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Research Proposal - Hypnotic Suggestibility

From: **Tim D. Brigham** <TBrigham@ksinc.net>
Date: Sat, 7 Aug 1999 23:39:00 -0500
Fwd Date: Mon, 09 Aug 1999 11:20:34 -0400
Subject: Research Proposal - Hypnotic Suggestibility

Subject: Research Proposal - Hypnotic Suggestibility, Event
Related Brain Potentials, and Paranormal Experiences

Hello all,

After some talk with various members of this list in regards to abduction research, I have finally finished a rough draft of a research proposal which grew out of these discussions. It has changed quite a bit from my original intentions and is less obviously related to UFOs. Original plans were to have abduction experiencers be specifically sought out and have them examine ambiguous stimuli while brain potentials were recorded via EEG, and these results would be compared to controls. The focus has shifted to examine the theoretical "fantasy prone personality," paranormal belief and experiences, and how all of this may relate to hypnotic suggestibility as well as what goes on in the brain when people evaluate ambiguous stimuli. I think it has taken on a more 'doable' (and yes, conservative) form, and may lay some groundwork for future research which is more directly related to UFOs/abductions. I have in no way written off more directly related UFO/abduction studies, and I hope to get the chance to push the envelope a bit more in the future. The abstract follows, as well as an earlier "pre-proposal" which gives a bit more detail. If anyone cares to review the full proposal, feel free to request it (just so I can avoid spamming 20 pages over the list to those who dont want it).

Best,

Tim Brigham

Research Proposal:
Hypnotic Suggestibility, Event Related Potentials, Stimulus
Ambiguity, and Fantasy Proneness

Abstract

The proposed study aims to explore the nature of hypnotic suggestibility and how decisions are made regarding ambiguous external stimuli. Three categories of visual stimuli, differing in ambiguity, will be presented immediately following recorded oral statements regarding these stimuli. Some of these statements will be accurate while others will be inaccurate. Participants will indicate agreement or disagreement with the oral statement after the visual stimuli is presented. Event Related Potential data will be obtained via scalp electrodes during stimulus trials, and this data will allow objective

measurement and comparison of cognitive processes at work. Fantasy proneness, cognitive failures, and reports of personal paranormal experiences and beliefs will also be measured. The researcher hypothesizes that highly hypnotizable participants will demonstrate a greater degree of suggestibility than low hypnotizables while in a hypnotic state of the same depth. It is further hypothesized that fantasy proneness and cognitive failures will correlate positively with hypnotic suggestibility.

Pre-Proposal

Hypnotic Suggestibility, Event Related Potentials, Stimulus Ambiguity, Fantasy Proneness, and Paranormal Experiences

The proposed study aims to explore the nature of hypnotic suggestibility and how decisions are made regarding ambiguous stimuli. Event Related Potential data will be obtained via scalp electrodes during stimulus trials, and this data will allow objective measurement and comparison of cognitive events at work. It is also hoped that data will be gathered that will provide information regarding if and how decision making processes are related to fantasy proneness and level of hypnotizability. A total of 30 participants will be involved in the study, with 15 selected because they test "high in hypnotizability" and the remaining 15 because they test "low in hypnotizability." All participants will be involved in the research in both hypnotized, and 'normal,' states of consciousness. Randomization and counter-balancing will be used in determining the order of each individual's participation, and the order in which groups of stimuli are presented.

Participants will be presented with images (via a computer monitor) using the STIM system located in the Neurocognition Lab at The University of West Florida, and oral statements regarding the nature of these stimuli will be presented by the researcher, in pre-recorded form, just before each image is presented. Participants will indicate whether they agree disagree with the oral statement presented by pressing the corresponding button on a provided input device.

Three categories of images will be used as stimuli. The first category of images presented will be extremely simple in nature. In 50% of images in this category, the screen will be filled with a solid color. The researcher will present an oral statement regarding the nature of the stimulus. In half of these cases the statement will be accurate regarding the nature of the stimulus ("true"), while in other cases it will be obviously inaccurate ("false"). As an example of an accurate statement, in a case in which the screen color is green, the researcher would state "The screen color will be green." In the inaccurate cases, the researcher might state, before a green screen is presented, "This is blue." Simple geometric shapes will also be presented (independently) as stimuli in 50% of the trials. In these cases, the researcher will either accurately describe the upcoming stimulus' shape or inaccurately describe it (e.g. "This is a triangle").

The second category of images will be selected from the Rorschach Test and will, therefore, be much more ambiguous in nature. Statements regarding the stimuli will again be presented, in this case, suggestions as to what the image resembles. Some of these statements will be selected because they are statements commonly made by people who view that particular Rorschach blot (ex. "This resembles a butterfly."), while other statements will be crafted so that they bear little resemblance to the image (e.g. the statement that "This is a hammer" when it's shape obviously does not resemble a hammer).

The third category of images will be selected from the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), and will also be ambiguous in nature. The oral statements presented preceding these images will be regarding the nature of events supposedly depicted. Similar to the Rorschach images, some of these statements will be selected from responses commonly given by people who are being administered the TAT (ex. "This man is preparing for work"), while other statements regarding the events pictured will be selected because they would require a much larger cognitive 'leap' agreement.

In addition, all participants will undergo a brief "control data" gathering session, in which they are instructed, while in an ordinary state of consciousness, to deliberately indicate agreement with statements which they consciously know to be inaccurate or false. ERPs will be recording during these sessions and the results will be used to determine if episodes in which participants are consciously acting against their own judgements differ from data gathered in which 'misjudgments' are presumed to be unintentional or the result of hypnotic suggestion.

Tests administered to participants will include: The Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale, which will be the first test administered to potential participants, to evaluate their level of hypnotizability. Once participants have been selected, more tests will be administered. The Inventory of Childhood Memories and Imaginings (ICMI), a modified version of The Paranormal Belief Scales (PBS), and The Creative Experiences Questionnaire (CEQ), will be administered to assess if any of the participants can be classified as "Fantasy Prone Personalities." Results of these tests will be evaluated to determine if they yield any correlation to hypnotizability or participants' accuracy in judging the ambiguous stimuli. The Dissociative Experiences Scale (DES), The Cognitive Failures Questionnaire (CFQ), will also be administered.

Information gathered from this study will include: Are participants more prone to agree with inaccurate statements when hypnotized? Do participants scoring high on hypnotizability make these inaccurate judgements more often than participants who score low in hypnotizability? Do the ERPs of participants who agree with inaccurate statements indicate that they truly do not perceive any incongruence, and is this influenced by whether they are in an 'ordinary' or hypnotized state of consciousness? And are there correlational relationship(s) between, fantasy proneness, hypnotizability, and suggestibility?

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