

The New Hypnosis in the Old Hypnosis: Memories of the future

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■ *New Hypnosis consists of specific techniques inspired by comprehensive theories and concepts. Contributions from the newer theories are grounded in the foundation provided by previous models. These combine to provide a more inclusive body of knowledge and to deepen understanding regarding the nature of hypnosis.*

Erickson described hypnosis as a "New Orientation." He based this depiction on both experimental studies and clinical findings. Erickson's work seemed to have roots in contributions from the past, particularly those of Pierre Janet.

The new conception views hypnotherapy as a reorganization of associations that is activated by the hypnotist but produced by the subject. This accentuates the prominent role that New Hypnosis attributes to individual resources in the therapeutic process.

Old theories and new theories

One of the most common criticisms of hypnosis is that it is not founded on a clear and specific theoretical background of its own. Actually, even a cursory investigation of the historical evolution of the discipline clearly shows that hypnosis has been connected to specific theories, perhaps to an even greater extent than other approaches.

It also appears that many of these theories were not only devised to explain the nature of trance states and how hypnosis works. They also strove to allow integration of conceptualizations of hypnosis with more comprehensive understanding of the human being. In some cases, theories of hypnosis even aimed to offer an explanation of the reciprocal influence between man and the physical laws of the universe. This occurred in the 18th Century with the interpretation of hypnotic effects as a consequence of the magnetic influence of planets, seen in the hypotheses of Franz Anton Mesmer (1766).

Efforts to maintain a specific theoretical background were exemplified in the changes and corrections later incorporated into Mesmer's initial formulation. Based on clinical findings, Mesmer himself refined his early ideas into the theory of *animal magnetism*. Later, students of Mesmer contributed to the evolving theory, particularly D'Es-

lon and the Marquis Chastenot de Puységur (1784), the latter emphasizing the role of imagination.

In more modern times, the pioneering work of Hilgard (1979) supported Puységur's hypothesis. *Imaginative involvement* became one of the leading explanations regarding the nature and function of hypnosis. And, though they denied the presence of a specific state of consciousness in hypnosis, imagination was again considered the sole factor in understanding hypnotic effectiveness by T.X. Barber and colleagues (Barber & Caiverly, 1964; Barber, Spanos & Chaves, 1974). Following from this shared theoretical perspective, imagination and guided imagery emerged as two of the main techniques in the clinical practice of hypnosis (Pelletier, 1979).

In the late 19th Century, Bernheim (1886) proposed another theory, the theory of *suggestion*. Despite the opposition of the influential Charcot, suggestion for more than 50 years enjoyed eminence as the most credible hypothesis to explain the therapeutic influence of hypnosis. Many authors shared this opinion of the centrality of suggestion. Even today, suggestion is considered important. However, what we now call New Hypnosis is moving away from the traditional conception of suggestion as the key element in hypnotherapy. A different view of experience and behavior is contained in this passage from Milton Erickson, who opined: "Suggestion can only provoke the modification of the subject's behavior and temporary cure of the symptom. But in this case the 'cure' is simply a response to suggestion and doesn't imply the reassociation and reorganization of ideas, points of view and memories that are essential for the real cure. The occurrence of behavioral response to a given suggestion can only give satisfaction to the therapist" (Erickson, 1948).

The position taken by Erickson regarding suggestion was certainly not new. Pierre Janet took a similar stance in the previous century. In his book, *Neuroses et idées fixes* (1898), he wrote, "...not only is suggestion unable to explain all that happens in hypnosis, but suggestion itself requires to be explained."

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all of the many theories of hypnosis, both as a state of consciousness and as a form of psychotherapy. But it is important to mention that there was *mystical* period that spanned many centuries before Mesmer in which supernatural factors were invoked to explain why hypnosis was effective as a therapeutic instrument. Mesmer effected a shift in which hypnosis was interpreted as a *physical* event. After Mesmer, theories became more complex and tended to characterize hypnosis as a *physiological* state, even to some a pathological one associated with hysterical personality traits. At the end of Nineteenth Century, hypnosis was cast as a *psychological* experience, as a *psychosomatic* condition, and finally as a *neuropsychiological* phenomenon.

1. The new conception of hypnosis

As we have seen, the criticism of hypnosis as lacking theoretical underpinnings is unfounded. But might this same criticism be fairly leveled at the New Hypnosis? Since

New Hypnosis emphasizes practical issues more than theoretical ones, the accusation that theory is disregarded might rest on firmer ground.

Certainly, the New Hypnosis tends to downplay complicated theories. Indeed, complex analyses of hypnosis are frequently regarded as obstacles to effective therapy. Some even view explanatory complexity as a distraction skillfully used by clients. As Jay Haley (1997) noted: "The theory should be simple enough for the average therapist to understand. When important issues are clearly understood, the therapist is not distracted by clients who are experts in complexity and obfuscation."

The use of different and possibly conflicting theories - all the better if complicated and untestable - as well complex diagnostic procedures, and the quest for discovering an "underlying disorder", are among the major factors considered by Haley essential to success in "The Art of Being a Failure as a Therapist" (Haley, 1969).

In my opinion, Milton Erickson did not oppose theories. He was suspicious of "comprehensive" theories that propose to offer thorough explanations for every piece of human behavior, for every state of mind, and for every form of social interaction.

It is clear that New Hypnosis is not in favor of theories that pretend to explain everything. But there are a number of theoretical principles in New Hypnosis that are sometimes overlooked. With the aim of facilitating a better integration between the theoretical base of New Hypnosis with its clinical applications, the following briefly presents some of the important principles with examination of their historical roots.

The naturalistic approach

One of the most relevant theoretical positions that consistently appeared in Erickson's writings was his advocacy of the naturalistic approach. In his own words (Erickson, 1958): "By naturalistic approach is meant the acceptance and utilization of the situation encountered without endeavoring to psychologically restructure it. In so doing, the presenting behavior of the patient becomes a definite aid and an actual part in inducing a trance, rather than a possible hindrance. For lack of a more definite terminology the method may be termed a naturalistic approach in which an aspect of the principle of synergism is utilized."

Actually, by naturalistic approach Erickson also inferred:

- The recognition of hypnosis as a normal, natural state.
- The existence of common everyday trance.
- The naturalistic induction of hypnotic trance.

Hypnosis as a normal, natural state

The debate about whether hypnosis is a natural, an altered, or even a pathological state is not new. During the late Nineteenth Century, the Nancy School in France, under the leadership of Hippolyte Bernheim, proposed a physiological explanation of hypnosis, based on their extensive research. This model was opposed to the Salpêtrière School of Paris, where Jean Marie Charcot and his colleagues strongly believed hypnosis to be induced neurosis. According to this *neurosis theory*, the state of hypnosis

was considered a peculiar pathological condition into which certain predisposed patients fell. In this state, special physical agents possessed the power to provoke special symptoms. After long and heated controversy, Bernheim's position that give more weight to the physiological processes, induced by "normal" suggestions, proved to be more accepted by the therapeutic community. It laid the groundwork for naturalistic positions regarding the nature of hypnosis.

Common everyday trance

Erickson was not only convinced that hypnosis is a natural condition. He also considered trance a frequent phenomenon in the normal experience of everyday life. Without formal induction, individuals often develop modified states of consciousness while performing customary everyday activities. The common everyday trance is considered a familiar experience that can be utilized for therapeutic purposes. It also allows habitual tasks to be accomplished without occupying much of our awareness.

An impressive description of the same concept demonstrates that Pierre Janet, in 1898, held a position quite similar to Erickson's: "We can walk in the noisy streets of a big city, wondering about some important problem; nevertheless our legs succeeded in walking and avoiding obstacles, ears and eyes continued to perceive dangerous situations and continued to guide our behavior completely outside our awareness."

The naturalistic induction of hypnotic trance

In Erickson's view, the induction process should be as naturalistic as possible, facilitating the subject's natural propensity to elicit trance. Erickson was not a proponent of formalized and ritualistic induction procedures. As he put it (Erickson, 1958): "Too often the effort is made to fit the patients to an accepted formal technique of suggestion, rather than adapting the technique to the patients in accord with their actual personality situations. In any such adaptation there is an imperative need to accept and to utilize those psychological states, understandings, and attitudes that each patient brings into the situation. To ignore those factors in favor of some ritual of procedure may often does delay, impede, limit, or even prevent the desired results. The acceptance and utilization of those factors, on the other hand, promotes more rapid trance induction, the development of more profound trance states, the more ready acceptance of therapy, and greater ease for the handling of the total therapeutic situation."

Actually, Erickson extended the naturalistic approach far beyond the induction phase, considering the acceptance of the subject's "natural" behavior essential to the entire process of hypnotic psychotherapy, as well as in experimental studies: "The operators or experimenters are unimportant in determining hypnotic results regardless of their understandings and intentions. It is what the subjects understand and what the subjects do, not the operators' wishes, that determine what hypnotic phenomena shall be manifested.... At best, the operator can only offer intelligent guidance and then intelligently accept the subject's behavior" (Erickson, 1964).

Similarly, Janet (1898) proposed that the therapist's role is limited to reinforcing the

subject's ideas and decisions, both in the induction and the during therapeutic process: "The person that induces [hypnosis] will simply strengthen the decision, the idea previously expressed by the patient. He will strengthen and enrich it, only adding, by virtue of implied circumstances, the peculiar emotions that were missing" (p. 55).

Janet's position certainly appears to be compatible with New Hypnosis principles. Janet considered both the attitude of respect for the subject's resources and the emotions derived by the therapeutic context (including the relationship) as paramount, like New Hypnosis.

Reduced interest in relaxation

The New Hypnosis is less concerned about relaxation than are traditional forms of hypnosis. There is a much greater emphasis on the patient's resources. Such does not require the passive attitude that was favored by classical authoritarian hypnotists. For this reason, the passive responsiveness promoted by traditional hypnosis is given minor consideration by New Hypnosis. Responses that can be performed whether hypnotized or awake are considered more meaningful and useful for therapy.

Two centuries ago, a similar attitude toward hypnotic trance was espoused by the Marquis de Puységur. He used the term "artificial somnambulism" for the state in which individuals are in trance but seem able to perform various functions of everyday activity. He also referred to the "perfect crisis" for situations during which people were in trance but did not appear to be so.

In 1819, Abbé Faria proposed that trance should be considered substantially different from sleep. He described "lucid sleep," a term that gradually became a substitute for magnetism. According to Faria, "lucid sleep" wasn't invoked by the "magnetizer" but by the "magnetized" subject. Therefore, he considered a ritualistic procedure to induce trance unnecessary.

Definition of the hypnotic state

The New Hypnosis formulation of the hypnotic state underscores several key components: absorption, response attentiveness, rapport, and modified orientation toward the hypnotic experience.

Absorption

Zeig (1980) forwarded absorption as the level of involvement a subject achieves in specific stimuli. He viewed it as an indirect measure of a subject's participation in the trance experience.

Response attentiveness

According to Erickson and Rossi (1975), response attentiveness is akin to common everyday trance. It is the experience of trance that is not formally elicited by the hypnotist. It develops in a subject who is seemingly awake even prior to induction. There is an especially intense form of attention in response to meaningful stimulus. Rossi noted: "Erickson invariably adds something new to the situation that is related to the

patient's central motivations in such a way that the patient is fascinated. The patient is opened with curiosity about the new point of view that Erickson is presenting; *he develops a creative moment, or acceptance set, for all the suggestions that follow*. The patient listens with such attentiveness that a formal trance induction is often unnecessary. The patient listens with that sort of rapt response attentiveness that Erickson recognizes as the *common everyday trance*" (Erickson & Rossi, 1975).

Rapport

One of the most telling shifts that New Hypnosis effected away from the classical focus on the suggestive "power" of the hypnotist was to stress the particular form of social interaction that develops between subject and hypnotist. In New Hypnosis, this specific form of relationship is considered the most relevant factor in understanding both how hypnosis occurs and how it is effective in promoting desired change.

The hypnotist-subject relationship, often termed hypnotic rapport, is characterized as reciprocally *selective* and *responsive*. Banyai and her colleagues (Banyai, Meszaros & Csokay, 1982) investigated this relationship. They demonstrated that both hypnotist and subject develop a condition of trance, even to the point of undergoing similar neurophysiological changes.

These findings are certainly consonant with the description Erickson himself offered regarding his own hypnotic experience while working with clients: "If I have any doubt about my capacity to see the important things, I go into a trance. When there is a crucial issue with a patient and I don't want to miss any of the clues, I go into trance" (Erickson & Rossi, 1977).

Rapport, then, can be viewed as a *selective* and *exclusive* relationship that takes place in a *conjointly* modified state of consciousness in which both the subject and the hypnotist develop *increased mutual responsiveness*.

When comparing this definition with concepts from previous accounts of hypnosis, there are similarities. In his explanatory propositions regarding the basic laws of magnetism, Mesmer (1779) referred to "responsive influence" and "reciprocal action." Pointing to the *selective nature* of rapport, Puysegur noted that the "magnetized" subject could hear only what the "magnetizer" said.

Pierre Janet wrote about the existence of what he called *magnetic rapport* and described it as: "a special relationships that occurs in the course of somnambulistic trance between the magnetizer and his patient... that behaves like all the others don't exist" (Janet, 1919).

In a previous work, *L'Automatisme psychologique* (1889), Janet posited an elective relationship in hypnosis and attributed it to the *selective attention* paid to the hypnotist by patients.

Modified orientation

An often neglected definition of hypnosis that Erickson favored described the trance experience in terms of an modified orientation: "Hypnosis consists of losing the ori-

entation toward the usual external reality and establishing a new orientation toward an abstract, conceptual reality" (Erickson, 1964).

Erickson developed this opinion after field experimentation that were later elaborated (1967) with larger groups of subjects. The core aspect of the hypnotic experience, particularly the somnambulistic one, was described as: "An apparent inability to perceive external stimuli included in the immediate situation, and the frequent spontaneous ability to misperceive the surrounding realities as the realities experienced or imagined possible in the past of the individual subject, often with peculiar restrictions or alterations in the actual perception of reality."

Erickson attained sufficient confidence in this opinion about the divergence that develops in hypnotic trance between the subject's orientation toward *hypnotic reality* and *nonhypnotic reality* that he concluded: "As a final statement, after extensive experimental work aided by independent work of others employing the author's procedures, and the findings achieved over the years in teaching and clinical situations, this author feels that a somnambulistic hypnotic subject spontaneously apprehends the surrounding environment of realities differently than does a subject in the ordinary state of waking consciousness, and that the one type of reality apprehension does not preclude the other type of reality apprehension".

It is surprising that little or no attention has been paid to these conclusions, despite the time and effort Erickson devoted to his investigations. Many authors have recognized Erickson's innovative intuitions and extensive contributions. But there is a distinct lack of similar studies and conclusions, even by authors who explored the nature of hypnosis during the past several centuries. The "modified orientation" theory has stimulated little in the form of replication studies and it apparently has raised little interest or commentary among the New Hypnosis authors.

It certainly seems that the "modified orientation" hypothesis deserves more attention and consideration, that its theoretical and clinical implications should be more thoroughly explored. For example, if the divergence of orientation toward the two different types of reality is an indicator of a subject's involvement in the hypnotic experience, the depth of hypnosis could be assessed by utilizing a simple scheme (see scheme below).

In this scheme derived from Erickson's New Orientation hypothesis, trance depth is operationally defined as the relationship (*Hypnotic Delta*) between the orientation toward the *Hypnotic Reality* and the orientation toward the *Nonhypnotic Reality*.

Scheme 1: Trance Depth and the Hypnotic Delta

TRANCE DEPTH

Orientation toward *Hypnotic Reality*

_____ = *Hypnotic DELTA*

Orientation toward *Nonhypnotic Reality*

2. The new conception of hypnotherapy

The new forms of hypnotic psychotherapy primarily focus on the subject as the center of the therapist's interest. Old hypnosis was more concerned with the induction of behaviors considered useful by the hypnotist. The therapist's ideas and his/her power to generate phenomena in the patient were the core concerns in therapy. Respect for the client's wishes and needs was too frequently a secondary consideration. The new approaches to hypnosis explicitly emphasize the subject's resources and potentials. Acceptance of these qualities guide therapeutic interventions.

From technique to process

Many authors and clinicians of the New Hypnosis mold highlight techniques and specific tools for therapeutic interventions. These seem to be the most important ingredients in therapy. However, if the abovementioned premises of New Hypnosis are remembered, then the primary thrust of therapy should be more on therapeutic process than on techniques.

In his papers, Erickson dedicated much more space and attention to the complexity of the process than to the technical aspects of hypnosis. If one considers the techniques from Erickson's work in isolation, apart from process (as unfortunately happens sometimes), there is risk of losing the essence of his treatment. Misunderstanding the profound treatment philosophy becomes likely.

From dramatic phenomena to minimal cues

In order to improve hypnotic effectiveness, it is important not to be enamored with the dramatic effects of some trance states and thereby overlook the minimal cues that are the basis of every hypnotic response. If insufficient attention is paid to these cues, the hypnotist will be impeded in reaching meaningful results.

Beginning hypnotists are frequently in search of spectacular phenomena, such as hand levitation, positive and negative hallucination, total amnesia, age regression, and the like. They tend to miss subtle body movements, slight changes in the breathing rhythm, subtle patterns of the eyes, and differences in the tone of voice of the subject. Hunting for dramatic "events" can cause one to miss the access to unconscious processes the subject provides through these *minimal cues*. I have always been impressed by the important contribution of Erickson's work (Erickson 1980a, 1980b, 1980c, 1980d) in the attention he paid to little, seemingly unimportant details and cues. He demonstrated that noticing and utilizing these cues could have a profound impact with far-reaching implications and with often unexpected changes in a person's life.

We can define *minimal cues* as those indicators, seemingly trivial and irrelevant, that suggest a specific state of mind or internal process. These cues are sometimes not considered signals by untrained therapists because *careful observation is required to reveal the connections between these indicators and meaningful behavioral responses*. They can be important and useful variables when used by the therapist who pays them

particular attention. This particular attention should be considered one of the crucial factors in the therapeutic use of minimal cues. Subjects will respond, in fact, consciously or unconsciously, to the hypnotist's attention. This in itself can prove to be a relevant dynamic in enhancing the therapeutic relationship.

From suggestion to re-association

As we have seen, in the New Hypnosis, therapeutic intervention doesn't intend to bring about change by relying on "the power of suggestion." Rather, the therapist's aim is to activate subjects' opportunities to reassociate and reorganize their own psychological processes and to restore access to personal resources.

Erickson defined hypnotherapy as "a reorganization of personal experience" (Erickson, 1946). As such, hypnosis can be considered a curative experience *per se*, regardless of which specific strategies are used.

Two well-known strategies that promote new orientations and reassociation on cognitive and behavioral levels are the *interspersal technique* and the *confusion technique*. The interspersal technique (Erickson, 1954) (see Figure 1) is applied when a hypnotherapist inserts therapeutic words, ideas, and suggestions within an otherwise normal conversation with the client. The therapeutic "message" is not perceived at the conscious level because they appear to be just casual statements, part of the ongoing conversation. When words and ideas are interspersed, habitual associative processes can be gradually modified. A new orientation toward both the outside and the internal reality can develop in the subject.

The confusion technique (Erickson, 1964b) (see Figure 2) produces a similar effect by working in the opposite direction: instead of offering new associative patterns, it interrupts the client's habitual and repetitive ways of thinking and behaving.

Confusion can be provoked by a number of interventions, like the repeated use of

Fig. 1: The intervention on associations in the Interspersal Techniques

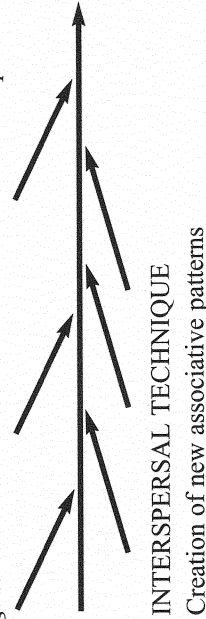
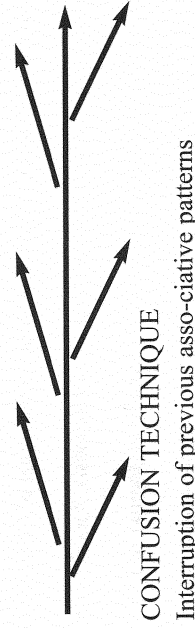


Fig. 2: The intervention on associations in the Confusion Techniques



opposites, fast speaking, or saying a series of details that are very difficult to remember. These interventions can create a meaningful, but transient state of confusion in the subject's mind. The degree of confusion induced in the client can be light, almost unnoticed ("soft" confusion), or very intense and evident ("hard" confusion).

The interruption of habitual associative patterns inevitably promotes the emergence of new forms of association. Therefore, the interspersal technique and the confusion technique are both able to elicit new forms of association and a new orientation toward reality.

Strangely, even this aspect of Ericksonian hypnotherapy has been afforded little consideration. Luckily, Jeffrey Zeig elegantly describes the process of guiding associations in a chapter of the present text (Zeig, 2002). According to Zeig: "To guide associations could be considered a technique. However, it is more than a technique. It is a style of 'being' a therapist."

Once again, it is interesting to discover that Pierre Janet proposed a point of view very similar to that of Erickson and Zeig. Commenting on some difficult cases, he observed: "In all these cases there is no connection with suggestive effects. These patients were never told to experience certain hallucinations and I never thought to the circumstances in which they have been produced. It could be certainly noted that they are connected to my instructions, by associations. Anyway I can but suppose a considerable spontaneous work that has developed and transformed my instructions" (Janet, 1889).

The fact that so many ideas and conceptions of the New Hypnosis were seeded in the Old Hypnosis does not detract at all from the originality in the emerging models of the field. Instead, we should appreciate how consistent the legacy from the past is that drives us into the future. We should remain aware of how wise and strong are these ideas that survive the centuries and endure the passage of time.

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