Commentary: Remembrance of Hypnosis Past

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This is an elaborate critique that uses many old concepts regarding hypnosis as a basis for its premises. It would help move the field forward, and out of the past, if the authors would take into account the newer neurophysiological data which helps to explain the wide range of amplitude and differences in responsivity to suggestion which are associated with high, low & mid-range hypnotizability. The authors make much from older work which defines hypnotic phenomena as a susceptibility rather than the newer findings which identify the degree to which an individual can experience the hypnotic state as an innate ability or talent (H. Spiegel & Greenleaf, 2006). Using the old paradigm leads to a confirmation of an old thesis.

The large variety of induction ceremonies (including some which are absurd, yet functional) is clear evidence that it sometimes is less about what we do, than it is evidence that trance capacity is an inherent talent (not susceptibility) that can be activated in many ways. The degree of trance experience varies with each individual. The basic level of response reflects a neuro-circuitry (probably genetic) which can be secondarily enhanced somewhat with guidance and motivation. This is reflected in experiments which demonstrate significantly different measurable physiological responses to suggestion from high to mid-range to low when the measure of hypnotizability includes the bio-psycho-social attributes of the individual and the measure of hypnotizability is not limited to behavioral responses (Greenleaf, Fisher, Miaskowski & DuHamel, 1992; Horton, Crawford, Harrington & Downs, 2004; Kosslyn & Spiegel, 2000; Raz, A., 2005; D. Spiegel, 1989; H. Spiegel & D. Spiegel, 2004).

The induction ceremony simply activates the inherent capacity of the cooperating person, inferring the message – pay attention and shift gears. Or, more frequently, it is activated spontaneously when the person automatically or consciously decides to increase concentration (H. Spiegel & Greenleaf, 2005-2006).

Suggestion and/or self-initiation of trance produce a reduction of peripheral awareness with a corresponding increase in focal attention and dissociation. Since

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the degree of concentration varies with the quality of the neural circuitry, it is clearly useful to identify this circuitry which is assessed by testing with the Hypnotic Induction Profile. This reveals: 1) the Eye Roll sign; 2) involuntary differential muscle responses; and 3) amnesia. None of these three are suggested. They either occur or don’t occur (H. Spiegel, 1972; H. Spiegel & D. Spiegel, 2004; H. Spiegel, Greenleaf, & D. Spiegel, 2005; H. Spiegel, 2006). Low, mid-range, high or no capacity can then be identified.

In general, the lows are somewhat more dependent upon the formal induction ceremony. The highs can make the transition readily and with ease. Perhaps these are the instances that mistakenly influence, Kirsch, et. al. to characterize all transitions into hypnosis. Most lows and some in the mid-range even require the formality of an induction ceremony to mobilize peak attention.

Further, when the authors refer to an “awake” state as a contrast to the hypnotic state, they perpetuate a misleading old myth. We now know hypnosis has nothing to do with sleep – it is an awake state. It is a state of attentive, receptive concentration. “Trance” is a more appropriate label than “hypnosis.”

References


