

Hypnosis - a State or a Relationship?

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■ *Hypnosis is considered here as a particular form of human interaction in a person's real or intrapsychic (imaginative) "psycho-social field." This opens the opportunity to construct a comprehensive theory of hypnotizability, suggestion, "deepness" of hypnosis, the role of induction procedures and other aspects of hypnotic experience. Explanation of those as well as other hypnotic phenomena does not require the concept of the "third state of consciousness." Some sources of this concept are discussed, experimental and clinical data confirming interactive approach are presented.*

In the past decade different studies and theoretical approaches tried to support the concept of hypnosis understood as a particular state of consciousness or a specific "ego state." At the same time different aspects of hypnotic interaction were the subject of research. The papers by Baker (1981), Banyai (1985), Chertok (1984), Diamond (1987), Shor (1962) and others stressed the role of relationship between the hypnotized person and the hypnotist not only in the successful induction of hypnosis and in the development of hypnotic phenomena, but also in the understanding of the essence of hypnosis.

As I stated before (Aleksandrowicz, 1980), it seems possible to explain hypnotic phenomena by defining hypnosis as a particular form of interaction between two human persons.

The efforts to understand hypnosis in such a way are, on the one hand, connected with the failure of research aiming to prove that the hypnotic state is a so called "third" state of the brain functioning. Neurophysiological data obtained when the subject is in hypnosis reveal changes connected rather with other qualities of psychic processes, e.g., emotions, than with hypnosis itself. Moreover, all those data indicate some aspects (specific traits of EEG, for instance) of global reaction of the person as a whole, and not of one particular state of mind. It is very doubtful to ascribe them - following the rules of causality - the role of factors explaining the essence of hypnosis.

The concept of hypnosis as a form of interaction is connected also with the Erickson-

nian approach. Although Milton Erickson himself used the words "trance" and "state" in the traditional way, in reality his practice proved that the essence of the nature of hypnosis is a particular form of relationship and a form of interaction created in the frames of this relationship. In my opinion, in the description of his therapeutic practice he covertly revealed and presented this approach, though he never formulated it as one theory.

To understand hypnosis as one of the possible forms of interaction we need some reference to the general theory of interactions, in the framework of relationships created by a human being.

Some remarks on relationship and interaction

The human being is integrally not self-sufficient. He needs particular conditions in his physical milieu to survive: a natural sustaining life system - appropriate oxygen tension, appropriate temperature, diversified food, and so on.

Different forms of interhuman relations make it possible to fulfil some of the subject's biological needs. They are mainly task-oriented, aiming at cooperation necessary for successful production of food, for warranting security, etc.

However, striving to fulfil his biological needs, a human being can be relatively self-sufficient. It is even possible to imagine a person living alone on a desert island, able not only to survive but also to have some comfort. Only one of those needs is impossible to satisfy for a single person: reproduction. In opposition to the very primitive, self-sufficient forms of life, a human being cannot divide himself creating two new representatives of our species.

Among the different aspects of social quality of human nature, perhaps the most specific one is the fact that without social environment we cannot develop the particular human quality differentiating our species from other animals, and realize the essence of humanity.

This essence is a set of specific psychic processes being a result of language, the human mind. Not only observation of the fate of some kids found after several years of development without presence of other people, e.g., in the jungle, but also other anthropological data confirm it. Forming human being from the newborn requires the close presence of other persons and interaction with social environment.

This is connected with needs different from biological ones: the presence of others, their attention and respect, tenderness and acceptance, need of friendship, worry and hate, the so-called social and cultural needs, etc. Also, erotic and sexual desires are generally addressed to others. The object relation of a human being is dominated by the relation to other human beings.

Thus, it seems useful to name two main general categories of relationship. One of them comprises task-oriented relations, aimed at "material" objects and satisfying biological needs. In those relations specific forms of interactions occur: cooperation, subordination, etc. The second category includes "disinterested" relationships - oriented at "pure being with" others, aimed at satisfying the needs named here "psychosocial." In

those relations another specificity of interactions occurs.

To present this specificity it seems useful to introduce the concept of "Psychosocial Field" of interaction - in contrast to, e.g., "Professional Field" and other fields of human activity in social settings. This concept expresses the dynamics of processes (in the Kurt Lewin's sense) as well as the character of the structure (Piaget, 1968), revealed in this sphere of interaction.

One pole of this field is constituted by the subject's expectations, fantasies, experiences etc., connected with satisfying the psychosocial needs. The other pole (or rather poles) is constituted by persons-objects, real or imagined ones, able to answer the appeal for satisfaction of these needs. The object-relation occurs between those poles.

There is no actual distinction between those real and ideational planes of interaction. Also real persons, physically present in the subject's life, often perform their function in satisfying psychosocial needs only by virtue of features or emotional attitudes attributed to them by the subject, and not existing in reality. We could evoke here transference phenomena.

Every person creates himself/herself a psychosocial field and interacts in its frames with the partners, "emotionally important persons." Those creations are temporary, the needs and partners change in the course of one subject's life. Also the modalities of interaction change, mainly due to their efficacy in different conditions and moments. But the way of satisfying the psychosocial needs depends also on the Ego and coping mechanisms of the person, formed in developmental process. All those different modalities are connected with particular languages. Their quality depends also on languages, and its form depends on the language we grow in and are able to use creatively in communication with partners-objects, to form our own "parole" (in the terms of structural linguistic), as well as on the nature of current relationship. Some of those modalities are more successful in everyday life - then we use the terms of "normality," "maturity"; some are deviated, e.g. to the side of ideation and fantasy - we name these forms "immature" or "neurotic," etc.

In the network of different forms of structuring the psychosocial field and communicating in it, we can find a place for hypnosis and for explanation of its phenomena.

Hypnosis as a form of interaction in the psychosocial field

One of the most significant aspects of the form of interaction named "hypnosis" seems to be concentration of attention on only one object, chosen for fulfilling psychosocial needs. Another one is the short-term character of this interaction, provoked by conscious behaviour of the person proposing herself/himself as an object.

Similarities between the specificity of hypnosis described above and the situation of psychotherapy or of falling in love are evident. Once more we could refer here to Ericksonian concepts. There are also some important differences - e.g., in the degree of a real person's engagement in the psychosocial field.

This degree is higher in psychotherapy or in most love relationships than in hyp-

nosis. The psychosocial field in hypnosis is located mainly on the ideational plane, especially when the hypnotic procedures additionally close the hypnotized person in his/her inner world. (It seems that Ericksonian hypnosis differs from "traditional one" mainly in this aspect.)

Such a type of symbiotic relationship "closed" by concentration of attention provokes, or even is, a "functional state of the brain" - quite different from the state of attention dispersion. This does not mean that it is a particular and mysterious "third state of consciousness."

Explanation of some essential hypnotic phenomena

In a short paper it is possible only to mention some possible ways of explaining the essence of different hypnotic phenomena in the framework of the proposed theory.

What seems most important is that this particular form of the psychosocial field, where the subject addresses all demands of having his/her psychosocial needs fulfilled to only one person, must inevitably provoke the situation of dependence and regression, as well as growth of suggestibility.

The decision of addressing one's demands to only one object limits the richness and diversity of mature individual object-relation. This creates some form of dependence, due to the lack of other potential sources of fulfilment of psychosocial needs.

This does not necessarily mean growth of dependence understood as a trait of the subject's personality or overdependence in the sense of pathology of relation. If such phenomena arise, it is due to supplementary factors. For instance, the hypnotist's needs to dominate and to make his partner dependent may lead to overdependence of the hypnotizee. But this is not specific to the hypnotic relationship only.

The limited, "one-to-one" object relation is natural for a child's interaction with his mother. This could explain "regression" of the hypnotized person at the moment of forming the hypnotic type of psychosocial field. It is not only a simple repetition of the past behaviour but, in fact, the immanent result of specificity of such relationship. Of course, some "maternal" traits of hypnotic procedures could reinforce such regressive effects.

Concentration of attention on one person only limits the affluence of messages coming from other sources. This diminishes a chance for free choice, criticism, having one's own opinions and making independent decisions. This means growing suggestibility.

Suggestibility is a relational phenomenon, though some traits of the subject's personality could be a predisposition to easy acceptance of other people's opinions. On the other hand, only some aspects of this very complex phenomenon (confidence, naivety, influence of "prestige," etc.) could be explained by the effects of attention concentration. Other aspects, like growth of access to ideo-motor and "ideo-vegetative" reactions, cannot be so easily explained only by specificity of relation. They seem to be questions concerning suggestibility itself rather than oversuggestibility in hypnosis, though they are also connected with particular features of object-relation.

Similarity of hypnotic and hysterical behaviour starts to be clear when we realize that

in both forms of interacting in the psychosocial field we have to do with the act of proposing something without intending to do it. Neither does the hypnotist really wish to satisfy the psychosocial needs of the hypnotized person nor does the hypnotized person want it. This "manipulative" way of acting is mostly introduced by the hypnotist, but it also comes from the hypnotized subject.

Both the hypnotist and the hypnotizee are self-oriented. The hypnotist's task is to induce hypnosis and to have some profits from this action. On the side of the hypnotized person, his aim is to use the hypnotist to achieve his own psychosocial goals.

This brings us to the problem of narcissistic features of hypnosis.

Even while suggesting concentration of attention on a physically external object (e.g., the hypnotist's eye) at the moment of induction, hypnosis focuses attention on the subject himself - his cenesthetic feelings (e.g., muscular tension), his fantasies, emotions, etc. This is creating the psychosocial field on the ideational rather than realistic plane. The hypnotist and his behaviour are more the pretext to experience something subjectively, in the fantasy, than provocation to a real relationship.

On the superficial, observable level, it is the hypnotist who formulates certain messages. The hypnotized person responds mainly by nonverbal reactions, and more on the unconscious level. But experience shows that in reality it is the subject who formulates messages and uses the hypnotist's behaviour as a response to his appeal. Psychosocial field of a hypnotized person is formed between the pole of the subject's identity and the poles being the subject's other inner parts - e.g., fantasies on the "ideal partner" (or "ideal self"), relatively weakly connected with the real behaviour or attributes of the hypnotist.

Yet, there is also another aspect of hypnotic procedures that reinforces narcissism. The instructions to explore and to express the self as well as regression implied to someone concentrating his/her attention on only one object inevitably push the subject into a narcissistic position.

The remarks presented above are connected with the question of autohypnosis. In different forms of autohypnosis the subject enters into a relation with an imagined partner. In some procedures it is only the dissociated part of the subject - his own fantasy, in others it is reinforced by the tape-recorded voice of a hypnotist. Imaginative creation of the "partner's pole" of interaction in the psychosocial field makes it possible to address the psychosocial needs to the more or less clear image of the interacting partner. Thus, there is no serious difference between heterohypnosis and autohypnosis. In both cases, the image of the partner plays a more important role than the real partner in the psychosocial field of the hypnotized person. The aim of induction both of heterohypnosis and autohypnosis is to create such an image and to start the hypnotic form of interaction in psychosocial field.

Hypnability is one of the main sources of information on the relational aspect of hypnosis. Susceptibility to the induction procedures depends evidently on the expectations and fantasies of the hypnotized person, his/her perception of the hypnotist as

powerful, reliable etc. Some studies associate the concept of personality traits with higher hypnotizability and with the capability of "deep" hypnotic engagement. These data, though sometimes contradictory, commonly present integrated persons of a lower level of anxiety, possessing certain "hysteric traits," as more hypnotizable.

There is no doubt that personality traits may determine the mode of functioning in the psychosocial field and consecutively influence the ability to enter into a hypnotic relation. In every case the level of hypnotizability is connected with readiness and susceptibility to seduction. They both depend on various factors, personal as well as relational ones, perhaps mostly on the attractiveness (in this case - expectation of obtaining satisfaction of psychosocial needs) from the seducing person. This does not mean that only some persons, having particular personality traits, could enter into a "deep" hypnosis.

The notion of "deepness" of hypnosis is commonly used as the designator of a particular quality of hypnosis and related to the intensity of subjective feeling, the subject's ability to evoke certain uncommon suggested phenomena, and the degree of difficulty in obtaining suggestion effects. On the other hand, we know that some very particular reactions (like negative hallucinations or amnesia) could be suggested even in very "superficial" hypnoses. It seems, however, that this "deepness" is only a myth, maintained by the force of tradition.

It seems more reasonable to understand "deepness" as intensity and extent of attention concentration. The possibility of evoking strange behaviour could be explained also as dependent on the sort of psychosocial needs that are satisfied in hypnotic relation as well as on the extensiveness of demands exchanged in this relationship. The kind of psychosocial needs can explain why some hypnotisees more easily than others accept suggestions to present, e.g., exhibitional or hostile behaviour, why they potentialize their muscular tension to the extreme, etc.

To understand the complexity of hypnosis better, it seems necessary to remember that unconsciousness is structured like a language. Messages which are connected with fulfilment of psychosocial needs are - in hypnotic relationship - mainly unconscious. And in this language metaphor plays the crucial role. Even formulated without such intention, a message is treated by the subject as a metaphor. This sometimes causes unexpected effects of suggestions.

Once more we have to come back to Milton Erickson - the conscious use of metaphors in the therapeutic discourse makes the activity much more effective than the use of a language adequate in task-oriented cooperation and not in the psychosocial field.

The concept of hypnosis as a particular modality of interaction in the psychosocial field explains also the therapeutic effects of some hypnotic procedures, e.g., in neurotic disorders.

The interactive behaviour of an individual in the psychosocial field may be conceived as a structure - inwardly organized set of behaviours. Like all structured wholes, hypnotic behaviour is a substructure of the more general structure of communicating

in the psychosocial field.

From this point of view the hypnotic relationship, like other forms of relations in the psychosocial field, is a weak, transient structure regulated by feed-backs. Such structure can easily transform into another structure of communication in psychosocial field: e.g., neurotic language using functional disorders as words, can transform into normal language using common vocabulary, or another form of communication. And in this, potentially, hypnosis offers much for psychotherapy.

Conclusion

It is not easy to understand this remaining in the vicious circle of concepts like "third state of consciousness," "ego-states," etc. Maybe, there are some unconscious, hidden reasons for presenting hypnosis as a trance and as something particular and mysterious, as an uncovered state of mind.

They are, I guess, connected with certain personal needs of some people using hypnosis in their practice. This may suggest that they are powerful persons having mysterious phenomena under control, due to their particular traits of personality. Such suggestion also helps to practice hypnotic procedures. On the other hand, to have "scientific" - i.e., neurophysiological - support of hypnotic knowledge could beautifully legitimize this esoteric aspect of practice. But the entanglement in the concept of the third state of consciousness can hardly be justified by the experience from everyday practice.

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