BRIEF REPORT: VERY DEEP HYPNOSIS

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THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Almost all hypnosis research has focused on evocation or enhancement of abilities as a result of specific suggestions (Weitzenhoffer, 1963; Hilgard, 1968; Barber, 1969). Very little research has concentrated on the experiences subjects report when they are unprogrammed by suggestion. Additionally, virtually no rigorous research has explored very deep hypnotic depths—those depths beyond the levels normally reached by excellent subjects (Tart, 1970b). The present study attempts to answer the question: When subjects are allowed to go extremely deep into hypnosis and are asked simply to let whatever happens happen, what are their experiences, is there commonality among them, and can they be logically ordered?

Electroencephalographic studies have found no differences between the EEGs of waking and hypnotized subjects (Chertok & Kramarz, 1959; Weitzenhoffer, 1963; Edmonston, 1967; Barber, 1970; Galbraith, et al., 1970). Since the depths explored in this research are more profound than those previously researched, an EEG investigation is included.

PROCEDURE

Ten subjects were selected, using the criteria of very wide experience and demonstrated excellence as hypnotic subjects. A special set and setting were created, enabling the subjects to go very deeply into hypnosis. In this set and setting, honesty and trust between subject and experimenter were central. Depth was monitored at intervals by self-report; this

This research is presented in greater detail in the author's PhD thesis entitled "Very Deep Hypnosis: An Experiential and Electroencephalographic Investigation," dated August, 1971, and available from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.
details of procedure

Each subject underwent three individual hypnosis sessions. The first two sessions for each subject were structured similarly: the subject, after being told to minimize expectations and to simply experience whatever he experienced, induced himself as deeply as he was able. Every few minutes, he was asked "depth?" and "what have you been experiencing?" The questions and answers were recorded, and after awakening, the subject completed a variety of questionnaires designed to permit full explication of his experiences.

The third session differed from the first two in that continuous electroencephalographic recording was done throughout the session.

RESULTS

A wide variety of experiences was reported, many showing very strong intersubject consistency (with a statistical significance beyond the .001 level). Experiences characteristic of the deepest phase of very deep hypnosis include: being everything, feeling oneness with everything, loss of knowledge of individual identity, no "self" or "ego," blankness, absolute mental quiet—no thoughts or images, voidness, and nothing happening. Other experiences characteristic of very deep hypnosis are: difficulty in talking, other realities, feeling totally free, complete loss of touch with external environment, feeling of motion, feeling totally spread out, mind fully separated and physically distant from body, thoughts widely spaced, subconscious thoughts and images, dissolving or spreading out, warmth or cold, feeling totally inside one's head, loss of touch with body, occasional isolated images, great darkness, no sense of time, feeling afraid, thinking in images rather than words, feelings of joy, separating of parts of the mind, feeling of consciousness being located in a particular part of the head, great brightness, feeling of floating, and feeling of clairvoyance or telepathy.

Electroencephalographically, eight of the ten subjects showed a phenomenon that occurred only at what the subject described as extremely profound depths. At those very deep points, the amplitude of the electroencephalogram, from both vertex and occipital electrode loci, showed periods of drastic decrease. These periods of marked amplitude diminution were easily distinguishable from the electroenceph-
akographic patterns immediately preceding and following them.

**DISCUSSION**

Based on my limited understanding, I offer the following viewpoint on very deep hypnosis. As a subject proceeds from light into deeper hypnosis, he progressively experiences and then "turns off (in order to go still deeper) more and more basic conscious functions. Usually, this involves paying attention to simpler and simpler conscious phenomena. For example, while in light hypnosis, a subject might experience memories involving fairly vivid pictures, as well as sounds, tactile sensations, verbal thoughts, etc. As he progresses deeper, he experiences occasional isolated images, unconnected to verbal thoughts. The subject might also proceed from experiencing complex ideas at light levels to perceiving only visual phenomena, such as great brightness, while at deeper levels.

There are exceptions to the progression towards simpler functioning—most notably "subconscious" phenomena, which typically occur deep and for which the complexity issue is not settled. However, the progression toward more basic functioning still applies; subconscious events can be viewed as extremely basic functions (this view of subconscious and other related phenomena is perhaps best elucidated by Carl Jung).

At the most profound depths, the subject has succeeded in turning off almost all conscious activity. The experiences he does attend to (being everything; feeling oneness with everything; blankness; absolute mental quiet, no thoughts, images, etc; voidness; nothing happening) are those that are more basic than his individual personality (loss of knowledge of individual identity; no self or ego). In other words, the subject has passed beyond all those cognitive patterns that define him as a specific person and separate him from other people and his environment. What is left is undifferentiated awareness—the awareness of purely "being," through which the person is identical to everything in the universe.

Another way of stating this viewpoint is to assert that the subjects gradually open themselves to more universal stimulus processing messages. Since there exists less "noise" generated by their individual personalities, they are able to "listen" in increasingly subtle ways, ending with the pure perception of existence, which underlies, and has as its over-
lay, every particular (differentiable) experience with which the person comes into contact. Even time is seen as a personal construct, a part of that overlay.

The electroencephalographic results can be interpreted as supporting this viewpoint. As the subjects go very deep into hypnosis, most show a decrease in EEG amplitude—that is, less brain electrical activity. At the deepest points, almost all subjects show a diminution of EEG activity to very low levels. This phenomenon may indicate that subjects have ceased all normal activity; the minimal electrical activity that remains may reflect undifferentiated awareness, or events from deeper or lower nervous system loci which have no conscious reflection.

CONCLUSIONS

The research presented indicates that: (1) it is possible for (at least some) hypnotic subjects to go deeper into hypnosis than has been previously explored; (2) the experiences reported in very deep hypnosis are consistent across subjects and follow a meaningful pattern—the deepest of them show a correspondence to what is usually labeled "mystical" or "unitive" experience (Watts, 1960; Deikman, 1969; Grof, 1970; Harman, 1971; Ram Dass, 1971); (3) very deep hypnosis appears to be characterized by a particular electroencephalographic pattern that differs from that of the waking state.

REFERENCES

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