International Literature Reviews

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Cardeña, E., Terhune, D.B., Lööf, A., & Buratti, S. (2009). Hypnotic experience is related to emotional contagion. *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 57*(1), 33-46. This important article sheds light on the emotional processes that underlie the experience and creation of hypnosis. A number of authors have previously speculated that empathy may play an important part in how hypnotic subjects put together hypnotic experiences during hypnosis (Sarbin, 1956; Hilgard, 1970; Wickramasekera II & Szlyk, 2003). There have now been a number of studies published which show that trait empathy is correlated with hypnotic ability (Wickramasekera II & Szlyk, 2003; Wickramasekera II, 2007). In this study the authors examined whether the empathic process of emotional contagion and imitation may be related to hypnosis using behavioral and experiential indices of hypnotic ability.

The authors employed a measure of emotional contagion which they state measures the “propensity to automatically imitate the emotional expressions of others and to experience the corresponding emotions.” Imitation and emotional contagion are thought to be a part of how we form representations of others’ emotional experiences in our mind through recreating them in our own body and mind. More recent research in affective neuroscience suggests that the bodies’ own mirror neurons may allow us to form neural representations of others emotional experiences just by imitating their facial and other social somatic cues at a neural level. These neural imitations of others bodily expressions may or may not actually be expressed behaviorally. For example, almost everyone has caught him/herself smiling or laughing with others at a joke in a social group quite automatically even before fully understanding the humor of the joke being told. However, processes of imitation and emotional contagion may form part of the neural basis that helps us to understand another person’s emotional experiences whether or not we actually behaviorally exhibit the behaviors that we are witnessing.

The authors conducted two experiments to examine whether emotional contagion and imitation might be related to hypnotic ability. A measure of emotional contagion was administered in the same context as behavioral and experiential measures of hypnotic ability in the first experiment. The authors measured emotional contagion in a separate context from hypnotic ability in the second experiment. In both experiments the measure of emotional contagion was seen to be significantly correlated with experiential aspects of hypnotic ability. However, the behavioral measures of hypnotic ability were correlated with emotional contagion only in the
in-context condition of their two experiments. Collectively the authors interpret their findings by stating that they strengthen “the case for the importance of affectivity in hypnotic responsiveness.”

It was previously predicted that processes of emotional contagion would be related to hypnotic ability in an article which appeared in this journal (Wickramasekera II, 2007). This article is important since it opens up new methods and measures to employ in the study of empathy’s relationship to hypnosis. The authors are to be congratulated for actually finding a way to empirically test whether emotional contagion is related to hypnotic ability. I know of no other prior research in the area of hypnosis that attempts to investigate whether contexts effects may exist in the relationship between hypnotic ability and empathy. Hopefully other researchers may now begin to examine the important role that empathy may play in the creation and experience of hypnosis. Address for reprints: Dr. Etzel Cardeña, Lund University, Dept. of Psychology, Box 213, SE-221 00 Lund. Email: Etzel.Cardena@psychology.lu.se.

References

Chiarioni, G., Palsson, O. S., & Whitehead, W. E. (2009). Hypnosis and upper digestive function and disease. *World Journal of Gastroenterology 14*(41):6276-6284. This is an impressive review written by some of the world’s leading experts on how to use hypnosis to help patients master their chronic GI-related difficulties and complaints. They describe hypnosis as “a therapeutic technique that primarily involves attentive receptive concentration.” The authors indicate that hypnosis has repeatedly demonstrated empirical data which show it to be an effective treatment for irritable bowel syndrome not responsive to standard care. They also discuss more recent studies showing hypnosis can help upper digestive function and disease. The authors describe the primary purpose of their paper as an effort to review the efficacy of hypnosis in the modulation of upper digestive motor and secretory function. They conclude with a discussion of the potential mechanisms which underlie the therapeutic action of hypnosis. At this point in time, it is still somewhat of a mystery regarding how hypnosis helps IBS and other GI related syndromes. There are many theories of placebo effects and mind/body healing although the data has yet to disconfirm or confirm any of these hypotheses. Address for reprints: Dr. Chiarioni, Divisione di Riabilitazione Gastroenterologica dell’Universita di Verona, Azienda Ospedaliera di Verona, Ospedale di Valeggio sul Mincio, 37067 Valeggio sul Mincio (VR), Italy. Email: chiarioni@tin.it.
Cox, R., & Barnier, A. J. (2009). Hypnotic illusions and clinical delusions: a hypnotic paradigm for investigating delusions of misidentification. *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 57*(1), 1-32. The authors present a study which uses hypnosis as an analogue of abnormal psychological phenomena. In this experiment the investigators utilized hypnosis to investigate processes of delusion and their influence on autobiographical memory. The authors selected high and low hypnotizable subjects for participation in two different experiments. In the first experiment the highs and lows both received a hypnotic instruction to become someone similar or dissimilar to themselves. In the second experiment the participants were given hypnotic suggestions to become a same sex sibling. These suggestions were then tested using challenges that attempted to gauge the strength of the hypnotic delusion upon the hypnotic participant.

The participants were also asked questions about themselves during the hypnotic delusion condition to allow them to generate autobiographical memories. In general, the highs did much better on the challenge task and were able to more deeply experience the delusional experience of being another person. The highs also generated autobiographical statements when cued during the experiment which were thought to reflect the perspective of the delusionally-enacted identity state.

Readers will find this experiment to be fascinating since it does seem to demonstrate how hypnosis can be used as an experimental analogue of abnormal psychological phenomena. In a sense, the delusionally-enacted identity state could be thought of as an experimental analogue dissociative state and/or ego state phenomena. It was interesting that highs might be better at enacting the role of another person in hypnosis. This ability of highs is similar to the empathic role-taking skill known as perspective-taking in the literature of social psychology. The author’s findings thus seem consistent with current research by myself and others on the relationship between empathy and hypnotic ability. Address for reprints: Rochelle E. Cox, Macquarie Centre for Cognitive Science, Macquarie University, Sydney, NSW, 2109, Australia. Email: rcox@maccs.mq.edu.au.

Krakauer, S. Y. (2009). The therapeutic release of anger: Helen Watkins’s silent abreaction and subsequent elaborations of the anger rock. *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 57*(1), 47-63. This paper contains the author's summary and commentary on Helen Watkins’s (1980) silent abreaction technique for releasing anger. Krakauer also discusses the work of other theorists’ perspectives on silent abreaction as well. The author pays particular attention to the original article by Helen Watkins and her verbatim account of how the technique should be used. The article discusses how the silent abreaction technique has been utilized by others to treat dissociative identity disorder, constant pain syndrome, and severe depression with trauma and discusses the general utility it has in all of its variations. I enjoyed this paper for its use of case illustrations to demonstrate the power of the artistry involved with using this technique. Address for reprints: Dr. Sarah Krakauer, College of William and Mary, PO Box 8795, 232 Jamestown Road, Williamsburg, Virginia 23187-8795. Email: sarahkrakauer@cox.net.
Pekala, R. J., Kumar, V. K., Maurer, R. L. Sr., Elliott-Carter, N., Moon, E., & Mullen, K. (2009). Positive affect, negative affect, and negative effects during a phenomenological hypnotic assessment within a substance abuse population. *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 57*(1), 47-63. This is yet another important article by the author and his colleagues using the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory: Hypnotic Assessment Procedure (PCI-HAP) to investigate hypnotic phenomena. The PCI-HAP provides a measure to estimate a patient’s hypnotic ability for clinical purposes in about 35 minutes of administration time. The PCI-HAP also gives clinicians and researchers access to a depth of phenomenological information about a patient or a participant’s experience of hypnosis that is unparalleled by any other standardized instrument. The instrument is easy to use in clinical and research settings. It is highly recommend that readers contact Dr. Pekala and learn to administer this instrument which is as useful in clinical contexts as it is in hypnosis research.

In this study the authors used the PCI-HAP to investigate the positive and negative emotional experiences that participants had during hypnosis. All participants received the PCI-HAP to assess their hypnotic ability and their phenomenological experiences during hypnosis. The participants were war veterans undergoing substance abuse treatment at a VA hospital. The results demonstrated that positive emotional experiences were often associated with hypnosis. Positive emotional experiences were related to the degree of hypnotic depth that participants achieved during trance as well as the vividness of their imagery in hypnosis. The authors reported that very few participants experienced negative emotions during the PCI-HAP. These negative emotional experiences were related to a participant’s scores on the Dissociative Experiences Scale as well as their spontaneous experience of falling asleep during the induction. However, these results regarding negative emotional experiences did not replicate on a cross-validation sample.

This may become a memorable study on the basic nature of hypnosis. Practitioners are often asked by patients, students, colleagues, and the public about the relative safety of hypnosis and what the experience will be like for a novice participant. Dr. Pekala and his colleagues research over the years has provided us with some of the best answers to these common questions. This study is consistent with other researchers’ previous findings that negative sequelae after hypnosis are uncommon and mild in nature. However, this study goes further than previous studies in demonstrating empirically that positive emotional experiences are common in hypnosis and specifically when it is employed in a standardized testing format.

Researchers of hypnosis may wish to cite this study when writing about the relative risks of participation in hypnotic research. This paper is important as it offers empirical data addressing the common advice given in many hypnotic experiments (such as the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility: Form A) that most people find hypnosis to be a very relaxing and pleasant experience. Address for reprints: Dr. Ronald J. Pekala, Coatesville Veterans Administration Medical Center, Coatesville, Pennsylvania 19380-2765. Email: Ronald.Pekala@med.va.gov.

414
Pyun, Y. D, & Kim Y. J. (2009). Norms for the Korean version of the Harvard Group Scale Of Hypnotic Susceptibility, Form A. International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 57(1), 117-126. This is a cross-cultural experiment in which Korean subjects were administered a Korean language version of the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility: Form A (HGSHS:A). Previously there has been a great deal of research using the Harvard instrument with subjects from many different cultures and language backgrounds. The pool of 271 participants contained 175 males and 96 females. The authors wished to examine their results in relationship to previously published international samples. The authors reported that their data from the Korean sample using the HGSHS:A were similar to the means and standard deviations obtained with other international reference samples. However, some notable differences did emerge with this Korean sample. The authors reported that the pass rate on the hallucination item (to experience a fly/mosquito) on the Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility, Form A, was significantly different from that obtained in other samples. The authors reported that Korean females showed higher overall scores than males which is also different than what we generally see in North American and European samples.

This paper illustrates the pattern of similarities as well as the differences that emerged between Korean and other international samples. It is interesting that the ability to experience hypnosis is somewhat culture-free in its larger aspects. It is almost as if the experience hypnosis is, to some extent, a universal experience. However, this paper and others do show that there can be unique cultural differences in the phenomenology of hypnosis. This leads to the obvious and fascinating question: why do these specific differences exist? These differences could reflect cultural beliefs, expectancies, the history of hypnosis in the culture, psychophysiological variables, the nature of a culture’s language patterns, and a great host of other factors. Email: pyunyd@naver.com.

White D, Ciorciari J, Carbis C & Liley D. (2009). EEG correlates of virtual reality hypnosis. International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 57(1), 47-63. This is a new study looking at the psychophysiological characteristics of participants engaged in a hypnotic virtual reality task. The authors utilized electroencephalographic (EEG) instruments to record EEG changes in coherence and power spectra during the experiment. The subjects were 17 high and low hypnotizable participants (Mean age = 21.35, SD = 1.58) who were screened using the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Clinical Scale. The administration of hypnosis was induced utilizing a virtual reality hypnosis (VRH) induction system. There has been a general hope in the field of VRH that using VRH methods might help improve the experience of hypnosis for many hypnotic subjects. VRH methods may be able to help low and moderate hypnotizables experience hypnosis more deeply. There is also a hope that VRH methods may be especially useful to those subjects who have difficulty generating visual imagery but are responsive to other aspects of hypnosis.

The EEG data from the 17 participants were compared based upon their hypnotic ability score. The EEG was recorded in reference to a 2-minute/eyes-closed baseline state which was compared to a sample collected during the hypnotic procedure. The authors reported finding significant interactions with coherence in the EEG beta band. The high susceptibility group (n = 7) showed decreased coherence in beta while the low susceptibility group (n = 10) demonstrated an increase in beta coherence between medial frontal and lateral left prefrontal sites. The authors discussed their current findings as being fairly consistent
International Literature Reviews

with previous research literature regarding the psychophysiology of hypnosis.

The paper seems to relate to much previous work in using EEG biofeedback to enhance hypnotic responsiveness. We know that EEG can be used to modify hypnotic susceptibility and enhance hypnotic responding even without using VRH methods. One might expect that receiving VRH methods as a form of feedback could be innately more rewarding than listening to tones or other feedback methods that were used in the early years of EEG conditioning research. Thus one might speculate that feedback mechanisms using EEG conditioning and VRH to modify hypnotic ability could become more successful than older methods. Email: dliley@swin.edu.au.