Salient Findings: Summaries of Key Findings in the Research Literature

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SALIENT FINDINGS
Summaries of Key Findings
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JOURNAL: Pain


Hypnosis has been shown to reduce reported pain and pain behaviors in hypnotically responsive individuals, and many studies have attempted to define the neural basis for hypnotically modified pain perception. This study uses physiological measures to investigate individual strategic responses to suggestions for hypnotic analgesia. Eighteen subjects reporting high levels of hypnotic analgesia were presented with painful electrical stimulation of the sural nerve located in the left lower leg. Measurements obtained included verbal reports of pain as well as measurements of the nociceptive flexion reflex (RIII) and late somatosensory-evoked cerebral potentials (N150-P22). All subjects were able to significantly reduce their pain threshold with the use of hypnosis as compared to a baseline comparison condition. In addition, the subjects produced a reduced late somatosensory-evoked cerebral potential in response to hypnotic analgesia. This reduced somatosensory potential differed from that produced with relaxation. Two distinct patterns of modulating nociceptive response were noted. Hypnotic analgesia resulted in a significantly increased threshold for the RIII reflex in one subset of individuals, although another subset of individuals produced a significantly lower threshold for the RIII reflex.

This led to a corresponding inhibition or facilitation of the motor reaction to a stimulus at the spinal level. Return to baseline after the end of the hypnotic procedure was gradual rather than immediate, which suggests the possibility of an unknown regulatory mechanism rather than merely a shift in attention. These findings suggest further research to determine which individual factors may be associated with differences in responses to hypnotic analgesia in highly suggestible individuals.
Investigations of the neural mechanisms underlying hypnotic responding, particularly attempts to determine whether there is lateralization of cognitive functioning, have produced equivocal results. Recently, there has been growing support for a complex understanding of hypnosis. This study was designed to examine which areas of the cortex are activated by hypnosis, and how are these changes influenced by presentation of pain and suggestions for altered perceptions. Eight subjects shown to be moderately to highly susceptible to hypnotic suggestion were administered positron emission tomography (PET) scans under three conditions: restful baseline, hypnosis, and hypnosis with a suggestion for altered pain perception. Four scans were completed under each condition, exposing subjects to two neutral (35°C) and two painful (47°C) hand immersions during baseline and hypnosis conditions. During the hypnosis-with-suggestion condition, all scans were completed with painful hand immersions, and suggestions were given for either increased or decreased pain unpleasantness. During hypnosis, a widespread increase in occipital regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF) was evident. This change was interpreted as possibly indicative of decreased arousal related to relaxation and a decrease in cross-modality suppression. This effect was thought to provide a possible explanation for reports of increased imagery that often occurs with hypnosis. Occipital rCBF was decreased in the presence of painful stimuli and provides support for the hypothesis that pain may disrupt competing cognitive processes. When specific suggestions for pain modulation were provided during hypnosis, there was an increase in rCBF in the frontal cortices, particularly the left frontal lobes. This is consistent with previous research indicating that the left frontal lobe may play a role in altering perceived external reality. These results suggest that it is important to consider the effects of specific hypnotic suggestions separately from those found for hypnosis alone.
between the evolution of Mesmerism and that of Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). Indeed, the development and propagation of both forms of psychological treatment have many similarities. The author provides an interesting historical overview of social forces that influenced the development of Mesmerism and EMDR. This is presented in a manner that speaks to those factors that continue to influence psychotherapy, in general, today. The author is careful to state that Mesmerism and EMDR are not necessarily hypnosis, but it is noted that suggestion and suggestibility may play an important role in both phenomena.

**JOURNAL:** *Psychological Bulletin*


This set of four papers provides insight into the current “state of the debate” regarding dissociation theories of hypnosis. Kirsch and Lynn review both Hilgard’s (1986) neodissociation theory and Bowers’s (1992) dissociated control theory. A primary critique that they arrive at is that these theories rely upon special mechanisms to explain hypnotic phenomena. Their conclusion is that dissociation should be used as a descriptive label rather than an explanatory concept. Kihlstrom responds to the critique of neodissociation by discussing the complementary nature of sociocognitive and neodissociation theories. He suggests that the two theoretical perspectives attend to different aspects of the hypnotic experience. An understanding of both social interaction and cognitive factors addressing consciousness are necessary to understand hypnosis.

Furthermore, Kihlstrom argues that dissociation should not be dismissed simply because the mechanism by which dissociation occurs has not been explicated. Woody and Sadler also take an integrationist view toward theories of hypnosis. They disagree with Kirsch and Lynn’s
characterization of dissociation theories as necessarily relying on special mechanisms, such as the amnesic barrier and hidden observer. Rather, they refer to Shallice and Norman’s (1986) dual system model of action, which can accommodate both dissociation and sociocognitive theories. In reply to the responses by Kihlstrom and Woody and Sadler, Kirsch and Lynn disagree that dissociation theories are useful. They essentially contend that the bases for these theories rely on outdated notions and are not empirically supported.