

INTRODUCTION TO HYPNOSIS

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What is Hypnosis?

The American Heritage Dictionary

“An artificially induced altered state of consciousness, characterized by heightened suggestibility and receptivity to direction.”

American Society of Clinical Hypnosis

“Hypnosis is a state of inner absorption, concentration and focused attention.”

American Psychotherapy and Medical Hypnosis Association

“Hypnosis is a process during which an individual, usually with the aid of another, allows himself/herself to become more suggestible.”

American Psychological Association, Division 30

“Hypnosis typically involves an introduction to the procedure during which the subject is told that suggestions for imaginative experiences will be presented. The hypnotic induction is an extended initial suggestion for using one's imagination, and may contain further elaborations of the introduction. A hypnotic procedure is used to encourage and evaluate responses to suggestions. When using hypnosis, one person (the subject) is guided by another (the hypnotist) to respond to suggestions for changes in subjective experience, alterations in perception, sensation, emotion, thought or behavior. Persons can also learn self-hypnosis, which is the act of administering hypnotic procedures on one's own. If the subject responds to hypnotic suggestions, it is generally inferred that hypnosis has been induced. Many believe that hypnotic responses and experiences are characteristic of a hypnotic state. While some think that it is not necessary to use the word 'hypnosis' as part of the hypnotic induction, others view it as essential.

“Details of hypnotic procedures and suggestions will differ depending on the goals of the practitioner and the purposes of the clinical or research endeavor. Procedures traditionally involve suggestions to relax, though relaxation is not necessary for hypnosis and a wide variety of suggestions can be used including those to become more alert. Suggestions that permit the extent of hypnosis to be assessed by comparing responses to standardized scales can be used in both clinical and research settings. While the majority of individuals are responsive to at least some suggestions, scores on standardized scales range from high to negligible. Traditionally, scores are grouped into low, medium, and high categories. As is the case with other positively-scaled measures of psychological constructs such as attention and awareness, the salience of evidence for having achieved hypnosis increases with the individual's score.”

In other words, there is no one generally accepted definition of what hypnosis is. There are, however, consistent identifiable characteristics.

Hypnotic Inductions

With a very few exceptions, anyone who wants to be hypnotized can be. Going into hypnosis is a skill; with practice people learn to go into hypnosis more easily and more deeply.

There are hundreds of different hypnotic inductions, but they all fall into a few basic categories:

Eye Fixation

The person concentrates on a fixed object or point in space while the hypnotist gives them suggestions to guide them into a trance state.

Relaxation

The person consciously relaxes the body to bring about a gradual transition into hypnosis.

Mental Confusion

The hypnotist deliberately overloads the conscious mind to gain access to the subconscious.

Surprise

The hypnotist induces a sudden shock or loss of equilibrium and inserts a short suggestion while the conscious mind is preoccupied.

Post-Hypnotic Suggestion

The hypnotist triggers a posthypnotic suggestion left with the person during a previous trance experience.

Signs of the Hypnotic State

A person in hypnosis generally shows most of these characteristics:

- Profound physical relaxation
- Reduced heart rate and blood pressure
- Brainwaves in the alpha (9-14Hz) and theta (5-8Hz) ranges
- Increased neural activity in the anterior cingulate gyrus (part of the brain associated with learning, memory, and interpreting sensory input)
- Increased receptivity to suggestion

Depending on the person's depth and experience with hypnosis, they may experience any or all of these:

- A feeling of tranquility
- Time distortion
- Enhanced imagination/visualization
- Catalepsy
- Amnesia
- Anesthesia

Hypnosis is a perfectly natural state that we enter and leave multiple times each day. Examples of everyday trance states include:

- Daydreaming
- Being absorbed in a movie, TV show, or book
- Being “in the zone” while playing a sport or game
- Driving

How Does Hypnosis Work?

Hypnosis takes advantage of the differences between the conscious and subconscious parts of the mind.

The Conscious Mind...

Evaluates inputs
Thinks critically
Single tasking (usually)
Manages short term memory
Reasons
Deals with facts
Controls less than 5% of body functions

The Subconscious Mind...

Takes things literally
Accepts things easily
Multi tasking
Manages long term memory
Imagines
Deals with emotions
Controls all involuntary body functions

When determining behavior, the subconscious always wins!

Hypnosis works by bypassing the conscious mind (the “critical factor”) and working directly with the subconscious to effect change through **suggestion**.

Direct Suggestion

- “When I count to three, you will cluck like a chicken.”
- “The idea of lighting a cigarette makes you feel nauseous and sick.”

Indirect Suggestion

- “It pleases you to realize that you are now a nonsmoker for life.”
- “I wonder when you will notice that your eyes have become heavy and tired.”

Posthypnotic Suggestion

- “From now on whenever you feel yourself craving chocolate you will eat a lima bean instead.”
- “Whenever I snap my fingers you will go back into hypnosis just as deeply as you are now.”

All Hypnosis is Self Hypnosis

Hundreds of years of research consistently shows that:

- Nobody can be hypnotized if they choose not to be
- Nobody will accept a hypnotic suggestion that violates their morals or places them in danger
- Hypnotized people participate in hallucinations and fantasy but remain aware of reality

Milton Erickson (1901-1980) performed numerous experiments in which hypnotized volunteers showed awareness of stimuli they had been directed to ignore.

Ernest Hilgard (1904-2001) built on Erickson's work and published the theory of the *hidden observer*. The hidden observer exists separately from the conscious and cannot be bypassed.

Examples of the hidden observer as demonstrated by Erickson and Hilgard:

- Volunteers hypnotized and told that the space before them was empty would still walk around a large obstacle without consciously seeing it or realizing they had done so.
- People undergoing hypnotic anesthesia reported no pain or discomfort, but unconscious physical signals indicated that part of the mind did register pain.
- Volunteers given the hypnotic suggestion that they were temporarily deaf could remember, under later hypnosis, conversations that took place during their “deaf” time.

Common Uses of Hypnosis

Hypnosis is routinely used for many purposes, including:

Behavior Modification

- Stop smoking
- Weight control
- Fears and phobias

Academic Achievement

- Enhancing memory & recall
- Stress Relief
- Improving study habits

Mental Health

- Stress Management
- Self Confidence
- Resisting Peer Pressure

Sports

- Motivation to practice
- Focus and concentration
- Visualization & rehearsal

Medical/Pain Control

- Dentistry
- Childbirth
- Surgical anesthesia
- Emergency response
- Symptom control (with physician approval)

Law Enforcement (Forensic Hypnosis)

Entertainment (Stage Hypnosis)

But hypnosis cannot fix everything. In particular, hypnosis is NOT effective or appropriate in cases of mental illness and is not a substitute for medical care in cases of disease and injury.

The Obligatory List of Dead Guys

Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-1815)

Induced trance states using what he called “animal magnetism.” He got the concept from an a Jesuit priest named Father Hell (1720-1792) and made the technique popular with the French aristocracy until he was discredited by a panel of experts including Benjamin Franklin, who concluded that mesmerism worked largely by imagination -- what we would call the *placebo effect*.

Marquis de Puysegur (1751-1825)

A student of Mesmer's who discovered and named the state known as *somnambulism*.

Dr. James Braid (1795-1860)

Coined the term “hypnosis” in 1842. When he later realized hypnosis was not a form of sleep he tried to change it to “monoidealism” but his original name stuck. Braid wrote what is considered the first book on hypnosis, *Neurypnology*, in 1843.

Dr. James Esdaile (1805-1859)

Performed over 300 painless surgical operations using hypnosis (still called “mesmerism”) as the only form of anesthesia in British-ruled India around 1834. Discovered and documented the hypnotic condition now called the Esdaile state, or “hypnotic coma.”

Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893)

A French neurologist who promoted hypnosis for the treatment of hysteria and prompted some of the first formal, systematic studies hypnosis, including the first documented uses of post-hypnotic suggestion.

Ernest Hilgard (1904-2001)

Co-authored the Stanford Scales for measuring hypnotic susceptibility. Went on to study sensory deception, analgesia, and to study and promote the “hidden observer” theory.

Dave Elman (1900-1967)

A lay hypnotist who trained physicians and psychotherapists in the medical uses of hypnosis. The Dave Elman induction is popular with therapists to this day because it is fast and produces good results with almost everyone.

Dr. Milton Erickson (1901-1980)

Pioneered the use of indirect suggestion, especially by embedding an induction and hypnotic suggestions into the form of a story told to the patient.

Ormond McGill (1913-2005)

Famous stage hypnotist, also called “the Dean of American Hypnotists.” He performed stage shows, taught classes and treated clients from 1927 until his death in 2005.

Good Information Sources

If you'd like to know more about hypnosis and hypnotherapy, I can recommend a few resources:

<http://www.hypnosis.com>

Has a good collection of hypnotic induction and therapy scripts that illustrate what is possible.

<http://www.ngh.net>

National Guild of Hypnotists website. Not a lot of information on the main site, but the user forums are extensive and a good place to get questions answered.

<http://www.secondtrances.com>

The amazingly well-designed website of a local hypnotist. ;^) With parental permission you can download a 16-minute stress relief MP3 (<http://www.secondtrances.com/stressrelief.mp3>) for your iPod or computer.

Me, I'm a big fan of books. Here are some of my favorite hypnosis books:

The Art of Hypnosis by Roy Hunter (ISBN 0-7872-6828-3)

An excellent introduction to the basic techniques and theories behind them.

Hypnotherapy by Dave Elman

A bit dated (originally published in 1964), but still a definitive work from one of the major contributors to modern hypnotherapy.

The New Encyclopedia of Stage Hypnotism by Ormond McGill (ISBN 189983602-0)

Pretty much THE book on stage hypnosis by a man who performed it for over 70 years. Not cheap, but extremely informative. If you're lucky you'll find a copy at a used book store.

My Voice Will Go With You: The Teaching Tales of Milton H. Erickson by Sidney Rosen (ISBN 0393301354)

Milton Erickson is largely considered the father of modern hypnotherapy and was famous for weaving his hypnotic suggestions into stories that he'd make up on the spot. Rosen's book is a collection of those stories and the cases in which they were used and is a fascinating read.

I'll also answer questions by email if you're curious about anything: michael@raugh.net

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