

Earth

**Aliens On Earth.com***Resources for those who are stranded here*

Earth



[UFOs](#) | [Paranormal](#) | [Area 51](#)
[People](#) | [Places](#) | [Random](#)
[Top 100](#) | [What's New](#)
[Catalog](#) | [New Books](#)

Search... for keyword(s)

in Book Title/Author

Our Bookstore
 is **OPEN**

[Mothership](#) -> [Book Catalog](#) -> [Hypnosis](#) -> Here

[Book Catalog](#) [An Excerpt from Hypnosis for the Seriously Curious](#)

Introduction

A deeply hypnotized person experiences himself in some rather unusual ways. Typically, he feels a profound sense of relaxation, frequently accompanied by sensations that his body is light or heavy, floating or sinking, enlarging or shrinking. His behavior and perception are exquisitely sensitive to the hypnotist's communications. For example, in response to pertinent suggestions, the person's arm can float up into the air of its own accord with no sensation on the part of the person that he is doing the lifting. It's as if his arm itself heard and responded to the command to become lighter and lighter, to float up into the air effortlessly--as if tied to balloons full of helium. Suggestions to a hypnotized individual that the room is full of roses may result in expressions of wonderment at the hallucinated beauty and fragrance that surround him; he may even prick a finger on a thorn when he tries to pick up a particularly lovely garland.

Such a deeply hypnotized person may be "regressed" back to an earlier age and laugh at a circus clown he is seeing on his eighth birthday, or he may become tearful and upset as his parents tell him that his dog has died. If age-regressed to an even earlier time, our hypnotic virtuoso may begin talking in a foreign language that he hasn't spoken since he was 3 or 4 years old--and that he could not remember when awake. Returned to the here and now, our subject can be told to smell the Chanel #5 under his nose, and he will sniff delightedly at the ammonia that has been placed there instead.

The entire arm of our deeply entranced subject can be plunged into ice-cold water, and, protected by suggestions for analgesia ("your arm is like a block of wood; it can't feel anything"), he will show no sign of pain or discomfort, even though he would be in agony under ordinary waking circumstances. Yet, our subject will grimace in pain if his "unprotected" arm is plunged into room-temperature water that has been transformed by suggestion into ice water.

This ability of hypnosis to alter perception and thinking has many practical implications--for some people. Long-time sufferers of migraine headaches have been cured permanently by incredibly short periods of treatment with hypnosis. People dying from terminal cancer have been spared the final indignities of ceaseless and senseless pain that seems impervious to medication. Major surgery has been conducted with nothing more than hypnotic analgesia to eliminate the pain. Memories have been hypnotically recovered and disarmed of their ability to cause unconscious torment. Asthma has been cured, and weight lost; smoking habits have been broken, and skin disorders successfully treated--all by hypnosis. (Some clinical applications of hypnosis will be covered in the last chapter of this book.)

Anything that has such a dramatic impact on a person's condition and functioning cannot help attracting the attention of the clinician and scientist on the one hand and the sick or simply curious layman on the other. But, historically, hypnosis has received much more than attention; it has frequently been at the center of vigorous and even venomous controversy. Advocates of hypnosis have been denounced as charlatans and ne'er-do-wells; its adversaries, as narrow-minded bigots.

But why? Why should something so dramatic and apparently effective be so contentious? A key word here is "apparently." Bitter opponents of hypnosis during the 19th century charged that reports of hypnotic cures were fraudulent and that witnessed demonstrations of hypnotic phenomena were purposefully contrived. This sort of extreme charge is seldom heard nowadays, but modern critics have seriously proposed that hypnotic analgesia, to cite but one

example, is not really what it appears to be but is instead attributable to incredibly stoical subjects who are simply trying hard to please the hypnotist--even as they endure the most excruciating pain.

Another basis for skepticism is the claim that hypnosis is merely responsiveness to suggestions, a proposition that presumably demystifies hypnosis, rendering it more amenable to scientific investigation. What is exorcized by this account is hypnosis as an altered state of consciousness. And indeed, for a hard-core behavioristic psychology, such altered states have approximately the same status as demons or ghosts; indeed, for behaviorism even the existence of mind is in serious doubt.

There are other sources of controversy, but we need not detail all of them here; the reader by now has the idea that the study of hypnosis has not always had smooth scientific sledding. And the truth is that overly enthusiastic advocates of hypnosis have contributed to the controversy by making exaggerated claims about it. For example, it just presses the credibility of most open-minded scientists too far when it is seriously proposed that a person can be hypnotically age-regressed back to a previous life or that hypnosis can be used to "astrally project" the subject to different places, even to different worlds. The legitimate claims made about hypnosis are weird enough, and even they have elicited skeptical responses ranging from smile through smirk to snarl. To claim "supernatural" powers for hypnosis can make the difficult job of gaining scientific respect for the phenomenon almost impossible (Hilgard, 1971a). And, indeed, there have been long periods in history when the scientific study of hypnosis has simply ground to a complete halt.

At this moment in history, however, hypnosis is enjoying something of a renaissance: more research of higher quality is being done now than ever before; several books on hypnosis have recently been published (E. Hilgard, 1965; J. R. Hilgard, 1970; Cordon, 1967; Fromm & Shor, 1972; Barber, 1969, 1970; Barber, Spanos, & Chaves, 1974; Moss, 1965; Shor & Orne, 1965; Lassner, 1967; Sarbin & Coe, 1972); and hypnosis is gaining general acceptance into medical, dental, and psychological circles as it never has before. For example, the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis and The Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis are two professional organizations that concern themselves exclusively with the clinical use and experimental investigation of hypnosis. Each society has an annual convention, sponsors workshops on hypnosis, and publishes a quarterly journal of interest to clinicians and/or scientists involved with hypnosis.

Several converging factors have led to this renewal of interest in hypnosis. Classical behaviorism is fast losing its hold on North American psychology, and there is an awakening to the importance of cognition and subjective experience as legitimate domains of inquiry. This recrudescence of subjectivity in science reflects a cultural trend in which "consciousness raising" has become a catch phrase and is achieved not only by diligent discussion but by meditation, drugs, novel therapeutic techniques, biofeedback, Eastern religions, and rock music--to name only a few roads to Rome.

Partly to accommodate this emphasis on subjective experience, there has been a concomitant liberalization of what counts as "objectively real" in science. Verbal reports, for example, are considered far more seriously today as an index of genuine internal experience than they were ten years ago. And philosophers of science have recently accorded more formal recognition to the subjective roots of scientific endeavor (for example, Kuhn, 1962; Polanyi, 1958; but see also Scheffler, 1967). It has even been seriously proposed in a prestigious scientific journal that certain external realities can only be perceived under an altered state of consciousness--induced either by drugs or by other means (Tart, 1972).

Just where the pendulum will stop its swing toward subjectivity is difficult to say. Certainly the field of hypnosis has profited from this liberalization, but too much salt in the stew can quickly make it unpalatable. As Shor (1972) has rightly phrased it, "The fundamental problem in hypnosis research is the necessity of maintaining at the same time both caution and conviction" (p. 36). Lightly salting hypnosis with cautious conviction is what I hope to accomplish in this book.

The book begins cautiously indeed, questioning the very reality of hypnosis. This may seem an odd way for an advocate to begin a book about hypnosis, but it stems from a decision, early made, that the skeptical view should be aired early and forcefully. Skeptics may be more receptive to what I say in later sections of the book if their doubts are dealt with openly at the outset. For the credulous, whose belief in hypnosis often borders on the mystical, an initial dose of skepticism helps to lay the groundwork for a more reasoned and reasonable understanding of hypnotic phenomena. I hope that before the book is over the credulous will have been rescued from superstition and the skeptics from self-

righteousness. Those open-minded readers who are simply curious about hypnosis need not feel forsaken, since the early chapters deal with classical hypnotic phenomena as portrayed in some timeless experiments of both older and more modern eras.

Although the book begins cautiously, it is my conviction that hypnosis is virtually a window into the mind. Often the window is smudged and dirty with artifacts and exaggerated claims; but even through a glass darkly we are beginning to see forms of thinking, perceiving, and feeling that are barely hinted at in more conventional lines of inquiry (see especially E. R. Hilgard, 1973a, 1974). Eventually-- and in the not too distant future, I suspect--research on hypnosis will begin to be assimilated into a more general theory of cognition far more probing and satisfying than any now existing. Conversely, the findings from experimental work in cognition and perception will also enhance our understanding of hypnosis.

In writing this book, I have made no attempt to survey all the literature in the field; today that would be an almost impossible task. What I have tried to provide is an intellectual framework in which hypnotic phenomena can be understood. The framework is, of course, one that I find congenial, and it undoubtedly has heavily influenced the research selected for exposition. However, I have not ignored research that challenges my biases, nor have I tried to duck the really tough issues that confront current investigators in the field.

Throughout the book I have attempted to keep technical language to a minimum. Some excursions into statistical issues have been impossible to avoid completely, but I have done my best to present them in a simple, straightforward manner. On occasion, the sophisticated reader may find it convenient to skip over some elementary statistical concepts that are aimed at the novice. This is especially true in Chapter 5.

There is one point, also treated in Chapter 5, that I would like to mention briefly here in order to aid the reader's comprehension of earlier chapters. Becoming hypnotized is not an all-or-nothing proposition. While some people are able to achieve deep hypnosis without difficulty, and others seem intractable to hypnosis, many more people are only moderately hypnotizable. Just why these differences in hypnotic ability exist is not entirely clear, although I will later have some things to say about the origins and development of hypnotic talent. In any event, the differences in persons' hypnotic ability (or hypnotic susceptibility, as it is more frequently called) can be measured by various scales designed for that purpose. These scales involve actually hypnotizing a person, administering several suggestions, and seeing how many of the suggestions the person "passes." The more suggestions passed, the more hypnotically susceptible the person is.

A final word: I have tried very hard to present some complex issues as simply as possible, but without simplifying the complexities. Consequently, the reader new to psychology in general and to hypnosis in particular may find parts of the book challenging--but, I trust, rewarding. It is my hope that anyone who has a genuine itch to know about hypnosis will find this book a satisfying scratch. It is also my hope that investigators of hypnosis who have been scratching for some time will find in this book something that extends their reach.