The History of Hypnosis

Directions: Read the following material, then answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper.

Throughout recorded history, various persons, such as medicine men, witch doctors, and religious leaders, have practiced hypnosis in different forms. During the eighteenth century, scientists and researchers began to study the validity of hypnosis.

From 1734 to 1815, Franz Anton Mesmer, a Viennese physician, drew attention to hypnosis. Mesmer believed that hypnotic phenomena could be produced by animal magnetism. Mesmer’s patients grasped iron rods attached to a large tub filled with iron filings to receive the magnetic flow. Mesmer stated that the flow came from astral bodies and was channeled through his hands. An official scientific commission led by Benjamin Franklin exposed Mesmer in 1784, stating that his cures resulted from imagination rather than magnetism. His followers continued, however, for they recognized the importance of the phenomenon and backed the philosophy of experimentation and observation.

It was British physician James Braid who coined the word hypnotism from the Greek word ὑπνωσ after the God of sleep. By the time Braid realized that hypnosis was not sleep, the term had gained popularity. This confusion between hypnosis and sleep conceals the real meaning and purpose of hypnosis. One definition of hypnosis states that ideas are presented in such a way that a desired result occurs.

Jean Charcot (1825–1893), a leading French neurologist, helped to make hypnosis a respected field of inquiry. He conquered the skepticism of the French Academy of Sciences by demonstrating that hypnosis is a neurological event, not the result of magnetism. His research and teaching influenced such prominent men as Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and Pierre Janet (1859–1947).

Hippolyte Bernheim (1837–1919) and A.A. Liebeault (1823–1904) began to study the results of hypnotic therapy. They developed Braid’s idea of hypnosis as a “suggestive” therapy, and together treated more than 12,000 patients.

During the 1800s, a heated controversy developed between the two leading schools of thought on hypnosis. The proponents of each position and their views are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bernheim/Liebeault’s Theory of Hypnosis</th>
<th>Charcot’s Theory of Hypnosis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypnosis is a psychological state brought about by suggestion.</td>
<td>Hypnosis is a medical condition connected to hysteria.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hypnosis requires no specific personality type.</td>
<td>Hypnosis requires a neurotic personality.</td>
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This controversy led to further scientific investigation, and ultimately greater clarity in the field. The Bernheim/Liebeault position was eventually shown to be the correct theory.

Hypnosis as a method of treatment was set back when Sigmund Freud, in 1895, rejected it in favor of his technique of psychoanalysis. Freud did not fully explain his rejection of hypnosis, but many speculate that Freud avoided its use because:

1. He was embarrassed that he could not hypnotize many patients to a sufficient depth.
2. The cures tended to be temporary, and posthypnotic suggestion could not be maintained.
3. He could not obtain buried traumatic material due to patients’ resistances.

Despite Freud’s personal disfavor, hypnosis was not discredited. Psychologists later refuted many of Freud’s subjective criticisms.
The need for rapid treatment of war-related psychological problems among World War II veterans led to a dramatic increase in the use of hypnotherapy. Shortly afterward dentists began to experiment with hypnotherapy to control pain. Obstetricians also experimented with hypnotherapy to help pregnant women with labor pains.

In 1949, the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis was established to maintain high ethical and training standards. In 1955, the British Medical Association admitted that hypnosis, when applied medically, has the potential to relieve pain. The American Medical Association followed suit in 1958. Both societies supported the teaching of hypnosis in medical school programs but urged cautious use of it in practice. Hypnosis was later approved for the treatment of some psychological disorders and as an alternative form of pain management during childbirth and surgery.

In 1960, the American Psychological Association (APA) officially recognized the American Board of Examiners in Psychological Hypnosis. Practitioners meeting the specified qualifications are listed in the official directories of the APA. Division 30, Psychological Hypnosis, is dedicated to advancing research into the uses and techniques of effective experimental and clinical hypnosis. Hypnosis is used today to help people stop smoking, manage pain, and improve athletic performance.

Questions

Directions: Answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. A friend of yours recently slid on the ice and wrecked his car. Although his injuries were minor and no one else was injured, he cannot get back into a car, not even as a passenger. Would you recommend hypnosis as a form of treatment for him? Explain.

2. Create a time line of the history of hypnosis.

3. Research how some athletes use hypnosis to prepare for major competitions. Write a report on your findings.