

The Long History of Hypnosis in Medicine

Trance experiences have been described at least as far back as the ancient Greeks, often as vehicles for the treatment of mental or physical illness. In non-Western cultures, trance states tended to be the domain of the healer, who entered a dissociative state as part of the healing ceremony.[19,20] Frequently, however, these ceremonies were public, inviting both patient and observers to enter the trance state as well.

One of the most important aspects of ritual healing in many cultures involves the movement from one state of consciousness to another. Noll[21] has persuasively argued that the ability to experience imagery appears to be a cross-cultural experience, one which embodies some innate capacity of human beings.[21] Kessler's[18] more recent study of heart bypass reaffirms this perspective, arguing that visualization (or imagery) is a process of *deliberately* forming mental pictures of a scene or occurrence.[18] In this sense, imagery may be useful to the medically ill by helping them reconstitute their relationship to a body that has in some way failed them.[43]

Hypnosis was identified as a formal phenomenon of psychotherapeutic interest in the 18th century by Franz Anton Mesmer, who employed it as an alternative treatment for many ills that we would now label as stress-related or psychosomatic. His work is credited with being the first Western conceptualization of psychotherapy,[22] a verbal therapeutic interaction between doctor and patient. Shortly thereafter, in 1784, hypnosis-or animal magnetism, as it was then known-was discredited by a panel of French experts appointed by King Louis XVI, not so much on the basis of its results as on its theories.

The panel, composed of Benjamin Franklin, the chemist Lavoisier, and the infamous Dr. Guillotin, concluded that the phenomenon was due to "nothing but heated imagination," although they acknowledged that suggestion, the influence of one individual upon another, was at the root of social order as well as personal change. Despite this rejection, hypnosis has persisted in one form or another for two centuries as a treatment involving the therapeutic use of this special alteration in consciousness.

In the mid-1950s, the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association officially recognized hypnosis as a legitimate therapeutic tool. Two professional hypnosis societies have emerged, The Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, which emphasizes research in the field, and the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis; each society publishes a journal. Hypnosis is now taught in many major medical schools, a division of the American Psychological Association is devoted to its study (Division 30), and its use in clinical and investigational areas is growing.