

# HYPNOSIS



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# Hypnosis

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**There is no such thing as hypnosis, there is only suggestion... so how can we find a true definition of Hypnosis?**

A complete understanding of the nature, effect and power of suggestion is fundamental to a full understanding of hypnosis. The mechanics of hypnosis are no more mysterious than the workings of the internal combustion engine

In the United Kingdom, Hypnosis is defined in the 1952 Hypnotism Act as ‘any phenomena where the susceptibility of the mind is increased to suggestion.’ The wording was included in the act as a ‘catch all’ policy, specifically designed to prevent stage hypnotists claiming that they were not using hypnosis to avoid applying for a licence, something all stage hypnotists in the UK have to have.

As early as 1892, The British Medical Association (BMA) published a report on Hypnotism and officially recognised Hypnosis: *“The Committee, having completed such investigation of hypnotism as time permitted, have to report that they have satisfied themselves of the genuineness of the hypnotic state.”* The Committee also acknowledged that *“as a therapeutic agent hypnotism is frequently effective in relieving pain, procuring sleep, and alleviating many functional ailments.”*

In 1955, a follow up report was commissioned which endorsed the findings of the original 1892 Committee and added the conclusions that *“hypnotism is of value and may be the treatment of choice in some cases of so-called psycho-somatic disorders and psychoneuroses. It may also be of value for revealing unrecognised motives and conflicts in such conditions. As a treatment, in the opinion of the Subcommittee it has proved its ability to remove symptoms and to alter morbid habits of thought and behaviour... In addition to the treatment of psychiatric disabilities, there is a place for hypnotism in the production of anaesthesia or analgesia for surgical and dental operations and in suitable subjects it is an effective method of relieving pain in childbirth without altering the normal course of labour.”*

Contrary to popular belief, the state of hypnosis is not a trance or altered state of consciousness although it would be fair to describe it as a divergent frame of mind. Hypnotised subjects are fully aware of what is going on around them — they are able to hear the sounds of the world outside as well as the voice of the hypnotist. If they actually went to sleep, they wouldn’t be able to hear and process the suggestions (information) given them by the therapist.

The process is fairly straightforward. The brain is naturally susceptible to suggestion and responding to suggestion is part of the learning process. Advertisers know this and so do politicians, lawyers, religious leaders and con-men. Hypnotists have understood the power of suggestion for over two hundred years. In fact, the big secret about hypnosis is that there is no secret! Relaxation helps the mind focus, visualise and imagine. Suggestion is closely linked to learning and is yet another way of imparting new ideas and thoughts, moulding not just individuals, but whole societies and civilisations.

It’s important to understand that the hypnotist is not creating anything new in the mind of the subject, the hypnotist is merely exploiting a mechanism already there. But be warned... Hypnosis is ten percent knowledge and ninety percent practice and experience. It takes time and dedication to become reasonably adept at it. Hypnosis requires supreme

confidence on the part of the hypnotist and for those considering hypnosis as a stage act, be aware that it is one of the most stressful occupations there is. This is partly because there are so many variables with hypnosis and partly because the hypnotist is so dependent on the co-operation of volunteers. On the stage, you never really know what you're getting yourself into and there is no safety net!

Hypnosis is a natural state that we've all experienced many times. The physical feeling is like dozing, similar to the twilight zone between consciousness (the normal waking state) and unconsciousness (normal sleep), the time when you notice the things that go bump in the night. In the quiet solitude of the night hours, the sense of hearing picks up sounds we don't usually notice. So as we pass through this state, drifting off to sleep and again as we awaken in the morning. During those times, we are naturally in a more suggestible frame of mind — and a good time to listen to repeated messages on a recording!

This state of relaxation/drowsiness and heightened suggestibility can be artificially induced using verbal suggestion (or verbal direction) and hypnotic suggestion can alter perception, attitudes and behaviour.

Concentration and involvement are also important elements in the formula. Imagine your consciousness as a cinema screen on which there are lots of different things going on all at the same time. All these different things take up a proportion of your attention, but during hypnosis, your attention is narrowed to what is happening on just one square inch of that screen. As a consequence, that one square inch commands your undivided attention and takes on importance.

At some time in our lives we have all been in tricky situations which have taken all our wits to get out of. Extricating ourselves from such situations takes a fair degree of mental effort. As a result, the memory of that situation and the emotions attached to it, is important and significant. This is often the reason why some people develop phobias about flying, water, spiders and so on. Pleasurable 'peak experiences' can also be memorable and significant and the memories of these experiences are likely to stay with you forever, not only because it was your first time or because it was scary, but because these events occupied your full and complete attention, which is why they remain important. In hypnosis, because your attention is so focussed, suggestions and ideas establish themselves as peak experiences.

With concentration comes a sense of involvement. Have you ever read a really good book... a book that's so interesting it's hard to put it down? Sometimes it feels as if you have only been reading for half an hour and yet when you check your watch, you realise that you have been reading for two hours! We have all had similar experiences. People who can fully immerse themselves in their work, or in a hobby notice that time seems to pass more quickly, sometimes fly by. In fact, people who are able to achieve that degree of involvement make very good subjects, because they find it easy to get lost in the creative visualisation process that is a key part of hypnosis.

It has been proved that the ability to pay attention and store memory is improved when a person's eyes are closed. Children who are made to look at their teacher whilst answering difficult questions don't perform as well as those children who are allowed to avert their gaze or look down. When we consider that in hypnosis, client's eyes are invariably closed while suggestions are given. This not only helps concentration but also aids imagination and visualisation.

Have you ever noticed how athletes, just before a race look as if they are focussing their attention and seem 'lost in the moment?' These brief moments before strenuous physical action are a time of supreme concentration, switch off the outside world completely.

Using functional MRI, Neurobiologists Ilan Goldberg, Michal Harel and Rafael Malach of the Weizman Institute of Science in Israel, compared the brain patterns of a group of nine people engaged in tasks involving intense sensory stimulation or self-reflection. Areas of the brain that were active during personal introspection were largely suppressed during perception and vice-versa. What this means is that when people are busy sensing something or doing something, the area involved in self monitoring calms down. On the other hand, introspection stimulates the areas involved in self-monitoring suppresses the areas active in perception.

This valuable research suggests that the prefrontal cortex — involved in self-monitoring — is literally switched off when the brain is busy elsewhere. This may go some way to explaining why we sometimes forget ourselves when we are excited (as when we're caught up in mass hypnosis) or when we're asked to concentrate on one thing to the virtual exclusion of everything else — including when we undergo hypnosis. It appears that there is a very distinct neural state which accounts for 'being lost in the moment.'

On a sunny afternoon in 1999 at Harvard University, Psychologists Daniel J. Simons and Christopher F. Chabris showed a film of a basketball game to their students and asked them to count how many times the team in the white shirts passed the ball. It wasn't so easy to keep track of the ball all the time, but in the end most of the students got the score correct. "What about the gorilla?" the professors asked. Gorilla? What Gorilla? The students had been concentrating so hard on the task in hand that they had all failed to notice a man in a gorilla suit stroll casually across the court.

There is a mechanism in our brains that decides what we should take notice of and what we shouldn't, which information should reach our consciousness and which should be filtered out. Our needs and expectations influence what we perceive so that our attention is selective. Concentration on certain stimuli confers greater importance on those stimuli. Some stimuli are self-selective, for instance sudden loud noises or the sight of a beautiful woman in the street, in fact anything that stands out from the normal background that captures our attention. On the other hand, we can actively decide to focus our attention on things like listening to someone else's conversation in the pub whilst pretending to do the crossword.

New research is proving that when neurons start to fire when we give attention, they fire in groups and synchronise their activity. Imagine that you suddenly notice a butterfly. Before it arrives in your consciousness 'fully realised' as a fully formed three dimensional entity, several different areas of the brain must activate, processing size, shape, colour, movement and most important, significance. Add to this the principle of expectancy, where the mind fills in the gaps and anticipates movement, all these functions combine to give the complete picture.

In a simple experiment, listeners were asked to listen to a series of similar tones generated on a synthesiser. Hidden in the series of notes was a target tone that was slightly different to all the others. When the brain registered the target tone a high frequency gamma band activity was noticed in the brain. Conversely, unexpectedly loud tones, which automatically call attention to themselves, did not have this effect.

Overall, regardless of which sensory system is working, gamma band activity turned out to be a good indicator of active attention. When subjects have their attention specifically directed to those stimuli, not only do the firing rates in individual neurons change, but there is a general increase in the synchronisation of all the neurons involved in that process. The whole effect is like a symphony orchestra consisting of literally tens of thousands of players suddenly playing the same tune at the same tempo. Concentration on messages

delivered by means of hypnotic suggestion have the same effect, the subjects attention being directed to the meaning of the words, synchronising all the relevant groups of neurons and giving the suggestions significance.

More important is that if the stimuli conform to the expectancies of the subject, the incoming signals are reinforced. The difficulty though is that if the stimuli do not correspond to the expectations of the subject, the brain has an unfortunate tendency to suppress them. It is this principle that lies at the heart of the basketball/gorilla experiment — the students were concentrating so hard on the task in hand, counting the number of passes, they failed to notice the gorilla. Their brains played a trick on them because the information about the gorilla was out of sync with their expectations. If the students had simply been asked to just watch the film, they would have noticed the gorilla straight away.

However, a healthy brain is not merely a passive receiver of information, it is a complex and active system and responds very well to repetitive instruction.

Hypnosis is not magic or hocus-pocus, it's a fully understood process which focuses the attention using suggestion and relaxation. But it also utilises the preconceived ideas of the subject and this is called Expectancy.

Expectancy lies at the very heart of what's known as the Placebo Effect. A placebo exerts a powerful influence on the imagination and we'll be looking at the placebo effect in more detail shortly. Social compliance, or perhaps social convention would be a better term, is also an important part of the not so secret formula that is hypnosis. All these singularities are the result of electro-chemical reactions taking place in the brain and it is their *collective* effect that constitutes hypnosis.

There are rules which govern the behaviour of individuals and groups — both rely on suggestion, relaxation, expectation and the placebo effect. Quite apart from all the different ways relaxation can be induced and suggestions given, hypnosis is one of the biggest games of bluff in the entire universe and the whole concept of hypnosis arose from nothing more than an accident of history.

Franz Mesmer was born in Switzerland in 1733 and although he certainly didn't invent or even understand the placebo effect, he certainly but unknowingly exploited its power to great effect. A placebo is simply a neutral or inert substance given to a patient — it could be nothing more than a sugar pill, but if the patient thinks it's going to make them feel better, it probably will. In Mesmer's case, the placebo was no more than a belief in the curative power of magnetism.

In Vienna, Mesmer set up practice in the most fashionable part of town. A flamboyant character, his healing sessions soon became a popular attraction, especially with wealthy women! In the eighteenth century, there was no afternoon TV, there were no large-scale concerts or movies or sporting fixtures, in fact there wasn't an awful lot to do at all, save perhaps the law courts, or laughing at the lunatics in the asylum which was, believe it or not, a popular entertainment. Second to public hangings, surgical operations attracted large audiences.

Medical science in the mid-eighteenth century was still steeped in the traditions of endless bleedings, leechings and mercury. Compared with modern medicine, the surgeons of the eighteenth century knew virtually nothing about the body and even less about the mind.

Mesmer however was a different kind of doctor. His patients lay on the operating table while he passed powerful magnets over their bodies. This process was repeated hundreds

of times and many patients fell into a deep relaxation, almost certainly a result of the soothing effects of the ritual and similar to the modern practice of Reiki. Of course, the magnets did nothing at all — Mesmer might just as well have done it with pieces of cheese, but to his, and everybody else's astonishment, patients recovered their senses and most said they felt much better.

Mesmer believed he had discovered a miracle and wrote a paper claiming it was possible to harness the 'animal magnetism' of the universe to heal the sick and cure the incurable. News of Dr. Mesmer's healing sessions spread throughout pre-revolutionary Europe and attendances shot up as the fashionable Mesdames et Messieurs flocked to the good doctor's salon to witness the spectacular effects of animal magnetism on the frail and infirm. To the uninitiated, these recoveries would have appeared miraculous.

The by now famous Mesmer cashed in on his reputation and acquired all the trappings of theatricality. Entering the room dressed in a scarlet cape and clutching iron lightning rods in both hands he would thrill the ladies with a generous helping of dash and fire. In the twenty-first century, hypnotherapists are a little more low-key when it comes to greeting clients, but the array of certificates which decorate the walls of their offices exert much the same influence on prospective clients.

Unfortunately for Mesmer, it was not only the idle rich who were taking an interest in his activities, the established medical profession were not so easily impressed and viewed Mesmer as a threat. First indignant and then positively outraged, their trade in pills and potions were under threat. Mesmer was getting the same results by waving a couple of magnets around! [Secretly, he is one of the people I would like to have had a drink with.]

It's easy with hindsight to dismiss Mesmer as a charlatan but I think he deserves more credit. He was a doctor, medically qualified according to the standards of the day and I think he was a serious researcher into an area that had not yet been investigated properly. Any talk of harnessing animal magnetism from the universe would not only attract the unwelcome attention of the medical profession but also the vested interests of a powerful Church!

Mesmerism, as it became known, dropped out of fashion as quickly as it had caught on and the public turned their attention elsewhere for diversion. After the drubbing at the hands of the authorities, no serious physician dared practice it again, fearing the ridicule and condemnation it would bring upon their own heads. Given the stupendous ignorance of the medical establishment at the time, Mesmer's downfall was undoubtedly the result of professional jealousies rather than carefully considered investigation. Established principles dictated that bleeding was considered to be a cure for most ailments, mercury a cure for syphilis, and open wounds dressed with vinegar and best brown paper!

Before long, envious rivals succeeded in having him run out of town and in 1778 Mesmer settled in Paris where his reputation preceded him, so again he started up in business and again he began the commerce of 'magnetising' his patients — occasionally bestowing on them extraordinary powers. It was claimed that some of his patients became blessed with clairvoyance and were even able to diagnose illness in others. Of course it was nonsense, but people were only too ready and willing to believe it — another consequence of indirect suggestion and the placebo effect. Mesmer's work became so famous that King Louis XVI ordered an inquiry into 'animal magnetism' and a Royal Commission was set up.

At the time the Commission was set up in 1784 the famous American inventor Benjamin Franklin had taken up an appointment as American ambassador to the French Court. Franklin was a well known and respected scientist who had done his own experiments

with lightning and electricity and almost certainly knew more about magnetism than Dr. Mesmer. Even after consulting with Franklin, it took the Commission seven years to reach the inevitable conclusion that the magnetic forces Mesmer spoke of simply did not exist, and that the whole thing was nothing more than “*an excitement of the imagination*”. How right they were, but they also failed to recognise the undeniable power of suggestion, and thus its potency and potential benefits. Discredited once again, Mesmer was forced to leave France and disappeared into the dustbin of history. Today’s more modern healers rely on exactly the same ‘excitement of the imagination’.

Mesmerism wasn't dead and buried quite yet though. Throughout the next century various practitioners dabbled with animal magnetism, fascinated by its effects, some of which appeared to be very powerful.

In the 1830's a physician at University College Hospital in London, Dr. John Elliotson, dabbled with mesmerism to treat people with epilepsy, bed wetting in children, and certain types of hysteria. Elliotson recognised the relaxing and calming effects mesmerism produced — not because he was following Mesmer's work (although he had undoubtedly heard of him) but because he had seen a demonstration of mesmerism given by Baron Dupotet de Sennevoy who had arrived in England in 1837. Elliotson believed that mesmeric influences could be stored in, amongst other things, objects such as gold coins and magnetised water (this is a doctor, remember!) Elliotson's work was reported in *The Lancet*, attracting the attention of the editor of that esteemed journal, Thomas Wakely.

Wakely decided to do some experimenting of his own, and found that patients responded to the treatment whether the water was magnetised or not. If the doctor, the perceived authority figure, said the water was magnetised, then that was good enough — the placebo effect in all its glory!

Wakely came to the same conclusions as the Royal Commission — the effects produced had nothing whatsoever to do with magnetism, they were created solely as a result of the beliefs and expectations of the patient! However, there was great resistance to Elliotson's ideas among his peers, and he was forced to resign his post after daring to give a lecture on mesmerism at the Royal College of Physicians. Even so, Elliotson was not on his own and mesmerism refused to go away.

In India, Scottish surgeon James Esdaile used mesmerism to anaesthetise patients undergoing surgical operations. Esdaile had also witnessed a remarkable demonstration of mesmerism in which needles were inserted into the arms of volunteers for the delight of onlookers and was determined to see if he could use the same techniques in his hospital in Bengal. Miraculously, it worked on enough patients for the word to get about and with an inevitability that borders on the monotonous, the British Deputy Governor of Bengal ordered an inquiry and a committee was set up to examine Esdaile's work.

In 1846 they published their findings, and although some of Esdaile's patients didn't look as though they were experiencing pain, there were those that very obviously were. Added to this, in line with the colonial and jingoistic attitudes of the time, it was felt that because of their poorer backgrounds and the fact that many were deformed beggars, the Indian patients would be more impervious to pain than their British counterparts! One thing in particular stood out... it could sometimes take hours for the patient to be influenced by the mesmeric techniques and it was just possible that they were simply falling asleep through boredom.

Only the stage mesmerists were really taking mesmerism seriously and one of the most famous performers of the day was the Abbé Jose Custodio de Faria. Born in Goa in 1756

Faria had studied for the priesthood, so he would have been well aware of the possibilities of persuasion. He had started to give public demonstrations in Paris as early as 1813 and openly admitted that he had no special or occult powers and that everything the audience witnessed was only as a result of the willingness of his volunteers to participate. Faria did not pass his hands over the subject's bodies but merely spoke to them in a calm voice. Not everyone was convinced and Faria was caught out many times by people who were determined to go onto the stage and fake the 'trance' in order to prove Faria a fraud. But many were convinced, and Faria was able to produce a range of emotions, even reducing some people to tears, and hey presto!, stage hypnosis was born!

In 1841, a French performer called Lafontaine arrived in England to give demonstrations of mesmerism, rather like Baron de Sennevoy had done in 1837. Sitting in the audience in Manchester was another Scottish surgeon, one James Braid. Braid saw Lafontaine insert surgical needles into a volunteer (this seems to be one of the stock-in-trade routines of the day and certainly more interesting than watching someone run round like a chicken) and hold an open bottle of ammonia under the subject's nose. While the subject seemed blissfully unaware of what he was being subjected to, Braid left the demonstration totally unconvinced by animal magnetism or the existence of mesmeric powers and went away with the impression Lafontaine was a charlatan. In the 1950s and 60s, British stage hypnotist Peter Casson thrilled audiences with the same stunt. I spoke to Casson on many occasions and he said that the needle stunt had made people in the audience faint. He also told me that he would pinch the volunteers' flesh as the needle was withdrawn, thus producing a drop or two of blood as proof there was no trickery.

Even so, one hundred years after Mesmer had been politely asked to leave Paris, James Braid decided to take a second look at mesmerism. Braid had also worked in India and was curious as to how the local fakirs seemed able to immunise themselves against pain. Braid started reading up on mesmerism on the quiet, thinking there may be a connection. He began practicing on wounded soldiers from the British East India Company's private army and began to use mesmerism to take away, or at least reduce the pain that usually accompanied the amputation of a limb with a saw.

It was clear to Braid that something was going on which required explanation, so he conducted some experiments of his own. He held a small bright object inches from the subject's eyes and asked the subject to gaze fixedly at it. After a while, the subject would become lethargic and enter what appeared to be a light trance in which the senses "*became confused.*" Those that underwent Dr. Braid's procedures seemed to fall into a sleep-like state because the patients certainly gave the appearance of sleep, their physical forms took on the attitude of sleep, and curiously, when questioned about the experience, very few of them could remember anything about it.

Medical science had moved on a little since Mesmer's time and Braid had already started to develop a much clearer idea in his own mind about what was really occurring. Animal magnetism it wasn't... but if it wasn't animal magnetism, then what was it?

Braid had learned a few tricks of his own during his time in India and he eventually came to the conclusion that *suggestion* was the key force at work and nothing to do with magnets. Braid also noticed that repetition of the right kind of suggestions was more likely to send the subject to sleep (albeit after some time) and so he embarked upon a daring rebranding, coining the word 'hypnosis' which derived from the Greek word hypnos, itself derived from the name the ancient Greeks gave to the god of sleep, Hypnos. Today busts of Hypnos can be found in the reception areas of the best up-market hypnotherapists.



And so it was that modern hypnosis got its name. Eventually Braid returned to England and took up a post in Manchester where he continued to experiment with hypnosis and recorded his work in a book which he called 'Neurypnology' — a fascinating manuscript because it's an account of one man's voyage of discovery into the unknown.

In Manchester however, Braid was suddenly overtaken by events. Just when things were about to get really exciting, along came the discovery of ether as an anaesthetic. Ether had two distinct advantages over Neurypnology — it was fast and it worked every time. There was also another problem. It was clear that not everyone was easily 'hypnotised' while some people clearly weren't affected at all. Ether was both quick and reliable. So just when it seemed the medical profession had at long last started to take serious interest, hypnosis was outflanked and outgunned by a glass bottle and a rubber face mask.

Hot on the heels of the discovery of the medicinal qualities of ether came nitrous-oxide, or laughing gas, which was an immediate hit, not only with the medical profession, but also with the public! It is said that at the turn of the century in the United States there was hardly a circus lacking a side show where one could enjoy the laughing gas experience. Just a few whiffs and you too could stagger off in paroxysms of uncontrollable giggling. No longer were people queuing to enjoy the antics of the lunatics in the gothic surroundings of Bedlam, they were now able to take part in the next big thing in entertainment. Groups of perfectly respectable and otherwise normal, well balanced people could, for a mere five cents, experience delirium themselves.

The major problem with laughing gas however was that if you took too much of it you could end up with a blinding headache. And so, after a few people had fallen over and vomited and complained to the authorities, laughing gas as a form of entertainment began to get a bad name. After some pressure from the medical establishment (those guys again) it was banned. Actually they needn't have bothered, because laughing gas had got so much bad press, its appeal had waned anyway.

But what happened to hypnotism? Forgotten by the medical profession because of the introduction of chemicals and gasses, which were more dependable, hypnotism remained on the back burner. Occasionally, a few doctors with time on their hands would have a go, but fewer and fewer people were interested in hypnotism in an age where more remarkable and more important leaps forward in medical science were being made. And then along came a man who just about put an end to hypnotism for once and for all.

Remember Freud? ...the one who gave us psychoanalysis, the Oedipus Complex, repressed memory and other fantastic ideas? Freud also dabbled with hypnosis, but he soon found what James Braid and others had discovered years earlier. Hypnosis simply didn't work for everyone, so he dismissed it as nothing more than hocus-pocus and that was the end of it. Interestingly enough, Freudian psychoanalysis has never proved to have been to be of any value either.

In the meantime, where the doctors and the psychoanalysts had all but given up on hypnosis, a new breed of even more curious people had begun to take an interest in the arts of mesmerism and more importantly, some of its effects. Hypnotism was about to be reborn, not in the surgeries and consulting rooms of physicians, but in the music halls of Great Britain. The modern mesmerists of the early 20th century were first and foremost showmen who knew how to work a crowd — a specialised skill in itself. With their mesmeric powers they would hypnotise a subject to be impervious to pain, the audience gasping as needles were inserted through the bod and bare skin pinched with tweezers.

The most famous hypnotist of the new century was Dr. Walford Bodie, who wasn't a real doctor, but by all accounts held spectators spellbound in the manner of a master magician demonstrating the mysterious powers of hypnotism. See:

### **The Electric Wizard — The Amazing Story of Dr. Walford Bodie — ILLUSTRATED**



[https://newtonhypnotherapy.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/the\\_electric\\_wizard.pdf](https://newtonhypnotherapy.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/the_electric_wizard.pdf)

Then came the War, and a young Royal Navy Petty Officer by the name of Peter Casson began entertaining British troops in North Africa with demonstrations of hypnotism. When the war was over, the stage was literally set for Casson to become the first of a new generation of hypnotists.

Peter Casson was more than just a showman. He took his subject very seriously. Before the war, he had worked in the test and experimental department of GEC who were at that time involved in manufacturing the new UHF radio sets for the R.A.F. When he entered the Royal Marines, he was taken on as a telecommunications specialist and radar engineer. It's undoubtedly this scientific background which influenced a more scientific approach to hypnosis. He quickly made a name for himself and in 1944 he started putting on shows for the troops in Egypt, attracting the attention of doctors who had no hesitation in asking for his help with shell-shock cases at military hospitals in Alexandria and Malta. With the exception of enthusiasts such as Dr. Sir Alexander Cannon, hypnosis was largely ignored by medical professionals. Peter Casson changed that, in fact, it would be fair to say Peter Casson single-handedly saved hypnotism, at least in Britain, from terminal obscurity. Hypnosis had almost breathed its last and Peter Casson literally brought it back to life.

Casson divided his time between performing in theatres around the UK, amazing audiences by inserting surgical needles into participant's fleshy bits (haven't we seen this before?) and running his clinics, one in Yorkshire and one in London. He became involved in research projects at universities. He wasn't just a showman; he became also a therapist and lecturer. At the age of just twenty-eight, he found himself lecturing to — of all people — the British Medical Association. After a career which spanned over half a century, Peter Casson carried out the first measurement of hypnotic activity in the brain using scientific instruments at Wake Forest University in the United States. His career included a long list of achievements, including a pioneering cure for aqua-phobia and it is unlikely we will see his like again.

I only saw Peter Casson in action once and that was in 1981 at the *Talk of the North* in Manchester. By that time, he had forty years of experience under his belt and watching him work was an inspiration. Asking for exactly twelve volunteers and dispensing with any kind of suggestibility test, he was able to hypnotise every one of them with an effortlessness befitting the Grand Master he undoubtedly was. Whispering a few carefully chosen words into his subject's ears, they fell into hypnosis and it took mere seconds. Despite our disagreements and all too frequent run-ins I don't believe he ever got the recognition he justly deserved. He made me aware of the great Dr. Walford Bodie and I think Casson would have seen Bodie perform, possibly several times. Notwithstanding the fact that Casson was an almost totally humourless man with a reputation for being somewhat superior, he is still the best hypnotist that ever lived and we will return to his story later.

Today, doctors often prescribe placebos to patients who have nothing wrong with them. Giving them a sugar pill is a convenient way of getting them out of the room before they take up any more valuable time. The amazing thing is that the placebo often works

wonders. Placebos are used in medical research with control groups. No one, except the researchers, knows who is taking the real drug and who is taking the placebo, but it is a very handy tool for making sure test results are accurate.

Although doctors and physicians may have caught on to the effect of the placebo for some time, it was not until the closing months of the Second World War that American doctors Henry Beecher and Dabney Ewin realised its full potential on the battlefields of Europe. Dealing with wounded soldiers who were often in severe pain, both Beecher and Ewin found to their distress that they had run out of morphine. In desperation, they injected some of the soldiers with pure water, telling them it was morphine and then stood back with fingers crossed to witness the effect... and with most, it worked just as well as the morphine!

This book is concerned with the psychological effects of suggestion, belief systems and how the actions and words of others affect our own beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. Hypnosis is the ultimate placebo... no pills, no potions, just a few well chosen words designed to focus the attention of the subject on the task in hand. The more suggestible the subject, the greater the effect...

Suggestion provides a way of creating and using imagery, shaping thought processes and influencing the way people think. Suggestion can be used to modify the way a person perceives themselves and their surroundings as well as the way they react to external influences. It can also radically alter moods and emotions, sometimes with dramatic results.

Other ways in which subtle non verbal suggestions can exert influences on a person's emotional state are music, decoration and lighting. For the hypnotherapist, the overall ambience of the therapy room is as important as lighting and dry ice is to the stage hypnotist. These subtle inferences and visual stimuli increase spectator's suggestibility and are closely linked to the idea of the placebo effect, examples of which are listed below. To show you just how suggestible people can be, below are some experiments that have been used to alter behaviour:

Two psychologists from the University of New York went into a railway station waiting room and started playing Frisbee. One of their colleagues had been secretly waiting for them and joined in the fun at the first opportunity. Before long, other people also joined in. On another occasion however, when the experiment was repeated, their colleague refused to join in and as a consequence, no one else joined in!

Pleased with the success of the first experiment, the psychologists set up another, and on this occasion smoke was fed into the room through the air vents to make it seem as if the building was on fire. All three made it obvious that they had noticed the smoke but just sat there and continued to chat as if there was nothing wrong. No one else in the room got up to leave. When the experiment was repeated, the psychologists immediately got up at the first sign of smoke and headed for the emergency exit and this time everybody followed them — this time with a sense of urgency!

What I find interesting about these stunts is not just the fact that it proves what we have always suspected, that humans are easily influenced and sometimes easily led. The examples above are perfect illustrations of how the behaviour of a small group of people can be influenced by the actions of a small minority. I remember giving out leaflets on the street to advertise one of my shows. Passers-by were happy to take them until one person

said 'no thanks' and then no-one was willing to take one. Getting the flow going again took a few moments.

On an edition of the *'Richard & Judy Show'* (UK Channel 4, March 2004) the dynamic duo decided to set up their own experiment to see how easily people are influenced by the cult of celebrity. I have no idea why they did this by the way, but it was an extremely clever idea and I thank them for it. Although I already knew what the outcome would be, there is nothing I like more than being right. In a shopping mall, a stall was set up advertising a new range of orange juice. Shoppers were invited to taste three orange drinks and decide which tasted the best. The drinks were given brand names — 'Tangerina,' 'Orange fizz' and 'Becks Fizz.' 'Becks Fizz' had a picture of the popular celebrity footballer David Beckham on the carton. In fact all three drinks were exactly the same. Remarkably, 72% of all the people questioned said that 'Becks Fizz' tasted better than the others — one young lady even said that it had a better aftertaste!

This next example is one of my all time favourites. When the original version of the film 'Planet of the Apes' was made, over two hundred extras were engaged by the film studio to make up the chorus of humans and apes. In Hollywood, being a film extra is for some, almost a career in itself and many of the extras knew each other from work on previous movies. But as filming commenced, extras that had been long-time friends started to form new alliances. During the first week of shooting, at the lunch break, all the human extras started sitting together while the ape extras began to gravitate to their own group. By the end of the second week, something even more bizarre happened... the ape extras had separated into more distinct groups — chimpanzees dined with chimpanzees, gorillas sat with gorillas, and the handful of orang-utans formed their own elite clique which, in keeping with their elevated position in the film, requisitioned the best tables! No one planned this... it just happened.

Director Oliver Stone claimed *"The most powerful historian of the twentieth century is the Hollywood film industry..."* After his film JFK (a bio-pic of President John F. Kennedy) was released, more people than ever started to believe that President Kennedy was the victim of a sinister conspiracy involving the Mafia and the CIA, despite overwhelming and logical evidence to the contrary. In fact Kennedy was assassinated by disturbed a gunman and fantasist Lee Harvey Oswald... and he acted alone.

Neither was the power of the cinema lost on that great movie buff, Joseph Stalin. Early Soviet cinema provided Stalin with the perfect vehicle for Bolshevik propaganda. In fact Stalin used all the arts — particularly film, which could be reproduced and reach a mass market, to shape opinion and belief. Thus the Soviet film industry was used to shape society rather than reflect it. This is something that the Hollywood movie mogul Louis B. Mayer wanted to do with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer — use the movies to influence society for the good. Mayer's principal aim was to make wholesome family movies that reflected the kind of America Mayer wanted — decent, moral, and middle-class.

Other movie moguls also realised they could use their films to influence politics when it suited them to do so. When California Governor hopeful Upton Sinclair threatened to raise taxes, the movie moguls decided to support his political rival, Robert Merriam, who promised he would not. Cinema goers in California in 1933 were treated to newsreel footage in which an inquiring reporter would ask ordinary citizens whom they were voting for. *"I am voting for Governor Merriam,"* said a little old lady, her voice quavering. *"Why, Mother?"* *"Because I want to have my little home. It is all I have left in the world."* *"Vy, I am foting for Seenclair,"* boasted a bedraggled, bewhiskered, wild-eyed immigrant in another newsreel. *"Vell, his system vorked vell in Russia, vy can't it vork here?"* In another, an army

of hobos descended on California in anticipation of Sinclair's election. [from *An Empire of Their Own, How the Jews Invented Hollywood* by Neal Gabler.]

In the late 1960's, in a quiet town in New Mexico, the face of Christ appeared on the wall of a local church. By the weekend, thousands of people God-botherers gathered to witness this wondrous miracle, most spent the day kneeling in fervent prayer. But around tea-time it started to rain, and as the whitewashed wall of the building became wet, the face of Christ was transformed into a poster advertising a tour given by American country and western singer Willie Nelson.

In the early 1970's, when the Trade Unions still had the power to bring governments to their knees, I remember watching the Six-o'clock News which contained a report on the outcome of a vote by members of one of the larger unions. As the workers and potential strikers filed towards two ballot boxes, the contents of which would eventually decide whether or not they would accept the management's offer or go on strike, I couldn't help noticing that only one of the boxes was labelled. 'VOTES AGAINST' was painted on the side of this box, but there was no slogan on the box for votes in favour of returning to work. It worked and after a landslide vote against, the workers went on strike.

The richness and power of language is something that is often underestimated. Using the right words is oh so important. That's why well-known burger chains ask you if you would like regular or large fries with your offal burger. Using the word 'small' is never going to work. Also in America (where else?) financial advisors have taken to calling themselves Wealth Advisors... very catchy!

The use of words plays games with our minds in the same way that barristers play with words in an attempt to confuse witnesses and bewilder juries. In the case of a defendant accused of dangerous driving, the prosecution is likely to ask how fast the vehicle was moving when it first came into view, whereas the defence will inquire as to how slowly the vehicle was moving at the time, thus subtly changing the interpretation of events in the minds of the witness and more importantly, the jury. At the very least, these verbal gymnastics can sow seeds of doubt, and in a criminal trial, doubt is all that is required.

Labour Foreign Secretary Robin Cook once famously remarked that Chicken Tikka Masala had become Britain's favourite national dish. This remark was picked up by the press and has been accepted as fact ever since. In fact Chicken Tikka Masala, in terms of portions served, comes a very poor third behind traditional fish and chips (first) and crispy duck (a close second.) You would be amazed how many people still believe the statistic to be true.

The sight of someone sucking on a lemon will cause most people to salivate. This is the worst thing you can do to a trumpet player just before his solo. Yawning and coughing can become infectious and suggestions of itches will cause some people to scratch.

From the world of fiction, the story of 'The Emperor's New Clothes' is a perfect example of how people will not just go along with the flow, but actually believe something which is patently fraudulent. The erroneous belief that men can transition to womanhood (and vice-versa) is but another example of nonsense being accepted as truth, not to mention a charter for perverts and pedophiles. The unwillingness of human beings to stand out from the crowd has never been better illustrated because it is an excellent reflection of the vagaries of the human condition.

Karl Marx wrote "*Religion is the opium of the masses.*" This was undoubtedly true in less enlightened times, but in the first years of the twenty-first century, the cult of celebrity has far eclipsed the cult of religion. We now live in an age where celebrity no longer requires

even the pretence of achievement or talent. The modern celeb clamours for our attention — self-absorbed, preoccupied — without offering any significant reason. The mismatch of need for attention (pity will do!) and ability is one of the most disturbing aspects of fame in the twenty-first century.

In an experiment carried out in 2000, the nature of belief, and thus the placebo effect was stretched to its very limits. A group of sixty people suffering from a variety of minor ailments were given the opportunity to be cured by one of the country's leading faith-healers who would perform his magic from behind a screen in the corner of the therapy room. All the volunteers had to do was to lie on the table and relax. The majority of people (around 70%) reported that after the session they felt there had been a marked improvement in their condition. Some even claimed that during the 'healing' they had seen flashing lights and a 'presence' in the room. But there was a catch... the healer was present giving the 'Full Monty' healing in only half the sessions. For the other half, the chair behind the screen was empty. If that doesn't convince you of the power of suggestion, I don't know what will.

The famous American defence attorney F. Lee Bailey used suggestion to hypnotise juries. In one memorable trial he succeeded in getting his client acquitted of a charge of murder. The defendant had been accused of murdering his wife, Ruth, and although no body was ever found, the circumstantial evidence was compelling: he had moved his mistress into the marital home less than a week after his wife's disappearance and neighbours had overheard a murderous argument the night before Ruth disappeared. At the end of his closing argument Bailey looked squarely at the jury and said in carefully measured tones *"As a matter of fact, ladies and gentlemen, Ruth is going to walk through that door in the next thirty seconds."*

With a dramatic gesture Bailey turned toward the door and everyone in the courtroom, including all the members of the jury, leaned forward and strained to look at the door. After thirty seconds, nothing happened. The great defender then turned again to face the jury and resume his speech... *"Of course ladies and gentlemen, Ruth isn't going to walk through that door, but the fact that you all looked means there is doubt in your minds, and you cannot convict my client if there is any doubt in your mind."* Bailey's client was found not guilty. There is however, a postscript to this story. If the jury had glanced at the defendant at the time they were so preoccupied with looking at the door, they would have noticed that the accused was the only person in the room that didn't look... because he knew Ruth wasn't going to walk through the door...

In a study carried out by researcher Ellen Langer at Harvard University and published in the Psychological Science journal, chambermaids from a large and prestigious hotel were asked to take part in an experiment, the results of which are of great significance for those of us who are genuinely interested in the power of suggestion. Half of the group of 84 housekeepers were told how many calories they were burning as they carried out specific tasks — cleaning bathtubs, changing linen, vacuuming etc. After a mere four weeks, those maids that were told that they were actually exercising hard as they worked lost an average of two pounds and lowered their blood pressure by 10%. The other half of the group, the poor women who were not party to the information, showed virtually no change. This is a perfect example of the placebo effect in all its glory. It also goes a long way to explaining why the bizarre Atkins diet works!

There are many more examples of how suggestion influences us and how and why the placebo effect comes into play. An obvious one is the class system, based on the assumption that some people are better than others because of either accident of birth or

visible wealth. Most people are impressed by displays of wealth, regardless of any ability or talent. Ostentatious displays of wealth — and thus power — seem to work particularly well in America, where a limousine with a Jacuzzi in the back is one of the ultimate status symbols. For some, these ridiculous displays are potent, not only for the owners of such fripperies but for the accidental spectator because a taste of this opulence is now accessible to all. There are numerous limousine hire companies operating that in return for a fee, allow parties of hairdressers the opportunity to sample the champagne lifestyle for a day. Most will inevitably sample too much champagne, behave just as badly as they did when they drank beer from a bottle, and throw up at two-o'clock in the morning outside a nightclub whilst waiting for a taxi, but at least they're doing it in style — living proof opulence and intelligence don't always go hand in hand.

There is little doubt that many alternative treatments can have beneficial, if not spectacular results. However, for the alternative treatment to be successful one must first turn up and to turn up, one must first of all believe in the treatments efficacy. You can include alternatives such as Homoeopathy, Aromatherapy, Acupuncture and Reiki in this category.

Parades, marches and military spectacle are also guaranteed to stir the heart and an excitement of the imagination in the same way military spectacle had been popular in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in America, Busby Berkley movies were so popular, Hollywood couldn't churn them out fast enough. Audiences found this watery human synchronicity captivating, even rousing. Today, the synchronous gyrations of boy bands generate the same thrilling fascination, especially for pre-pubescent teenage girls.

Anywhere there are large crowds gathered, whether it is a sporting event like a football match, large scale religious gathering or even a rock concert, the individual is likely to become submerged in the larger organism of the crowd and be carried away by the sense of occasion. Large-scale spectacles exert a powerful effect on the human mind, particularly in cases where the organisers have set out deliberately to achieve these effects. The excitement and emotions generated by participation in such spectacles cause the brains of the spectators to produce natural opiates such as dopamine which enhance the experience to such a degree, the individual loses control of their critical faculties.

The Cult of Celebrity is something which increasingly occupies a disproportionately large measure of our attention. The thoroughly talentless and loathsome Katie Price is an example of this depressing slide into mediocrity. Miss Price has achieved notoriety in the UK, Shameless, common as muck and thoroughly obnoxious, she has, against all the odds, achieved the celebrity status craved by thick, talentless, common as muck and thoroughly obnoxious teenage girls everywhere. The point of including Pig of the Year in this article is to make you, the reader, a little more aware of how easy it is to present trivia as important factual news, and *her* opinions *your* opinions.

Celebrities routinely get away with behaviour that in the real world would see lesser mortals in court. Celebrity's banal pronouncements are too often greeted with cheers and whoops of delight. This is how stupid we have become as a society. When a well-known footballer (whose name I omit to save him any further embarrassment) is exposed in the tabloids for cavorting with prostitutes we shrug our shoulders and forgive him. Even his girlfriend, Colleen, with an eye for future big bucks, forgives him. Oh well... it's only show business! But fame allows us to forgive someone who is a flawed genius — at least when it comes to kicking a football around swallow it, our critical faculties temporarily suspended, dazzled by celebrity. But how are we supposed to explain this to our children... that it's alright to cavort with whores because you're famous? Or that it's not alright to pay for sex

because there's something fundamentally wrong about it. But then again, he's a footballer, so that's alright then.

Now we are told to admire celebrities that have taken drugs and gone through rehab. Personally, I have no sympathy. I reserve my admiration for those who do not take hard drugs, or get into fights outside nightclubs, or beat up their girlfriends. Our true feelings of revulsion are suppressed by the clever PR men that celebrities employ, their excuses repeated by compliant journalists.

What a strain it must be to be a celebrity! Constantly in the public eye, famous for, er... well nothing really, but who must still bear the enormous burden of their, er... talent. I wonder if, while smashing up hotel rooms, celebrities ever stop to consider that the guy running the corner shop who struggles every month to pay his bills and feed his family might not be under some pressure himself, in which case it might be better to set a better example. Unfortunately, bad behaviour sells newspapers and newspapers encourage bad behaviour. Still, whilst our attention is focussed on the gossip sheets, at least we don't have to think for ourselves.

Designer Labels are just as much a symbol of status as fast cars and ridiculously expensive 'designer' clothes. An Armani suit which costs £900 lasts not a day longer than a suit from Marks & Spencer costing £200. Unless the label is visible, most people can't tell the difference. Both are equally stylish and both need dry cleaning after a dozen shows. In Japan, fashion statements are exhibited by keeping the label on the sleeve. It's the human equivalent of a peacock.

Like everything else of its ilk, Voodoo (and therefore the perceived power conferred upon it) exists only in the mind of the believer. The influence of Voodoo is in the main, limited to the island of Haiti where its adherents are mostly uneducated and unable to see it for what it is — suggestion and expectation deeply rooted in cultural belief. There are very close similarities between the practice of Voodoo and the exorcisms once common in the early Christian Church. Both involve the use of talismans, imagery and ritual... and both practices prey both upon existing beliefs and easy manipulation of impressionable minds

In Cape Town, my house-maid goes to church every Sunday and is a devout Christian. But she also firmly believes that the woman who lives in the flat above her has put a curse on her which has caused her to have sore legs. She told me this one day and in spite of my best efforts, she refused to let go of the idea so I decided on a more radical solution... I went round to her house and performed a barmy ritual which in truth, I made up on the spot. With the aid of a few lines borrowed from Gilbert & Sullivan's comic opera *The Sorcerer*, I lifted the curse and the problem was resolved.

The pageantry of the Christian religion is a perfect illustration of how symbolism and ritual combine to affect the mind of an individual. When inducted as priests, supplicants lie prostrate before God — something that exerts a powerful effect on the novice because lying face down before one's maker requires absolute unquestioning and unflinching acknowledgment of God's existence and authority, particularly coming as it does at the end of years of preparation for this one moment, this great peak experience. It's interesting to note that since Vatican II, which decreed that the Mass would no longer be celebrated in Latin (so everyone could understand it) much of the mystique has disappeared, along with an increasingly large proportion of the congregation.



In the Army, being shouted at by an overbearing sergeant while lying face down in the mud represents a slightly different approach, but the end result is the same. The experience not only focuses attention and represents a peak experience, it also assists in the psychological rebuilding and retraining of the man, now obedient and unquestioning.

The Toronto Blessing, if you haven't seen it, is literally, a really good laugh. Armed in advance with the knowledge and therefore expectation that one will be transported into paroxysms of joy by the intervention of the 'Holy Spirit,' participants in the Toronto Blessing literally fall about laughing — as near perfect an example of emotional manipulation as there is! Normally sensible men and women gather to piss themselves laughing at er, nothing — well ok, the power of the Lord — just expectation, building to mass hysteria and very little else.

The comparatively less spectacular effect of the 'bedside manner' is understood by medical practitioners the world over. The more optimistic a doctor appears about a patient's recovery, the more likely the patient is to recover. The converse is also true, one reason doctors get very annoyed when a colleague tell their patient they have only two weeks to live. Presumably they wanted to tell them themselves.

The public buildings of Victorian and Edwardian Britain display wealth and power (and thus authority) effects the psyche and thus also behaviour. Many buildings of this period are more decorative than functional. Warehouses in Manchester were designed with more than just the storage of goods in mind — their architectural splendour was also a public expression of the wealth and influence and power of their owners. Manchester Town Hall is a perfect example, as is Tower Bridge — it's only just over a hundred years old, and yet its gothic design suggests something much older and permanent. There are examples of this mindset all over the world, particularly in places where the British were once in charge. The Town Halls of Durban and Cape Town and Government House in Singapore are perfect copies. In the United States, the Capitol Building is designed along classical lines. Grecian proportions and fluted columns bestow permanence and purpose, strength and stability.

There are examples of the subtle ways in which décor influence not only behaviour but also performance. Research has shown beyond doubt that shades of blue exert a calming effect. Classrooms painted in shades of blue encourage children to sit quietly during lessons. These colours improve performance in English and maths. Warmer shades of red encourage more extrovert behaviour — ideal for sport or drama. Using different colour schemes for different purposes in different environments does affect behaviour, causing people to feel more a part of their community, even stimulating social behaviour.

One reason compulsive gambling is so addictive is that Casinos use every clever trick in the gambling industry's book of clever tricks. A gamble on the National Lottery is unlikely to become addictive because of the frequency the lottery can be played, a maximum of twice a week. A fruit machine on the other hand has greater accessibility and can therefore be played with much greater frequency. In addition, these machines are now electronic devices rather than mechanical, so each game ends more quickly and so increases the frequency of play.

The machine's coin tray is made from a metal alloy that makes a lot of noise when winnings, always paid out in coins, clatter into it. The effect is enhanced when a win is accompanied by bells and electronic sound effects so gamblers are aware of winning machines paying out. Machines that don't pay out remain relatively quiet, but all machines are colourful, bright and cheerfully lit, they play random familiar tunes to attract passing players in the same way the Venus fly-trap attracts flies. Machines are often adorned with familiar fun cartoon characters such as *The Simpsons* — characters that are not only

comfortable and familiar, but fun, making them even more attractive. Psychologists have discovered that a near win on these machines induces almost as much pleasure in the brain than an actual win. Note too, that there are no clocks in casinos or arcades...

People will say and do anything, often in ways that are out of character when confronted by a professional camera crew, who usually travel in teams of four: cameraman, sound man, research assistant and director/producer. A television camera is guaranteed to inspire a state of immediate compliance. Faced with this ratio of four to one, the vast majority of people can be relied on to put on the appropriate performance no matter how ridiculous the request. The antics of Ali G and his alter ego, Borat are living proof of this. I carried out an experiment in my favourite seaside resort of Llandudno, North Wales to prove exactly this point. Taking it in turns to play the part of inept and incompetent hypnotists, we succeeded in persuading people to 'just fake it' for the sake of the camera... and they all did, without question or complaint. The other part of the experiment concerned filming ourselves doing a series of bizarre acts to see if the presence of even a small camera crew would attract a crowd and of course it did.

Public Relations Hype — so called 'spin' — is influencing our lives as never before. In an interview in Los Angeles, director Oliver Stone said there was "*not a word truth in entertainment journalism.*" The same is true of show-business gossip. Feature writers frequently regurgitate the press releases more or less verbatim once they have been tamed by expensive lunches, gifts, backstage passes and invitations to meet stars at lavish parties. Public relations men skilfully groom show-business reporters. When (shock! horror!) 'celebrity superstar' Jordan (Katie Price) was photographed by an undercover reporter having sex on the bonnet of a Jaguar, the story made every tabloid newspaper. Sad to say, the whole incident was manufactured by Jordan's press agents and with the connivance of Jaguar, who also wanted to promote their latest model. That's the car, not Jordan.

Here is another of my favourites... In New Zealand, fed up with the number of assaults on traffic police by irate motorists, the New Zealand Government decided to change their approach. After calling in the psychologists, out went the black and white police cars, the flashing red lights and the black leather uniforms and in came the 'Traffic Safety Service,' driving white family sedans decorated with less threatening blue chevrons, pleasing to the eye and sponsored by local businesses. Traffic officers started wearing more customer friendly grey slacks and light blue jackets. Within six months, assaults on Traffic Safety Service Officers dropped by fifty percent. It's all about getting the image right you see!

During the Second World War, the British were desperately worried that the Suez Canal would likely become a target for German bombers, so in desperation they called on the services of one Jasper Maskelyne, a well known magician, conjuror and illusionist. Maskelyne suggested that they move the canal twenty miles to the west by building a replica out of silver foil and electric lights to confuse the Luftwaffe. It worked. In those days, there were no navigation beacons to guide aircraft; it was all done by 'dead reckoning' and after the long flight over the Mediterranean, even experienced pilots accepted there would be some margin of error, possibly as much as twenty or thirty miles, depending on the winds. I have flown over the Med myself, piloting a light aircraft, from Crete to Cairo. Even with the assistance of air traffic control, radar and a friendly United Airlines Boeing 767 who was kind enough to relay messages to and from my tiny aeroplane, the margin of error is considerable. The Germans had no such navigational aids and fell for it hook, line and sinker. This one simple act of illusion helped us win the war.

And so to the 'much respected man.' There's one on every council estate. Unfortunately, 'much respected' usually means 'much feared.' Everyone knows who he is and despite possessing no official sanction he is able to impose his will upon his neighbours. He succeeds in this solely through reputation, but his authority is imagined, although like others with narcissistic tendencies he also surrounds himself with loyal lieutenants who are there to make sure he stays much respected and offered the deference he firmly believes is his by right. He is easy to spot — he walks briskly along the street with shoulders hunched forward, head down, knuckles dragging along the ground, fully absorbed in his own sense of purpose. These days, he sports very close cropped hair and prefers trainers to the more traditional bover boots, more likely to be Adidas than Nike. His entire wardrobe, even his boxer shorts, is by Tommy Hilfiger. He considers his "solid, you know" gold chains a wise investment (they aren't) and is considering running his own stretched limo business, as soon as he can find the time to spare from his other (cash) businesses.

In a study carried out by Dr. Irving Kirsch at the University of Hull in the UK (completed in 2008) the percentage of people who claimed they felt better after a course of Prozac (70%) was the same as for those who were prescribed a placebo. All scientific protocol was observed — control groups, strict secrecy and meticulous monitoring. The results speak for themselves. 70%. Makes you think, doesn't it?

### **How Suggestion is used in Advertising**

Humanity is made up of groups of people influencing, persuading, requesting, demanding, cajoling, exhorting, inveigling, and otherwise manipulating each other in an attempt to further their own ends.

We are blessed with the ability to resist persuasion. Yet most of us are ignorant of this latent talent. It takes constant vigilance to spot when we are being fed a line. In this first quarter of the twenty-first century, fewer people are able to think for themselves. Our brains are becoming less aware of the insidious persuasion tactics of politicians, media and climate change fanatics. We get caught out thousands of times a day, unconsciously influenced by the will of others!

Every time you buy a product you are inadvertently taking part in someone else's private war. Even a supposedly simple decision such as what particular brand of shampoo to buy is the result of the success of the persuasive abilities of one manufacturer's advertising agency over another's. Just think about this for a moment: all those people — copywriters, art directors, photographers, lighting and set designers, models, makeup artists, right down to the guy who pastes the poster on the billboard — are employed just so you will buy one brand of shampoo instead of the other brand. Make no mistake about this, these multi-million dollar companies are playing for high stakes and it's their avowed intention to put the competition out of business. We are just pawns in their game and we pay through the nose for the privilege.

Most people go through life unaware of these influences or at least vastly underestimate their power. But one of the keys to the understanding of hypnosis is the realisation of just how hugely powerful suggestion can be. In the waking state, people will generally just do as they're told and it's as simple as that. Add a bit of creativity to instruction and you'll be surprised how far you can take it and how much you can get away with.

Have you ever noticed that when advertisements interrupt your nightly viewing, they are played at a slightly higher volume than the programmes they interrupt? This is so they are better able to grab our attention.

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150,000 women have already taken Erdic

\*Offer applies to 3-box programme orders only © Erdic

sell the product: advertisers know that to be successful, that the product will allegedly bring. By making the bear more attractive than they really are, the advertisers ice — another part of the human survival strategy.

ne space to give the impression that buying a particular about yourself. Some advertisements would have you ticular brand of cigarettes, you too can have a beautiful terranean where you can go at weekends in your own ow they sell us that lifestyle dream.

n a lovely smile, just like in real life!

mpeccable taste, and both are immaculately groomed.

oring, and have endless patience.

ards and are opened perfectly, simply by pulling at the ate!

ery drunk people from council estates looking for a fight.

mi-naked hunk, sometimes accompanied by a great impressed by his manliness.

an up-market outward-bound course where you get to lay.

ave no idea what it's about, will probably be turn out to ds.

p will make your family beautiful and happy.

er have one spot, and what a magnificent specimen it the spot within hours, vastly improve their social escent issues.

- Cars do not have noisy engines, not even diesels.
- All people in advertisements are heterosexual, all women are sexy and technology always works first time.
- And more recently, all genders and racial persuasions will be represented.
- In short, your life will be more perfect if you buy one!

Pictured below is an advertisement I cut out from a magazine, but what exactly is it selling? Note it doesn't say what the product actually does! Glancing at the picture one could be forgiven for assuming that it is a formula for bigger boobs, but nowhere does it say that! Whatever it is, they must be selling lots of it because the advert appeared on a regular basis in most of the Sunday supplements.

Presentation is of considerable importance, but it also has a bearing on successful hypnotherapy. In the therapeutic situation, the more highly polished the brass plaque on the door, the more luxurious the office, the more certificates on the wall, the more impressive will be the impact on the individual about to become your client. In just the same way that Franz Mesmer created an atmosphere in Parisian drawing rooms, dazzling the ladies in his scarlet cloak and his lightning rods, the more modern practitioners of the art rely more on the plush leather recliner and quadraphonic sound system.

The image of hypnosis is locked into cultural the mythology that surrounds it. It's also generally accepted that this unusual social situation increases suggestibility all by itself anyway!

Whether engaged in therapy or on stage, as a hypnotist one should ideally have a strong personality, a natural authority and a confident demeanour. To some degree you are playing a role in the same way that an actor takes on a part. Clients simply *have* to believe in you. If you're able to project the image of someone who knows exactly what they're doing, you'll be ten points ahead of the game from the outset. Shuffling into the room and then pussy-footing about is a recipe for disaster! Neither is hypnosis something you can do on auto-pilot. It takes just as much concentration on the part of the hypnotist as it does on the client.

For both stage hypnotist and hypnotherapist, the exploitation of expectancy is equally important. Expectancy, coupled with your understanding of the enormous power of suggestion means that your words over the next hour or so will have consequences. In the therapeutic situation, it is the skill and experience of the hypnotherapist, their ability to understand the human condition and identify the points on which the case will turn that really matters!

The consent to be open to change takes place unconsciously and it's the co-operation of the subject that will determine a successful outcome. The hypnotist/therapist can only change attitudes or behaviour with the full consent of the client. There is a story about the sun and the wind: they each bet they could get a man to take off his overcoat. No matter how hard the wind blew, the man kept his coat firmly buttoned. When the shone brightly, the man was only too willing to take off his coat — a good example of how gentle persuasion will always beat a more demanding approach.

However, one major difference between stage hypnosis and therapeutic hypnosis is often overlooked. In stage hypnosis, the hypnotist depends on volunteers — in the therapeutic situation, everyone is a volunteer! The maxim 'one volunteer is worth a hundred pressed men' comes into its own in hypnosis. On stage or in the consulting room, reassurance and encouragement can make the difference between success and failure. Either way, it's down to charming an individual or an entire audience.

Persuasion will always trump domination. For it to work, we *must* get *consent*. Compliance is often a quick-fix solution to a problem — playing classical music over a loudspeaker will clear an area of itinerant teenagers in no time at all, yet those teens will not have changed their attitudes one bit, whereas persuasion attempts to win hearts and minds. Persuasion can induce attitude change, which is emotion-based. Although persuasion is sometimes more difficult or time consuming, its effects will last longer because the client will be more willing to accept suggestions, and suggestions should be both logical and attractive. This is the road to attitude change which will achieve long term improvement.

We live in an authority driven society and although this is perhaps less true today than it was say, fifty years ago, this is one of the reasons hypnosis works. There is a world of difference between a sense of authority, which engenders confidence and respect, and an authoritarian attitude which can have the opposite effect. These days, people are more able to discriminate, to think for themselves and exercise their critical faculties than they once were. This is in the main due to the increase in the dissemination of informed debate via television, the internet and especially social media, both of which give instant access not only to information, but to differing opinions and new ways of thinking. Having said this, it is still the responsibility of the hypnotist to take ultimate control of the situation.

I have noticed in recent years that some hypnotherapists have taken to calling themselves Clinical Hypnotherapists or Consultant Hypnotherapists and similar. Of course, titles have obvious advantages — those magic words conjure up a much more credible image of qualifications, examinations and certificates and these designations are more likely to command higher fees! For a mere US\$250 a year you can join the American Society of Medical and Dental Hypnotists, which looks great on the wall and is highly unlikely to raise any awkward questions regarding standards, ethics or anything else. Successful hypnosis is often a game of bluff ensuring the placebo will be swallowed whole.

Even calling yourself 'Mr.' (just like a real consultant) can seem quite impressive, albeit in a more subtle way. A receptionist in a white lab-coat can look quite good and if you really feel like going the full hog, then why not invest in one of those open fronted filing cabinets and stuff it with beige-coloured files with lots of paper spilling out of them — no one is ever

going to look. Shelves piled with lots of old books on psychology or psychiatry are always a good investment, especially if you take the time to read some of them!

Keeping clients waiting a few minutes is always a good idea. It makes them feel just like they do when they go to the dentist and it's another way of creating expectation. By the time they amble in to the consulting room, they'll be like putty in your hands. Another tip, although a more expensive one, is to have a large office. Apart from the obvious fact that it's impressive, the longer the walk to the desk, the more nervous (and thus compliant) the client will be. Hitler and Stalin both understood this principle very well. The walk from the door to Hitler's desk in the Chancellery was at least fifty feet and the walk from Stalin's secretary to Stalin himself took unfortunate 'visitors' half way round the Kremlin.

So far we have talked about the attributes of the hypnotist and relatively little about the subjects themselves. Every client is different and they will all react to hypnosis in slightly different ways. But over a broad spectrum, the conventional wisdom is... at either end of the scale there are high suggestibles and low suggestibles, with most of the population falling somewhere in between.

### **Suggestibility Tests**

The supposed purpose of a suggestibility test is to predetermine how susceptible a person is going to be to hypnosis. But the importance of suggestibility tests, as interesting and fun as they are, is hugely overvalued. The fact of the matter is that they are not always an accurate indicator of how susceptible to hypnosis a subject is going to be and in the therapeutic situation they're a complete waste of time and can even be counterproductive! There's only one sure way to find out how susceptible someone is to hypnosis and that is to get on with it. Subjects will drift into the beautifully relaxed 'hypnotic' state at their own pace and in their own time, so the time it takes for an induction will vary from person to person. At the end of the day it all boils down to practice and experience. However, for the sake of completeness, here are some suggestibility tests to consider. Once you've read them, you can forget they even exist.

'Chevereul's Pendulum' is perhaps the first suggestibility test ever invented. Draw a circle intersected by a horizontal and vertical line similar to the cross-hairs on a rifle sight and get your guinea pig to suspend a pendulum, about twelve inches in length, over the centre. As you give suggestions the pendulum is moving up and down, or from left to right or round and round, you will notice tiny movements in whichever direction you suggest. This effect can take a few moments to happen, but as a general rule of thumb, the greater the movement, the more suggestible the subject is likely to be. The movements of the pendulum are however generally very small and not as spectacular as some of the others.

The postural sway test is used a lot by stage hypnotists who often combine it with a rapid induction. Sometimes it's difficult to tell where the suggestibility test ends and the induction begins, but the technique is notoriously hit and miss. The subject stands rigidly to attention with their head back and their eyes closed. Make sure they have their feet together as you suggest to them that they are falling backwards, or forwards, or even to the left or the right if you're feeling adventurous. Sometimes it helps if they look up into the top of their heads while their eyes are closed. This helps the process because they are more likely to experience the sense of disorientation you're looking for. Again, the degree of sway is an indicator of suggestibility.

The 'hand clasp test' is one of those stock-in-trade devices used by stage hypnotists at least since the early 20th century. There are various permutations of it but basically the way it's supposed to work is that the hands are clasped together, fingers interlocked, and

then squeezed tightly together. Suggestions are given that the hands are getting tighter and tighter until eventually they become glued, bolted, cemented, tightly locked together, as if they were stuck in a vice, as if the subject has superglue on their fingers. In this test, only about five percent of people, sometimes less, will actually find their hands locked together. More often, suggestions the hands are merely getting tighter are given and this is enough to prove the point. Why? Because offering a challenge which results in a negative response will cause the subject to lose such a degree of faith in your abilities, you may as well give up. The test is completely and utterly pointless in the therapeutic environment.

Another test, known in the trade as 'heavy hand, light hand' is where the subject extends both arms so they are parallel to the ground. The left hand is outstretched, palm up and the right hand is outstretched, palm down. The subject then closes their eyes and asked to imagine a heavy weight on the upturned left hand such as a pile of very heavy books or a heavy steel cannonball and a lighter than air helium balloon attached to the right hand. After the appropriate suggestions that the left hand is getting heavier and the right hand is getting lighter, the hands will start to move apart. Note the the suggestion that the balloon tied to the right hand is 'lighter than air' and the heavy weight on the left hand is being pulled down by the force of gravity. Both the speed at which the hands move apart and the distance they move apart is the indicator. If there is one suggestibility test that could be carried out in a clinical environment, then this would be it, but I tend to ignore them all because a failed suggestibility test usually results in a failed session.

Rubbing the hands together with suggestions they are getting warmer will produce a result, but then the warmth is really the result of friction. My personal opinion of this test is that it's crap, although I once saw a stage hypnotist use it to great effect.

Next... with hands clasped and fingers interlocked, the two index fingers are extended and positioned with a gap of about an inch between them. Suggestions are given that the fingers are being irresistibly drawn together, as if they're magnetised and indeed they will be, but then that's obvious and most people will see right through it!

Some of these tests are more interesting than others — some are more long winded, but each has at least some value in that they show a potential subject what is possible when they begin to concentrate. And it's the subjects own willingness to concentrate that is the key to making the tests work. The downside is that they are time consuming and become redundant as soon as you get a little experience. To be honest, their only real use is to get the beginner used to giving suggestions before moving on to the real thing. Still... it's useful to bear in mind that after a successful suggestibility test, presuming you can be bothered to waste your time doing one, it's often a good idea to say something along the lines of *"this shows you are a good candidate for this form of treatment"*, which of course is nonsense. After a not-so-successful suggestibility test you can 'utilise' the situation by saying something along the lines of *"excellent! This shows me that you can concentrate and not easily distracted, which means you're a good candidate for this sort of treatment!"*

More reliable than any suggestibility test is your ability to observe and assess a client's behaviour when they enter the room. Do they wait to be asked to sit down for instance, or do they march in and plonk themselves down as if they own the place?

In the course of therapy it is frequently important to remind the patient that, as well as having the desired result, the therapy will make them feel good about themselves. In fact every subject will feel some benefit from a session simply because of the sensations and feelings of relaxation created by the nature of the induction.

## **Preparing the Subject for Hypnosis**



Preparing the subject for hypnosis is just as important, if not more important than the hypnosis itself. Good stage hypnotists (of which there are very few) know how to 'work the audience' before they get volunteers. Every single performance, every religious ceremony, every political rally, follows the same well thought out, tried and tested formula. First, the attention of the individual and the audience is focussed on the main protagonist — the speaker, the preacher, the hypnotist, the therapist. Anything said to the individual or the crowd when the attention is focussed this way will be swallowed hook, line and sinker. The power of suggestion is a potent tool not to be underestimated.

A lot of people are nervous or apprehensive of actually going out and doing hypnosis because they find it hard to believe that it all boils down to something so straightforward. People who become interested in hypnosis are always looking for 'the magic words' or the 'mysterious pressure points' that some stage hypnotists appear to target from time to time. The bad news is, there are no secret words or magic touchy-feely points! If only we could all do it like Mr. Spock in Star Trek... but hold on a minute... we can!

To *really* make hypnosis work, you *have* to get your subject to relax and it's far easier for a subject to relax if they are first shown just how easy it is to relax. All you have to do to achieve this is carry out an easy exercise. Simply support the subject's arm in your hands and then let it fall limply onto their lap like a rag doll. Do this a couple of times (with each arm if necessary) and they should get the idea. You can see how easy it is by trying it yourself first. That's also a really good way of showing them what's expected.

Preparing the subject for hypnosis, we are really just telling them what to expect from the experience, thus moulding their expectations early on. This is why we have to understand the psychology behind hypnosis. In other words we must understand not just how to hypnotise, but why hypnosis works in the first place.

Proper preparation is of vital importance if you are to succeed. Remember... the five P's; proper prior preparation prevents poor performance. Of course, you could strap your subject to the couch and position a bright light a few inches from their face, but the majority of people might consider that approach a trifle overbearing, although it would certainly focus their attention. Hypnosis should be an enjoyable and relaxing experience and that's all we're trying to do — get the subject into a suitably relaxed state. All mothers know that gently stroking a child's forehead will cause the child to relax and go to sleep. This is not an inappropriate activity for grown adults in the therapeutic situation so we use words instead.

Preconceived ideas about hypnosis can be a problem. Some people think they are going to be zapped out into some zombie-like trance where they will have no inkling of what is happening. Some people imagine that during the session they will actually go to sleep (although this can occasionally happen) or that at the end of the session, they will have forgotten everything and they will wake up to find that the hypnotist has worked some kind of magic on them. This is very definitely not the case and it's up to you to spell out to the client what is going to happen, what is definitely not going to happen and what the subject can expect from the experience. Something along these lines would be ideal:

*"Hypnosis is easy! Because all you have to do is sit back, relax and enjoy the feelings of calm and wellbeing. While listening to my voice, you will enjoy a pleasant feeling of complete physical relaxation and nothing else. Hypnosis is a natural state of relaxation which helps the mind increase awareness and help you focus your attention. You will almost certainly not feel the way you expect to feel when you are hypnotised... you won't lose consciousness and hopefully you won't fall asleep. You will be able to hear the sound*

*of my voice at all times and you will probably be even more aware of any background noises than you are normally.”*

Despite all this, some people still expect to be ‘put in a trance’ or have some sort of out of body experience or even expect feel as if they have relinquished control to the hypnotist. I always make a point of explaining to clients what is about to happen and how relaxing the entire process is, but the fact is that some people still expect to lose consciousness!

*“This is how hypnosis works — by suggestion and relaxation — no zombie-like state or anything like that. In fact the opposite is true — you will be fully aware during the whole process, although you may find that your mind will wander from time to time... and that doesn’t matter. Remember... you will not lose consciousness and you will be fully aware of what’s happening all the time. The mind is more open to suggestion when both body and mind are relaxed, and that’s what we’re going to do here today.*

*“Just enjoy the pleasant feeling of total relaxation as all the stresses and strains of the day melt away. In fact you’ll feel just the way you normally do before you fall asleep at night — fully relaxed but fully aware of what’s going on around you. You will remember everything that has been said and probably won’t feel ‘hypnotised’ at all. Some people make the mistake of ‘waiting for something to happen.*

*“I’m going to ask you to look at the light/spot. When we do this, everybody finds that after a short while, their eyelids start to get heavy and tired, so much so that eventually it will feel like you can’t keep them open. This is perfectly normal and it happens all the time.*

*“Your body may start to feel heavy or even light... you may even experience a slight tingling sensation in your fingers or toes. Again, this is perfectly normal. Time will appear to pass more quickly and most of the time you will feel that you would be able to open your eyes if you wanted to, but because you’re in such a relaxed state, it will feel more comfortable to keep them closed. You may experience a feeling that your eyelids are flickering or fluttering, but most people are not aware of this sensation.*

*“There are no side effects with hypnosis and at no time will you relinquish control. Most people feel very relaxed and even quite sleepy after hypnosis and find they sleep better that night.*

*“Because you’ll have your eyes closed, your main sensory input will be switched off and this means that your sense of hearing will very likely ‘perk up’ a little and therefore you may be even more aware of background noises such as traffic noise, but this too is perfectly normal.*

*“When the eyes are closed, the dominant sensory input is cut off and an individual is forced to rely more on the other senses. Personally, I get a lot more pleasure from listening to a good play on the radio than watching a trashy American movie... the radio play leaves a lot more to the imagination and it’s more mentally stimulating. The general idea is that the subject will more easily be able to form the images described by the suggestions in his or her creative imagination with the eyes closed. Please make yourself comfortable as you will be sitting in that position for some time.”*

Finally — get consent. I always say this:

*“OK, let’s try some hypnosis... would you like to do that now?” And they always say “Yes!”*

Why is this important? Because by saying yes, they have just committed themselves to the process and to co-operating with you. This is an important step on the road to success.

### **The Standard Eye-Closure Induction**

This is the most basic hypnotic induction — what I call a ‘text book’ induction. Its principal purpose is to make the subject’s eyes so tired that they will eventually close of their own accord no matter how hard they try to keep them open. At the point of final closure, everything changes. When the eyes finally close for good, the subject is in the most responsive state and the appropriate suggestions can be administered.

The technique is simple. The subject just has to focus on one point or object. This could be a pinpoint of light slightly above eye line, but anything they can focus their attention on is fine. A bright object is more likely to hold the attention and if it’s located above the normal line of sight, the eyes will get tired more quickly. Verbal suggestions that eyes and eyelids are getting tired are compounded by the physical effort involved in trying to maintain an unnaturally high line of sight. A trick of the trade is to have the focus point closer to the eyes than would normally be comfortable — about a metre distance is good, making it even more difficult for them to keep their eyes open.

Try to avoid using gadgets such as spinning ‘hypno-disks’ because they can occasionally make subjects feel nauseous and if pursued to its inevitable conclusion has the potential to cost you a new carpet.

Engineers go to great lengths to design roads so as not to induce in drivers something which is called ‘Highway Hypnosis.’ Monotonous patterns of white lines on extended stretches of road or specific types of lighting on motorways can, at certain speeds, in a warm car, at night, when both mind body are beginning to unwind, be very dangerous.

The eye-closure induction involves much repetition and thus reinforcement. The induction can take anywhere from two or three minutes to ten minutes or even more, but given an average subject, you are normally looking at about three to six minutes.

Right at the start, I give the subject one last piece of information:

*“In a moment I’m going to ask you to just stare at that light. When we do this, everybody finds that after a while their eyes start to become heavy and tired. Eventually they’ll want to close. In fact, everyone finds that after a while it’s impossible to keep them open and this is all perfectly normal.”*

This is a suggestion in its own right and prepares the ground nicely. *To achieve hypnosis, that is, the sensation of relaxation we are looking for — you merely have to go round and round the body with suggestions for complete relaxation, like this;*

*“As you focus on the light, your eyes will begin to get heavy and tired...”*

*“As you focus on the light, your eyelids are getting heavy and tired...”*

*“As you listen only to the sound of my voice your eyes are getting heavy and tired...”*

*“As you listen to the sound of my voice, your eyelids are getting heavy and tired...”*

*“They are beginning to close; they are so heavy and tired, so tired and sleepy...”*

*“As you look at the light, your eyes are getting even more heavy and tired...”*

*“With every second that ticks by, and as you look at the light, your eyes are becoming more and more heavy and tired...”*

*“With every normal breath you take, and as you look at the light, your eyes are becoming more and more heavy and tired...”*

*“With every word that I say, and as you look at the light, your eyes are becoming more and more heavy and tired...”*

*“I want you to concentrate on the feeling in the tips of your fingers...”*

*“I want you consciously relax every muscle, every joint in the tips of your fingers. This is something you must do for yourself. Consciously and purposely relax every muscle, every joint, every sinew, every fibre, every nerve in the tips of your fingers. Imagine that the tips of your fingers are going numb... imagine that the feeling in the tips of your fingers is one of numbness...”*

Now repeat this last paragraph with every body part (listed below) each time throwing in a couple of suggestions relating to the eyes or eyelids continuing to get heavy and tired.

*Fingers, thumbs, hands, knuckles, wrists, arms, elbows... Toes, feet, soles of your feet, ankles, legs, knees... All the muscles that help you smile... all the muscles that make you frown... all the muscles in your forehead... your eyebrows... cheeks... eyelids... eyes... all the muscles in your jaw... around the whole of your face... relaxing, becoming inert...”*

In effect, we are playing a game of ‘mix and match’ with the relaxation of body parts, interspersed with useful words and phrases that aid relaxation, such as:

*relax, unwind, rest, ease, become inert, turn off, go limp, loose, relaxed... Feelings of peace, calmness, tranquillity, serenity, feelings of well being... So tired and sleepy... heavy and tired...*

It’s always a nice idea to use some visual imagery once the subject has achieved eye-closure. Something like the following often helps the subject unwind even more:

*“Imagine you are turning off every muscle, every joint, every sinew, every nerve... just imagine you are turning off all these muscles... imagine that you are able to do this in the same way that you are able to turn off all the lights in a tall skyscraper at night... one by one... one at a time... just turning off all the lights... and in the same way you can imagine yourself turning off all your muscles and all the joints in the whole of your body... just the same way you turn all the lights off in that building, one by one, and as you do so you will find yourself relaxing even more... as the lights go out, one by one, so your body relaxes even more...”*

There are no limits to this game of virtual reality. You can give suggestions that help the subject relax by saying that he or she is going down in a lift or elevator through the floors of a building from the tenth floor right down to the ground floor and then even deeper, down into the basement... going even more relaxed and so forth, although this one doesn’t work so well with clients who have come to see you because they have a fear of being trapped in elevators.

As the process continues, you will start to notice the body of your victim (sorry, subject) slowly but surely slip into an attitude of relaxation. You will notice the subjects blink rate increase and their eyes begin to narrow until it becomes more and more difficult to keep them open. Eventually the subject simply will not be able to keep them open any more.

Ultimately, eye-closure is irresistible and it's what makes this technique so reliable — it's always just a question of time.

It can be quite a drawn out process, but sooner or later, the eyes will close and this is one of the advantages of using this 'text book' technique. There are no short cuts with this induction but it's a good one to practice and get under your belt before moving on to more rapid inductions. It's fair to say that it's time consuming, and frankly, it's one of the things that make therapeutic hypnosis the most tedious job in the universe. After more than forty years of talking to people while they struggle to keep their eyes open, it has become about as interesting and as much of a challenge as watching paint dry. Generally speaking though, the one who manages to stay awake the longest is the winner, or hypnotist.

### **More Key Phrases for the Induction of Hypnosis**

These are especially practical as they are straightforward and to the point, but as with the script outlined above, they are by no means set in stone or to be rigidly adhered to — a lot depends on timing and your own particular preference based on experience and practice.

1. *As you feel more relaxed, you will feel yourself going deeper...*
2. *every part of your body... from the tips of your fingers to the tips of your toes is starting to feel relaxed... limp, loose and relaxed...*
3. *every muscle in the whole of your body... from the top of your head to the tips of your toes is feeling absolutely limp, loose and relaxed...*
4. *imagine sinking down into the darkness... going deeper and deeper... more and more relaxed...*
5. *everything feeling heavy and tired... your arms and legs heavy and tired... the whole of your body heavy and tired...*
6. *like lead... your arms and legs like lead... the whole of your body like lead... heavy and tired... calm and relaxed...*
7. *from now on, no noises will bother you, in fact from now on, all noises will just fade into the background... sending you deeper and deeper, more and more relaxed... even the sound of my voice will help you relax... deeper and deeper... more and more relaxed...*
8. *with every normal breath you take, with every heart beat, you will sink deeper and deeper, more and more relaxed, more and more tired, more and more sleepy...*
9. *everything feels so heavy and tired... the whole of your body feels heavy and tired... like lead...*
10. *as you relax, sinking deeper and deeper, more and more relaxed, you feel more calm, more and more peaceful... a feeling of well being... of peace and tranquillity... a feeling of complete rest spreading throughout the whole of your mind and body... there is no tension, no stress... your mind and body is completely at rest...*

A useful tip here is to try to avoid using the word 'sleep.' Whilst it might be helpful and effective to use suggestions such as "*feeling tired and sleepy,*" the use of the word 'sleep' might confuse the subject's expectations. Neither is it a good idea to say things like "*as you feel yourself going deeply into hypnosis*" or "*going into trance*" for the simple reason that the subject has then to define what is meant by hypnosis or trance — something that is impossible.

Always avoid inductions that are too rapid or 'shock' inductions. These are very impressive on the stage, but experience suggests that the effect is rarely long lasting. In therapy, there is plenty of time and no hurry.

In the therapeutic situation, it is not always possible to find a room that is absolutely 100% quiet. There will be noises coming from the street that filter into the room where you're working. A good way round this is to tell the subject that they will become *more* aware of external noises than they usually are. As stated earlier, when the eyes are closed, the sense of hearing 'perks up' a little to make up for the loss of that main sensory input. As this is a natural effect anyway, prior warning can help subjects feel more comfortable with what is happening. There is also another reason why making this statement is useful. By drawing attention to the certainty of it happening, when it does, it will be convincing. I often remind subjects of this during a session. Plus, these gentle reminders can help subjects feel more comfortable as they are an indication of 'operations normal.'

Another useful tip is to use phrases such as *"the deeper you go the better you feel... the more relaxed you feel, the deeper you will go..."*

Reinforcement is not just a matter of repetition — there is also a modicum of logic at work. Reinforcement also depends on being convincing and convincers can be slipped in at every opportunity. In effect, the hypnotist is then following the lead of the subject. [This is sometimes known as pacing and following.] For example, during the eye-closure induction, when it becomes clear the subject is starting to have difficulty keeping their eyes open, a good convincer is to follow their lead by saying *"your eyes are now really heavy and tired!"* Of course they are, but the suggestion now becomes convincing and leaves the way clear for subsequent suggestions to be accepted without question.

If it appears that a subject is actually beginning to nod off, there is no reason why a suggestion to the effect *"just let yourself go..."* should not be given. In the rare instance where someone actually does fall asleep, this can be hugely convincing. It's then only necessary to give the client a gentle tap on the shoulder and start again.

A good hypnotist is like the conductor of an orchestra. A good conductor doesn't conduct the music, a good conductor conducts the players, leading them on in exactly the same way as you lead your client into the beautifully relaxed and suggestible state we call hypnosis.

### **Physical Indications of the Hypnotic State**

There are several physical tell-tale signs associated with the hypnotic state that can be observed when a subject 'enters' hypnosis. In fact a subject can be said to enter hypnosis as they start to accept suggestions. These signs are not easily simulated by a subject, but all subjects will exhibit at least one and sometimes a combination of two or three signs. However, it doesn't always follow that the higher the number of signs, the deeper the hypnotic state.

Deciding when the subject is relaxed enough to move on to case specific suggestions is more a matter of experience than anything else, but it is permanent eye-closure that signals the watershed moment when suggestions to 'deepen' the state can be given!

The majority of subjects will exhibit a general attitude of physical relaxation, in other words, a very relaxed physical appearance, almost as if they are actually drifting into sleep.

Many subjects note distinct changes in body temperature. Some report experiencing coolness but most experience an increase in body warmth. This has been attributed to a

slower pulse rate and extreme relaxation, but in reality, increased body warmth during hypnosis is more to do with the fact that the subject is motionless for some considerable time. Air trapped between the layers of clothes acts as insulation. This increase in body warmth can be used as a 'convincer' by suggesting that *"a warm relaxed feeling is spreading throughout the whole of your body."*

Sailors who took refuge in lifeboats during the Second World War found that they kept warmer by sitting perfectly still than they did if they engaged in any kind of physical exercise. This was because of the insulation their clothes provided against the cold. Some even took off outer clothing such as jumpers and jackets, dipped them in the sea and wrung them out so that they were slightly damp before putting them back on again. This was supposed to provide even better insulation! It's the same the Guards at Buckingham Palace march up and down every few minutes. It's simply to cool down. Standing absolutely still increases body temperature to such a degree that if they didn't go for the odd walk, there is a very good chance they might faint.

Some subjects in hypnosis display a slight 'fluttering' of the eyelids. Conventional wisdom says these subjects are in an REM (Rapid Eye Movement) state. This is similar to, if not the same as, the dream state which is a natural part of the normal sleep cycle. It's easy to spot and it's one of the best indications that the subject has successfully entered hypnosis. In extremely good subjects the effect can be more pronounced. Sometimes you can see their eyeballs moving around under the eyelids.

Subjects often exhibit a reddening of the eyes once they have entered hypnosis. This is merely a consequence of relaxation of the eye and eyelid muscles and an increase in the flow of blood through the veins and capillaries. This reddening of the eyes occurs naturally enough and is very often apparent if an individual is woken up in the middle of the night, after a short nap.

Increased lacrimation means an increase of the amount of tears produced by the eyes and is attributed to the relaxation of the muscles around the tear ducts.

If, during the induction, you notice a subject's eyes rolling back as if they are suddenly looking up into the top of their heads, and this is then accompanied by a marked fluttering of the eyelids, you know you are onto a winner! This rarely happens and it is an involuntary movement. But it is quite dramatic and one of the things stage hypnotists pray for. Subjects who display this are highly suggestible and although comparatively rare, are very easily hypnotised. In these rare circumstances, the session needn't go on for too long as every single suggestion will take firm root in the mind of the subject. These subjects are known as Somnambulists or somnambulistic... and they are extremely responsive.

Tiredness, the heaviness of the eyelids and general feelings of lethargy, even light-headedness, are phenomena that are experienced by the majority of subjects in hypnosis. These effects are the natural product of suggestions pertinent to relaxation and are doubly important because they reinforce any preconceived ideas a subject may have and also increase the subject's satisfaction with the experience. Put plainly, the purely physical component of the experience helps to convince the subject that something — possibly something profound and meaningful is happening.

There are times however, when it is possible, even useful, to back up observation with suggestion. For example, during an induction, if you notice the subject's head beginning to nod forward, it will be convincing to suggest that *"your heavy, heavy head is falling forward... let your heavy, heavy head fall forward onto your chest..."* This will increase the impact of what is already happening of its own accord. It will also serve as an indication to

the subject that things are going according to plan. The dramatic impact of this sort of thing should not be underestimated as is highly convincing. When this happens, the subject is not only ready for and unconsciously waiting for the next instruction.

While all this is going on, two things are happening in the brain. First, the verbally induced feelings of relaxation are encouraging the brain to produce tiny amounts of natural opiates such as dopamine. Second, as the suggestions are given, new connections are being established between neurons as the new ideas associated with the suggestions take root, while also modifying and even replacing old ideas.

In stage hypnosis, because the subjects are engaged in various activities that could fairly be described as athletic, even strenuous, the experience obviously goes beyond mere relaxation. Along with the added component of physical exertion, and taking into consideration the sort of activities that form part and parcel of stage hypnosis, other chemicals will be produced at the same time, such as adrenalin and cortisone, both of which are associated with fight and flight. Chemicals produced in the amygdala which will affect emotional responses will also be released depending on the nature of the suggestions being given.

A few years ago I saw a hypnotist who told a subject that he was cornered by a vicious dog. After the 'performance' was over, it was obvious to all who had witnessed the stunt that he was very unhappy. The fact that he had to be consoled, shaking and tearful, by his girlfriend in full view of the audience would have compounded his distress. Perhaps this anecdote will serve as a warning to those who think that hypnosis is a toy. It isn't.

It is always tempting to talk about how *deeply* a person is hypnotised. The expression 'depth of hypnosis' is of common usage, but it has led to confusion. The only true test of hypnotic depth is to observe and test to what degree the subject is responding to suggestion. So it is more correct to talk about the degree to which a person is hypnotised rather how deeply a person is hypnotised. A minor point, but one worth noting.

There are all sorts of 'scales of hypnotic depth' claiming for example that hallucinations can only be produced when a subject has achieved a certain depth of hypnosis. But after 6,000 stage performances, I can assure you that these can be taken with a pinch of salt. Different people respond to suggestions in different ways. I have seen subjects whose response was sluggish in the first half of the show, when suggestions are generally simple and straightforward and then suddenly come to life after the interval. I have seen highly imaginative subjects clam up when confronted with a request to perform a simple act and then recover two minutes later to deliver an award winning performance. As I said at the beginning, everyone has a slightly different view of the world and everyone's experience of it is distinct. I consider that one fact to be the deciding dynamic in the real scale of things.

## **Speeding Things Up**

Teaching hypnosis is very much like teaching someone how to play a musical instrument. It takes practice because there are no magic words or secret phrases that make it all happen. Hypnosis is a skill like any other and the more you practice, the more proficient you will become in the same way as if you were learning to play the piano. My point is, don't try to run before you can walk.

I always tell my students that they should get the eye-closure induction, and all the correct timing that it involves, perfected before they start trying to go faster. Taking this piece of advice will save you from becoming a member of the hit and miss school of hypnosis.



Remember... the old ways are the best and will always get you out of trouble when you're struggling with a client.

As far as rapid inductions are concerned, there is really no such thing — but there is such a thing as an experienced and accomplished hypnotist! A good hypnotist can recognise the chance of a short cut and the more you practice, the more apparent these short cuts become. It just takes practice, time and patience. And lots and lots of practice and experience. And more patience. And more practice.

However... one way you can speed things up (at the risk of going too fast and losing your subject) is to let the subject close their eyes every time they breathe out. The proper use of language comes into its own here. First, here's the script...

*“Every time you breathe out, you can let your eyes close... every time you breathe in, it will seem more difficult to open them again... Every time you breathe out, you can let your heavy, heavy eyelids close... every time you breathe in, it will be more and more difficult to open them again...”*

Note I am saying “*let your eyes close*” rather than just “*close your eyes*”. The addition of that one simple word makes all the difference because it implies that it's easy to *let* the eyes close, but difficult to open them. Obviously, the success of this technique will vary from person to person, but usually after about twenty or thirty times, you'll see they no longer open their eyes when they inhale. A way of making it even more tiring for the subject is to tell them that when they open their eyes, they should try to look up into the top of their head at the same time. This also works well — maybe try it yourself a few times! The process can be used with lots of other suggestions for relaxation. Again, timing and experience are paramount.

### **The Andrew Newton Rapid Induction**

I had tried for years to find an induction that would take less than sixty seconds and would be just as useful in the therapy room as for the stage. It would have to be guaranteed to have at least the same success rate as the standard eye-closure induction. I already had something I was experimenting with but it just didn't have that 'flow.' And then one day, I found myself lecturing to a conference of experienced hypnotherapists in London and it suddenly came to me in one of those Eureka moments!

A woman in the audience who, although a hypnotherapist of many years standing, claimed to be un-hypnotisable. This really put me on the spot because the title of my talk was 'Dealing with Uncooperative and Difficult Subjects.' Fortunately, I always work well under pressure and have the ability to think on my feet — the result of years of dealing with audiences both friendly and hostile and in all sorts of situations. Even more fortuitously, it succeeded in genuinely astonishing all present — some delegates were even woken up by the thunderous round of applause it so richly deserved. It was one of those memorable flashes of inspiration and so I hope you will forgive my immodesty when I say that this induction is one of my greatest inventions, although it will only be a matter of time before it's copied by Paul McKenna and presented as his own.

It's based on a progressive yet relatively rapid relaxation process and I challenge anyone to come up with a better one. This is as close as you're going to get to the magic words...

Step one is simple. Using a scale of one to ten, where ten is the most relaxed, you start by asking the subject how relaxed they feel at that precise moment. Then, you simply get the subject to sit up in the chair, raise their toes off the ground and at the same time place

their hands on their knees, arms outstretched, with palms facing up. They tilt their head back and raise their eyes to look up at an imaginary point on the ceiling.

Step two involves relaxing the whole body from top to bottom:

1. *I want you to take a nice deep breath in... (pause for a couple of seconds) and as you breathe out, let your eyes close...*
2. *Now breathe in... (pause for a couple of seconds) and as you breathe out, let your heavy, heavy head fall forward onto your chest...*
3. *Now breathe in... (pause for a couple of seconds) and as you breathe out, let your hands and arms relax...*
4. *Now breathe in... (pause for a couple of seconds) and as you breathe out, let your shoulders sag down...*
5. *Now breathe in... (pause for a couple of seconds) and as you breathe out, let your feet go to rest flat on the floor...*
6. *Now breathe in... (pause for a couple of seconds) and as you breathe out, imagine you have no backbone, no spine... Imagine that all the bones in the upper half of your body have turned to jelly...*
7. *And one more for luck... breathe in... (pause for a couple of seconds) and as you breathe out, let all the muscles in the whole of your body relax... let them go completely to rest... imagine your arms and legs feeling heavy and tired... imagine that the whole of your body feeling heavy and tired... like lead... your arms and legs feel like lead... the whole of your body feels like lead... so heavy and tired... imagine that your fingers and thumbs are going numb... imagine that your toes and feet are going numb... imagine that all the muscles around you face are going numb..."*

You could even add a few lines about turning off the lights in a skyscraper floor by floor if you wish to add to it or if you're at all unsure when you take it for the first test-drive. The great thing about this induction is that it takes the subject from (physically) an unnatural position to a natural position in just seven easy moves. And guess what... everyone feels extremely relaxed within sixty seconds!

Next, whatever happens, don't spoil the effect by asking the subject if they found it relaxing. This is an open ended question and invites self-examination on the part of your client. Instead (and here again we're using the right language to get the response we want) you ask "*on a scale of one to ten, where ten is the most relaxing, how relaxing was that?*"

Everybody reports an increase in relaxation and most will score eight or nine and if you're lucky, ten. It plays upon the imagination rather more than the physical exhaustion that goes with staring at a spot on the wall.

There are other, more subtle advantages to this induction that may not be at first apparent. For instance, it can be repeated immediately with appropriate suggestions to the effect that "*next time you will feel even more relaxed.*" Repetition has a cumulative effect. Psychologist Milton Erickson claimed that it had once taken him three hundred hours to hypnotise one difficult subject — he should have tried this method.

Another advantage is that the procedure can be taught and taken away from the session as a relaxation exercise for clients who need to manage pain or increase confidence.

Coupled with self-suggestion, it works extremely well. The ritual involved in carrying out the physical movements also helps clients become more involved in the process.

Finally, in case you didn't notice, there is not one mention of the words hypnosis or sleep at all. In fact in the therapy room, I'm getting more and more used to telling clients that I feel it would be better to abandon hypnosis and instead use this new relaxation technique. This approach has the additional benefit of reassuring those who are nervous about being hypnotised or those who do not feel 'hypnotised' from saying "*nothing's happening*" or "*I can't feel anything*" or "*it's not working*", all of which are irritating and make you wish it was legal to administer sodium pentathol.

Whenever I encounter a client who is nervous of hypnosis, I always adopt the strategy of telling them that we will abandon hypnosis altogether and instead go for a new type of relaxation therapy... and then just hypnotise them anyway.

A great way to finish the session is to tell the client to "*give me a call in a couple of weeks and tell me how well you're doing!*" It's a very positive and confident note on which to end the session.

A hypnotherapist friend of mine from many years back had the whole operation down to a fine art. He was a northerner and a Yorkshireman to boot so his style was fairly direct and he didn't waste time. When I first watched him work I was impressed by his style and his efficiency. He would tell clients that once they were relaxed enough to let their eyes close, he would play some soothing music that would assist them unwind even further and help reinforce the suggestions he was to give them. As soon as they closed their eyes and he was satisfied that they weren't going to open them again, he pressed a button on his desk and some beautiful music started to play through the quadraphonic sound system that was installed in his office. The clever part was that he had also recorded all the subsequent suggestions to stop smoking or lose weight on the same tape and while the client blissfully relaxed for the next fifteen or twenty minutes, he was able to divert his attention to the crossword puzzle.

His method for weight loss was also brilliantly simple. Believing that the only reason people wanted to lose weight was to make themselves more attractive to the opposite sex, he told 99% of his female clients in a way that was inarguably to the point. As soon as the induction had been accomplished, and in the full knowledge that his words would have significance, especially in the minds of those whose best friends wouldn't tell them the truth, he would say "*Now you don't want to be fat and horrible and repulsive to everyone do you? Who's going to fancy you looking like that? So best lose some weight lass before you miss out on your life. Right, you can wake up now. That'll be forty quid please.*"

If I hadn't seen it for myself, I would scarcely have believed it. But this was the way he saw clients, on a conveyor belt system of one every 30 minutes. And it worked! His reputation in Halifax was formidable and there was a waiting list for appointments which stretched into weeks. Clients came from as far away as Huddersfield to see him.

On stage, I have used the backward postural sway induction for forty-odd years, and this way of working has been copied by every stage hypnotist since, including Paul McKenna. Although it is rapid, you are constrained by having to go along the line of potential subjects hypnotising them all individually, one by one. In the 1980's audiences were thrilled by it and it gave me lots of opportunity for joking around with my volunteers. However, modern audiences are not as patient. Attention spans are shorter these days and getting on with it is vital and this induction provides the answer. In fact, so successful is it that I now use it every time, even on the stage where it really does save time. My only reservation is that it

will be copied by the pub hypnotists who, having read this, will certainly take it for a spin at the next available opportunity. Sadly, it's also ideal for stage hypnotists in pubs and bars in Benidorm because it will permit the incompetent to get to the simulated sheep-shagging routine sooner.

### **Some Useful Tips for the Therapeutic Situation**

Some patients may be seeking help because they've seen a hypnotist on stage or on TV and the spectacle of stage hypnosis may cause people to harbour preconceived ideas and unrealistic expectations. So a good tip is to ask "*how do you think I will be able to help you today?*" or "*how do you see your problem?*" By answering, the client straightaway puts themselves in therapy simply by explaining and talking about their problems without any further prompting.

An exploration of these can reveal a client's expectations. By asking this question, it is also possible to subtly transfer the responsibility for the success of the treatment to the subject themselves. In this instance, the hypnotist becomes more of a sounding board for the patient to talk out their problems and this is exactly what psychologist Carl Rogers said. There is nothing people like talking about more than themselves. Once they start, there's often no stopping them and this can mean a lot of information gathering.

If a client is provided with a recording of the hypnosis session for home use, it's important to stress that the recording will also help them sleep, which of course it will. Sometimes success can elude a client because they concentrate too much on what's going on instead of just relaxing and letting themselves go. Listening to suggestions last thing at night is as good a way as any to get the message across, particularly as we all pass through the hypnotic state as we are drifting off to sleep. It doesn't matter if the subject falls asleep half way through. Carpet bombing the mind with suggestions is like throwing mud against the wall — some of it is bound to stick. All it needs is just one suggestion to take root because the repetition of a single idea is bound to have an affect on the person hearing it! Believe it or not, even hypnotherapists are susceptible to suggestion because they are exposed to it day in and day out.

We have already seen how repetition means reinforcement. That's one reason why some hypnotherapists like to see their clients for more than one session, often booking them in for three or four. My personal view of this is that most of the time it is not necessary, especially as modern technology has made it possible to make recordings. What can I possibly say next week that I can't say this week? For relatively straightforward treatments, any reinforcement can be accomplished by listening to a recording, at first on successive evenings or once a week. The technology is available on every mobile phone and means a considerable saving of time and money for the client.

### **Terminating Hypnosis**

A lot of hypnotherapists bring their subjects out of hypnosis gradually and gently so as not to spoil the feeling of relaxation. This is usually done by counting back from ten and giving suggestions that the subject is returning to their normal state of awareness. In my opinion, this is an unnecessary waste of time, and counterproductive. A simple "*three, two, one, eyes open*" is sufficient and gives the subject a chance to appreciate the difference between the two states. I said earlier that it's important to explain what to expect from the hypnotic experience. A gradual emergence from hypnosis does not give the subject as much of a chance to compare or contrast the experience and give the subject the opportunity to better distinguish between the two sensations and besides, the suggestion

that they will come round with a big smile on their face is irresistible and compounds the effect. In other words, the suggestion to smile is yet another convincer.

Because of the logical but tacit understanding between the stage hypnotist and a subject, it is highly unlikely that any of the suggestions will remain in force after the performance is over. However, and this is more for the benefit of the audience, there are some simple platitudes than can be uttered at the end just to keep everyone happy and they go something like this:

*“When you wake up, everything will be returned to normal; everything I have said to you will be completely cancelled out; you will feel and be exactly as you were before you came up onto the stage this evening; in other words, you will be your normal selves in every way.”*

### **Amnesia Associated with Hypnosis**

A common experience of subjects relating to recollection of what happens in the session range from remembering everything to remembering nothing, with a huge grey area in the middle made up of those who remember around 70% of what was said during hypnosis. The important thing is that they understand the general meaning of what has been said by the hypnotist.

In stage performances of hypnosis, subjects who remember nothing at all tend to believe they have only been on the stage for only a few minutes at most, and in some cases will swear that they have only just arrived on the stage and impatient for the show to start, much to the amusement of the audience! It is virtually impossible to predict these varied experiences because every subject is going to experience something different, depending on their unique psychological make-up, their personality, character and their individual expectations. This kind of ‘time distortion’ can also depend on the unique approach of the hypnotist and the circumstances in which the hypnosis is carried out.

However... spontaneous amnesia is something of a myth — an accidental result of stage hypnosis shows. In Britain, a lot of stage hypnotists ask subjects how long they think they’ve been up on the stage at the end of the show. This was a trend started in the 1940’s by Peter Casson and constitutes something of a leading question.

Because of the subject’s total concentration on, and involvement in the activity of what is for them a new and novel experience, it’s hardly surprising their estimate of their time on stage can vary from anything between a few minutes and an hour when the truth can be two hours or more. When asked how long they’ve been on stage, those varied answers can fool the audience into thinking that the participants must have forgotten everything! The fact is, they *can* remember everything if questioned properly, although perhaps not every tiny detail, but certainly the main bits and would be able to adequately describe what had gone on as well as any non-participating member of the audience. Nonetheless, the illusion of amnesia has been created and it sticks like mud to a blanket, establishing itself as another preconceived idea about hypnosis.

### **Problems Associated with Hypnosis**

If it were possible to write a book on the problems of hypnosis, there would very probably be 99 pages on the imaginary problems of hypnosis and only one page on the real problem, which is that most of the problems of hypnosis are imaginary. Imaginary problems are usually the result of expectation, unconsciously passed on via urban myth. However... they can be devastating to some participants.

In the same way that expectancy can help determine the favourable outcome of both stage performance and therapy session, this same expectancy can act as a double-edged sword and introduce a 'wild card' into the proceedings, which is why the hypnotist must exercise the greatest care and consideration, attending to every detail at all times. Suggestions must be administered with sensitivity and with forethought. Only fools rush in where angels fear to tread and every new suggestion should be made with caution. 'Think it through' is the golden rule. 'Engage brain before operating mouth' is another.

With both therapeutic and stage hypnosis, but particularly in the case of stage hypnosis, the following brief set of rules (or ethics) should be borne in mind.

- All participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw at any time.
- Informed consent should be gained from participants.
- Confidentiality must be observed at all times, including anonymity if appropriate.
- De-briefing after the session or stage show should be available if needed.
- Physical and mental health concerns include avoiding any situation which is likely to cause embarrassment, humiliation or damage to self esteem.
- Professional conduct is vital, including the integrity, responsibility and accountability of both performer or therapist.

In the final analysis, the hypnotist is the captain of their own ship and ultimately the one who will be held responsible when the lawyers send one of their nice letters informing you that you're about to go bankrupt.

Hypnosis in the therapeutic situation happens behind closed doors and is subject to confidentiality. Hypnosis on stage takes place in public view and every mistake, every error, every minor unprofessional action on your part will be picked over by a bunch of critical self-appointed experts present in every audience. Stage hypnosis should be a safe and harmless form of entertainment and the stage is certainly one of the safest places to do hypnosis because everything happens under public scrutiny.

In recent years in the UK there have been at least half a dozen cases where clients have alleged sexual misconduct by hypnotherapists. In 2023 I was engaged as an expert witness in a case where a hypnotherapist had been accused of a serious sexual assault on a female client. The charge was one of Rape by Digital Penetration. The hypnotherapist concerned was sentenced to two and a half years in prison.

### **The Politics of Hypnosis**

In the UK, there is a history of discord between hypnotherapists and stage hypnotists. There is nothing guaranteed to get the therapeutic hypnotist on their high horse like stage hypnosis. This is faintly unfair because if it wasn't for the early day stage hypnotists, likely as not hypnosis would have died a natural death a hundred years ago. Whilst it is true that a minority (not necessarily those who take part in or go to watch stage shows) consider that stage hypnosis is a degrading spectacle, they have no right to impose their preferred precious views on the rest of us who don't. There are plenty of entertainments which make just as much of a spectacle of people *without their prior consent* to much larger audiences on TV. The difference is that with stage hypnosis, the volunteers are... volunteers who have *consciously* consented to go up on the stage and give it a try.

The real objection I suspect, is that if a person is impressed enough by a stage hypnotist to decide to consult a hypnotherapist, the experience of hypnosis may not live up to expectations. Stage hypnotists are skilled at weeding out the most suggestible and therefore most easily hypnotisable subjects and so the process *looks* a lot more efficient than it really is. This makes the therapist's job that little bit harder because a client may not experience the 'trance' or any other kind of extraordinary sensation presented on stage. In hypnotherapy, there is also the possibility that the treatment might fail if the client is not prepared properly.

In the final analysis however, freedom of choice is what is at stake. People enjoy hypnosis shows and the people who take part are not forced to volunteer. As with most everything else in life, market forces ultimately decide these things. Many therapists though succumb to the temptation to embrace a holier than thou attitude which they like to think endows the art with a particular specialness which doesn't really exist. Hypnosis is not rocket science but a lot of hypnotherapists are guilty of trying to make you think it is! In addition, some of those carefully framed certificates on display may not be worth the paper they're printed on!

Bodies representing hypnotists are numerous and lots of them claim to be international. Usually, the only prerequisite for membership is the payment of an annual fee. Of course membership comes complete with more certificates and more letters after your name. A quick trawl of the internet will turn up dozens of them and membership of some of these organisations is exchanged in the same free and easy manner as stamp collectors exchange stamps. You could even start your own — no one is ever going to check.

Most stage hypnotists are happy to steal new and original routines because they gamble (correctly) that they will not get caught. This is one of the problems of stage hypnosis — a new and novel routine thought up by one of (the very few) original thinkers will be copied and become part of a pub show within weeks of its creation. The truth is, too many stage hypnotists are parasitic when it comes to stealing material.

The politics of hypnosis dictate that a lot of these organisations claim to be the longest established or the one with the most members. To hypnotists, credibility is of the utmost importance and all desperately want to be taken seriously. As with other 'regulatory' bodies, there are dozens of organisations competing for your cash. Some hypnotists start training schools (as have NLP trainers) and some offer training in both hypnotherapy and stage hypnosis. In reality, anyone can learn basic hypnosis in a day, but most courses are about a week in duration and some even manage to pad it out for longer, although what they manage to talk about for that length of time is anybody's guess. Mostly they sit around in groups practicing hypnotising each other. Few people who go into stage hypnotism waste their money on courses because they can usually see right through it from the word go.

Just as there was an explosion in the number of stage hypnotists in the 1990's, there has been an exponential increase in the number of people offering training and this insatiable thirst for more of the obvious has in turn spawned 'specialist' hypnosis experts touting every kind of course, from past-life regression to quantum hypnosis (which purports to be a mixture of hypnosis and quantum physics) to forensic hypnosis (hypnotising a witness to remember things conjured up in their own imagination) to psycho-phonetic hypnosis (could be anything).

There is also Hypno-anaesthesia (telling the client it doesn't hurt) and Hypno-analgesia (telling the client it doesn't hurt) as well as Hypno-Sensory Deprivation (telling the client it

doesn't hurt) along with Hypno-birthing (giving birth painlessly under hypnosis by telling the client it doesn't hurt) and Hypno-Sensitivity (telling the patient it does hurt).

At the present time, Ericksonian hypnosis seems to be in favour. Named after its inventor, the famous psychologist Milton Erickson, who claimed that he could hypnotise someone just by talking to them without a formal induction even if it does take three hours. Talking about Ericksonian hypnosis and pretending to understand the difference will ensure the seasoned practitioner will be held in much higher esteem by other hypnotists who secretly don't know the difference either.

(The fact is, Erickson found that he could get the same results bypassing a formal induction and engaging in conversation with the subject using metaphor, or example. He was right, and it makes the process or ritual of hypnosis redundant.)

In addition to starting your own training establishment, you could go as far as to invent your own brand of hypnosis. You could call it something like Methodological Hypnosis or Emotion Centred Hypnotherapy or Hypnotic Language Profiling, except that I thought of them first! Then all you have to do is put up a website and wait for the same people who hug trees to turn up and hand over their money in exchange for a few hours of twaddle. It really is that easy and there are lots of people doing it!

The ability to make something up on the spot can also come in useful. "*Have you read Wittebome's treatise on Hypnosis, Associationism and the Inner Self?*" is always a nice one to throw in, even though there's no such thing. Then you can wax lyrical about the advantages of concentrating on the value of Expectancy and non-hypnotic intervention. Whatever that means.

It's a sad fact that a lot of hypnotists, especially those of the therapeutic persuasion, are just as suggestible as everyone else. Hypnosis is God's gift to the serious bluffer and there are many ways to make a fast buck out of it — all it needs is confidence and a little understanding of the subject. Worldwide, there are literally tens of thousands of hypnotists getting away with it on a daily basis. Now you can join them.

**Suggestion: proposal, proposition, submission, idea, implication, hint, insinuation, intimation, indication, notion, impression, sense, perception, intention, clue...**

Time now to take a more serious look at some of the issues in more detail...

With a subject who is suggestible enough, the modern hypnotherapist can effect the same sort of miracle cure that saw Mesmer run out of Paris over two hundred years ago! The difference in this modern age is that hypnotherapists don't wear scarlet cloaks and get you to hold on to lightening rods. This new lot wear suits and sit you on a nice leather couch.

No longer do we believe in the animal magnetism of the universe! With just a few well chosen gentle, soothing words, the human mind will become just as open to suggestion as if Mesmer himself walked into the room. In other words, here we are, two hundred years down the line, and it's still more or less the same routine. Although the costumes are less colourful, the certificates are more numerous.

If hypnosis is purely suggestion, what's all the fuss about? If hypnosis *is* purely suggestion, does hypnosis really exist in the first place? If hypnosis is purely suggestion, why not just call it suggestion?



To understand hypnosis, you have to remember that it doesn't really exist, not in any real physical sense. Hypnosis is intangible... it's not a product —it's a concept. Remember that the word hypnosis comes from the Greek word Hypnos, which means sleep, which is what hypnosis isn't. Braid, the inventor of the word hypnosis later realised his mistake and regretted using it. He then spent many fruitless years popularising the word neurypnology, without any success whatsoever.

So let's forget hypnotism because it's a bad word to describe the phenomenon we're interested in, which is suggestion (or Tibetan mind control) or whatever. But what is suggestion?

First there's straightforward verbal suggestion. Imagine the phone rings. You're busy with something, so you just give your friend a glance in the general direction of the phone. He picks it up and answers it on your behalf. So he's responded to a non-verbal suggestion.

Try standing on the corner of a busy street with a couple of friends, gazing up at the sky with your hands shielding your eyes from the sun, and the chances are that most of the passers-by will at least have a quick glance heavenward. That's indirect non-verbal suggestion...

Body language is also suggestion. You don't need a degree in psychology to know when someone is flirting with you, when you're being threatened, when someone doesn't like you or when someone is lying to you.

Every day we are bombarded with literally thousands of suggestions and suggestion is one of the things that help us to form a view of the world. Our response to external suggestions is normally to behave in a way that has been clearly defined within certain parameters of accepted social behaviour. So when the waiter asks you if you would like a drink, you reply in a manner befitting the occasion. Conversely, if confronted by a loud, drunken hooligan, you would modify your behaviour accordingly, depending on whether you were the type of person who would wish to extricate themselves from this sort of situation or whether you were the type of person who enjoys this sort of challenge. In other words, your response is tailored to fit the needs of the situation which closely corresponds with social mores and your own personality and character.

But... not everyone can be relied upon to behave in the same way. A middle-aged banker would respond to the signals sent out by a police officer in a completely different way to a career criminal with a history of conflict with authority. Each has their own way of dealing with the situation, each knows what is expected of them in a given set of circumstances and thus act accordingly.

So where does simple suggestion end and when does hypnosis begin? Well... it's a trick question, because the question is a trick one. Remember, it doesn't matter how 'deeply' a person appears to be hypnotised, they're still only responding to words uttered by the hypnotist. Instead of asking how deeply a person is hypnotised it would be more correct to ask *'to what degree a person is responding to suggestion?'*

The verbal suggestions a hypnotist gives are interpreted in exactly the way expected, that is, in line with prevailing social rules, and respond in the appropriate manner. But there is more to it because whether you take your seat in a theatre, or escorted into a police station, or walk into a hypnotherapist's studio, the senses are literally bombarded with signals that conspire together to mould your perception of the person you're about to meet. Just as in the library, the environment alone can be enough to shape behaviour.

Next time you go to the theatre, take a look around. A lot of people have paid to see the man who's about to step into the spotlight. If he's any good, he'll have a good stage presence, an air of authority, and he will take command of your attention. The very fact that you've paid to sit there in the first place means that you already have some faith in this man's ability. And exactly the same is true when you're seated in the hypnotherapist's waiting room. If you've heard that he's not that good, or the film you've gone to see has scored low on Rotten Tomatoes, then you wouldn't be there in the first place, so the fact that you are there means that you are already conditioned to expect something positive.

There's nothing magical or mysterious about the hypnotist's power, it's just that they know something you don't. Hypnosis may be all in the mind, but the majority of people believe what they're told to believe, especially readers of the Daily Mail.

So... are people really hypnotised, or do they just think they're hypnotised? And if so, isn't it the same thing?

First, when both relaxed and focussed, the mind is not only more suggestible, it processes information in a different way. The hypnosis session gets the client to think in a different way, sometimes in a way that will help the client change the way they think. If someone starts to *think* in a different way, they will *behave* in a different way. Relaxation and focus of attention is the way to achieve that.

On the stage, it may look as though the people are just going along with a series of simple instructions. But why would they? Are we really that gullible that we would allow a total stranger to hoodwink us, or is there something that we've missed?

At the University of Liverpool, psychology professor Dr. Graham Wagstaff believes that there is no such thing as a trance, hypnotic or otherwise — and he's right. Apart from in low budget horror films, have you ever seen anyone actually in a trance? There is not one single documented proven case of anyone ever having been in a trance, not even in America! Medical books and journals are full of examples of people who are fixated, or in a state of hysteria, but sadly, no trances. They simply don't exist, and we only believe they exist because of that great fountain of disinformation, the urban myth. The word 'trance' has been bandied about with the same careless abandon as a lot of other words with no intrinsic meaning or value. The word 'subconscious' is another misunderstood term. There is in reality no such thing as 'the subconscious' — there is only the conscious and the unconscious.

The voodoo witch doctor derives his power from perceived suggestion and social standing in exactly the same manner as the fictional Svengali, complete with swinging pocket watch created for our entertainment. Neither of them are of any real substance, but before you could say hocus-pocus, everyone believed what they saw on the silver screen, and the image become lodged in our collective conscious.

Let's have a look at a couple of Dr. Wagstaff's experiments. The first involves a class of psychology students and Dr. Wagstaff puts them all through a bog-standard hypnotic induction, pre-recorded for convenience. He then gives them a test to measure the effect. Responding to suggestions that their arms are getting lighter, many of the students' arms begin to rise into the air. (His is in fact a standard suggestibility test.) At the end of the experiment the students get quizzed about their experience. They certainly all looked as if they were hypnotised and they certainly showed all the symptoms of being hypnotised — they looked extremely relaxed and they responded well to suggestions. But on closer examination nearly all of them decided that they had just been going along with the suggestions and didn't feel as if they were hypnotised or in any kind of trance. If they

thought they were going to experience some sort of state of altered consciousness, they were disappointed, because it didn't happen and neither could it have happened.

Once one student volunteered that he felt very relaxed but was simply going along with the suggestions, the others agreed that they had been doing pretty much the same thing. But something did happen, because most of them did respond as predicted and that was precisely the effect we were looking for! What *really* happened was that their behaviour was modified due to their own responsiveness. The thing that was missing was any 'trance-like' experience.

The problem is, when we ask a subject if they experienced something out of the ordinary, except for the feeling of profound relaxation, the answer is no... because the state of hypnosis is not out of the ordinary. Hypnosis is no different than any other kind of guided relaxation and increased responsiveness to suggestion. It might have been more revealing to ask the students how much easier it was to follow the suggestions when they were relaxed, and that is the key.

So hypnosis is a state of mind where responsiveness to suggestion is increased. When hypnotists work their magic on the stage, it always seems to the audience that the volunteers really are in some kind of special state where the hypnotist exercises ultimate control — and therein lies the confusion. The truth of the matter is that stage hypnotists are very good at getting their subjects to perform in the way they do because people who are hypnotised on the stage hardly get a moment to think about or analyse exactly what's happening because the suggestions move along so quickly and smoothly there is hardly a free moment for them to examine or question their own responses. It could be argued that this sort of slick performance owes more to good stagecraft than hypnosis and I would agree with that. Even so, we are still looking at a process, and this process is called hypnosis.

One could be forgiven for thinking that the oft drawn-out process of the hypnotic induction is nothing more than a ritual to focus the mind on the suggestions. There may be some truth in this. All the hypnotist is doing is grabbing your attention. So in this respect, hypnosis is no different than the power of healing crystals, or Mesmer's magnets!

One could surmise that because the effects of hypnosis can be faked, it doesn't exist. An orgasm can be faked, but that doesn't mean to say orgasms don't exist. One encounters the same difficulty attempting to define an orgasm as trying to define hypnosis. Both are pleasant, both result in a release of chemicals in the brain's pleasure centres and both can be described in fairly uncomplicated language... and both can be faked.

Trying to look at hypnosis as something tangible is the same as an astronomer trying to see a black hole using an optical telescope. Because no light can escape from the black hole, it is impossible to see, yet its effect on other celestial bodies is apparent and can be measured. The same is true when we look at hypnosis. With magnetic resonance imaging we can see changes in the brain brought about by concentration, focus of attention and involvement and therefore, hypnosis. We can also determine that hypnosis is taking place by measuring the changes in behaviour, but the real proof is in the brain scanner.

What Dr. Wagstaff has actually proved, is that effects (behaviour) produced using hypnosis can be produced just as well without it. The bricklayer dancing like a ballerina on the stage may be simply responding to suggestion, something he could do equally well without hypnosis. But the difference is, he's unlikely to. It is the context of the hypnotic show which provides the appropriate environment... and the entertainment.

If Dr. Wagstaff, and a few others of his ilk, are right, if hypnosis is merely compliance, or 'playing along' then the news would be out as quick as a jack-in-the-box and *all* hypnosis would be exposed as a sham. But that is not the case. *If* Dr. Wagstaff were right, tens of thousands of people must be sitting at home keeping secret something that would be the tabloid story of the decade.

So, if hypnosis is so great, why doesn't the hypnotist just hypnotise someone to rob a bank? The answer to this is by no means straightforward. First, most hypnotists (even the common or garden stage variety) are reasonably honest people. Second, it is generally accepted wisdom that the moral values outweigh suggestions that contradict the moral and ethical values of the recipient. In other words, hypnosis is a consent state. You simply can't make anyone say or do anything that would contradict or bypass their own inherent morals and values. Third (and this especially applies in the case of the stage hypnotist) actions carried out for the purposes of entertainment, on the spur of the moment, when a subject is lost in the moment, are simply not in the same league as suggestions carried out in situations that are outside the comfortable context of the hypnosis show.

On stage, the excitement of an unfamiliar environment together with the euphoria of profound relaxation allows a change in the way subjects react to their new environment. It might even be accompanied and helped along by chemical changes in the brain. People do indeed feel as if they have been hypnotised and as a consequence can be persuaded to do things that they would not normally do because they temporarily lose all inhibition. Exactly the same thing occurs when American TV evangelists take to stage and use the same tried and tested hypnotic techniques on their congregations. Instead of dancing around the stage like a ballerina, normally well behaved people will charge around the arena shouting "*Hallelujah*" and "*praise the Lord*".

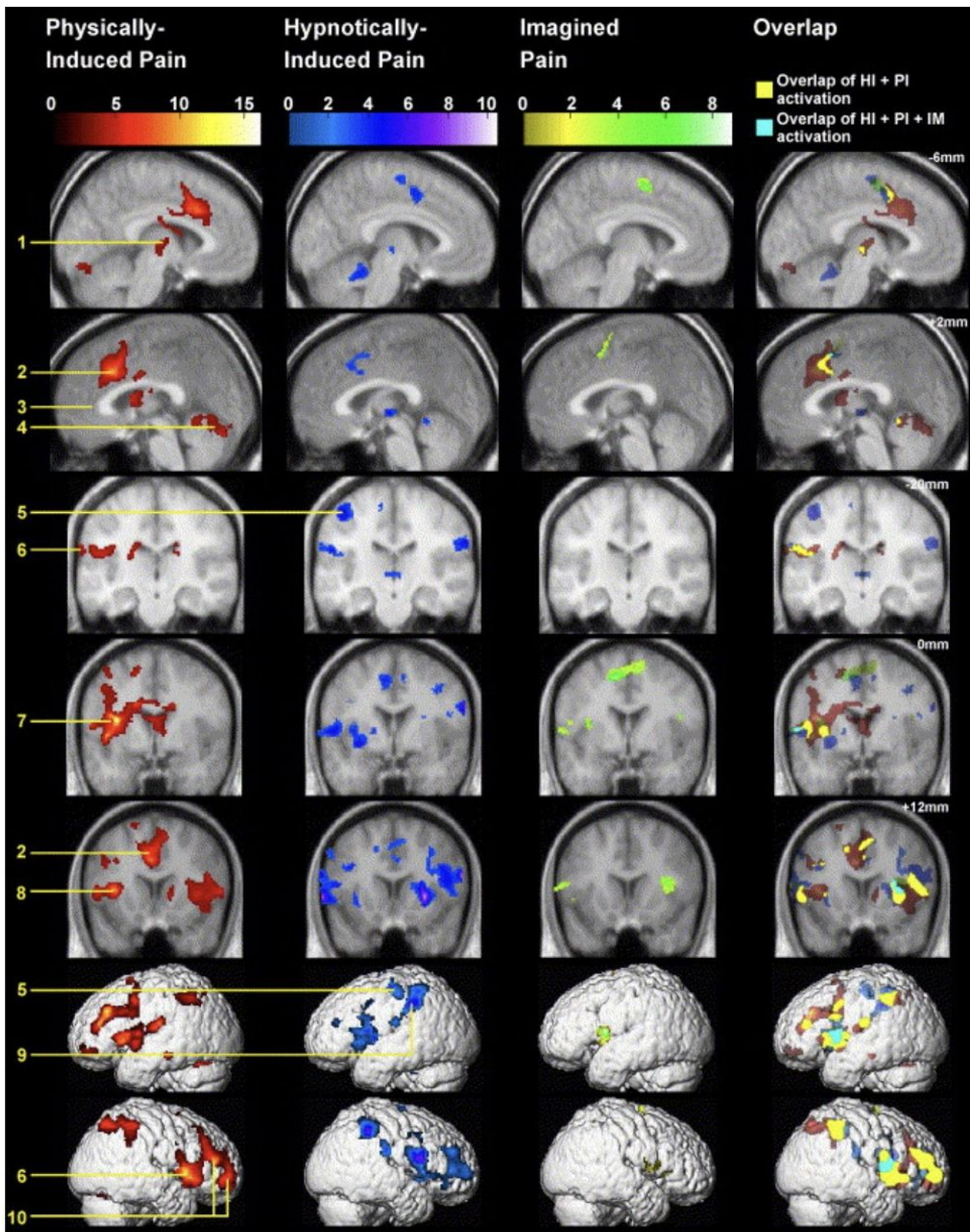
People tend to behave differently when under emotional stress or excitement and then later ask themselves "*why on earth did I do that?*"

But is there something deeper going on, something that has a fuller scientific explanation? Given the right conditions and taking into account expectation, relaxation, suggestion, belief, and so forth, the individual becomes overwhelmed by being a member of the group. This kind of group cohesion would explain why people get caught up in riots or demonstrations, where emotional responses overwhelm logic and common sense.

Dr. Wagstaff and I have appeared together on two television programmes examining hypnosis, each arguing our own corner. The format for these documentaries is always pretty much the same — they show some footage of me working on stage followed by a brief interview with some of those subjects which examines their subjective experience of hypnosis. All are convinced by the genuineness of the hypnosis — some remember most of what happened while others remember very little. All are of the opinion that they knew what they were doing, they just couldn't help themselves. Then Dr. Wagstaff is wheeled out and proceeds to confuse viewers by telling them that the whole thing can be faked. Both of us get our two hundred and fifty quid through the post a couple of weeks later and that's it until next time.

The state of heightened suggestibility we call hypnosis has neurological correlates just like any other mental activity such as mental arithmetic or feelings of great joy or exasperation. Thanks to modern technology, these changes can also be recorded by using brain scans which show definite changes in brain activity where hypnosis is employed, in the same way the scans can show which areas of the brain are activated by pain, by feelings of elation, sadness, or fear. The scans prove that the state of hypnosis is special.

Scientists at **Stanford University** scanned the brains of 57 participants using **Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging**.



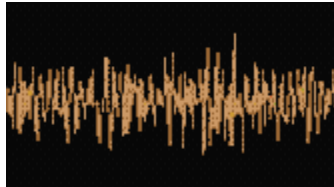
Used today, hypnosis helps individuals with addictions, pain management, depression and stress & anxiety etc. Hypnosis can be a very powerful means of changing the way we use our minds to control our thoughts and emotions.

## Hypnosis and brain activity

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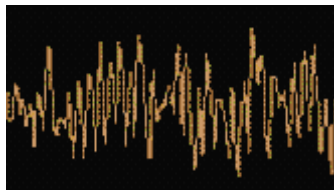
### **Beta Rhythm:** more than 13 Hz

Beta waves occur when a person is awake and alert and engaged in problem solving activity. This could be anything from solving a crossword puzzle to filling in your tax return. These waves are also seen during Rapid Eye Movement sleep (REM.) REM occurs whilst dreaming — at least six to eight times every night. **It also occurs when a subject is in a state of hypnosis.**



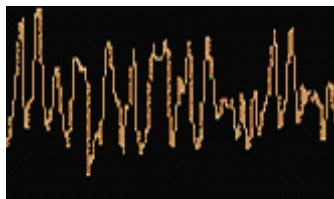
### **Alpha Rhythm:** 8 – 12 Hz

Alpha waves are usually present when a person is awake — the brain is thinking but in a relaxed way: listening to music, watching some mindless television soap opera and so on. The person may be in a drowsy state, with their eyes closed. These waves commonly occur before a person falls asleep. They also occur when a person is engaged in performing familiar tasks. Many churchgoers fall into an Alpha state whilst repeating monotonous prayers that they already know off by heart. The task is both familiar and comfortable and therefore does not require a great deal of concentration or critical thought.



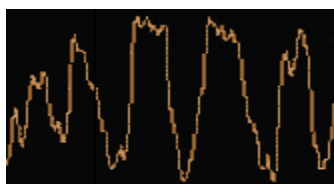
### **Theta Rhythm:** 4 – 7 Hz

The brain is feeling sleepy — Theta waves are more commonly seen in children rather than in adults. They can be detected in adults feeling frustration or with some types of brain disorders. They also are present during light sleep.



### **Delta Rhythm:** 3 Hz

Delta waves are present when the brain has fallen into a deep sleep and in people with severe brain disorders.



Graham Wagstaff and I are pretty well of the same opinion — as indeed we are about NLP! Hypnosis is a matter of using the imagination to follow the suggestions. If it can be used as a cure, then all well and good. There are less scientific procedures around as we shall see. If it can also be used to make someone run round like a chicken, then so be it. Dr. Wagstaff has fallen into the trap of looking for a secret that isn't there. Some American woman once asked me *"is it like a ray that comes out of your eyes?"* "Yes dear," I replied, so as not to disappoint her and she immediately averted her eyes and headed toward the free buffet.

We can all behave in extraordinary and unusual ways when faced with extraordinary and unusual circumstances, and this is as much a part of human nature as is dictated by any of more usual situations that determine or change or modify behaviour. People modify the way they conduct themselves according to circumstances, and that includes the social conventions associated with conditions and environment. Most of us would behave quite differently if we were about to meet the Queen than we do at a football match. Even the way we dress is different (unless you are actually a footballer, in which case you behave as you normally do and Her Majesty will just have to make allowances.) Whether we are visiting the therapist or about to volunteer to go on stage to be 'put under,' our behaviour is modified to fit the occasion.

Does hypnosis then, like God, exist only in the mind of the believer? The two have more in common than you would think. Many religions are based on the philosophy that God is like a cosmic puppet-master manipulating the universe in the same way as the Wizard of Oz pulled levers and chains. Most people have the same image of the hypnotist as someone who can manipulate the subject at will. Neither of course is correct, even though real-life puppet-masters can manipulate the way we think.

An age old problem with hypnosis is that not all people are equally suggestible and it would be unscientific to claim that they are. This is one of the limitations of hypnosis. So far no-one has been able to come up with a satisfactory explanation of why this should be so although upbringing, attitudes, cynicism, inherited brain structure and learned beliefs may provide answers.

People vary in suggestibility just as they vary in height, weight, hair colour, and artistic or mathematical ability. There are many and varied tests of suggestibility and here are some more interesting ones:

The 'progressive weights suggestibility test' consists of fifteen boxes with weights inside. The weights in the first five boxes increase progressively but then remain constant in the next ten boxes. Volunteers were asked to pick up the boxes one by one. Suggestible people were more likely to report an increase in the weight of the boxes long after it had levelled out, although it's interesting to note that applied psychologists were not so easily fooled! Similar tests of varying light, sound, warmth, and so on gave similar results. Unfortunately, high scorers in these tests proved to be no more or less susceptible to hypnosis than those with low scores.

A researcher in hypnosis, C. L. Hull, made the excellent point that there are two types of suggestibility: prestige and non-prestige. Each depends on the prestige of the person making the suggestion, particularly when suggestions are purely verbal. This is intriguing as it confirms what I said before about the perceived status of the hypnotherapist or the stage hypnotist. In the case of non-prestige suggestions, for example the progressive weights test, success was more dependent on the suggestion implicit in the materials and methods of procedure than on the prestige of the person giving the test.

Hans Eysenck carried out a series of tests on sixty neurotic patients. The tests were divided into two groups — primary suggestibility tests of body sway, arm levitation, Chevereul's pendulum and so forth. The secondary suggestibility tests consisted of progressive weights, judgment of the lengths of certain lines and other tests of naiveté and gullibility.

Only primary tests seemed to predict suggestibility. Primary suggestibility tests such as the postural sway test, all involve ideomotor action. A seemingly involuntary movement of a pendulum can be triggered by the verbal suggestions of the person carrying out the test. In the body sway test the success of the test can be determined by non-verbal suggestion. A practised hypnotist can easily draw a subject forward by asking the subject to focus on one eye. What is actually happening is that the subject is indirectly being asked to focus their attention on the distance between them and the hypnotist's eye. Again, the expression 'focus of attention' is all important. As the hypnotist gently steps back, the subject unconsciously tries to maintain what he perceives to be the correct distance and follows through until either the sense of balance kicks in and the subject puts out his foot to steady himself or, on occasions where the suggestion is either implicit or the subject is highly suggestible, continues to fall forward (don't forget to catch!) and spontaneously enters a hypnotic state. I use this trick on stage a lot. Because the audience have absolutely no understanding of how it works, and it never fails to draw gasps of amazement from the crowd.

In a hypnotic induction, suggestions as to complete relaxation, heaviness of arms, legs, immobility and complete closure of the eyes, depend on ideomotor suggestions.

The response to primary suggestibility tests depends on a subject's attitude *and* aptitude. A negative attitude, for example resistance or a 'don't believe in it' attitude is no worse than a negative aptitude. The subject may want to co-operate too much! It is obviously preferable that subjects have both a positive attitude and a positive aptitude to guarantee success. Subjects who are waiting for 'something to happen' have predetermined that the hypnotist will make something happen without any effort on their part... they have failed to comprehend the fact that hypnosis is a partnership, that hypnosis depends as much on the co-operation of the subject as it does on the skill of the hypnotist.

Professor Gibson of Hatfield Polytechnic used personality tests to measure introversion, extroversion and neuroticism. He recruited three control groups. The first consisted of well adjusted university students (a contradiction in terms if ever there was one) the second was made up of anarchists, and the third was made up of mediums, spiritualists and faith healers. Mediums and the like were very susceptible to hypnosis — some would even insist on talking to their spirit guides. In this respect I think Professor Gibson may have got more than he bargained for. However, the connection is clear; those with vivid imaginations and an ability to believe in such stuff and nonsense make good hypnotic subjects. My experience of 40+ years of working with hypnosis confirms this.

Tests can also be complicated by the 'lie factor.' Asked a series of pertinent questions, subjects would bend over backwards to create a picture of themselves as perfect and improbable models of moral perfection whilst the known liars were found to be not susceptible to suggestion or hypnosis, in all probability because people are guarded and suspicious are thus less willing or even less able to enter a rapport situation with another person, especially a psychologist!

These tests are not to establish who is more suggestible but to find out why people *differ* in susceptibility. If susceptibility depends to some extent on neuroticism or hysteria, even as a result of a present or imagined mass hysteria, an experiment can be carried out with a



control group. Half the volunteers are hypnotised using straightforward psychological techniques, the other half were given Valium to lower the level of resistance. They were then hypnotised, and the results compared.

Again, confusion reigns. Some researchers claim that drugs will increase suggestibility and therefore hypnotisability while others claim that they make no difference. Another study was made using two control groups, one given Valium and the other given a placebo. Members of the tranquilised group were both more and less susceptible although the drug did have an effect on neuroticism. The wild card is obviously the individuals own personalities. My own opinion is that their own inherent or inherited suggestibility overrides even the drugs. Without doubt, the more obedient a person is, the more suggestible they are.

There is however, one personality trait that points us in the right direction. Those who can get lost in themselves, in a book or a film, daydreamers, children, those who assume a trance-like involvement in whatever they do to the almost total exclusion of all distractions, those who are both imaginative and suggestible turn out to be good hypnotic subjects, as are those with the ability to totally involve and engross themselves in reverie.

There is even a questionnaire for hypnotic or trance-like experiences:

“Have you ever had the experience of watching yourself from a distance? Have you ever lost intervals of time when you cannot remember what you have done?”

It would be an advantage to find out the frequency of this sort of experience. The problem is that people’s experiences are subjective and often differ markedly from the truth. Apart from deliberate falsehood, results can be made inaccurate because of exaggeration, or a sense of the dramatic, or even wild guessing when true memory fails. If you were to ask a group of five year olds ‘have you ever jumped six feet in the air?’ some will say they have.

In experiments carried out by American psychologist Josephine Hilgard, students that reported that they were able to lose themselves in a fantasy world and have been able to do so since childhood, were more susceptible to suggestion and therefore to hypnosis. We know that children are more susceptible when young, particularly at a time when the brain is still developing, neurons still being allocated, and the more rigorous critical faculties not yet fully established.

This was demonstrated by Lieblault a century ago and still holds true today. Children appear to be at their most suggestible between the ages of twelve and fourteen. Before the age of twelve, verbal understanding is not developed enough to absorb any complex ideas presented to them, but after around fourteen, as they move into adolescence and are determined not to appear naive or gullible, they are not so eager to please and nor are they as easily impressed or intimidated by authority.

Peter Casson always said that what you were actually looking for in a good subject was obedience. The best stage hypnotists watch their volunteers carefully as they make their way up onto the stage. By observing the way volunteers conduct themselves as they find their own personal space on the stage, and giving simple instructions such as “*please stand there, please take a pace forward*” it’s easy to spot who amongst them are the most obedient. It’s unfortunate that most stage hypnotists don’t notice these signs because they simply don’t understand the subject well enough to even bother looking before they bodge their way through playing the numbers game.

An interesting comparison between children and adults is that although children will, on the whole be more capable of experiencing hallucinatory and imaginative phenomena, they are much less influenced by suggestions of physical manifestations, for example the irresistible closing of the eyes.

Are men and women equally suggestible? In Leiblault's experiments he concluded women were one fifteenth more hypnotisable than men. It may just be coincidence that men are also taller than women by the same fraction. This means nothing of course as it's highly unlikely that there's a connection between the two, but if women are more hypnotisable than men, it's probable that it's because on the whole women tend to be more sensitive. So is this really a significant result? I can say that after all the stage performances I've given, I find overall that more women volunteer to take part than men and that overall, they seem to be easier to hypnotise. Of course there have also been nights when only women have volunteered and nights when only men have volunteered.

I did go through all my records to verify this. I used to keep comprehensive reports of every show which included not only the details of how many people were on the stage but which routines I performed and whether there were any unusual responses or incidents. These reports even incorporated information about the weather conditions on a particular evening, the effectiveness of the lighting in a particular theatre, the number of people in the audience, whether or not the show started on time and so on. I amassed this information from theatres all over the world because I was interested in the patterns that emerge. For instance, miserable weather can subdue the enthusiasm of an audience if they have had to fight their way through the pouring rain to get there.

When researchers say there is no difference between the hypnotisability of men and women, what they really mean is that there is no *significant* difference. If a certain tendency, no matter how small, is found throughout a series of experiments, with control groups and differing circumstances, then the tendency is definitely there. But this is more likely to be of cultural rather than a biological origin. Could it be that women volunteer more than men because of the cultural assumption that the hypnotist will behave in a more gentlemanly fashion toward them than he would toward the men? I have made over twenty thousand men take a bite out of an onion which they believed to be an apple, but on no occasion have I ever made a woman do this, or perform a striptease when the men regularly wake up to find their trousers round their ankles and it's quite possible that this information has worked its way into the collective unconscious minds of the audience, many of whom have turned up because of the recommendation of their friends and have a good idea of the sort of thing they can expect.

Research also suggests that as far as creativity is concerned, in men it is negatively related to suggestibility, whereas in women it has a strong positive relationship. But I'm not so sure. In a group that scored highly on susceptibility to hypnosis, the association between creativity and susceptibility was especially high for women but low for men. But again, this same research flies in the face of my experience on stage although it does confirm my experience in the therapy room. The creatively challenged do not make the best subjects on the stage, whereas sensitive, creative males usually turn out to be good subjects.

Measurement of facts about a person's make-up could predict susceptibility to hypnosis. Measurements taken with an electroencephalograph (EEG) have shown that people with a greater susceptibility to hypnosis show more alpha brain activity (when their eyes are closed) before they are hypnotised. In the same experiment, less hypnotically susceptible subjects showed less alpha brain activity. But even so, the question remains, why some and not others? The answer *might* be that that's just the way we were born or that we are

as different as we are due to the varied and collective experiences of our lives. Right-handedness and left-handedness develop early and relate to the two brain hemispheres, so could brain asymmetry be related to hypnotic susceptibility?

An interesting experiment is to set someone a mental problem or ask them to form a mental image. Whether the eyes avert to the left or the right relates to their brain symmetry. Left gazers and right gazers, checked on their hypnotic scores, displayed more than just a trend. Left gazers were significantly more susceptible to hypnosis than right gazers. Left gazers also turned out to be more imaginative, more artistic and more sensitive and their thinking was more subjective than objective, which brings us right back to the importance of brain symmetry.

Up until recently, it was always thought that we are the sum total of our growing up experiences from childhood, but the origins may originate even earlier. Perhaps the type of child one is, dreamy and imaginative or hard-headed and practical, relates to the type of brain one is born with. These results are confirmed by clinical and experimental hypnotists in the USA and Britain and has added even more fuel to the nature/nurture debate.

There is one common trait that always seems to have been ignored by researchers in the field. It is something that, after 40+ years experience and over 6,000 performances as well as dealing with more private clients than I care to remember, has become more and more apparent as the years have gone by. It is a phenomenon which I call *The Optimistic Principle* and to understand it, one must first understand the differences between an optimist and a pessimist.

Incurable optimists *always* make good hypnotic subjects. They have an unrealistically rosy view of the world that sometimes suggests a mind that may be a stranger to reality. They believe that their latest diet really will help them lose weight when in reality only one in fifty dieters ever lose weight permanently. They believe in a lot of other airy-fairy nonsense as well. Optimists are far more likely to believe that flying saucers really do exist, and trees really do have spirits. A disconcerting percentage of these optimistic types also believe in ghosts when the rest of us believe that ghosts are for kids who watch Scooby Doo. And yet there are an alarming number of grown-ups who read their horoscopes every day and believe every word. Optimists are more prone to believe any of a variety of conspiracy theories. They seem to lack the requisite critical faculty which enable their best of us to discriminate between logic and fancy.

Pessimists on the other hand wouldn't be caught dead wasting their money on a diet book and consider flying saucers to be the same as the tooth fairy. Optimism is undeniably linked to ignorance while pessimism is more linked to well-informed logical thought. Optimists are generally more religious than pessimists, particularly the happy-clappy types with the perma-grins. Optimists are much more into spirituality and mysticism than their pessimistic counterparts. Pessimists generally make more money because they have a more realistic approach to business. Optimists are poor gamblers because they don't know when to cut their losses, and so on. In short, pessimists are unencumbered by false optimism. Recent research shows pessimists may even live longer! I find that piece of information comforting.

What all this means is that optimists are far more influenced by suggestion than their more cynical and pessimistic counterparts. Yet in the world of stage hypnosis, I have discovered a trend which might be just as significant as all the other research that's been carried out into susceptibility and suggestibility. I have met a lot of stage hypnotists over the years from all over the world, some good, most appalling. Unlike their opposites in the therapy business, they all have one thing in common — without exception they are all both utterly

cynical and pessimistic and in a lot of cases, though not all, thoroughly miserly and mean spirited human beings. They also share something else in common... they all had the capacity to see through the hocus-pocus from the start and see hypnosis for what it is — the ultimate game of bluff. This is in stark contrast to the optimism of the subjects that make it possible for them to make a living.

It could turn out after all that suggestibility does go hand in hand with susceptibility and that it comes about because of nothing more than an accident of birth combined with the social, cultural and educative processes that a person experiences throughout their developmental years. Still, the importance of the optimistic principle should not be understated.

More than any other test of suggestibility or susceptibility, optimism is a sure sign of hypnotic success. But there again, and with a knowing nod and a wink to the cult followers of NLP, Carl Rogers suspected this as early as 1961. He rightly said that a psychologically healthy person is open to all experience and has an ability to live fully in every moment, the will to follow their instincts rather than the will of others, freedom of thought and action, spontaneity, flexibility and above all, creativity. These are the people we want...

Despite the romantic notion that 'adversity makes a person stronger' the latest research indicates that the opposite is true. In an experiment carried out at Leicester University, researchers read an account of a bank robbery to sixty volunteers who were then asked to recall details of the account. Then, a series of leading questions were asked, specifically designed to elicit incorrect answers from the volunteers who were persuaded that their original recollections may have been wrong. Participants who had experienced greater degrees of hardship and adversity in their lives more readily bowed to pressure and changed their stories.

Life's negative experiences may indeed lead to increased suggestibility by eroding their own confidence in their personal judgement. Makes you think doesn't it? How many witnesses have been convinced by clever lawyers to change their evidence on the witness stand? How many false confessions have been elicited from innocent people by bullying police officers? The situation is undoubtedly further complicated by so-called 'forensic hypnosis,' something we have already mentioned.

As a brief aside, Cordelia Fine, a psychologist at the Australian National University claims (accurately I think) that the individual mind is biased. The truth of the matter is that most of us consider ourselves to be more ethical, more capable and better judges of character, than others. This, she calls the 'vain brain.' Put simply, the brain tries to bias perceptions in favour of the person doing the perceiving. It is a facet of human nature that when things go well, we are only too happy to take credit but when things go badly, we tend to apportion blame to others or to circumstances beyond our control.

Our brain is not only biased, it has an unfortunate habit of stage-managing memory and even reason if it suits our own egos, especially when it comes to concocting excuses. Even being in possession of this knowledge does not stop us applying the principle to others more than we are willing to do to ourselves.

Ironically, there is one category of people who find it easier than most to view life more objectively. *"Their self-perceptions are more balanced, they assign responsibility for success and failure more even-handedly, and their predictions for the future are more realistic. These people are living testimony to the dangers of self-knowledge... They are the clinically depressed."*