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Lay Beliefs About, and Attitudes Towards, Hypnosis and Hypnotherapy

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ABSTRACT – Participants ($N = 101$) completed a 94-item questionnaire that explored their beliefs about what hypnosis is; individual susceptibility to hypnosis; hypnosis as therapy and as entertainment. It also assessed how individual experiences with hypnotism, through having seen a demonstration of hypnosis, and indeed having been hypnotized before, have an impact on lay attitudes and beliefs. The questionnaire was derived from “popular” and academic books on hypnosis and from interviews with lay people that concerned their beliefs about hypnosis and hypnotherapy. The three sections of the questionnaire were individually factor analyzed, and an interpretable factor structure emerged from each. Correlations were also found with these factors and demographic variables, as well as having been to a stage hypnotic show and having personally been hypnotized before. Factors associated with the three sections of the questionnaire were correlated modestly and significantly. The discussion considers the myths and dangers associated with hypnosis and hypnotherapy. Limitations of this particular study are also considered.

Keywords:

Hypnosis; Hypnotic susceptibility; Lay beliefs; Attitudes toward hypnosis; Hypnotherapy; Stage hypnosis; Belief systems

Introduction

Hypnosis is increasingly employed by educational, clinical, sports and occupational psychologists; by medical practitioners and dentists, midwives and social workers (Gibson & Heap, 1991). Within the academic literature, Rowley (1986) lists seven different theories of

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hypnosis. Yet naturally, there is considerable divergence of opinion about the topic (Hilgard & LeBaron, 1984) However, two main differences of approach seem apparent: those who refer to a “state” of hypnosis, and those who take a “non-state” position. The lack of any unique physiological criteria of hypnosis is one of the main objections of the “non-state” theorists. The most prevalent definition of hypnosis by state adherents is that it is “an altered state of consciousness.” Weitzehoffer (1963, 1978) proposed that a more scientifically tenable position would be to view hypnosis as a potential element of a class of trances, itself to be viewed as a subclass of a broader class of “so-called” altered states of awareness.

At present, two hundred years after the “discovery” of artificial somnambulism, researchers are still divided on basic issues such as the veridicality of hypnotic phenomena, and indeed, whether or not hypnosis exists as a state. There are some who insist it is all a matter of role playing, brought about by appropriately chosen motivating techniques. The only point on which there seems to be a general consensus is that hypnosis is not sleep (Weitzehoffer, 1978).

Many popular myths surround the practice and process of hypnosis. One of these is an alleged connection with the occult. No doubt this is due to the history of hypnosis in connection with mesmerism, which spawned tales of mesmerized participants reading without eyesight and communicating with thoughts at a distance. However, investigations of these beliefs with respect to hypnosis came to the conclusion that such beliefs were without factual basis. The idea that hypnosis itself abolishes pain also relates to association between hypnotism and mesmerism. The mistaken belief that hypnosis per se confers analgesia is quite untrue; although pain can be attenuated, e.g., by inducing a negative hallucination for pain. Hypnosis itself makes no difference to the perception of pain (Hewitt, 1993; Karle, 1992).

It is widely believed that when hypnotized, participants can exhibit physical strength greater than their normal capacity. This belief has been nurtured by stage hypnotists, who seem to demonstrate this alleged phenomena, for example, by the “human plank feat,” whereby the hypnotized subject appears strong and rigid and is able to be suspended horizontally with the head on one chair and the feet on another. However, in reality, it is not very difficult to perform this action without hypnosis. Gibson (1977) explained that hypnosis cannot provide one with superhuman strength, but it can enable one to concentrate more intensely on a particular task and thus increase performance by these means.

Many also believe that hypnosis can be used to improve the memory, so that many forgotten events can be remembered with hypnosis. This is not entirely a myth, but the belief has been under scrutiny since witnesses have been hypnotized to remember details of the scene of a crime in law courts. Experiments on hypnosis and memory have since resulted in skepticism as to the efficacy of the technique in this matter (Laurence & Perry, 1983). Indeed, “recollections obtained during hypnosis can involve confabulations and pseudo- memories and not only fail to be more accurate, but actually appear to be less reliable” (p. 1921, American Medical Association, 1985).

It is believed that people who are easily hypnotized are of an especially “compliant” nature, and that when hypnotized, people will become more submissive and obedient than they are in their normal waking state. Both these beliefs are mistaken, yet they are fundamental to the common image of hypnosis – the idea of the phenomenon of one person's will dominating

another's. The compliance myth is, no doubt, one of the stereotypes created by fiction writers, the most famous example being that of "Trilby" by George du Maurier. Although it is difficult to demonstrate that people who can be easily hypnotized are not especially compliant individuals, London and Fuhner's (1961) study provided some evidence that un hypnotizable individuals tended to be more compliant than hypnotizable individuals in that they are more willing to exert themselves to please an experimenter, both before and after an attempted induction procedure, than were hypnotizable individuals.

Hypnosis and hypnotherapy are subjects of considerable public interest, and their use as entertainment, both on stage and on television, has received considerable coverage in the media. Lay people have the opportunity to acquire beliefs and opinions about hypnosis and hypnotherapy, which are influenced by media coverage. Consequently, it presents a suitable area of study for the investigation of lay beliefs on the nature of hypnosis and its acceptability as an adjunct to psychological therapies and other procedures.

This study concerns lay theories of hypnosis (Furnham, 1988). There have been a number of studies that examined specific problems and processes like alcoholism (Furnham & Lowick, 1991), anorexia nervosa (Furnham & Hume-Wright, 1992), depression (Furnham & Kuyken, 1991), heroin addiction (Furnham & Thomason, 1996), homosexuality (Furnham & Taylor, 1990), phobia (Furnham, 1995) and schizophrenia (Furnham & Bower, 1992; Furnham & Rees, 1988).

This study has a number of objectives: to examine the range, type and agreement with a number of statements that reflect lay beliefs about hypnosis and hypnotherapy; to examine the factor structure of these rated beliefs to see whether the myths about hypnosis are believed by lay people; to examine the relationship between a lay person visiting a stage hypnosis show, seeing a television program on hypnosis, and being hypnotized, and how their personal experience of hypnosis impacts on their beliefs and attitudes; and to examine various demographic correlates of the lay beliefs of hypnosis and hypnotherapy.

Method

Participants

One hundred and one participants took part in this study by completing a questionnaire. Of the participants, 61 were male and 40 were female. Approximately one third of the participants were students, the rest a random sample drawn from a subject pool. Their ages ranged from 17 to 63, with a mean age of 24.45 ($SD = 8.58$ years). In all, 64 (63.37%) had never been to a stage hypnosis show, while 37 (36.63%) had; 66 (65.35%) had seen hypnosis as entertainment on television, while 36 (35.64%) had not. Eighteen (17.82%) participants had actually been hypnotized, while 83 (82.18%) had not. Of those who had, 16 (88.89%) had been hypnotized on stage, and 2 (17.82%) had been hypnotized in other circumstances. Of this number 17 would like to be hypnotized again. Of the 83 who had not been hypnotized before, 58 (69.88%) did not wish to be. In all, 69 (68.32%) did not know where to go for hypnotherapy, and 54 (53.47%) did not know where to go to see a stage hypnotic show. Finally, 50 of the participants did not know anyone who had been hypnotized, while 51 did.

Questionnaire

Participants were asked to complete a three section, 94 item questionnaires. It was explained that it was a survey on people's beliefs about hypnosis and hypnotherapy. The first section was headed "What is Hypnosis?" and consisted of 30 items; the second and third sections were headed "Susceptibility to Hypnosis" and "Hypnosis in Therapy: Hypnosis as Entertainment" respectively. Both sections consisted of 32 items. The standard instructions required participants to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each statement, on a 7-point scale (*agree* = 7, *disagree* = 1). There was also a "don't know" option. The 94 items of the questionnaire were derived from two sources, following previous studies of lay beliefs (Furnham & Kuyken, 1991; Furnham & Taylor, 1990; Furnham & Hume-Wright, 1992). The first was from "popular" and academic books about hypnosis and hypnotherapy (see references). The second was from in-depth interviews with individuals who were asked to describe what hypnosis is, what sort of people are most susceptible to it, its "powers," and its application to medicine, as well as entertainment. These statements were recorded.

Procedure

Of the 120 questionnaires distributed, 101 were completed and returned. The non-return rate was 12.67%. Where possible, participants were debriefed.

Results

Table 1 shows the results from the 30 descriptive statements. Participants tended to agree that hypnosis is a naturally occurring mental state that allows communication with the unconscious mind and that it helps to improve memory and can be used to regress a person back to childhood. They tended to disagree that hypnosis is anti-Christian, or the work of the devil, and they do not doubt its existence. Some of the "don't know" answers seemed to imply that there was doubt about the dangers and misuse of hypnosis.

Table 2 shows the results of the responses to 32 items about susceptibility to hypnosis. There was also a wide range of responses (6.00 - 1.39). Participants tended to agree that willingness to co-operate is necessary for hypnosis to take place and that hypnosis itself is a relaxing experience. Also, they tended to agree on their own susceptibility to hypnosis. They tended not to agree that only weak-willed or unintelligent people could be hypnotized, and that a pendulum watch was necessary when inducing a trance state. More than 60% of the participants responded "don't know" to the statement "only 30% of the population can be hypnotized." Indeed, the percentage of people who can be hypnotized is still disputed within academic literature. It has been agreed that most people can be moderately hypnotized.

Table 3 shows the results of the items on hypnosis in therapy and as a form of entertainment. Participants tended to agree that training is required to practice stage hypnosis, as well as to administer therapy. They agreed that hypnosis is not a therapy, but an adjunct to therapy, and that it is useful in the treatment of psychological and medical problems, such as giving up

Table 1: Means, standard deviations and 'don't know' responses: *General beliefs*: The section of the questionnaire that deals with general concepts (what it is, how can be used)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Unknown
1. Hypnosis can be used to regress people to their childhood	5.66	1.24	11
2. Hypnosis improves the memory so that many forgotten events can be recalled	5.38	1.43	5
3. Hypnosis is a state that allows communication within the unconscious mind	5.22	1.35	20
4. The hypnotic state is just one of many naturally occurring mental states	5.21	1.49	12
5. Even animals can be hypnotized	5.19	1.63	20
6. When hypnotized, people will become more submissive and obedient than they are in their normal waking state	5.04	1.42	6
7. When hypnotized, people can exhibit physical strength greater than their normal capacity	4.76	1.60	18
8. Hypnosis is a profound altered mental state	4.71	1.62	1
9. Hypnosis is a phenomenon involving the dominance of one person's will over the other	4.25	1.75	7
10. Hypnosis enhances the imagination	4.24	1.75	13
11. Cobras can hypnotize its victim	4.18	1.75	13
12. Hypnosis is a form of sleep	4.03	1.83	8
13. Hypnosis is like a daydream state	3.87	1.75	12
14. Hypnosis is about your own control of yourself	3.84	1.67	9
15. Hypnosis has been used throughout the ages by people who practice the occult	3.75	1.95	17
16. The hypnotist can make you do things against your will	3.55	1.89	9
17. All hypnosis is self-hypnosis	3.49	1.74	23
18. Hypnosis is dangerous	3.47	1.82	14
19. People have no control over their own actions when hypnotized	3.39	1.96	12
20. To some extent, Hitler used hypnosis to influence people in mass rallies	2.89	1.80	32
21. Einstein reckoned that humans use only about 10% of their brains. While hypnotized we can gain access to the other 90%	2.81	1.94	29
22. Hypnosis is like 'believing something that you know is not true'	2.62	1.51	16
23. A person can enter a hypnotic trance and not wake up	2.55	1.51	16
24. Hypnosis can cure anything or solve any personal problems	2.43	1.55	6
25. Hypnosis is a mysterious magic power	2.04	1.53	4
26. Hypnosis is a fairly recent development	1.71	1.78	12
27. It is possible to turn ordinary people into fabulous painters and composers by using a hypnotic procedure	1.70	1.08	17
28. Hypnosis does not exist at all; both the hypnotist and the hypnotized are just role players	1.66	1.09	11
29. Hypnosis is essentially anti-Christian or the work of the devil	1.57	1.03	5

Note: *N* = 101. Scale – (Agree) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Disagree).

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and ‘don't know’ responses: *Susceptibility*: The section that considers nature of hypnosis and groups more susceptible to hypnosis

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Unknown
1. For hypnosis to take place subjects must, in the first place, be willing to cooperate	6.00	1.27	11
2. The hypnotic induction itself is a relaxing experience	5.37	1.35	22
3. Hypnosis can trigger repressed memories of the past	5.31	1.34	6
4. It is possible to hypnotize oneself	5.01	1.66	24
5. I believed that I can be hypnotized	5.00	2.10	22
6. Hypnosis can cause you to reveal hidden secrets	4.93	1.41	14
7. Communication, rapport and body language is needed between the hypnotist and the subject during the course of induction	4.90	1.55	19
8. One cannot be hypnotized against one's will	4.82	1.40	6
9. Every human being who is mentally sound can be hypnotized to some degree	4.64	1.73	10
10. Hypnosis can be a form of seduction	4.62	1.36	17
11. Techniques for the hypnotic induction can be easily learned by anyone	4.46	1.69	17
12. Being able to hypnotized other people is a particular talent	4.42	1.83	3
13. People could easily hypnotize themselves	4.09	1.66	30
14. People tend not to be aware of their actions when under hypnotism	3.96	1.79	14
15. I believe that I will actually enjoy the experience of being hypnotized	3.92	2.10	22
16. Certain personality traits can predict the extent of susceptibility to hypnosis	3.81	1.77	32
17. Under hypnosis you actually have more control than usual and so can do things you normally would not do	3.74	1.99	28
18. It is easier to hypnotize a person who is under the influence of alcohol	3.93	2.42	42
19. Self-hypnotized subjects are in full control of themselves	3.66	1.50	42
20. People can be hypnotized quite instantaneously with a snap of the fingers	3.56	2.16	29
21. When you wake up from a hypnotic trance you tend not to remember what you have done	3.51	1.89	10
22. Children are most susceptible to hypnosis	3.49	1.81	46
23. Susceptibility to hypnosis shows an influenceable personality	3.47	2.04	12
24. It is possible to hypnotized someone over the phone	3.23	1.07	44
25. In a hypnotic state, others beside the hypnotist can make suggestions that the subject will comply	3.01	1.42	39
26. People who are easily hypnotized are of an especially ‘compliant’ nature	2.85	1.65	17
27. Extraverts are more easily hypnotized than introverts	2.78	1.64	43
28. Females are more susceptible to hypnosis than males, in general	2.33	1.66	28
29. Only 30% of the population can be hypnotized	2.32	1.58	57

30. There is only one person in the world who can hypnotize you and that is yourself	2.26	1.53	20
31. Only weak willed or unintelligent people can be hypnotized	1.87	1.40	6
32. A pendulum watch is necessary when inducing a trance state	1.39	0.75	10

Note: $N = 101$. Scale – (Agree) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Disagree).

smoking, obesity and stress. They also tended to agree that most medical doctors are skeptical that hypnosis can help cure physical problems, and that most of them do not recommend hypnosis. This may imply that lay people see therapeutic hypnosis as an effective alternative cure for various problems. More than 60% of the participants were unsure if hypnotherapy was a registered profession. Indeed, hypnotherapists are often labelled “lay” therapists, although there is no clear demarcation between lay and non-lay practitioners. Participants tended to disagree that patients can be cured of their ills by hypnotherapists who can hypnotize their troubles away, and that hypnotherapy is an absurd waste of money. Only 1.1 % answered “don't know” to the statement “state hypnosis often makes ‘fools’ out of people. This can be degrading for the participants.” The wide media coverage of stage hypnosis for entertainment purposes may have contributed to the small percentage of non-responding participants. The responses were then treated to a varimax rotated factor analysis to reveal orthogonal factors that underlie the structure of responses. Items that loaded .40 and above were included in each factor.

A. General beliefs

Six factors emerged with eigenvalues of > 1.00 and accounted for just under 55% of the explained variance. The first factor that emerged was labelled “powers” because of the loading of items that concerned the “power” of hypnosis to increase physical strength, reduce pain, improve memory etc. The second factor was labelled “enhancer” because of the loading of items that included hypnotic enhancement of imagination and recollection. The third factor was labelled “popular myths,” and dealt with loadings of hypnosis described as mysterious, magical or of the occult, and indeed, as a form of sleep. The fourth factor was labelled “self-hypnosis,” with items on self-control. The fifth factor was labelled “dominance,” and the sixth “profound altered mental state.”

B. Beliefs about susceptibility

Five factors emerged that accounted for less than 50% of the total variance. The first of the factors was labelled “own first susceptibility” because the loadings concerned individual susceptibility to hypnosis. The second was labelled “children's susceptibility”. The third was “female susceptibility.” The fourth was labelled “danger,” since it dealt with the abuse of hypnosis. The fifth was labelled “technique” and dealt with the nature and learning of the trance induction technique.

Table 3: Means, standard deviations and ‘don’t know’ responses: *Therapy and entertainment*: The section that considers possible applications of hypnosis

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Unknown
1. Training is needed in order to practice hypnosis on stage as well as in therapy	5.90	1.29	3
2. Hypnosis may be used in the treatment of psychological and medical problems	5.63	1.14	4
3. Hypnosis can allow a person to become aware of disturbing memories, ideas, conflicts, and to resolve them	5.49	1.06	13
4. Hypnosis is not a therapy but an adjunctive in therapy	5.47	1.24	10
5. Most medical doctors do not recommend hypnosis	5.44	1.27	30
6. Hypnosis is useful in controlling excessive anxiety and tension	5.33	1.07	11
7. ‘Hypnotherapy’ is not a registered profession	5.32	1.75	64
8. Most medical doctors are skeptical that hypnosis can help to cure physical problems	5.21	1.18	39
9. Hypnosis helps cure smoking, obesity, and stress	5.06	1.57	22
10. You cannot show people being hypnotized on TV because it is dangerous for the viewers	5.01	1.52	10
11. Like coming gags, showbiz hypnosis give us action without responsibility	4.92	1.77	9
12. Stage hypnosis often makes a ‘fool’ out of people. This can be degrading for the subjects	4.79	1.65	2
13. By using hypnosis alone one cannot get people to do things that are in conflict with their morals and values	4.65	1.50	20
14. I find the program “The Hypnotic World of Paul McKenna” very entertaining	4.59	1.77	45
15. Hypnosis is useful in treating ‘psychosomatic’ problems	4.57	1.23	24
16. The best subjects for stage hypnosis are lively and uninhibited even though this may not be their everyday persona	4.44	1.41	12
17. People who volunteered in a hypnotic show usually have the intention to prove to their friends that they cannot be hypnotized	4.30	1.41	12
18. Hypnotists tend to adopt a superior attitude	4.24	1.75	33
19. There have been numerous cases of abuse and molestation of clients by psychotherapists and doctors using hypnosis	4.21	1.85	45
20. Hypnosis should be made widely available within the national health service	4.16	1.61	17
21. Those who have decided to go to a hypnotherapist are by definition already motivated	4.16	1.51	17
22. Women have been raped when ‘deprived of will power’ under a hypnotic state	4.13	1.70	39
23. Hypnosis cannot be misused to induce hypnotized persons to commit wrongful acts against themselves or others	4.06	1.59	16
24. Psychological distress of any kind can be more readily and powerfully relieved using hypnosis	4.04	1.33	22
25. The audience of a hypnotic show may become hypnotized as well	3.54	1.92	22

26. Some people can control their immune system by using hypnotic procedures	3.82	1.54	35
27. Stage hypnosis simply reveal how banal and restricted our imaginations are	3.73	1.45	13

Note: $N = 101$. Scale – (Agree) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Disagree).

C. Beliefs about hypnosis in therapy and hypnosis as entertainment

Six factors, which accounted for about 55% of the variance, emerged. The first was labelled “adjunct” since items that loaded on it suggested hypnosis as an adjunctive in therapy. The second factor was labelled “skepticism,” since items loading on it suggested skepticism of hypnosis in both the medical field and entertainment. The third was labelled “abuse,” dealing with the misuse of hypnosis by therapists and stage hypnotists. The fourth was labelled “restriction” and dealt with a moral code. The fifth factor was labelled “characteristics,” describing the characteristics of stage hypnosis volunteers. The final factor was labelled “stage hypnotism” and dealt with beliefs about hypnosis as entertainment.

Table 4 shows the correlations of each of the factors with each of the subject demographic variables, as well as correlations with the subject's individual exposure to hypnosis, measured in terms of eight variables:

- a) having been to see a stage hypnosis show
- b) having seen hypnotism on television as entertainment
- c) having been hypnotized before
- d) having not been hypnotized before, but asking if it would be considered
- e) having been hypnotized before, and asking if the experience would be repeated
- f) knowing where to go to seek hypnotherapy
- g) knowing where to go to see a stage hypnosis show
- h) knowing anyone who has been hypnosis

The variables that related most to beliefs about hypnosis and hypnotherapy were sex and race of the participants; whether or not they have visited a stage hypnosis show; and whether they have been hypnotized. These correlations suggest that never having seen a stage hypnosis show is related to strong beliefs about the nature of hypnosis. Yet having the experience of being hypnotized also resulted in participants having strong beliefs about hypnosis and hypnotherapy. Actual experience of hypnotism and non-experience (in the context of not having visited a stage hypnosis show) are both contributory to lay theories of hypnotism. Men are more likely than women to believe that animals can be hypnotized.

Those who have been hypnotized before believe that hypnosis is a dominance phenomenon involving one person's will over another. Surprisingly, those who had not visited a stage hypnosis show, and those who had been hypnotized before, both hold strong beliefs about their own susceptibility to hypnosis.

Table 4: *In Therapy and as Entertainment*: The section that considers the possible applications of hypnosis in therapy and the nature of entertainment hypnosis

	Sex	Race	Been	Seen	Before	Like	Again	Go	Show	Anyone
Correlations between descriptive factors and various demographic variables										
1. Powers	.01	.32*	.13	.17	-.06	.04	.29	-.02	-.07	.32**
2. Enhancer	.05	.10	-.23	.02	-.25	.18	.00	-.12	.11	.11
3. Popular myths	-.18	.24	-.08	-.27*	-.15	-.14	.00	.12	.10	.23
4. Self-hypnosis	.04	.17	-.17	-.08	-.12	.14	.35	-.03	.04	.11
5. Dominance	.18	.06	-.08	-.01	-.28*	.05	-.22	.05	.09	-.08
6. Mental state	.44**	.06	-.28*	-.27	-.33*	.14	.40*	-.25	-.17	.12
Correlations between susceptibility factors and demographic variables										
1. Own susceptibility	.09	.32*	.32*	.06	.38*	.19	.56**	-.33	-.04	.01
2. Children's susceptibility	.08	-.09	-.06	-.18	-.18	-.28*	-.52*	-.16	-.06	-.12
3. Female susceptibility	-.09	.36**	.16	-.29*	-.29	-.08	.51	-.22	-.09	.02
4. Danger	-.12	.34**	.01	-.28*	-.28	.06	.00	-.11	-.14	-.32*
5. Technique	-.29*	-.07	.21	.29	.29	.07	.00	.19	-.04	.11
Correlations between therapy and entertainment factors and demographic variables										
1. Adjunct	-.21*	.17	-.06	-.08	-.12	-.05	.13	-.15	-.16	.05
2. Skepticism	-.08	.28*	-.35**	-.14	-.13	-.09	.51	-.16	-.04	-.12
3. Abuse	.03	.11	-.12	-.20*	-.30*	-.22	-.07	.04	.05	-.04
4. Restriction	-.06	-.11	.03	.09	.28**	.02	.28	.01	.12	.02
5. Characteristics	.28*	.23*	-.15	-.59	-.21*	.07	-.48	-.20	-.08	-.20
6. Stage hypnotism	.07	.09	-.33**	-.17	-.05	-.45	.05	-.13	-.23*	.01

Note: Scale – (Agree) 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 (Disagree). * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Men were also more likely to see hypnosis as an adjunctive to therapy. They also believed that the characteristics of stage volunteers are usually “lively and uninhibited.” Those who had not visited a stage hypnosis show were more skeptical of hypnotism and strongly believed that stage hypnotists used “stooges” and “crude routines.” While those who had been hypnotized before were aware that hypnosis can be abused by practitioners, they believed that there are restrictions in place to prevent abuse.

Those who had seen hypnosis as entertainment on television appeared to hold strong beliefs about the “popular myths” of hypnosis, such as it being a form of occult, or a type of sleep. They also believed in women's susceptibility to hypnosis, and that it can be used to seduce or molest vulnerable people; furthermore, they believed that hypnosis can be abused.

Table 4 also shows the correlations among general descriptive factors, susceptibility, and entertainment/therapy factors. The highest correlation which emerged between description and susceptibility was that children are most susceptible to hypnosis (susceptibility factor 2) and that hypnosis is a phenomenon involving the dominance of one person's will over another's (description factor 5). The belief in one's own susceptibility to hypnosis also correlates hypnosis enhances the imagination and increases brain power was correlated with the beliefs about restrictions and controls on the use of hypnosis significantly with the descriptive factors that deal with the powers and popular myths of hypnosis (e.g., increasing physical strength, improving the memory etc.). That hypnosis can be used as a form of seduction was found to correlate with factors that involve hypnosis as a dominance phenomenon.

The belief that hypnosis can be used as a form of seduction correlates with the restriction of hypnosis in getting people to act against their morals and values. This is interesting as it ties in with Guilan's (1977) statement that the hypnotic trance should not be considered as an excuse for committing rape. Correlations were also found for one's own susceptibility to hypnosis with factors that deal with hypnosis as adjunctive to therapy. The belief that hypnosis can be abused correlated with children's susceptibility to hypnosis.

Correlations of entertainment/therapy factors with description factors showed the highest correlation between popular myths of hypnosis, with the belief that hypnosis can be abused in the wrong hands. The belief that animals can be hypnotized correlated with the belief of restrictions and controls on the use of hypnosis. Significant correlations were also found for the belief that hypnosis is essentially self-hypnosis, with the beliefs about characteristics of stage volunteers as being “lively and uninhibited;” also, between the beliefs of the powers of hypnosis, and its place as an adjunct to therapy; and the belief that hypnosis enhances the imagination and increases brain power was correlated with the beliefs about restrictions and controls on the use of hypnosis.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that lay people hold consensual and moderately accurate beliefs about the nature of hypnosis, susceptibility to hypnosis, and hypnosis in therapy, and as entertainment. Consensuality of beliefs (as can be seen from the standard deviations) suggests that lay beliefs must be formulated and mediated by some kind of cultural transmission (Rippere, 1981). The media could be held primarily to generate the transmission of the image and nature of

hypnosis and hence contribute as a powerful source of information to lay people's beliefs and attitudes. However, contrary to the apparent consensuality of knowledge, the high number of "don't know" responses suggests the differential nature of knowledge that the participants hold in common.

In assessing the accuracy of lay beliefs, it should be pointed out that "accuracy" will be assumed where the lay beliefs parallel academic and experimental research in this subject, whether or not they merit such a status. For example, within academic literature, it seems that the state of hypnosis is dealt with at a speculative and inferential level, which, in many cases, does not meet the criteria for being scientifically acceptable (Weitzenhoffer, 1974).

It is clear that lay people hold beliefs about the nature of hypnosis and its relationship with entertainment on stage and television, and in therapy. For example, people who have watched a stage performance of hypnosis (or who have watched it on television) agree that it is degrading to personal dignity. Many qualified hypnotherapists have argued against the use of hypnosis for amusement and by unqualified people, as it debases and devalues an otherwise helpful therapeutic aid (Waxman, 1978; Harding, 1978).

The majority of lay people in this study agreed that hypnosis itself is not therapy, but an adjunctive procedure in therapy. They also acknowledged the therapeutic purpose of hypnosis in various symptom relief and believed that proper training was required to practice hypnosis. Most of the participants also believed that medical doctors are skeptical about the abilities of hypnosis to help cure physical problems, and that most doctors do not recommend hypnosis. It seems that people accept that hypnotherapy is an effective form of alternative medicine. Furnham & Smith (1988) found that patients who consulted alternative medical practitioners were much less confident and more skeptical about their treatment than patients who consulted orthodox medical practitioners. Therefore, when treatment is efficacious, it cannot be ascribed entirely to the placebo effect. The same can be said about hypnotherapy (White et al., 1985).

Many participants were unaware that "hypnotherapy" does not exist as a profession in the National Health Service. Indeed, few people in Britain who advertise themselves as "hypnotherapists" are qualified to carry out formal psychological therapy within the Health Service (Gibson & Heap, 1991). Such ignorance on the part of lay people may lead to confusion regarding lay and non-lay practitioners.

The results also revealed that some of the common myths about hypnosis still exist among lay people. For example, beliefs about hypnosis and super-normal strength and endurance; that hypnosis abolishes pain; the question of compliance and supposed connections with the occult, are all prevalent to some extent. In general, although some people still continue to believe in the myth of hypnosis being a form of obedience and compliance, and the hypnotist as a sort of Svengali figure, researchers have discovered that this is not the case (Orne, 1980).

Most people are moderately susceptible to hypnosis and can experience the hypnotic phenomenon to some degree. Indeed, it has been generally accepted that relatively few people can be classed as being "unsusceptible" to hypnosis (Gibson & Heap, 1991). Regarding the differential susceptibility to hypnosis, age, sex and personality differences have been extensively studied

(Bernheim, 1886; Shor, 1972). It was found that children are more susceptible to hypnosis than adults (Bernheim, 1886; Morgan & Hilgard, 1973).

Common beliefs and prejudices affecting attitudes and beliefs were found in sex differences in susceptibility to hypnosis. Many studies have shown that females are slightly more susceptible to hypnosis than males. Yet there is reluctance to admit this sex difference because of the outmoded popular stereotype of women being more “submissive” and “suggestible.” Hilgard (1965) denied that there were any sex differences in hypnotic susceptibility, and this is the currently accepted view.

It appears reasonable to expect personality tests to predict susceptibility to hypnosis. However, extensive research revealed that although susceptibility did frequently correlate with a particular personality trait or dimension, these were not reliable. The conclusion is that there is no simple answer to the question “What kind of person can be hypnotized most easily?”

Some of the most common myths about hypnosis concern its therapeutic use. The main myth deals with the belief that hypnosis produces a placebo mechanism. Therefore, when patients benefit from treatment through hypnosis, this is entirely a placebo effect (Wagstaff, 1987). However, clinical evidence makes it quite clear that hypnosis is not only a placebo (Gibson, 1987).

It is also believed by many people that hypnosis in itself has a generally therapeutic value for all sorts of disorders, both psychological and physical. This has led to unqualified people advertising their services as “hypnotherapists.”

Spiegel (1987) noted that “hypnotherapy is a somewhat misleading term.” It is ambiguous in that it has several different meanings. Used by professional people, it refers to the use of hypnosis in a program of therapy (Gibson & Heap, 1991). But as the lay public generally understand the term, and as encouraged by various lay therapists, it implies that hypnosis in itself is therapeutic. This is not the case, for patients cannot be cured of their ills by “hypnotherapists” who simply hypnotize their troubles away.

It is the case that anyone can set up as a “hypnotherapist,” and many cases of people who were treated by charlatans have come to light (Heap, 1984). The myth of hypnosis’s magic properties is still prevalent, and it is important that it should be exploded, and that lay people understand that proper therapeutic hypnosis is an adjunctive procedure carried out by trained health professionals. The results also revealed that some of the common myths about hypnosis still exist among lay people. However, the myth that hypnosis is a mysterious magic power, or that it is anti-Christian, was dismissed by the participants.

It was found that lay people believed in the existence of hypnosis - and believed that role playing was not invoked in the phenomena. Many also believed they could be hypnotized, although they were not sure if they would enjoy the experience of being hypnotized.

People who had visited a stage hypnosis show and those who had been hypnotized revealed strong belief structures. The former were skeptical about the acts on stage shows, questioning their credibility and scrupulousness. The latter believed that although hypnosis can be abused and misused, both within therapy and entertainment, people cannot be made to do things which conflict with their morals and values. Such beliefs are interesting at a time when the media has covered a number of malpractice cases involving “hypnotherapists.” However, there are some

inconsistencies, such as participants being unaware that there have been cases when women have been molested or raped while under hypnosis. Indeed, there are several recent papers (Haberman, 1987; Judd et al., 1988; Kleinhauz & Eli, 1989) relating alleged incidents of private “hypnotherapists,” and actual assault (Hoencamp, 1989). For example, several women have reported how they have been persuaded to allow the therapist to have physical contact, on the pretext that this would help them to “release their inhibitions.” As well as reports of sexual assault and rape during hypnosis (Hoencamp, 1989), there have been reports of patients apparently being traumatized directly as a result of hypnotic interventions by unqualified practitioners and by stage hypnotists (Waxman, 1988).

Many doctors, dentists and psychologists have campaigned for effective legislation for restricting the use of hypnosis for those not properly qualified. However, one reason given by the government for not pursuing the legislation is the lack of any public pressure (Waxman, 1988). The participants in this study seem to endorse this; although they believe that hypnosis can be misused, they do not believe that it is necessarily dangerous. As for hypnosis used as entertainment, people generally believed it was harmless.

It has been suggested that legal restraints on the practice of hypnosis may not be in the best public interest (Gibson & Heap, 1991). The experts themselves are unable to agree on a definition of hypnosis, and, indeed, whether it exists. People should have the right to decide how to tackle their problems and this includes the choice of consulting either an orthodox professional, or a lay or “alternative” practitioner. However, freedom of choice can only exist when there is sufficient information on the choices available.

In this study, many significant intra-correlations were found among factors of three dimensions, description, susceptibility, and entertainment/therapy. This suggests that inconsistencies exist, in that people appeared to endorse contradictory as well as complementary beliefs. It may be that these inconsistencies in lay belief structure are due to the split image of hypnosis being projected to the public; on the one hand as therapeutic, and on the other, as entertainment. Another explanation for these contradictory beliefs may be that lay people do not hold a clear and organized belief system about hypnosis and hypnotherapy, but that their beliefs are imprecise and weak and overlapping.

The conclusion drawn from this study is that lay beliefs about hypnosis and hypnotherapy included inconsistencies and imprecisions; that some of the myths about the nature of hypnosis still exist within lay people's belief structures; that media coverage of hypnosis may promote these myths; and that people who have not visited a stage hypnosis show and those who have been hypnotized hold stronger beliefs about hypnosis as therapy and as entertainment.

Finally, this has been a relatively small-scale study, and hence it may be dangerous to generalize. An ideal study would have looked at a much larger, more representative population, with a much larger sample of participants who had been hypnotized before, as well as those who had no direct experience of the phenomena. The questionnaire itself may also be criticized for the ambiguous way some of the items are phrased.

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