### HYPNOSIS, HYPNOTIZABILITY AND TREATMENT

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# HYPNOSIS, HYPNOTIZABILITY AND TREATMENT

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## Abstract

There is broad agreement that a phenomenon we call "hypnosis" exists. However, there is no generally accepted definition of hypnosis. A brief historical overview of the use of hypnosis in healing practices demonstrates how it evolved willy-nilly, and like Topsy, "just growed" into its current status in medicine, psychiatry, psychology and dentistry. The mechanisms underlying hypnosis and how hypnosis differs from other cognitive states are almost totally unknown. With the exceptions of suggestions for pain control, current concepts of high, medium, low or non-hypnotizability do not reliably predict clinical outcomes for most medical, psychiatric or dental disorders. We do know that it is relatively easy to reliably evaluate hypnotizability, but other than choosing volunteers or subjects who will or will not exhibit traditional hypnotic phenomena, we rarely know what to do with that evaluation with actual clinical patients. Four case studies, representative of many others, chosen retrospectively from a practice that spans 45 years, illustrate how traditional or modern hypnotizability assessment is irrelevant in the clinical setting. Although the four patients differed obviously and vastly in hypnotizability, they all benefited from the use of hypnosis.

Keywords: Hypnosis, hypnotizability and treatment.

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questions: What is hypnosis? Who gets hypnotized? What can you do with it? Now 45 years later, with lots of training and experience, I ask the same, but now profound questions: What is hypnosis? Who gets hypnotized? What can you do with it?

# What is Hypnosis?

Usually we know what a phenomenon or object is and there is broad agreement about its nature. For example, from the time of Columbus to the time in the 20th century when Uri Gagarin gazed down on our planet from space, sufficient evidence had accumulated producing almost universal agreement: the earth is round. Evidence about the nature of hypnosis has not evolved to the point where there is such a simple conclusion about its nature.

hypnosis in healing practices demonstrates how it evolved into its current status in medicine, hypnotism and different historical theories about from other methods that also claim to influence Spiegel's (1978/2004).

it is. But, the truth is, no one really knows from scientific investigations. what is going on in the mind and body of a

In 1957, when I was in professional school, hypnotized person. Most definitions of I asked the customary ignorant and naïve hypnosis merely describe the behavior of "hypnotized" people (Araoz, 2005; Barber & Calverley, 1963; Daniel, 2005; Frischholz, 1985; Gauld, 1992; Green, Barabasz, Barrett & Montgomery, 2005; Hammond, 2005; Heap, 2005; Hilgard, 1965; Killeen & Nash, 2003; Kirsch, 2003; Lynn & Rhue, 1991; McConkey, 2005; Mesmer, 1948; Nash, 2005; Perry, 2004; Rossi, 2005; Spiegel & Greenleaf, 2005; Spiegel & Spiegel, 1978; Woody & Sadler, 2005; Yapko, 2005). Deluded by their ability to persuade some people to cooperate in an induction ceremony, too many clinicians and researchers suffer from, what I call a "Humpty Dumpty Complex", that is, hypnosis is what I say it is, nothing more and nothing less.

There is even controversy over whether the administration of an induction produces a hypnotic "state" which is qualitatively different from the normal waking state (Frischholz, A brief historical overview of the use of 2005a; Frischholz, 2007; Hull, 1933; Kirsch, Mazzoni & Montgomery, 2006; Weitzenhoffer, 1953). Interestingly, a recent attempt to answer psychiatry, and dentistry. While many consider this question was undertaken using a poll of Franz Anton Mesmer as the father of modern hypnosis professionals (Christensen, 2005). hypnosis (Ellenberger, 1970; Gauld, 1992; Respondents claimed, by a ratio of 4:1, that Hilgard, 1965), the term "hypnotism" was induction ceremonies produced an identifiable coined by James Braid in the 1840's more than "state" (presumably different from a normal 50 years after Mesmer's original publication conscious "waking" state). While not surprised (see the translation of Mesmer's early work by the poll results regarding this issue, I submit published in 1948, but originally published in that questions such as these cannot be 1766). One thing is clear. Mesmer's answered on the basis of opinion alone. The mesmerism was not the same thing as Braid's issue of whether hypnosis is really different the nature of hypnosis have been summarized thought, behavior and physiology, or is different by Gauld (1992), Hilgard (1965) and the in name only (e.g., systematic relaxation, guided imagery, meditation, neurolinguistic A similar situation still exists today. Many programming, aspects of yoga, or other mystic who use "hypnosis" still purport to know what rituals) can be answered only by data derived

# Who gets hypnotized?

1980) have asserted, without defining hypnosis, that almost everyone is hypnotizable if the hypnotist has sufficient skill and patience (Erickson, 1980). This begs the question: if you haven't defined a condition, how can you decide that everybody can achieve it - Erickson differentiated between light, medium, and deep trances. Hence, it seems that Erickson decided that whatever it was he considered to be hypnosis, some people had a little of it, some people had more, and some people had a lot.

History tells us that man may have been experiencing himself in altered states of consciousness for a long time. An early explanation for individual differences in responsivity to hypnotic induction-like procedures began to emerge around the time of Mesmer. For example, Father Gasner, (1727-1779), a contemporary of Mesmer's, and recently considered by some to be the father of modern hypnosis instead of Mesmer (Peter, 2005), treated by the use of exorcism. Here too, like the ancient Egyptian sleep temples, divine intercession was also a likely requirement. Thus, individual differences in responsivity to two external sources: the skill of the exorcist/ healer; and whether or not God chose to intervene in a particular patient. In Mesmer's case, individual differences in the ability to be magnetized were attributed to different amounts of magnetic fluid within the person size of the magnetic body exerting its effect that depended on "hysteria". upon the person.

after Mesmer also identified other individual differences in response to mesmeric-like procedures which were considered necessary to make the treatment effective (Gauld, 1992).

For example, the Marquis de Puysegeur (1751-Some hypnotists (e.g., Milton Erickson, 1825) postulated that "magnetism" and, in addition, "somnambulism" (often accompanied by a "spontaneous amnesia" for the healing procedure) was a necessary component of effective treatment. In contrast, the Abbe Faria (1756-1819), a mesmerist who nevertheless rejected the concept of "animal magnetism," gave "suggestions" during what he called "lucid sleep". He was more a showman than a therapist. Braid (1795-1860) wanted a "hypnotic sleep" and a state of "monoideism" in which the subject, even sometimes whilst apparently wide awake, became susceptible to being influenced and controlled entirely by the suggestions (implicit or explicit) of others upon whom their attention was fixed.

> James Esdaile (1808-1859) only sought "Mesmeric sleep," not needing "sleep-walking" or the "somnambulistic" state to perform painless surgery without chemical anesthetics. He delegated hypnotic inductions to assistants who used lots of passes, and had his patients mesmerized for hours each day, sometimes for 10 to 12 days. Patients also usually had "spontaneous amnesia" for the surgery.

Pierre Janet (1859-1947) thought that just exorcism could now be attributed to at least being hypnotized per se could bring certain therapeutic benefits. Charcot (1825-1893) and the rest of the Salpetriere school believed that hypnotism was akin to "hysteria" (i.e., a defective nervous system) and that the therapeutic influence of hypnotism needed only suggestion to activate the therapeutic "hysteria". But he or external factors such as differences in the thought it was chiefly effective with troubles

In contrast, A.A. Liebault (1823-1904), Clinicians and investigators who came father of the Nancy, school wanted his patients to be spellbound (i.e., in a state of "charme"). Bernheim (1840-1919) wanted his patients to "sleep" with "closed eyes" and believed that "suggestion" was the necessary process by which hypnosis operated.

with the healing process. The Dane, Carl these different methods as interchangeable Hansen (1833-1897), more a showman than a measures (Frischholz, E.J., Tyron, W.W., healer, still considered that he was Fisher, S., Maruffi, B.L., Vellios, A.T. &

difficult to describe. These examples illustrate Ruch, Morgan & Hilgard, 1974). Hence, how experts with a variety of requirements from "some clinical groups may score significantly different countries using different languages higher or lower than normal subjects on one further muddied the waters about the nature type of hypnotizability measure but not on of hypnosis. For example, how is Liebeult's another" (Frischholz, E.J. Braun, B.G., "Charme" different from van Renterghem's Lipman, L.S., & Sachs, R.G., 1992; p.1521). "somnambulistic" state? Without For example, schizophrenics earn significantly standardization of common terms and descriptors accurately characterizing the nature of hypnosis, agreement is impossible. That is, each early hypnotic practitioner required a specific patient reaction to consider his intervention to be effective. For example, Mesmer and his "crisis;" Esdaille "mesmeric sleep;" Liebeult "Charme;" van Eeden's "daze, etc."

Many contemporary clinicians and researchers, without defining what they are doing, are measuring something. These various measurements may be reliable, but their significance is questionable. There are many different quantitative methods for measuring individual differences in responsivity to

A.W. van Renterghem (1845-1939) and Aronson, Fleiss & Haber, 1976), and various F. van Eeden (1860-1932) were medical self-rating procedures (Frischholz, E.J., Tyron, partners in the Netherlands. When treating W.W., Fisher, S., Maruffi, B.L., Vellios, A.T. patients, van Renterghem sought a & Spiegel, H., 1980; Tart, 1979). This makes "somnambulistic" state while van Eeden any kind of standardization problematic preferred a state of "daze" or "passive lying because scores on different tests, while still with eyes closed." The latter avoided internally consistent, do not intercorrelate high "somnambulism" because he felt it interfered enough (range of r's = .20 - . 70) to consider "magnetizing" or "mesmerizing" his subjects. Spiegel, H., 1980, Frischholz, E.J. Braun, Hypnosis is an ephemeral condition B.G., Lipman, L.S., & Sachs, R.G., 1992; lower scores on the Induction Score of the Hypnotic Induction Profile than different normal comparison groups such as college students or medical patients being treated for their smoking addiction (Frischholz, E.J. Braun, B.G., Lipman, L.S., & Sachs, R.G., 1992; Spiegel, Detrick & Frischholz, 1982). In contrast, no significant differences between schizophrenics and normals were observed on the Stanford Form C Scale (Frischholz, E.J. Braun, B.G., Lipman, L.S., & Sachs, R.G., 1992). Thus, the answer to the question of who gets hypnotized may be more dependent on the type of scale one uses for measuring hypnotizability.

Few agree on anything today. A variety of hypnosis, such as the Barber Suggestibility terms have been proposed: suggestibility, Scale (Barber, 1965), the Stanford Hypnotic hypnotic suggestibility, imaginative suggestibility, Susceptibility Scales (Hilgard, 1965; hypnotic susceptibility, hypnotizability, trance Weitzenhoffer & Hilgard, 1959; Weitzenhoffer capacity or hypnotic responsivity to name a few & Hilgard, 1962), the Eye Roll Sign and the (Braffman & Kirsch, 1999; Christensen, 2005; Induction Score of the Hypnotic Induction Frischholz, 1985; 2005a; Spiegel and Spiegel, Profile (Spiegel & Spiegel, 1978; Spiegel, 1978; Weitzenhoffer, 1980). Making this

### HYPNOSIS, HYPNOTIZABILITY AND TREATMENT

different types of descriptive labels while at certain prescribed behaviors when I was method/measurement instrument. ľπ conclusion, while it is conceded that individual differences in responsivity to hypnosis can be reliably measured using the same instrument/ method, there is no doubt that there is continuing confusion about how to characterize or interpret an individual's score derived from any one method. hypnotic inductions.

# What can you do with Hypnosis?

Both traditional and current measures of hypnotizability seem to be good predictors of stage performance or the selection of subjects for hypnosis research. However, other than predicting subjects/patients most likely to treatments for pain reduction (Appel & Bleiberg, 2005; Frischholz, 2005b; Hilgard & Hilgard, 1975; Katz, Kao, Katz & Spiegel, 1974), the current belief which expects clinical traditional or current measures of hypnotizability successes to come most regularly and do not reliably predict outcome of treatment for effectively when dealing with "high most medical, psychiatric or dental disorders. Simply putting a number on something does not increase your understanding of anything.

although hypnotizability can be easily and reliably assessed, hypnotizability scores do not tell us much about how hypnotizability relates to treatment outcome. Below I illustrate the nature of this problem by first briefly describing some of my own clinical experiences. I present Case I four case examples where the patients differed this Humpty Dumpty labeled hypnosis.

matter even more confusing is that some use and rapidly responded to my suggestions with the same time employing the same assessment hypnotizing them, I considered them high or virtuoso hypnotizables. I assumed that it was they who would benefit the most from the clinical use of hypnosis. I also assumed that the corollary would be equally true: low hypnotizables were unlikely to benefit from treatments which presumably included

The four patients retrospectively reported below are representative of many others I have seen over the past 45 years. They clearly demonstrate that the above two assumptions are not valid: 1) patients who demonstrate high levels of hypnotizability do not necessarily profit from hypnosis; and 2) patients who respond positively to hypnotic and non-hypnotic demonstrate even very low levels of hypnotizability can still profit from hypnosis.

The first patient presented here supports hypnotizables." The second patient seriously questions that belief. The third patient clearly refutes the idea that clinical success can best The basic theme of this paper is that or only be achieved with "high hypnotizables." The fourth patient demonstrated opposing clinical results on two occasions.

# Case Reports

When I was co-teaching a course on vastly in their levels of hypnotizability, but hypnosis, a female student showed up in a nevertheless profited from treatment which state of panic. Before I met Diana, she had had an operation for an orthodontic purpose For 40 of my 45 years of practice, I called a split palate. Because she had been operated very much like most of my colleagues. deficient in clotting factor 8, postoperative During the last 5 years, I didn't change what I bleeding was a severe problem. Her head was doing; I just realized that I didn't and face turned purple because of bleeding understand what I was doing. If patients easily into the oral tissues. Now she needed to have

she was terrified.

Diana proved to be a virtuoso hypnotic subject, easily exhibiting every hypnotic behavior I could think of suggesting. I suggested that she continue to relax in order to address her pre-surgical anxiety. Brought out of her trance after just a few minutes of induction, I asked her if she still felt panicky. She responded, "No. I am appropriately concerned about facing any surgery, even a minor procedure like a tooth extraction, but I feel no panic."

the extraction. The oral surgeon was not control during the extraction. However, I did experienced with hypnosis, but was use specific suggestions to control her postunderstanding and cooperative. I asked Diana if she thought she could have the extraction do this on her own. done using only hypnosis as the anesthetic. She was enthusiastic about the idea. With Case 2 less than 5 minutes of induction followed by the suggestion that she had been given an injection of lidocane, the tooth was extracted. I had only suggested a mock injection of an the 1980's, we would bring our most interesting imaginary analgesic for pain control.

of fame and stardom. We were both heroes had suggested only analgesia. On her own, approach to pain and anxiety control.

Blood wouldn't stop oozing out of the did the C/S's cease. extraction site in response to the usual pressure of a gauze pad. I suggested that she re-enter her trance and stop the bleeding. She tried but could not stop the bleeding on her own. I tried hetero-hypnosis. In a commanding voice, I asked an assistant for some of the suture material that was made out of factor 8 (imaginary) and announced that I was going

a tooth extracted for orthodontic purposes and to place a pursestring suture (also imaginary) over the extraction site. I mentioned that a pursestring suture is in a figure 8. The bleeding stopped. We got another 15 minutes of fame. Diana went dancing that night.

Was it hypnosis or just elapsed time that stopped the bleeding - or both? No one knows. Because of the bias I held at that time, I expected all the favorable results we got were because the patient presented with high hypnotizability. No specific suggestions were given for her anxiety about the extraction She requested that I accompany her for except for her overall relaxation and pain extraction bleeding because she was unable to

The Chicago Society of Clinical Hypnosis is the local branch of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. At monthly meetings in or most difficult patients to show off our That day Diana and I had our 15 minutes successes or to ask for help from each other.

One Friday, a physician presented a to every student present at the extraction. One pretty, blond, blue-eyed girl of about 12 years student, in a tone of amazement asked, "Didn't of age. After a bout of flu, Tammy had that hurt?" Diana responded, "No, I was developed a strange and persistent symptom. across the room watching the extraction." I For about six months, every 15 seconds (like clockwork) she would exhale an explosive burst she had decided to have an out of body of air that sounded like a combination of a cough and sneeze (C/S). Only during sleep

> Tammy had been seen by a variety of medical specialists over the previous 6 month period to no avail. A psychiatrist who was present thought that treatment with hypnosis could not be helpful because she presented with a symptom that was presumed to be neurologic (i.e., physical, not emotional) in nature.

Everyone tried to induce a trance through

## HYPNOSIS. HYPNOTIZABILITY AND TREATMENT

relaxation techniques - all failed. No clinician for hypnosis to help her quit cigarette smoking. been hypnotizable.

was exhibited. I did not mention the C/S.

been timing the frequency of the C/S's hypnotist might well succeed. announced, "every 20 seconds now." Although frequency of her symptom, it did not eliminate it. The meeting ended and everyone went home.

The next Monday, Tammy's father phoned me at my dental office to tell me that responded, "No, I usually smoke cigarettes down through Friday evening and the next day the C/S's progressively reduced in frequency and by Sunday afternoon were gone completely. her again, but she phoned me the next Monday Tammy returned to school that Monday.

Tammy's physician reported that she had been (Right, I did not). "When I left your office, I got completely C/S free. There seemed to be no into my car and took out a cigarette, looked at it need for further follow up and the Society went for a while and then threw it out the window. I on to other concerns. Obviously, this have not smoked since I saw you, and what is unhypnotizable subject was able to profit more amazing, I have not wanted to." through a trance tension technique. Why? It is unclear; but what is clear is that her lack of days since our session and that she should call traditional hypnotizability did not predict her me again in 3 months. She called. "Dr. successful response to treatment.

## Case 3

her early 40's presented at my dental office lifeguard at the pool in my building, so I was

present would have considered Tammy to have Lilith had been a heavy smoker since she was 14 years old. She was one of the most resistant My turn came. I wondered how she could persons I have ever met in my 45 years of relax in the face of a C/S every 15 seconds. I experience with hypnosis. Instead of responding had read about inducing a trance through to my suggestions, she spent the time tension but had never tried it. I tried it. I suspiciously watching me to see what I was suggested that Tammy extend and stiffen her going to do. She remained alert and never arms and legs as much as possible. Every closed her eyes. At the end of the hour, I time she relaxed at all, I encouraged her to asked her if she thought she had been stiffen her arms and legs more. This went on hypnotized. When she responded "No", I could for about 15 minutes. She did not close her only agree that I did not think that she had eyes; the rigidity of her arms and legs seemed been hypnotized either. I added that just completely voluntary; no trance-like behavior because we had not succeeded that day it did not mean that she was unhypnotizable. The psychiatrist, who clandestinely had Attempts on another day or with a different

Lilith got out of the chair, immediately lit my technique with this apparently a cigarette, and began smoking. Although I unhypnotizable subject seemed to reduce the usually did not allow smoking in my office, I did not make it an issue that time. She smoked the cigarette half-way and put it out. I asked if that was the way she usually smoked. She to the nub. Strange, I wonder why I did that."

Lilith left. I never expected to hear from and said, "Dr. Sutcher, I don't know what you At the next two monthly meetings, did, and I'm pretty sure that you don't either"

I responded that it had only been two Sutcher, I have not smoked; I have not wanted to smoke; I have not had withdrawal or weight gain, and I am going to take courses in becoming Late one Saturday afternoon, a lady in a hypnotist." By chance, her son was a

able to keep track of her for almost 2 years. During that time, Lilith did not smoke. Once again we have a case where the patient proved to be unhypnotizable in a traditional sense. Few or no therapeutic suggestions had been administered. Nevertheless, the patient remained completely abstinent from smoking immediately following my attempt to hypnotize and treat her. What happened? I do not know but I am happy that whatever I did not entered a trance, she nevertheless felt stuck seemed to work.

## Case 4

how completely unrelated classical hypnotizability can be to clinical outcome. A cigarette from my doorman and began smoking. 22 year-old female asked me for help in quitting However, she exclaimed, "There is no tastesmoking. I recognized intuitively that, if I don't taste anything! Maybe it's because it's anything, Aphrodite was even more "hypnotizable" than Diana (Case I). For usual brand." Later, she still experienced no those of you who fantasize that tests of taste when smoking cigarettes. hypnotizability are of any value, Aphrodite was HIP was a 3/4, with an Induction score of 9/ hypnosis. 10 (Spiegel & Spiegel, 1978).

Before treatment, I asked her my standard questions: Do you want to quit smoking, or are you quitting because you think If the response is the latter, I you should. generally avoid getting involved. Her response was an emphatic "I want to quit smoking."

Aphrodite was a very finicky eater. anything tasted or looked "nasty" to her she would not try it or go near it.

I believe that she entered a trance almost before I began the induction. I suggested that cigarettes would henceforth taste so "nasty" that she would avoid them completely.

Interestingly, Aphrodite felt that she had not entered a trance. I believe that was her perception because, for her, no novel sensation had occurred. I had previously observed her dissociate frequently and, unguided, seemed to drift in and out of trancelike states several Her mother and sisters were times daily. aware that she "zoned out" frequently.

Although Aphrodite claimed that she had and could not get out of her chair. I then redid what did not work the first time, and gave her suggestions that she could get out of A fourth patient, by herself, demonstrated the chair when we were through. She got up.

Aphrodite immediately bummed a not my brand. When I get home, I'll try my

It took Aphrodite 4 days of intrepid evaluated on the Hypnotic Induction Profile smoking to get her taste for cigarettes back. (HIP) by an independent, experienced Aphrodite currently smokes about as much as psychologist/hypnotist who was and is she did before we tried hypnosis. I believe committed to measures and tests of that Aphrodite consciously overpowered hypnotizability. Aphrodite's eye roll on the everything I thought we had achieved with She now says, "I thought I was being honest when you asked me if I wanted to quit smoking or just thought I should. suppose I really did not want to stop."

> Thus, although an extremely high hypnotizable subject, Aphrodite got no benefit from hypnosis for smoking. However, about 6 months after the failed attempt at smoking cessation, Aphrodite, in severe pain, phoned me to say that she had broken two natural and artificial fingernails by decking a rival for a man. The raw skin under the nails was exposed, and several shards of nail were imbedded in the nail bed. The pain prevented Aphrodite from bending the two involved fingers at all. I

## HYPNOSIS. HYPNOTIZABILITY AND TREATMENT

to that place where you were when we were are asking the wrong questions when we limit trying to get you to stop smoking. Let the pain our investigations to traditional or current drain out of your fingers and fall onto the floor." concepts of hypnotizability. We may merely

immediately. Aphrodite was then able to bend to stage hypnotists or researchers who do not her fingers and remove the shards relatively need our help in evaluating the elements of comfortably by herself. Same person-opposite hypnotizability that they need. treatment results for different problems.

## Conclusion

cannot be done by relying on traditional or going on that we know nothing about? Are current evaluations of hypnotizability, superior clinical results with "high Aphrodite's case could be suggesting one way hypnotizables," and the lack of clinical results of predicting clinical outcome: forget with low or non-hypnotizables merely self "hypnotizability." Just ascertain the immediacy fulfilling prophecies? Are they the result of of the need as perceived by the patient.

Clinicians want client/patient evaluations Questions abound. Answers are needed. that will help them to predict outcomes of

quietly and reassuringly said, "Aphrodite, go back therapy when using hypnosis. To do that we The pain reduced greatly in severity be measuring phenomena of importance only

In response to what we call hypnosis, do these four patients all share some characteristics as yet unidentified? Are their clinical successes the result of unknown personal properties? Are How to relate the clinical results in my they just responding differently to something four cases? I do not know, but it obviously unknown? Is some sort of mental processing which ceremonies we have chosen as inductions?

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# HYPNOSIS, HYPNOTIZABILITY AND TREATMENT

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