

## Reading About . . .

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### Hypnosis

Hypnosis has never reached a widespread acceptance as a therapeutic technique and psychiatrists, especially, appear to give it a wide berth. Since the time when John Elliotson (1791–1868) was forced to resign from the Chair of Medicine at University College Hospital because of his advocacy of mesmerism, the attitude of the medical profession has been one of frank hostility subsiding, in this century, into a lingering mistrust of medically qualified hypnotists. Hypnotherapy is regarded as a form of 'alternative medicine' and a recent survey (British Medical Journal, 1978) found that organized teaching of the subject occurred in two of the 33 medical schools and two of the 18 dental schools in Britain. Although I have no exact figures, in a conversation with Professor Gwynne Jones, we suspected that there was also widespread disregard of the subject in psychology courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. "Why" asked Sir William Trethowan (1976), in a somewhat sceptical vein, "if hypnotherapy is so effective as some authors of books claim it to be, is the subject not more widely taught on medical courses?" He partly answered his own question by pointing to the lack of good quality research, but I would add a more fundamental inhibitor and that is the manner in which the subject is presented; if the interested trainee in psychiatry or clinical psychology picks up any of a number of recommended texts, disillusion will rapidly follow. Hypnotherapy is too frequently presented in terms which seem to be frankly anti-scientific and at variance to all other teaching. The expectation of the dramatic disappearance of symptoms, and even disease, at the authoritative command of the practitioner, is clearly allied to the practice of the fairground rather than accredited healing; psychiatrists, especially, shudder at such frequently repeated statements as that hypnosis enables the therapist to 'directly converse with the unconscious mind of the patient'.

Fortunately some excellent texts have recently appeared and my purpose is to draw attention to these in the hope that they may be included in undergraduate and postgraduate libraries and provide guidelines for future teaching. First amongst general texts is Udolf's *Handbook of Hypnosis for Professionals*; the author is an American professor of psychology with a

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background in law. His well-referenced book lays emphasis on the increasingly recognized fact that hypnosis may be a useful addition to many approaches to therapy; he also points out that the least useful technique is the direct suggestion of symptom removal and that this is the one that has probably brought hypnotherapy into the greatest disrepute. The student who asks for a brief vade mecum and introduction to the practice of hypnotherapy, ignoring theoretical discussion, is directed to Laurence Shaw's *Hypnosis In Practice*; the author is a general practitioner and wisely avoids all entanglements with psychiatric issues. Although he advocates the use of hypnosis in such conditions as ulcerative colitis and migraine no guidelines are given as to which patients may do well; probably at present none exist. The best brief text dealing with theoretical rather than therapeutic topics is in the Pelican series: *Hypnosis, Fact and Fiction* by an American psychologist, F. L. Marcuse. Although this was first published in 1959 and has not run to a second edition it still covers the field in a fairly adequate fashion. The title of the book states the author's aim, which is to take a serious look at what may be considered to be established truth, and what are the accretions of myth and nonsense that have been promoted, usually for pecuniary purposes, over the decades. Those who wish to be brought up to date with the theoretical concepts and to be guided through the semantic jungle surrounding the subject will be rewarded by reading *Hypnosis, Compliance And Belief* by Graham Wagstaff. A book with a somewhat whimsical title: *Hypnosis For The Seriously Curious* by Kenneth S. Bowers, appears in the American Contemporary Psychology series. In this text the student is introduced to the works of the renowned American researchers, the Hilgards and Professor Orne; it acquaints the reader with the concepts of 'trance logic' and 'hidden observer' and the fascinating topic of hypnosis and brain hemisphere function is touched upon, awakening a thirst for more information.

Passing to more specialized texts, the first is *Hypnosis in The Relief of Pain* by Ernest and Josephine Hilgard: this is partly an account of their own research and partly an account of techniques other than hypnosis, but it is an essential orientation for those

who aspire to introduce psychological therapy into the pain clinic. The authors draw attention to the variety of hypnotic techniques for pain control and they warn that there are dangers in attempting to use hypnosis to treat pain of psychological origin and pain in the setting of frank psychiatric disorder. They also make a plea, which I would echo, of continuing to use the word hypnosis rather than denying the existence of the concept by employing some alternative such as 'relaxation'; only by so doing will research be focussed on the important issues. Briefer accounts of hypnotherapy in the management of pain may be consulted: these are the chapters by Orne in *Pain* and the chapter by Hilgard in *The Psychology of Pain*. Another specialist book, which would win my prize for 'best book', is *Hypnosis and Hypnotherapy with Children* by Gail Gardner and Karen Olness: this book does so much to bring hypnosis into the modern age and to emphasize its true potential, not as an authoritarian device to remove symptoms but as a skill to be acquired in order to cope with anxiety, pain and other distress. I wrote in a review and repeat here, that, "although there is less interest in hypnotherapy among psychiatrists in Britain than in the USA, where this book was written, it is to be hoped that this clear exposition will encourage both interest and research".

If at present, interest languishes in academic circles in Britain, practice and research are fostered by the two national associations: the British Medical And Dental Association and the British Society Of Experimental And Clinical Hypnosis; both organize courses and both produce journals. Information about the BSECH may be obtained from, Dr J. B. Fellows, Department of Psychology, Portsmouth Polytechnic, Portsmouth, PO1 2ER and the details of the BMDA are obtained from Mrs Samuels, 42 Links Road, Ashstead, Surrey.

Finally, I make no apology for mentioning my own contribution since I believe that, in therapy, hypnosis and autohypnotic training in particular, are learned

skills which represent the most hopeful development in the field; others whom I have or have not referred to in this article have mentioned this view but none have given a detailed account of a therapeutic programme incorporating hypnotically induced imagery, autohypnotic homework practice, exposure to anxiety and acquirement of coping devices. This therapeutic programme called Anxiety Control Training is an amalgam of elements from other techniques of hypnotherapy, autogenic training, desensitization, stress inoculation and cognitive reshaping procedures which is fully described in *Clinical Neurosis* (Snaith, 1981).

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