Dancing with Anxiety, Seeing the Colors of Life | Brief Report on Susanna Carolusson's In-Congress Workshop at the 2nd Asian Conference on Clinical Hypnosis

Professor | Susanna Carolusson (Sweden)

Author | Shao Xiaofang (China)

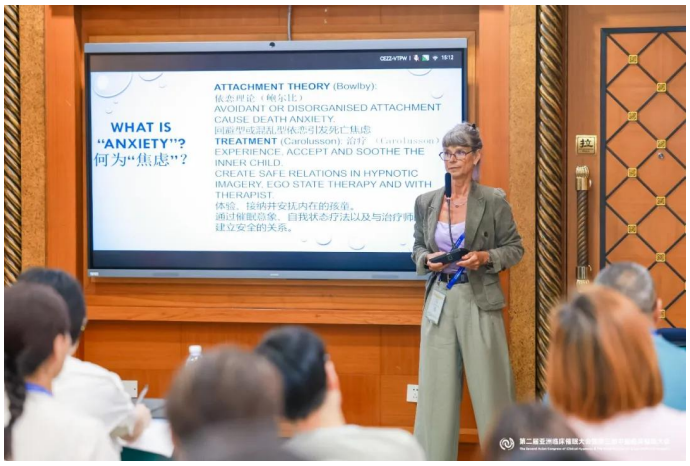
Reviewer | Luo Jun(China)

At the 2025 Second Asian Conference on Clinical Hypnosis, Susanna Carolusson shared alternative perspectives on understanding anxiety and coping techniques such as "Animal Imagery" and "Ego State Therapy."

Susanna Carolusson brings 45 years of clinical practice experience and 35 years of experience providing social service instruction to institutions including the University of Gothenburg, hospitals, and rehabilitation centers. She has worked across 29 countries in leadership, ethics, education, and therapy.

She is the former President, Honorary Member, and Director of Training of the Swedish Society of Clinical Hypnosis. Founder of the university-accredited psychodynamic hypnosis training program. President of the MHE Foundation. Editor of the European Journal of Hypnosis. Board member of the European Society of Hypnosis and the International Society of Hypnosis. Vice President of the International Association of Ego State Therapy. Co-Chair of the ISH Certification Advisory Committee. Recipient of the European Society of Hypnosis (ESH) Award for Excellence in Clinical Hypnosis Expertise and in Teaching & Writing.

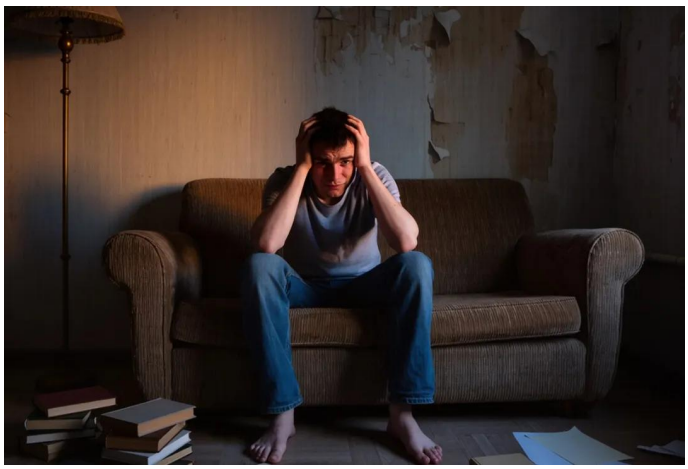
On the afternoon of August 16th 2025, the Shanghai Hall was packed to capacity. Susanna Carolusson from Sweden opened her presentation with the line: "Anxiety has never been absent from human history, nor will it ever be." As a keynote speaker at this Clinical Hypnosis Congress, she offered not merely a technical sharing but a philosophical exploration of how to wisely coexist with "anxiety"—humanity's eternal companion—backed by profound theoretical grounding and rich clinical experience.



I. The Beginning of Understanding: Anxiety Is Not an Enemy, But a Messenger

Ms. Susanna stated unequivocally that our therapeutic goal should not be to "eliminate anxiety," but to "understand anxiety" and seek a path toward balance.

Citing Aaron Antonovsky, the originator of Salutogenesis theory, she pointed out that anxiety stems from a lack of comprehension, a collapse of sense of coherence, and a loss of meaning. She shared, "Whether in medical settings or psychotherapy, the core lies in increasing understanding, enhancing manageability, and bestowing meaning." For instance, when doctors explain treatment steps in detail or invite patients to make choices regarding their treatment plans, it effectively alleviates their sense of helplessness.



In psychotherapy, when a client pleads, "Please take my anxiety away," Ms. Susanna responds gently yet firmly: "I can help you cope with your anxiety, but first, we need to listen together to what it wants to tell us."



II. The Way of Dialogue: Utilizing Hypnosis and Imagery to Listen to the Subconscious Voice

To hear the deeper messages of anxiety, Ms. Susanna demonstrated her creative clinical technique—the Animal Imagery Technique. She often invites clients to imagine an animal or image that represents their anxiety and engages in dialogue with it.

She shared a poignant case: A tech executive who appeared to simply need to "work hard to support his family" had an "anxiety animal" that cried out, "I need love." This imagery instantly unveiled unmet emotional needs in the subconscious, shifting the therapeutic focus from surface-level stress management to deep self-care and healing. "This isn't about talking about the problem," she emphasized. "This is about experiencing in the process, healing in the context. Hypnosis supplements traditional talk therapy with this direct experiential dimension, allowing change to occur not just at the cognitive level, but at the affective level."



III. Tracing the Roots: Childhood Anxiety and the Imprint of Family Systems

Ms. Susanna used her own family narrative as a textbook, offering a profound analysis of her early roots of anxiety—fear of her mother. Her childhood defense was idealizing her mother; it wasn't until adulthood, encountering a trusted therapist, that she began to understand and heal herself.

She also cited her brother's school phobia as a case study, revealing that behind children's anxiety often lies family system imbalance and the suppression of the authentic self. Her brother reflected in adulthood: "Why did the child therapist never ask me? What was my relationship with my father, my mother? What was the situation when I started feeling anxious at school? Perhaps if they had understood these things, the process might have been different." Later, Ms. Susanna wrote a book based on her family experiences titled *Mother Was a Psychopath, I Became a Psychologist*.

Recalling her time working at a Swedish orphanage, staff were previously advised against forming overly close attachments with children because they would eventually be adopted; strong bonds were thought to make separation difficult. However, Ms. Susanna held the opposite view. She believed staff should form secure attachments with children early on. Even if the child had to leave eventually, having experienced that bond would turn the relationship into a precious treasure and resource for the rest of their lives.



IV. The Art of Integration: Collaborating with "Addictive" and "Vulnerable" Parts

Addressing severe issues like addiction, Ms. Susanna introduced the perspective of "Ego State Therapy." She posits that addictive behaviors (such as alcoholism) represent a part attempting "self-repair," often functioning to protect the deepest, wounded, vulnerable self.

She described an individual with alcohol addiction whose "drinking part" manifested as angry and arrogant in hypnosis. However, when asked, "Who are you protecting?" the answer emerged: "I am protecting the bullied child." Consequently, the therapeutic goal shifts: seeking new ways to safeguard that vulnerability rather than simply eradicating the drinking behavior. The teacher summarized: "You are not treating a 'drunkard,' but accompanying a 'person' who is trying to protect themselves in the wrong way."



V. Epilogue: Between Black and White, Seeing the Colors of Life

Toward the end of the speech, a brief live demonstration transformed theory into tangible experience. A volunteer shared her anxiety regarding a loved one's potential death, describing it as a "black or white void."

Using a subtle, non-verbal, and deeply connecting attentiveness, Ms. Susanna guided the volunteer. Following a brief yet potent hypnotic induction—merely three deep breaths—a sense of calm arose spontaneously.

Ms. Susanna invited the volunteer, in a voice filled with anticipation and serenity, to gaze into the void between black and white and notice the imagery emerging from the subconscious. Between the black and the white, the volunteer saw "the color of sunlight"—a symbol of life and hope.

Ms. Susanna interpreted: "Sensitivity to death is precisely the deepest reverence for life, and this sunlight from the subconscious will become the most precious resource for coping with future anxieties."



As Ms. Susanna noted, anxiety never leaves, yet it never walks alone. When we listen to its whispers with a gentle heart and accept its presence with a collaborative spirit, we discover that the beast once loathed can ultimately become the starting point for a profound connection with ourselves, others, and life itself—growing together into a more complete and wiser version of who we are.

(Easter Egg: Who would believe Ms. Susanna is already 73? What keeps her so healthy and beautiful?)



Author: Shao Xiaofang



- EAP Project Lead, Chang'an Automobile
- Master of Psychology, Peking University
- Level 2 Certified Psychological Counselor
- Registered Clinical Hypnotist, Chinese Ericksonian Clinical Hypnosis Academy

Reviewer : Luo Jun



- Director, Department of Clinical Psychology, Chenzhou First People's Hospital
- Executive Director, Hunan Mental Health Association
- Certified Psychological Counselor (First Batch), Chinese Mental Health Association
- Executive Director & Registered Clinical Hypnotist, Chinese Ericksonian Clinical Hypnosis Academy