

Experimental hypnosis

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Hypnosis is defined as “ A trancelike state resembling sleep, usually induced by a therapist by focusing a subject's attention, that heightens the subject's receptivity to suggestion. The uses of hypnosis in medicine and psychology include recovering repressed memories, modifying or eliminating undesirable behavior (such as smoking), and treating certain chronic disorders, such as anxiety” (American Heritage, 2012). Its name comes from the Greek language “ hypnos” meaning sleep. Hypnosis is a natural state of mind.

This state of mind is known as hyper- suggestibility where a subject is more prone to change if guided by the hypnotherapist in the direction of his desire. While in this hyper- suggestible state, the mind has the power to change an association, get rid of old pains or accept new behaviors. The first to start studying the use of hypnosis was Franz Anton Mesmer in 1700, a Swiss medical doctor that noticed that patients with pains responded very well to inductions of sleep, which allowed them to lower their pains. A revision of Mesmer's theories was made by the English Doctor James Braid.

He coined the name hypnosis, and that is why he is regarded as the father of hypnosis. Dr. Braid used hypnosis extensively in his medical practice. Sigmund Freud also used hypnosis and was impressed by the therapeutic potential of hypnosis for neurotic disorders, but his focus on the mysterious element of sexual nature made him abandon it for psychoanalysis, and with the beginning of psychoanalysis the focus on hypnosis started to decline. In 1958 the American Medical Association recognized hypnosis as a legitimate cure in medicine.

In May 2001, at the Australian Medical Association, Dr. K Phelps stated, “ as evidence emerges that some complementary medicines are effective, then it becomes ethically impossible for the medical profession to ignore them” (Cowen, 2004). In this statement she is referring to some alternative medicine practices including hypnosis. The mind is the power behind it all, and hypnosis guides this power to heal mind, body and soul; thus hypnosis is a useful tool to cure mental disorders. Hypnosis should be used more often in psychological treatment because it is an effective, safe and proven tool.

Hypnosis was proved to be effective by several Doctors and therapists in the field. It all started with Mesmer and his animal magnetism. He noticed that by passing his hands close to the body to allow the “ magnetic fluid” to flow from his fingertips into the client’s body, he could restore balance and health, and it only took three sessions for a diseased person to heal. People were amazed by how clients would be cured from incurable conditions, but Mesmer clashed with the medical field when a client cured of blindness relapsed. Then he moved to Paris where he practiced magnetism.

James Braid was an English surgeon and writer on hypnotism. He is the one that coined the name hypnosis and demonstrated that it was not animal magnetism, but it was just achieved by suggestion. His writings are what led to future research and development of hypnosis and the investigation of what was later called the unconscious mind (E. Hilgard, 1984). Milton Erickson, the founder of Hypnotherapy, was a major influence in practices of counseling and psychotherapy, and his methods are without doubt the fastest growing in the western world in the field of psychotherapy.

He was also one of the most prominent founders of neurolinguistic programming (NLP). He was also very influential in the family and brief systemic therapy model of the Mental Health Research Institute. His work has been so original and creative that he was nicknamed “ Mr. Hypnosis” (Gunnison, H. , 1990). He also was the founder and first president of the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis, as well as the first editor of its journal. Erickson goal was to give back to their clients their personal power and control over their lives with the use of “ implied directive language.”

Instead of saying, “ Sit back in the chair, relax, and listen to my voice”, he would say: “ You can sit back in the chair and you might even relax and listen to my voice. ” “ The word can suggests that you have the ability to sit back in your chair and also sets up an implied choice, that ‘ you can choose to sit back in the chair, if you want to-or not’” (Gunnison, H. , 1990). “ The use of words such as can, might, could, and possibly makes for communication that remains tentative, open, highly respectful of the client’s world and wishes, and implying client choice and power.

IDL exists at the heart of hypnotherapy. ” (Gunnison, H. , 1990). His hypnotic language was focused on enabling the clients to believe that they could change, since the root of all people’s problem is that they do not know how to change and they do not think they can change. But Erickson knew that changing is easy; the way to make it happen is for the person to believe they can change and to make a “ choice,” to make the “ decision” to change. Without that permission the mind will always keep the old program because the subconscious mind follows orders and past decisions like a slave.

It will not change because one hopes to change or because one wants to change. It only changes when one tells it to change, when one makes that important decision like: I decided to quit smoking; I am doing it today; I decided to let go of all past hurts and to be happy now; I choose to be a success regardless of what others think of me, and so on. In order to enable the client Erickson would use suggestions such as: “ You can begin to change when you choose implies that you have the ability to change and the presupposition denotes, of course, that you will when you choose to.

This is an effective strategy for changing perceptions” (Gunnison, H. , 1990). Another of his powerful suggestions is: “ You can now curiously take this time to wonder about different ways to change. Isn’t it exciting to realize that you have the power to choose different ways of being? ” (Gunnison, H. , 1990) (The italicized words will be said with a higher or lower tone of voice to emphasize them. Another successful technique is called Reframing. “ Reframing represents the idea that individuals can “ break out of limiting misconceptions to a broader understanding of human possibilities” (Gunnison, H., 1990).

A picture will look totally different in a pink frame or in a black frame. In order to accomplish this, Erickson would use techniques like: “ You know I can hear your sadness and loss and at the same time I sense a very deep courage inside of you that you can draw upon. Isn’t it interesting that we can discover strengths we didn’t realize we had during times of travail and pain? ” (Gunnison, H. , 1990). Hypnosis is safe. The general belief about hypnosis is that the hypnotist will be in control of the client’s mind while under hypnosis.

The truth is that every form of hypnosis is a form of self-hypnosis where the hypnotist just guides the client to let go of the old associations and accept new ones. The heightened concentration created by hypnosis makes resource retrieval and association easier for the client's Adult and Child. Hypnosis allows the client to effortlessly shift attention to supportive ego states and build strong associations between each of them and offers the resources the Child needs to maintain the re-decision”(Singer, W. B. , 1952).

Change is a much easier process under hypnosis, where the mind is more suggestible and open to change than during the waking state where the mind is protecting itself from change. The way the session works is that the hypnotist tests responsiveness to find out the level of susceptibility with suggestibility techniques. The session starts with the induction technique that allows the client to enter the hypnotic state; deepening techniques are then used to facilitate a deeper state of hypnosis and therefore of susceptibility.

While the client is in this deeper state, the hypnotist will use hypnotic suggestions to attempt to create new associations in the client's mind while allowing old unwanted associations to be removed. There are many things the hypnotist can do while the client is in this state. A very successful technique is the abreaction extinction technique. This technique is very useful for people that had small or big traumas that created a mental or psychosomatic scar. This metaphorical “ scar” is the one responsible, most of the time, for client's disorders like depression, anxiety, guilt and sabotaging behavior, addictions, and so on.

The abreaction happens when the hypnotist asks the subconscious mind to bring up a significant emotional event that hurt and caused the particular issue that the client wants fixed. The subconscious will bring up an image of an event or a memory that created the problem in the first place. The hypnotist can then extinguish the cause and create new associations to replace it. I had a personal experience with this last one where for nine years I suffered from debilitating, atrocious pain cramps from periods. While I was under hypnosis and I was asked for the memory to come up, a memory actually did come up.

It was an event that was not that big a deal for me, but as soon as I saw that memory in my mind I thought: I must have done something wrong to deserve this. This was a phrase that continuously I would never even think about having, but my subconscious did. The skilled hypnotist removed that association and two days later I was shopping with no period cramps, something that never happened in the previous nine years. Another technique that is quite a success is the switching technique. In this technique the clients are asked to remember an event where they felt how they would like to feel today.

For a person that was happy and then got depressed, or for a person that was successful and then got broke, this is a very useful technique. The reason why is that many people are happy as they grow up; as kids they play, and their parents take care of the bills and protect them from harm, and everything is wonderful. One day, as grown ups, they get a bad experience. The husband dies, they lose their business or their home,

somebody steals from them, and the clients start developing mental distortions or disorders or even start suffering from psychosomatic diseases.

With this technique the hypnotist can easily re-create the old association in the client's mind by simply switching the bad association with the old new one. The clients will then be back to the old happy people they wanted to continue to be. At the end the clients are slowly awakened. One of the best and most powerful hypnotic techniques is the post-hypnotic suggestion technique. This was greatly used in the Veterans Administration Hospital, Vancouver, Washington, where there were very few beds available and many requests for them.

Therefore the hospital adopted the use of hypnotherapy to speed up the improvement of their patients in order to free beds quickly. Patients were given post-hypnotic suggestions that when they were coming to group meetings they were going to discuss their problems and have a high level of motivational participation allowing their patients to improve faster. (Singer, W. B. , 1952). One of the most amazing post-hypnotic suggestion is the one used to change neuron pathways. For example, people that have addictions have automatic responses to triggers. They smoke after dinner, in the car, after class and so on.

They have created a habit. In this case the hypnotist gives a post-hypnotic suggestion to reverse the habit. A good suggestion would be: Every time you finish eating, you just enjoy the flavors in your mouth and even if you think about smoking a cigarette, you can't, so go back to the things you need to be doing. In this post-hypnotic suggestion the clients will be amazed to see that after dinner they will try to go for the cigarette, but they will refuse it. In

some hard cases the suggestion would be: Every time you put a cigarette to your mouth you experience that bad taste in your mouth as if it were puke.

Of course the client needs to give permission to this suggestion, but it is very successful and many clients, as soon as they put their cigarette in their mouth, they literally will puke: That is how powerful the suggestion is. Another example of post-hypnotic suggestion is people will experience a bad event which will trigger them to become depressed, and days later they forget about the event, but still feel depressed not knowing why. In these cases the hypnotist gives a post-hypnotic suggestion that every time there is a bad event, they can still feel good and move on.

Therefore, clients that are in hard life situations and still are able to handle them with a smile on their face, because the suggestion has been programmed and the mind no longer accepts being sad from outside forces. Another very useful post-hypnotic suggestion is for people that focus on problems. The mind can focus on either negative or positive, either problems or solutions. It can only think one thing at the time; therefore if people think about the problem, the mind would not give them a solution.

At the same time, if the person focuses on the negative, the mind would not be able to think of the positive; hence, the person focusing on the negative will start to become depressed because the mind only sees negative. This could be represented in John Milton's quote, "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven". In this case the post-hypnotic suggestion would create an auto response that every time the person starts to think negative or problems, the mind will quickly just focus on solutions, focus on the positive while fixing the problem.

The amazing fact is that this is all it takes to cure depression in a few sessions. This is confirmed by many therapists. One of them, Elke Kellis, wrote that the use of hypnosis has been well documented and is highly effective for depression. “ Hypnosis can be useful in deepening and enhancing particular cognitive interventions such as cognitive restructuring, increasing confidence, coping better with life’s challenges, shifting focus from failure to successes, enhancing a sense of control, improving relaxation, and increasing frustration tolerance” (Kellis, E., 2011).

Also, Assen Alladin from the University of Calgary Medical School, Alberta, Canada “ advanced six clinical reasons for using hypnosis in treating depression: hypnosis a) amplifies subjective experience; b) serves as a powerful method for interrupting symptomatic patterns; c) facilitates experiential learning; d) helps to bridge and contextualize responses; e) provides different and more flexible models of inner reality and f) helps to establish focus of attention”. (Alladin, A. , 2010).

Hypnosis could cure most people’s problems if the medical field would turn to what really works, rather than synthetic chemicals. In order to do that there needs to be a clear goal in the medical field: find the solution for each patient. This requires too much time and money and doctors need to care a great lot about their patients to switch to something more time and money consuming when they can resort to the lazy, cheap, money building “ magic pill”. Therefore hypnosis is still not as widespread as other therapies.

It has been disappearing for the same reason home cooking and exercise have been disappearing. Less work is what people will choose first. As Roberto A. Ingram M. D. states: “ If hypnosis was as respected as morphine,
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it would become a tremendous weapon in the physician's armamentarium. " (P. G. O'C. , 1998) " Hypnosis has been receiving increased attention in the medical literature. It has been considered for use in acute pain management along with a variety of disease states" (P. G. O'C. , 1998).

The article " Hypnotic Analgesia Affects the Processing of Painful Stimuli," published by the Australian Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, describes some interesting findings: " Different brain mechanisms are involved in the processing of painful stimuli under hypnotic analgesia and attentional distraction instructions and support previous research findings that the differentiation of behavioral, subjective and electrophysiological responses may be a result of a dissociation between the processing of sensory information and the cognitive evaluation of that information" (Williams, J. D. , Croft, R. J. , Ferdinand, J. J. , & Gruzelier, J. H. , 2011).

Hypnosis is a powerful tool in medicine. According to Hammond (2008) hypnosis is so powerful that in the 1800s James Esdaile, an English surgeon stationed in India, did open heart surgery with the sole use of hypnosis as an anesthesia. " This historic example ... provides powerful documentation of the ability of the mind to influence the body". (Hammond, D. , 2008)

Hypnosis is also very effective in the cure of psychosomatic diseases. Many empirical facts prove this, as in the Canadian article " Treatment of psychosomatic disorders": " Many years ago ' I made wide use of hypnosis for the removal of psychosomatic symptoms ' by direct suggestion as well as for abreactive purposes. The results obtained in cases of monosymptomatic hysteria were encouraging. In patients with organ neuroses and in those with psychosomatic structural diseases". (Wittkower, E. , 1964).

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Hypnotherapy is very successful in curing many diseases, and most of the diseases are psychosomatic (American Medical Association stated that 90% of diseases are indeed psychosomatic). Physicians should do more of it instead of using drugs that have high price tags and terrible side effects. However, it is more profitable and less time consuming to just give a pill that gives the effect the person wants, rather than using time and money to find the source of the problem and eradicate it.

In conclusion, hypnosis is the power that heals mind, body and soul. It is a tool that has been researched for years, starting from Messner, a medical doctor in Austria, continuing with James Braid a surgeon that gave it its name and with Erickson which created many methodologies and suggestions that were highly effective in the cure of mental and physical disorders.

Hypnosis gives the therapist the ability to guide the client to remove old negative patterns with the use of aversive extinction techniques and to replace it with positive association that will in the long run allow the client to be who he/she wants to be and also to lower stress which will improve overall health. Hypnosis is a proven tool to let go of addictions and to cure many mental and physical disorders and the world needs to be informed of its powers in order to get back in charge of its health. There is no “magic pill”; people need to cure themselves with the possible alternative tools that are out there.