## HYPNOSIS

1. **History of hypnosis**:

Anton Mesmer (1734-1815), a Viennese physician, claimed he could cure illnesses by transmitting a form of energy he called animal magnetism to his patients, a process that became known as mesmerism. He mesmerized people by having them hold onto rods protruding from a tub filled with mesmerized water. Patients fell into a trance, responded to suggestions, and were cured. Mesmer became quite the rage in Paris, and in 1784, he was investigated by a commission headed by Benjamin Franklin to test the validity of his claims. They found no evidence of animal magnetism and said that the effects were attributable to the powers of suggestion and subjects’ active imagination. Mesmer moved to Switzerland in disgrace.

In 1842, an English surgeon named James Braid renamed mesmerism “hypnotism” and used it in his medical practice. Freud also used it but later abandoned it.

1. **Can hypnosis enhance recall of forgotten events?**

Can you be hypnotized to remember who sat beside you in first grade? What your favorite shirt was as a 2-year-old? Your own birth? BEFORE your birth…your past life? Most people think that every experience we’ve ever had is stored away somewhere, waiting to be brought back to life through hypnosis. The truth is, though, that 60 years of research haven’t been able to determine the truth of these claims. There have been cases in which people’s recall has been enhanced through hypnosis but in general, hypnotically-refreshed memories can’t be treated as fact, and they’re increasingly being banned in courts. Sometimes the relaxed state of hypnosis can boost recall, but the recollections are often tainted with “false memories” or the hypnotist’s suggestions. The person then incorporates these suggestions into actual memories…except they’re “pseudo-memories.”

Age-regression: Regressing someone back to their 6-year-old self: The subjects act in a way that they believe a 6-year-old would act, but they usually perform better than a 6-year-old actually would. For instance, they may write in 6-year-old handwriting but spell every word correctly. They also show brain waves typical of adults and not children.

Past-life regression: There was a televised documentary in 1995 that showed a group therapy session in which a woman was regressed through childhood, to the womb, and eventually to being trapped in her mother’s fallopian tube as an unfertilized egg. The woman provided a highly emotional demonstration of the pain of being stuck in a fallopian tube, but was it an actual memory? No…she wasn’t even a fertilized egg at that point and didn’t have a brain. Some therapist s (Weiss, 1988) believe that some patients who have psychological problems can be hypnotically regressed to a past life to go back to the source of their modern-day problems. (both physical and psychological). Some therapists actually believe that chronic neck and shoulder pains are the result of being hanged or guillotined in a previous life. People who are regressed to a past life too often make the mistake of believing they’re someone famous, their own gender, or their own race. Statistically, this shouldn’t occur. They often make historical errors such as these: One subject said that he was Julius Caesar and lived in 50 B.C. The problem is that there was no distinction between B.C. and A.D. at that time. Correct “hits” are explained as educated guesses and knowledge of a country or history (Spanos et al. 1991)

1. **Can you hypnotize someone to perform something dangerous or against their will?** Orne & Evans (1965) did a study in which they had hypnotized subjects dip their hands into what they thought was fuming acid and then throw the acid into the researcher’s face. The subjects did so and then, the next day, said they didn’t have any recollection of their actions and claimed that they’d never do such a thing. Orne and Evans were criticized for not including a control group in their study, so in a follow-up study they included a control group, in which Ss were told to pretend as though they were hypnotized. The hypnotist didn’t know which was the hypnotized group and which was the control group. The dependent variable was the same: Would the subjects dip their hands into what they thought was acid and then throw the acid into the experimenter’s face? The results showed that ALL of the control subjects performed the same acts as the ones who were hypnotized. As you’ll see later in the course, most people can be led to perform dangerous or unethical acts when told to do so by an authority figure. It has nothing to do with hypnosis.
2. **Hypnosis and pain relief**

Does hypnosis relieve pain? Yes, although it’s better for relieving acute pain than chronic pain (because chronic pain involves other psychological components than just pain). Headaches, asthma, stress-induced skin conditions, and warts have all been helped by hypnosis. Childbirth can be virtually pain-free with hypnosis and 10% of people do not even have to have anesthesia during surgery. Hypnotized subjects feel little to no pain when asked to dip their hand into an ice bath, which usually produces intense pain within 25 seconds.

In a meta-analysis of 18 studies on hypnotic pain-relief, Patterson concluded that hypnosis provided pain relief for 75% of the people studied. For acute pain, hypnosis fared very well in 17/18 studies compared to other pain treatments. For chronic pain, hypnosis reduced pain but its effects were generally equivalent to the effects of relaxation training.

**How does hypnosis relieve pain?**

Two theories: dissociation theory and selective attention theory.

Dissociation theory states that we experience a split between different levels of consciousness. Hypnosis may dissociate the pain stimulus (which the hypnotized patient is still aware of) from the actual interpretation of and experience of pain.

Selective attention theory states that we obtain relief because we simply don’t focus on the pain (like the guy who feels no pain during an actual shark attack because he’s too busy trying to escape). PET scans reveal that hypnosis reduces brain activity in a region involved in attending to painful stimuli, but not in the somatosensory cortex that receives the raw sensory input. At this point we don’t know exactly how hypnosis brings about pain relief.

1. **What else does hypnosis help?**

Smoking cessation: evidence is weak for hypnosis being effective at kicking nicotine, alcohol, or other drug addictions. Positive suggestions without hypnosis seem to have the same benefits.

Losing weight: It really does seem to help patients lose weight. One meta-analysis of 18 studies showed that hypnosis clients showed greater improvements than 70% of other therapy patients.

1. **Is hypnosis an actual altered state of consciousness or something else?** Braid named the phenomenon “hypnosis” because hypno is the Greek word for sleep. He believed that hypnosis was akin to sleep, but studies show that the brain waves of sleep vs. hypnosis are different. EEGS of hypnotized people show patterns similar to normal waking, but deeply relaxed, brain waves (Wallace & Fisher, 1987).There is some evidence that hypnosis is a unique state of consciousness. In a study by Kosslyn et al (2000), when deeply hypnotized people were asked to imagine a color, areas of their brain lit up as if they were really seeing the color. What would only be imagination to a nonhypnotized person becomes a compelling hallucination to the hypnotized person’s brain.
2. **Theories of hypnosis:** Skeptics claim that hypnosis is not a unique physiological state, and that behaviors produced through hypnosis can be produced without it as well. Perhaps hypnosis is just a “social phenomenon.” Maybe hypnotized people are just behaving the way they believe the hypnotist wants/expects them to (DEMAND CHARACTERISTICS). The more they trust their hypnotist and want to please him the more suggestible they become. This theory is known as social influence theory.

Other people believe that hypnosis is just imaginative acting. However, hypnotized subjects will sometimes carry out suggested behaviors on cue, even though they think no one is watching. That would seem to refute that they’re just trying to be a good subject.

***Hilgard’s theory:*** Hilgard is a well-known researcher of hypnosis. He contends that hypnosis involves not only social influence but also a special state of dissociated or divided consciousness. He viewed hypnotic dissociations as a vivid form of everyday mind splits. Behavior starts becoming automatically controlled rather than consciously controlled. You go on “autopilot.”

Hilgard believed that there is a hidden observer in your consciousness that passively watches what is happening without attempting to intervene. The hidden observer records what’s happening but is no longer in direct contact with the autopilot. To Hilgard, the hidden observer and the autopilot are the two splits in consciousness. Example: The subject sticks his hand in ice cold water but doesn’t complain of pain. When asked whether he was in pain later, he will indicate that he DID experience intense cold. The subject seems to have the experience of pain, but it’s not available to conscious thought the way it would be in real life. The hidden observer is passively recording the thought that the water is cold, but the autopilot does not record the cold water as painful.

In another paradigm: The subject is hypnotized, and ammonia is passed under her nose. She has no reaction to it. Hilgard would say that she is acting on autopilot; the hidden observer is aware of the aversive smell but doesn’t attempt to intervene. Social influence theory would explain this by saying that the subject was simply not paying attention to the smell; she was ignoring it because she’s so caught up in the hypnotized state.

1. **Bottom line:** Hypnosis remains a mystery. It seems to be neither real nor fake. It can produce dramatic, even astounding results. The pain relief function seems the most dramatic of all. On the other hand, growing evidence suggests that hypnosis is not anything special but simply a modest enhancement of nonhypnotic suggestibility—the ability of some people to alter their experiences in behavior in amazing ways. Hypnosis simply provides a context in which such abilities are amplified. RECALL THE RESEARCH ABOUT SUBLIMINAL PERSUASION AND SELF-HELP TAPES. GIVEN THE SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE ABOUT THAT, WHAT DOES THAT INDICATE ABOUT HYPNOSIS?

**Six conclusions based on research (Kirsch and Lynn):**

1. The ability to experience hypnosis does not indicate weakness or gullibility.
2. Participants retain the ability to control their behavior during hypnosis; they’re aware of their surroundings and can monitor events outside the framework of hypnotic suggestions.
3. Spontaneous posthypnotic amnesia is relatively rare (most people remember what went on during the session).
4. Hypnosis is not a dangerous procedure when practiced by qualified researchers and clinicians.
5. Hypnosis does not increase the accuracy of memory.
6. Hypnosis does not produce a literal reliving of childhood events.

Research is still currently being done in the area of hypnosis.