Hypnosis and Psychoanalysis: Twelve Steps toward Mutual Enrichment – Toward Recapturing Squandered Opportunities

(Richard P. Kluft, MD, PhD)
Hypnosis and Psychoanalysis: Twelve Steps Toward Healing the Rift and Recapturing Squandered Opportunities

Richard P. Kluft, M.D., Ph.D.
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Hypnosis and Psychoanalysis Project

Editor: Stephen Lankton
Special Issue Editor: Richard P. Kluft
Contributors:
  Daniel Brown  John O’Neil
  Ira Brenner  Mary Jo Peebles
  Stephen Kahn  Thomas Wall
  Richard P. Kluft

Outline

• What are the common wisdom, the oral lore, the most frequently quoted rationales for Freud’s rejecting hypnosis?
• What considerations must be taken into account in reassessing what Freud actually said?
• What did Freud actually say?
• Reassessing the common wisdom, oral lore, and most frequently quoted rationales....
• Original abstract overambitious... Apologies.
Why Should a Researcher Study Hearsay and Selective Quotations?

- Because psychoanalysts as a rule do not know much about hypnosis.
- Because the psychoanalytic literature on Freud’s rejection of hypnosis generally quotes one of three sources, and these three sources are core elements of most psychoanalytic curricula.
- For analysis and the mental health sciences in general, those sources and the oral lore constitute their core knowledge about hypnosis.

The Oral Lore about Rejecting Hypnosis and “The Big Quotes” - I

1) Freud found he could not hypnotize everyone
2) Freud found that he was a mediocre hypnotist
3) Freud felt hypnosis was authoritarian and suggestive
4) Freud found that symptoms treated with hypnosis were suppressed rather than resolved, and that recurrence or symptoms substitution was likely if not inevitable
5) Freud found that hypnosis distorted the transference
6) Once Freud realized the importance of resistance and the transference, he saw that the use of hypnosis would damage his ability to make optimal use of the most important elements of his emerging model of psychoanalytic treatment.

The Oral Lore and “Big Quotes” - II

- Freud rejected hypnosis in 1895, claiming his psycho-analysis was superior.
- By 1905 Freud’s concern with transference and psychosexual dynamics had begun to affect his conceptualization of hypnosis:
  - “In this connection I cannot help recalling the credulous submissiveness shown by a hypnotized subject towards his hypnotist. This leads me to suspect that the essence of hypnosis lies in an unconscious fixation of the subject’s libido to the figure of the hypnotist, through the medium of the masochistic components of the sexual instinct.” (Freud, 1905a, p. 350)
- This is a crucial moment. Long the defender of hypnosis as a reasonable and benign procedure, Freud now reinterprets hypnosis as an encounter suffused with sadomasochistic sexuality. For the first time, Freud attaches a profoundly negative valence to hypnosis.
The Oral Lore and “Big Quotes” – III

• Besides all this I have another reproach to make against this method, namely, that it conceals from us all insight into the play of mental forces; it does not permit us, for example, to recognize the resistance with which the patient clings to his disease and thus even fights against his own recovery; yet it is this phenomenon of resistance which alone makes it possible to understand his behaviour in daily life.

(Freud, 1905b, p. 261)

The Oral Lore and “Big Quotes” – IVa

• In his 1921 paper, “Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego,” Freud heads off in a new direction, even more disparaging to hypnosis. Beginning with considering similarities between hypnosis and love (see Freud, 1914b), Freud no longer describes hypnosis as merely ineffectual. He proceeds to proclaim a vision of hypnosis (perhaps based on his attribution of sexual sadomasochism to hypnosis nine years previously) that again conjures up visions of a Svengali or a dictatorial demagogue.

The Oral Lore and “Big Quotes” – IVb

“Let us recall that hypnosis has something positively uncanny about it; but the characteristic of uncanniness suggests something old and familiar that has undergone repression. Let us consider how hypnosis is induced. The hypnotist asserts that he is in possession of a mysterious power that robs the subject of his own will; or, which is the same thing, the subject believes it of him. This mysterious power (which is even now often described popularly as ‘animal magnetism’) must be the same power that is looked upon by primitive people as the source of taboo, the same that emanates from kings and chieftains and makes it dangerous to approach them (mana). The hypnotist, then, is supposed to be in possession of this power...”

(Freud, 1921, p. 125)
**The Oral Lore and “Big Quotes” – IVc**

- This absurd and anachronistic pronouncement, invoking long discredited Mesmeric theories, represents hypnosis as a sinister domination akin to coercive persuasion. An extravagant and hyperbolic misrepresentation, it portrays a caricature of a primitive Mesmeric “animal magnetism” discordant with hypnosis as practiced by Freud’s mentors.

**Taking a Closer Look...**

- The following observations and explorations are extracted from four scholarly articles, and will inevitably be both incomplete and perplexing both on that basis, and because I have had to be rather arbitrarily selective.
- For any resultant confusion, oversimplification of complex issues, or appearance of overstating my arguments and conclusions, I apologize.

**Crucial Considerations in Reconsidering Freud’s Rationales**

- Freud’s Errors of Categorization
- Mistaking the Style of the Era for the Substance of Hypnosis by Freud’s Followers.
- Acknowledging Unmitigated Nonsense
- Freud’s Conquistador Mentality and the Drive to Create His Own Grand Theory
- Freud’s Contamination of His Science with His Ambitions... Did He Sacrifice the Former for the Latter?
Two Errors of Categorization - I

- Freud defined “psycho-analysis” as “the science of unconscious mental processes... [and hence] a depth psychology.” It is also a particular methodology of treatment (Freud, 1926, p. 264).
- In contrast, hypnosis is neither. It serves as a facilitator of treatments, a catalyst that amplifies the impact of modalities and interventions (Frischholz, 1995; Frischholz & Spiegel, 1983) for better or, as Peebles (2017) reminds us, for worse. It has genetic components (Raz, Pan, & Posner, 2006). Ergo, attempts by analysts to interpret hypnosis in terms of psychoanalytic discourse, theories, and methodologies are a priori off the mark.

Two Errors of Categorization - II

- Freud simultaneously defined hypnosis in terms of the techniques and practices of the heterohypnosis of his day, and said it should be avoided, while: 1) leaving unaddressed auto-suggestion/auto-hypnosis which he practiced (Freud, 1989); and 2) observing that his analytic patients often went into trance or something like hypnosis on the couch (e.g., Freud, 1900).
- This paradox has remained unaddressed.

Two Errors of Categorization - III

- As O’Neil (2018) argues, by failing to consider dissociation an active defense, he severed dissociation and the premier way of dealing with dissociation, hypnosis, from what would become the psychoanalytic mainstream.
The Style of the Era

- Freud and his contemporaries mistook what hypnosis facilitated for hypnosis.
- Simply stated, Freud stopped doing certain things (which he called hypnosis) and began doing other things (which he called "psych-analysis").
- Hypnosis, like other healing arts of the time, involved an authoritative and paternalistic healer functioning in a highly stratified and class-conscious society. Looking back, many saw Freud as iconoclastic liberator. However, his psychoanalysis (in terms of the models of helping described by Brickman et al. (1986)) embodied rather than challenged these qualities, which would be mollified over time and attributed retroactively to Freud. Freud's values appear more progressive than his psychoanalysis.

Simple Nonsense

To make his points, Freud mischaracterized hypnosis in a detrimental manner.
- As the years passed, Freud's portrayal of the hypnotist became reduced to an evil caricature. The hypnosis he described and attacked was unlike what he had been taught and practiced.
- Likewise, if paradoxically, his description of the therapeutic effects of hypnosis diminished without any evidence to substantiate his claims. It was probably true that shorter treatments led to less robust results. He would soon discover that was true of analysis as well. Analyses grew longer: See Freud (1937).

Freud's Conquistador Mentality and His Quest for a Grand Theory

- How Did Freud See Himself as a Figure in the Intellectual Life of the World?
- What Was the Holy Grail of the Theory-Builders of Freud's Era, and How Did Freud Go About Building a Theory?
Will the Real Sigmund Freud Please Stand Up?

More recent scholars recognize that Freud's unique psychological configuration may have played a significant role in his ostensibly scientific modus operandi (Berman, 1981; Breger, 2009; Brenner, 2009; Kluft, in press a; Makari, 2008). Freud deplored the efforts of his friend Fleiss to praise his intellectual and scientific prowess. Instead, he likened himself instead to a conquistador (from the context, implicitly a conquistador of the mind):

“For I am actually not at all a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter, not a thinker. I am by temperament nothing but a conquistador — an adventurer, if you want it translated — with all the curiosity, daring, and tenacity characteristic of a man of this sort. Such people are customarily esteemed only if they have been successful, have really discovered something; otherwise they are dropped by the wayside. And that is not altogether unjust.”

(Freud, 1900, p. 398)

Freud’s “Grail Quest” — I

• Sigmund Freud wanted to create a heroic theory of his own, one that had a very broad scope. It is significant that he could not remain in the role of collaborator or junior colleague.

• For a heroic theory to please a scientist of his era, it could tolerate no exceptions or contradictions.

Freud’s “Grail Quest” — II

• When I note Freud’s determined defensiveness of his “psycho-analysis”, it may be difficult to appreciate that determination without realizing that Freud had already made and been forced to abandon several efforts:
  — Cocaine Treatment of Opiate Addiction
  — Project for a Scientific Psychology
  — Hypnosis
  — The Seduction Theory
Freud’s “Grail Quest” - III

• Within a few short years, 1895-1897, Freud:
  – 1895 - Rejected Hypnosis because it did not work for all.
  – 1895 - Rejected his Project because it was too far ahead of its time to be pursued further.
  – 1896 – Finally rejected cocaine and defending cocaine after 12 years of use, upon the death of his father.
  – 1897 - Rejected the Seduction Theory because he came to doubt the accuracy of some patient accounts, so it could not be an overall theory.
  – Freud retreated into the detailed study of the intrapsychic, which he believed would address universal truths.

Freud’s “Grail Quest” - IV

• As his thinking became more metapsychological than based on clinical observation, Freud’s psycho-analysis became increasingly Hermeneutic and driven by the notion of “psychological truth.”
• Finally immune from contradiction by reality limits and reality events, Freud increasingly interpreted the world through the lens of his theories, and assigned hypnosis a role therein, that of the coercive enforcer of homosexual submission.
• I will simply state my unproven interpretation in a very oversimplified form: In so characterizing hypnosis Freud symbolically justified “freeing” himself from his fears of being intellectually dominated by Pierre Janet and the colleagues in hypnosis he had left behind.

Freud’s Rejection of Hypnosis
(Kluft, 2018b, 2018c)

• Psychoanalytic Electrical Publishing Archives
• 73 entries
  – 3 republications
  – 1 reference within a reference
  – 71 usable citations
• Range
  – Initial publication 1887 – Freud was 31
  – Final publication 1938 - Freud was 82 (died 1939)
The Phases

- Enthusiastic Endorsement: Mid- Late 1880s
- Enthusiasm with a Difference: Late 1880s
- Collaboration, Cooperation, and Competition: Late 1880s through 1893-5
- Formulating a Metapsychology and Applying It Negatively to Hypnosis: 1895 – 1921
- Portraying Hypnosis as Tyrannical and Unhelpful: 1921-1939

Implications for Commonly Held Beliefs About Freud’s Rejection of Hypnosis

- Despite their largely unquestioned standing for nearly a century, they cannot be sustained.
- Even in their own era, Freud’s observations were contradicted by information often omitted, mischaracterized, or simply noted without reasonable efforts to explain them or show how they related to more privileged notions.
- They do not demonstrate scientific progress.

Bottom Line - 1

- 1. Freud’s concept of hypnosis was confused and internally self-contradictory. Apart from misrepresenting hypnosis by design:
  - He rejected a particular set of procedures which he called hypnosis.
  - He never addressed self-hypnosis or trance.
  - He knew patients slid into trance on the couch
  - His instructions for free association are suggestive and include imagery.
Bottom Line - 2

- Freud’s Inability to Hypnotize Everyone and Allegations He Was a Mediocre Hypnotist –
  - Freud knew the first going in. He addressed diversity in hypnotizability in his 1887 preface to Bernheim’s book. The discovery he could not hypnotize all was not a discovery. It is a false “finding” of what he had been taught.
  - That Freud could not hypnotize all was a statement of the same, not an indictment of hypnosis. Freud found he could not analyze everyone, but neither repudiated psychoanalysis nor declared himself a mediocre analyst. By this criterion every therapist is mediocre.
  - Freud’s greatest accomplishment may have been to develop a psychotherapy for low-moderates and lows.

Bottom Line – 3a

- Freud’s rationale that he abandoned hypnosis because it was authoritarian and coercive, paradoxically both dangerously powerful and rather impotent, is sheer historical revisionism.
  - He rejected hypnosis ten years before he first characterized hypnosis as negative rather than simply less good than psychoanalysis, and nearly two decades before he described it as coercive.

Bottom Line – 3b

- Freud abandoned hypnosis in 1895, and came to mischaracterize hypnosis in terms of its flagrant misuse, which was not characteristic of the work he had witnessed or practiced, but in terms familiar to any cultured European of his time.
- It is helpful to inquire, what else happened in 1895?
- Glad you asked... Publication of Triiby, still studied as an iconic best-seller.
Bottom Line – 3c

• Freud, always attuned into the popular culture and eager to prevent psychoanalysis from being seen as “a Jewish science,” increasingly characterized hypnosis in terms of the wicked Jew, Svengali, and distanced psychoanalysis from hypnosis.

• Ironically, hypnosis, largely the province of Gentiles, was redefined in terms of anti-Semitic stereotypes, and Freud labored to involve non-Jews among his analytic colleagues.

Bottom Line - 4

• Freud’s rejecting hypnosis because he witnessed relapses and symptom substitution is a rationale fraught with confusion.
  – It may have elements of truth, but Freud reported this only after rejecting hypnosis, not before.
  – Freud’s initial work with the short analyses of the time benefitted from the Hawthorne Effect. As years passed, shorter gave way to longer analyses.
  – In “Analysis, Terminable and Interminable” (1937) Freud leveled similar charges against psychoanalysis.

Bottom Line - 5

• Freud argued that the use of hypnosis was destructive to the optimal exploration of resistance and transference.
  – Given how hypnosis was being used, this, his first rationale, remains credible at face value, and remains potentially relevant today.
  – However, since Freud’s conceptualizations and understandings of hypnosis were deeply flawed, this statement lacks generic credibility.
**Bottom Bottom Line**
- Freud's rejection of hypnosis was based almost completely upon fallacious arguments.
- Viewed dispassionately, Freud's scientific explorations of hypnosis came to a halt subsequent to his decision to reject it. Thereafter, he wrote incessant and increasingly negative misrepresentations of hypnosis in tandem with his proclamation of the superiority of his "psycho-analysis."
- Due to Freud's iconic stature, these arguments have remained largely unchallenged and unexamined for the better part of a century.
- Arguments made elsewhere (Kluft, in press) demonstrate that the resultant rift between hypnosis and psychoanalysis has been counterproductive and merits reconsideration.

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**Toward Healing the Rift**
- The Rift Has Persisted for 123 Years
- There Is No Scientific Basis for Its Persistence.
- There Has Been Little Attempt Within Psychoanalysis to Reexamine Freud's Critiques of Hypnosis, Although They Were Promulgated from Between 81 and 123 Years Ago.

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**The Search for Common Ground**
- Given Freud's errors and their perpetuation, it is striking to find that many areas of rapprochement are readily available, if this matter is approached with an open mind.
- While some have proposed introducing hypnotic approaches into analysis, or analytic approaches into hypnosis (see Brenner and O'Neil, AJCH, vol. 60, #3 for examples), Kluft (in press) has pointed out that such mutual enrichment can occur without altering the boundaries of either paradigm.
Hypnosis and Psychoanalysis – Twelve Steps Toward Mutual Enrichment - I

1. Challenge the Dichotomization of Resistance and Transference vs. Suggestion
2. Using Psychoanalysis-Informed Efforts to Facilitate Inductions and Using Hypnosis-Informed Efforts to Facilitate Free Association
3. Curb Your Enthusiasm

Hypnosis and Psychoanalysis – Twelve Steps Toward Mutual Enrichment - II

4. Importing Xenomorphic Resources
5. Safety Last – Ending Sessions Well
6. Making More Patients Accessible to Treatment
7. Covert Imports That Enhance Exploration
8. Combatting Conceptual Countertransference

Hypnosis and Psychoanalysis – Twelve Steps Toward Mutual Enrichment – III

9. Engaging the Patient as Partner: Rapport vs. Therapeutic Alliance
10. Understanding Suggestion More Completely
11. Striking When the Iron Is Hot
12. Considering Process vs. Symptoms
Reflection

- Freud’s Rejection of Hypnosis Deserves Thoughtful Review and Reconsideration.
- A Series of Principles Marked by Faulty Reasoning, Trance Logic, and Paradigm-Driven Myopia Has Outlived Its Usefulness.
- Both Hypnosis and Psychoanalysis Can Grow From Better Appreciating Each Other.

Sources

- This presentation has been based on four articles published or currently in press with the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*.

  Contact Information: rpkluft@aol.com