Review of the International Literature

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The authors of this study report on their treatment approach to helping patients with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) using methods of hypnosis. The patients in this study were all combat veterans with PTSD. Each veteran’s presentation of PTSD symptoms contained a significant olfactory component within their traumatic memories. The authors discuss how they created a treatment approach that they term hypnotherapeutic olfactory conditioning (HOC) and employed it with thirty-six outpatients with chronic PTSD. All 36 patients had previously reported experiencing intrusive olfactory-induced flashbacks as a part of their experience of PTSD. The 36 veterans were all treated with six 1.5-hour sessions of HOC using hypnosis. All the patients were administered the revised Impact of Events Scale (IES-R), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), and the Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES) as outcome measures. The outcome measures were later re-administered at six months and one year follow-up sessions. The authors reported finding significant reductions in the veterans’ symptoms of PTSD by the end of the 6-week treatment. The clinical benefit of their hypnotic HOC procedure was reported to be seen across the IES-R, BDI, and DES measures. Furthermore, the authors reported that the improvement was maintained at 6-month and 1-year follow-ups while their use of medication was curtailed. The authors conclude that hypnosis and their HOC treatment protocol both “demonstrate potential for providing benefit to individuals suffering from PTSD with olfactory components” (p. 316). This is an interesting study given the high rates of PTSD currently being seen in veterans of many countries. The study is also interesting given its focus on flashbacks and in particular their relationship to sensory cues such as olfactory stimuli. Address for Reprints: Dr. E. G. Abramowitz, Mental Health Division, Israel Defense Forces, Israel. Email Address: eitanmd@zahav.net.il.

Hill, Z., Hung, L., & Bryant, R. A. (2010). A hypnotic paradigm for studying intrusive memories. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, [Epub ahead of print]*. This study demonstrates how useful hypnosis can be in investigating psychopathology. The authors discuss how they were able to ethically
and safely create a hypnotic experience in normal people that resembles features of intrusive memories that we find in persons suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other conditions involving traumatic memories. The authors report on a hypnotic paradigm that they created for eliciting intrusive memories which can then be studied under experimental conditions. The participants in this study were forty-nine highly hypnotizable participants who agreed to the experiment. The participants were all asked to discuss a distressing memory prior to being hypnotized. All the participants were later hypnotized and given a suggestion that they would remember the distressing experience in response to a post-hypnotic stimulus or cue (post-hypnotic suggestion). Some of the participants were told that they would remember being given the post hypnotic suggestion for reminiscing about the distressing event while others received post-hypnotic amnesia for the post-hypnotic suggestion and for the source of the memory itself. All the participants completed a cognitive task after being hypnotized during which the experimenters administered numerous trials of the post hypnotic suggestion to judge its effect on the cognitive task. The authors reported that the participants in the posthypnotic amnesia condition demonstrated greater interference related effects on the cognitive task after the post-hypnotic suggestion was given then the participants who had not received an instruction for post-hypnotic amnesia. The authors also reported that the participants in the post-hypnotic amnesia condition reported a greater amount of the feeling of intrusiveness and involuntariness to their experience of the post-hypnotic cue than the other participants. The authors conclude, “These findings suggest that posthypnotic suggestion provides a useful paradigm to elicit intrusive memories under experimental conditions” (p. 1). This study is highly recommend for professionals with an interest in trauma given the potential implications this technique may have in providing us with greater scientific insights about the nature and treatment of traumatic memories. Address for reprints: Dr. Zoe Hill, School of Psychology, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia. Email (Dr. Richard Bryant): r.bryant@unsw.edu.au.

Hunt, K. & Ernst, H. (2010). The evidence-base for complementary medicine in children: A critical overview of systematic reviews. Archives of Disease in Childhood, [Epub ahead of print]. This article takes a skeptical look at the evidence for the traditions of complementary medicine in helping children with medical problems. The lead author previously published an article questioning the commitment of providers of complementary practices to evidence based practice in medicine. The authors examined 17 different reviews of studies that attempted to help children using complementary medicine. The methods in these reviews included acupuncture, chiropractic, herbal medicine, homeopathy, hypnotherapy, massage, and yoga. The authors took a very skeptical view of the available evidence for the field of complementary medicine as a whole. However, they do acknowledge that there is some evidence that the hypnosis training can be effective for children with procedural pain. The authors conclude that, “Although there is some encouraging evidence for hypnosis, herbal medicine and acupuncture, there is insufficient evidence to suggest that other CAMs are effective for the treatment of childhood conditions” (p. 1). The authors provide directions for future research including guidelines for improving the experimental methods used in studies of the effects of complementary medicine on children. Address for reprints: Dr. Katherine Hunt, Peninsula Medical School, Universities of Exeter & Plymouth, Exeter, UK. Email Address: Katherine.hunt@pms.ac.uk.
Jakubovits E. (2010). Role of hypnosis and hypno-suggestions methods in the complex therapy of tumor patients. *Magyar Onkolgia, 54*(2):153-60. This is an article written in Hungarian which reviews the author’s viewpoints regarding the use of hypnosis in psycho-oncology. The author discusses many points including the practical benefits of using hypnosis with cancer patients. The author also discusses to the general psychophysiological situation that cancer patients find themselves in when they undergo cancer treatment and its relationship to acute and chronic stress syndromes. Address for reprints: Dr. E. Jakubovits, Semmelweis Egyetem Egészségügdományi Kar Morfológiai és Fiziológiai Intézet 1088 Budapest Vas. u. 17. ELTE Pszichológiai Doktori Iskola Magatartápszichológiai PhD Program Budapest.

Lazarus, J. E., & Klein, S. K. (2010). Nonpharmacological treatment of tics in Tourette’s syndrome adding videotape training to self-hypnosis. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics, 31*(6):498-504. This study demonstrates initial evidence suggesting that training in self-hypnosis may be helpful to children with Tourette’s syndrome to control tics. The authors chose the files of 37 children and adolescents with Tourette’s syndrome that had been referred to their clinic for training in self-hypnosis. The patients were trained in therapy which also included videotaped demonstrations of a boy successfully learning how to control his tics using self-hypnosis. The authors reported that 79% of the patients trained in self-hypnosis experienced a short-term clinical response lasting at least 6 weeks. The authors reported that 46% of the patients were able to gain control over their tics using self-hypnosis after only 2 sessions which improved to 96% after 3 sessions. Only one Tourette’s syndrome patient was reported to require 4 sessions to achieve a degree of control over his tics. The authors speculate that their use of videotape training “augments a protocol and probably shortens the time of training in this technique” (p. 498). The authors also conclude that their initial evidence seems to indicate the potential helpfulness of self-hypnosis training for children with Tourette’s Syndrome in general as well. Address for reprints: Dr. J. E. Lazarus, Department of Pediatrics, University Hospitals Case Medical Center, Rainbow Babies and Children’s Hospital; Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH. Email Address: JeffLazarusMD@gmail.com.

Patterson, D. R., Jensen, M. P., Wiechman, S. A., & Sharar, S. R. (2010). Virtual reality hypnosis for pain associated with recovery from physical trauma. *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 58*(3): 288-300. This is another study by Dr. Patterson and his colleagues using methods of virtual reality hypnosis (VRH) to help patients with pain due to physical trauma. The VRH suggestions for hypnotic induction and analgesia were all delivered by a customized virtual reality (VR) hardware/software. The authors present a randomized, controlled study of 21 hospitalized trauma patients using VRH. The patients were asked to complete subjective pain ratings were obtained immediately and 8 hours after using the VRH protocol. All patients received standard analgesic medical care whether they received VRH or not. The VRH patients were reported to experience less pain and less unpleasantness compared to the control group. Address for reprints: Dr. David Patterson, Department of Rehabilitation Medicine, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98104, USA. Email Address: davepatt@u.washington.edu.
Reinhard, J., Hüsken-Janssen, H., Hatzmann, H., & Schiermeier, S. (2010). Hypnotherapy, gestational age and incidence of preterm labour. Zeitschrift für Geburtshilfe und Neonatologie, 214(3):82-7. This is an initial study (in German) of a new approach to using hypnosis in obstetrics that was developed by the authors. The authors were curious to determine whether their approach could lower the rate of preterm labor and contribute to a higher gestational age of the mothers’ infants. The study recruited 101 women who participated in a birth preparation class that included hypnosis training which they termed hypnomental birth preparation. The results of these patients were compared with a control group that did not receive any hypnosis training but received the standard of care from a medical center in Europe. The patients were also given measures to determine their educational background, number of previous pregnancies, live births, average number of cigarettes smoked per day and age, in addition to a number of other variables. The authors reported finding a significantly lower rate of preterm deliveries in the hypnosis group (5.49%) than that which was found in the control group (11.3%). The authors also reported finding a significant relationship between the infant’s gestational age and maternal participation in the hypnomental birth preparation group. These effects were reported to take into account a number of maternal factors such as socioeconomic status. The authors reported being encouraged by their initial results and discuss the need for a planned randomized controlled study using their hypnomental methods to try and reduce the incidence of preterm labor.

Address for reprints: Dr. J. Reinhard, Frauenklinik der Universität Witten/Herdecke, Akademisches Lehrkrankenhaus der Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Witten. Email address: j.reinhard@marien-hospital-witten.de.

Restif, A. S. (2010). Self-hypnosis, a resource for children undergoing painful treatment. Soins. Pédiatrie, Puériculture, 254:37-9. This is a brief article in French discussing the use of hypnosis to help children undergoing painful and invasive medical treatments. The article discusses how specially trained medical providers such as nurses can provide the hypnotic treatment to the patients for their procedure. Address for Reprints: Anne-Sophie Restif, Puéricultrice, Onco-hématologie pédiatrique, CHU de Rennes, 33 (0)2 99 28 43 21. Email Address: marie-madeleine.lucas@chu-rennes.fr.

Santarpia, A., Blanchet, A., Mininni, G., Andrasik, F., Kwiatkowski, F., & Lambert, J. F. (2010). Effects of weight-related literal and metaphorical suggestions about the forearms during hypnosis. International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 58(3):350-65. The authors of this study wished to examine whether the variations in the wording of hypnotic suggestions might have specific effects for similar phenomena. The participants all experienced a similar arm lowering suggestion involving the perception of heaviness. However, the authors employed both classic direct literal suggestions (L) such as “your right arm is heavy” as well as metaphorical (M) suggestions such as “your right arm is made of lead.” The authors reported finding “a specific effect on the progressive increase of pressure forces only in the temporal sequence L-M for each forearm (literal suggestions followed by metaphorical suggestions) was found” (p. 350). The authors discuss the findings in terms of the “crescendo image metaphor effect, conceptualized within context-limited simulation theory” (p. 350). Address for reprints: Dr. A. Santarpia, Laboratoire de psychopathologie et de neuropsychologie (EA 2027), University of Paris 8, Saint-Denis, Cedex, France. Email Address: asantarpia@yahoo.it.
Storm, L., Tressoldi, P. E., & Di Risio, L. (2010). Meta-analysis of free-response studies, 1992-2008: assessing the noise reduction model in parapsychology. *Psychological Bulletin, 136*(4): 471-85. This is a fascinating study which revisits the area of how hypnosis and other techniques of self regulation may affect a person’s parapsychological experiences. Hypnosis and Parapsychology have a long, but troubled, relationship with one another. In the early years of Mesmerism, there were numerous unscientific and wildly speculative claims that patients undergoing Mesmerism were capable of all sorts of paranormal abilities such as telepathy, precognition, and even a kind of medical intuition. Many early hypnotists seem to have taken the Mesmerists claims at face value and also encouraged the belief that hypnosis can help create parapsychological phenomena to occur. This undoubtedly has led to common misconception that many people still have about hypnosis being an inherently magical phenomena and that hypnosis is somehow an inherently unscientific field of inquiry.

Many early Mesmerists and hypnotists observed that high hypnotizables appeared to report having more parapsychological experiences in general than other persons. A number of researchers have subsequently followed up on this hypothesis and have found evidence supporting that claim. A large number of studies that have demonstrated that people high in absorption (as measured by the Tellegen Absorption Scale) as well as high hypnotizables do generally score higher on self report based measures of parapsychological experiences. However, this is different than actually demonstrating that hypnosis improves parapsychological experience. Rather these studies simply demonstrate that high hypnotizables seem to report experiencing parapsychological phenomena more than other people. The truth is, there has been very little consensus (or evidence) in the scientific community regarding whether hypnosis or any other technique of self-regulation can actually improve a person’s performance on measures of parapsychological ability.

One exception to this statement might be numerous studies that have utilized the experimental protocol and methods of Ganzfeld stimulation. Studies using Ganzfeld stimulation (and similar methods) encourage their participants to engage in various forms of relaxation/self hypnotic practice while using a form of sensory deprivation. The participants in the classic Ganzfeld experiments were often engaged in telepathy related tasks such as attempting to receive images of randomly selected computer generated images from other participants. The purpose of the Ganzfeld procedure was to help them concentrate upon the telepathy task through practicing a procedure that encouraged their development of hypnotic-like experiences. The recipient of the images would then be queried by an experimenter to select which image the sender had been trying to send them from a page of numerous images. The experimenters in these studies were able to discourage a number of alternative hypotheses to telepathy for their results using random selection of the target images and other experimenter/participant-blinding procedures. Some proponents of the Ganzfeld paradigm have claimed that it might be possible that the Ganzfeld stimulation protocol might help improve a person’s parapsychological performance by cutting down on internal and external distracters (noise) that may normally cloud our parapsychological abilities. Hypnosis has been shown to alter people’s attention in various ways and this might be a simple explanation for its supposed effectiveness in Ganzfeld studies.

The authors of the current study provide an interesting new meta-analysis of 29 Ganzfeld studies conducted between 1992 to 2008. They compared the results of these 29 experiments to another 16 studies that used non-Ganzfeld noise reduction techniques such as meditation, relaxation, and hypnosis as well as to 14 other studies that did not use a noise-reduction strategy at all. The authors reported that the studies using a noise reduction
paradigm had a significantly higher effect size than the studies which did not use an experimental paradigm employing noise reduction. The authors also reported finding that the effect size of the Ganzfeld studies was significantly higher than the mean effect size of the non-Ganzfeld noise reduction studies and the non-noise reduction studies. The authors also found that participants who reported experiencing more parapsychological experiences in their daily life were also more likely to be high scores on measures of parapsychological experience. However, this was not the case for participants in the non-Ganzfeld studies.

This is an interesting meta-analysis that I highly recommend that everyone should read, given the potential implications of its findings. It may be valuable to read this paper, given the common misconceptions that people have about hypnosis. This paper seems to actually provides relevant data regarding the supposed “magical” nature of hypnotic experiences. The current Address for reprints: Dr. Lance Storm, School of Psychology, University of Adelaide, Room 248, Hughes Building, Adelaide, South Australia 5005, Australia. Email Address: lance.storm@adelaide.edu.au.