

Self-Hypnosis: The Chicago Paradigm

by Erika Fromm and Stephen Kahn
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pp xiii +254. \$30.00

This is an excellent book. It is a landmark research study on self-hypnosis which was done at the University of Chicago. This work was part of a two decade, largely unfunded, disciplined investigation by numerous researchers under the direction of Dr. Erika Fromm. This multifaceted study initially focused on differences and similarities between heterohypnosis and self-hypnosis. However, as the study progressed, interest shifted to the phenomenology of self-hypnosis. This latter aspect has distinguished this study from previous research and has shed new light on the character of self-hypnosis as an entity in itself, and in its relation to heterohypnosis.

This is a complex and fascinating study worth the attention required to assimilate the ideas explored in the text. Earlier versions of ten of the 17 chapters previously have been published as journal articles or as book chapters, however these materials combined with unpublished material add the merit of giving

the reader a coherent view of the entire study as it unfolded.

The research design was tested in two pilot studies. For the study proper, a total of 33 subjects (out of 58 screened from 425 volunteer naive subjects) completed the task. Subjects were given a series of hypnotic scales and personality inventories; only those subjects rated as highly hypnotizable and without signs of psychopathology were selected. Subjects' experience in heterohypnosis was limited to administration of select hypnotic scales.

The study was conducted over a 28-day period in which the subjects performed one hour of unassisted, self-initiated, self-hypnosis in an assigned sparsely furnished room. Subjects' journal accounts of self-hypnosis and their responses to three questionnaires formed the database for examinations. Researchers empirically and phenomenologically looked at differences between self-hypnosis and heterohypnosis, the structure and content of self-hypnosis and the phenomena of self-hypnosis.

This project builds upon previous research on self-hypnosis in a number of important ways. It (1) was, in part, a phenomenological study; (2) was based

on suggestions initiated by the subject in contrast to self-directed responses to hypnotist-suggested tasks; (3) assessed the structure and content of the self-hypnotic experience rather than hypnotic task performance; (4) examined absorption in the trance itself rather than as a trait in the waking state; and (5) went beyond the response characteristics of established hypnotic scales to identify a personality type likely to be successful in self-hypnosis.

An important finding of the study is the identification of a personality type likely to be successful in self-hypnosis. Personal qualities include: being self-actualized, open to experience, taking risks, having little need for external validation, and demonstrating a high tolerance for ambiguity. Absorption, fading of reality orientation, and time distortion were found to be characteristic of both self-hypnosis and heterohypnosis. Primary process imagery was identified as the core of self-hypnosis and an indicator of trance depth. Attention was more expansive and personally meaningful in self-hypnosis than in heterohypnosis, but the latter was more successful in promoting phenomena such as age regression.

The research appears to be grounded on psychoanalytic and behavioral schools.

To facilitate understanding, a glossary of terms would have been a welcomed addition. Definitions of terms are scattered throughout the text, but they often do not coincide with the introduction of a term. Additionally, the presentation has some redundancy, perhaps reflecting the fact that segments of the book were written to be published separately.

This study is a rare example of the extended efforts of a large group of professionals dedicated to the advancement of hypnosis by scientific research. Their cooperative work serves as a model to inspire the continuing investigation of fundamental aspects of hypnosis. With the current environment of scarce funding, this book provides a model to be emulated.

The authors note that the book is addressed mainly to experimental researchers, but also to clinicians who are interested in research developments. I give this pioneering study my highest endorsement for both clinicians who are interested in self-hypnosis, and for all professionals who are interested in innovative hypnosis research.

— Reviewed by

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