

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF HYPNOSIS\*

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The objects of the South African Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis are as follows:

1. To stimulate and to improve professional research, discussion and publications pertinent to the scientific study of hypnosis.

2. To encourage cooperative relations among medical, psychological and dental disciplines with regard to the study and applications of hypnosis.

3. To set up standards for professional adequacy and training of practitioners in the use of hypnosis.

## Object 1

Since the inaugural meeting of this Society, on 20 March 1959, applications for membership have been received from all parts of the country. There is certainly no lack of interest in the use of hypnosis. But interest in the practical application of hypnosis is not enough, for we have adopted as an objective the scientific study of hypnosis.

This objective implies that the members of this Society shall be well versed in research methodology and the theory and practice of scientific method. Is this the case?

We are faced here with one of the two glaring anomalies in Western education, *viz.* the fact that we produce university graduates who lack the knowledge to conduct a scientific research study; who know nothing about experimental design; and not one iota about the control of experimental variables, not to mention their total inability to frame a valid experimental hypothesis. Speak to them of elementary statistical methods for treating research data and they are willing to pawn their degree certificates for carpentry tools.

In passing, the other glaring anomaly is the fact that we teach our best intellectual people in their formative years without ever teaching them how to learn or study! This lack in our educational system is fortunately overcome on a trial-and-error or chance basis by those few who eventually 'make the grade'.

The lack of training in scientific method is not so easily overcome; it is not, however, the duty or responsibility of

societies such as the South African Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis to try to obviate such serious defects. The responsibility rests with our universities.

## Object 2

To ensure cooperative relations among the three disciplines, this Society's first and foremost duty will probably be to delineate and clarify the part which each of the specialized groups shall play in the study and application of hypnosis.

## Object 3

It is with reference to the third object of our Society that I should like to mention a few interesting facts selected from the comprehensive literature in the province of hypnotism, and I should like to review the minimum essential theoretical studies to be completed before any attempt is made to apply hypnosis. In such a study a historical approach is necessary to ensure true scientific perspective.

### HISTORICAL FACTS CONCERNING HYPNOSIS

Albert Moll, in 1889, wrote as follows: 'It cannot be denied that hypnosis is frequently practised by laymen in a very unscientific manner. I need only point to the public exhibitions of hypnotism which take place from time to time... Advertisements announcing instruction in hypnotism constantly appear in the daily press... (holding out)... to prospective pupils a means of learning the art of hypnotizing, whereby they should be able to influence their fellow-men in wondrous wise'. Note that this was written in 1889.

In 1949 Lewis Wolberg wrote: 'Fantastic publicity in lay magazines and books has tended to take hypnosis, in the minds of the lay public, out of the class of a practical scientific phenomenon and to place it into the category of metaphysical magic. This gives it both a false danger and a false value for those individuals who, possibly not trained to discount unscientific data, hope to benefit by non-existent mystic virtues'.

The claims made in our local papers today cause us to write exactly what Moll wrote in 1889 and Wolberg in 1949. Should we allow this generation's great-grandchildren still to be misled by extravagant claims? If everybody else refuses, it

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becomes our duty to introduce a private Bill to put an end to this quackery because it is not in the interest of the State.

Otto Stoll made it clear that hypnotic phenomena were found to have existed several thousand years ago among Oriental peoples, the Persian magi, the Indian yogi and the Egyptians, Jews and Greeks of old. It was practised not only in early religion, but in ancient medicine as long ago as 1500 B.C. One must assume that the facts of hypnosis were, along with all other knowledge that smelled of science, shelved and forgotten during the Dark Ages in the West, to be slowly rediscovered during the Renaissance period.

What we now term suggestion and hypnotism, and understand as psychological phenomena, were then accepted as manifestations of a peculiar disseminated fluid, much like the ether of the physicist, which could be absorbed by various substances and discharged from them.

In the medical field it was the then great physician Paracelsus (1493-1541) who endorsed and propagated the use of suggestion in the cure of disease. The Paracelsian doctrine was introduced into England by Robert Fludd (1574-1637) where strong opposition helped tremendously to publicize hypnosis.

Most of the known phenomena of hypnosis were described by the beginning of the 19th century, after which hypnosis started to gather an increasing practical following, both ethical and unethical.

A case published by Wolfram in 1821 tells of a doctor accused of having sexually assaulted a woman during 'magnetic' sleep. This is the earliest criminal case on record involving hypnosis. Many more were to follow later.

The earliest surgical operations on hypnotized patients were performed in 1821 by Récanier and in 1829 by Cloquet. As early as 1830 it was recorded that painless childbirth resulted when women had been 'magnetized' during labour. In 1837 Qudet delivered an address to the French Academy of Medicine on his successes in extracting teeth of patients in 'magnetic' sleep.

Hypnotherapy was successfully practised at a university training hospital in the year 1837—the hypnotherapist being none less than John Elliotson, President of the Royal Medical Society. This work was later carried further by James Braid, a noted surgeon of Manchester, who discovered that no 'animal magnetism' or vital fluid was involved in the process.

At that time opposition to the use of hypnosis was keen and a battle was raging between the Charcotian and Nancian schools concerning the theory of hypnosis. This battle was concluded with the French Academy of Medicine's acceptance of the Nancian point of view, namely, that hypnotic phenomena have a psychical basis. With the acceptance of hypnosis as a psychological phenomenon towards the close of the 19th century, wide interest in the subject occurred in professional and scientific circles.

At the International Congress for Psychiatrics in 1889 a paper was read, for the first time, on the therapeutics of suggestion.

At the three International Congresses for Experimental Psychology (1890-1892) half the proceedings were already on the subject of hypnosis.

During the year 1892 the British Medical Association received a favourable report on the psychological, physiological and therapeutic aspects of hypnosis, and various journals were now publishing studies on hypnosis.

The interest spread even further and hypnotic phenomena began to appear as the subject matter of poems, prose, literature and art—in particular Korb's *Song-book for German Physicians and Scientists*.

It stands to reason that attempts at controlling the use of hypnosis had to follow—especially to avoid its possible dangers to the physical, mental and moral welfare of the public. Belgium was probably the first country to pass such a law and to forbid public exhibitions of hypnosis. Austria followed suit in 1880, Prussia in 1881, and Italy, Switzerland and Germany in later years.

Since the beginning of this century, research studies on hypnotic phenomena have increased tremendously and the study of hypnosis and suggestibility has come to be an

integral part of training courses in psychology. The first scientific treatise on hypnosis and suggestibility, however, appeared only in 1933 with the publication of Hull's now classical study.<sup>2</sup> Since that time research work in hypnosis by psychologists has followed the stringent course outlined by Hull, and roughly 700 reports and books have been published on this subject. The student is thus faced with a comprehensive literature from which he must choose.

The following are a few selections from this literature for an introductory course in hypnosis:

1. Bramwell's *Hypnotism; its History, Practice and Theory*.<sup>1</sup>

This book is based on an accurate knowledge of the subject. Bramwell gives the results of his own psychological experiments, among others the fulfilment of suggestion after a long interval during which the time is calculated subconsciously.

2. Hull's *Hypnosis and Suggestibility—an Experimental Approach*.<sup>2</sup> This book serves as a blue-print for experimental studies into hypnotic phenomena.

3. Moll's *Hypnotism*.<sup>3</sup> In writing this book the author was guided by a desire to offer the reader a survey of all that is most important in the whole province of hypnotism.

4. Stoll's *Suggestion und Hypnotismus in der Völkerpsychologie*.<sup>4</sup> This book deals with the part played by suggestion in ethnological psychology. It contains important information on civilized and uncivilized races.

5. Weitzenhoffer's *Hypnotism: An Objective Study in Suggestibility*.<sup>5</sup> The first modern text to furnish a comprehensive evaluation of the development and current investigation of scientific hypnosis. It distinguishes empirically established knowledge from many unfounded beliefs.

6. Weitzenhoffer's *General Techniques of Hypnotism*.<sup>6</sup>

The student needs to know these texts before he uses hypnosis. He must understand primary, secondary and tertiary suggestibility, homo-action, hetero-action, and the influence of factors such as age, sex, intelligence, personality traits and attitudes on suggestibility, before he induces a hypnotic state. The danger of 'quack' hypnosis lies in the very fact that 'quacks' do not know, let alone understand, the dynamics of hypnotic states. In psychology it is held today that hypnotic hypersuggestibility is not a unitary phenomenon but that the observed phenomena have a multiple origin.

Such an introductory course needs to be followed by specialized advanced study. For psychologists and psychiatrists the field leads to hypnotherapy, and for dentists to hypnodontics. It should, however, be explicitly stated that any specialization should always follow a thorough grounding in the elementary psychological principles of suggestion and hypnosis.

Let me conclude by quoting the opening lines of Browning's poem *Mesmerism*:

All I believed is true!  
I am able yet  
All I want, to get  
By a method as strange as new:  
Dare I trust the same to you?

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