

Acting as if you are
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Acting As if Hypnotized Hypnosis has always been an intriguing topic that has captured the imaginations of ordinary people, as variously portrayed in fictional literature, theater or the big screen. Usually, it is interpreted as an altered state of awareness, different from both waking and sleep. Hypnosis is coined after the name “ Hypnos” or the god of sleep.

A hypnotized person is characterized by stillness, awaiting command from the hypnotist. Under the hypnotic state, he is portrayed as “ zombie-like” cast under a spell, without a will of his own. Ernest Hilgard is one researcher who supports the view that hypnosis is an altered psychological state. He believes that under hypnosis, a person is highly susceptible to suggestion, performs behaviors involuntarily, exhibits heightened recall of memories, has more vivid imagination, has the ability to dissociate consciousness of certain events from others and a lowered sensitivity to pain. Hypnosis makes one produce thoughts, ideas and behaviors which would not be usually exhibited had the person not been under that hypnotic state. Such a view has been subscribed to by a lot of people who put much faith on the hypnosis phenomenon. Of course, although many can attest to the existence of its evidence in their lives, it is still subject to scientific research to prove it.

Without intending to dampen the strong advocacies of hypnosis believers, Nicholas Spanos has disputed this widely accepted view. He claims that hypnotized people are exhibiting behavior which is just like any social behavior, and negates the view that it is involuntary. Rather, consciously or not, it is strategic and goal-oriented. Such behavior is dramatic enough to produce a desired effect. In essence, he says that instead of an altered state of consciousness, hypnosis is a state of increased motivation.

People under hypnosis are under the expectation that their behaviors will

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soon be involuntary as they relinquish control of them and agree to go under the hypnotic trance. However, Spanos argues that the behavior suggested by the person conducting the hypnosis is voluntary at first, and is eventually made to sound more involuntary. Since the hypnotized person is in an increased state of motivation, the suggestion is easily taken and what he hears as a command will seem to him as involuntary. Spanos explains that it is because the person enters the hypnosis with the intention to be controlled by the hypnotist's suggestions. He also expects that the hypnosis has more power than his own will to direct his behavior and lastly, his intention to cooperate with the hypnotist as he relinquishes control to him makes him more ready to experience and perceive the behavior as involuntary. Thus, as well accepted by behavioral scientists, a person cannot be hypnotized against his will. This may create a dichotomy of perceptions that gives contrasting arguments, but the final decision to be hypnotized or not is still dependent on the individual.

The impression that hypnosis can unearth repressed or lost memories is likewise disputed by Spanos and other researchers. Sometimes, under the pressure and expectation that he indeed is being hypnotized, an individual may be forced to come up with erroneous memories, or even unconsciously "create" some and then accept that the hypnosis was responsible in surfacing it to consciousness. In a sense, this action may be considered deceptive, just so it conforms to the expectations that hypnosis can bring out that recall ability.

In conclusion, Spanos' arguments point out that hypnosis is not really a process that puts an individual in a state where he is helpless and subject to the influence of the hypnotist. On hindsight, it may also imply that the

individual voluntarily chooses to be “ under the spell” of the hypnotist to conform to an expectation. Thus, he continues to be fully in control of his own behaviors and cannot make the hypnotist accountable for his actions while under hypnosis.

Further investigation is recommended on two thought-provoking questions gleaned from this article: Up to what extent can the hypnotist exercise control over the person being hypnotized, and in turn, up to what extent is the person willing to be subjugated to the influence of the hypnotist? It may also be worth pondering whether there could be an underlying psychological pact or “ meeting of minds”, consciously or unconsciously, between the hypnotist and the hypnotized before the process of hypnosis may take place.

Hypnosis is a controversial topic that stirs debate among people and leaves one to contemplate about how the human mind can work wonders. Indeed, this phenomenon continues to be one of the many “ powers” that humans need to demystify.