with the environment (Korpela & Hartig, 1996; Ottosson & Grahn, 2008) as sensory, bodily and emotional experiences: "*Being aware of my own solitude and still being in myself; it was like the garden was a reflection of what was going on inside of me.*"

Most practitioners found that strolling around in a garden immediately after the session had an impact, deepening their body awareness. Two out of seven on the contrary expressed that strolling around in the garden was not helpful. One even found the garden environment disturbing: "*It felt like an outside influence, when I had just gotten help to open up inside, it felt like I was in a competition with an external stimulus.*"

It can be interpreted that the surrounding did have an impact on all the practitioners and most of them seemed to enjoy the experience of the garden setting, both as sensory experiences and as reflections. It is not possible to draw any conclusions that the surrounding had an impact on the outcome of the session, or what the walk and stay in the garden setting may have added to the experience of the session.

The study has shown that to some, the garden setting had an impact and four out of seven may choose the modified session again. Their choice would probably also depend on such reasons as their current needs, season, impression of the practitioner, travel distance and so on.

## CONCLUSION

This study of one variation and alteration of a typical session in Rosen Method Bodywork should be regarded as a pilot study. There were a limited number of participants; and limited also to those who happened to attend the practitioner's meeting and those listed as practitioners in the southern region of Sweden. The practitioners who participated (seven out of twenty one) were not chosen at random. Rather, they were interested in taking part in the study and they also had the opportunity to do so because of their availability during the month of May. It is unknown if the results would have been different if clients new to Rosen Method were included in this study rather than RMB practitioners who were experienced in receiving sessions.

The study has given some answers but it is not possible to draw general conclusions due to these limitations. In addition, there were multiple differences between normal RMB sessions and the modified sessions: (1) the inviting questions, (2) the clothing, (3) the duration and (4) the surrounding. It is not possible to say anything about the effect of any one of these factors.

The results do, however, show that the modified session structure did not prevent the participants

from reaching contact with physical holdings and what was revealed within. It is not possible to assess what impact the different factors had on achieving this, or whether some of the factors may have been more important than others, or if the result is from the total combination of all the factors together. It is interesting to note that four out of seven would like to have the modified session again: having clothes and blanket on and afterwards taking a walk in the garden.

More research is needed with a larger number of participants and making a deeper examination of the four different factors in the modified session. There may, in addition, be other factors that have an impact on the inner process during RMB sessions. These may include the quality of touch and trust, the relationship between the client and therapist, and between the client and nature.

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