

Should a Christian be involved with Hypnosis?

What is hypnosis?

Hypnosis is a process by which critical thinking is diminished and internal visualization is greatly heightened. It has been used to decrease the sensation of pain and the desire for an addiction, as well as the subconscious reaction that leads to fear. It's also been used in entertainment to temporarily convince people of things that aren't true.

There are different types of hypnosis.

Traditional hypnosis is when a hypnotist puts a person into an alternate state that opens them to commands. This is most often seen in entertainment, but it can also be done by kids messing around.

Hypnotherapy is when the hypnotist puts a person into a trance and attempts to overcome some problem. It's been used to conquer fears, lose weight, and quit smoking. Therapy is not successful unless the person fully commits to the hypnosis.

Self-hypnosis is similar to meditation. The person is trained by a hypnotist to put himself into an alternate state and reinforce certain thoughts to overcome a problem.

Covert hypnosis is using conversation to hypnotize someone without them knowing - as seen in the TV show "The Mentalist". Covert hypnosis is sometimes used by therapists on people who are sceptical of hypnosis in general, but it is also touted as a way to control people, especially for men to pick up women by influencing the woman to drop her guard.

How does hypnosis work?

Studies are slowly unlocking the mysteries of hypnosis. It is not sleep or relaxation, or even a trance. It is a re-direction of the brain's attention away from interaction with the external and toward internal thought. The brain has only so much processing power to disperse to various thinking centres. This was shown in a famous experiment done fifteen years ago. People were told to memorize either a 2-digit or 7-digit number, then choose either a fruit cup or a piece of chocolate cake. Those given the 7-digit number chose the cake far more often than the others - in part because concentrating on the number left them fewer cognitive resources to make a critical choice.

"Interaction with the external" involves taking in data from the surroundings, determining possible reactions (critical thinking), and then choosing and completing a reaction (decision making). The critical thinking and decision-making sections of the brain are most active when we are exposed to outside stimuli,

particularly stimuli that we are not comfortable with. It puts us on our guard and keeps us engaged.

Critical thinking and decision-making skills can be muted when they are not being stimulated (boredom), when they are

overwhelmed (confusion), or when brain power is needed in a different section. For instance, talking on the phone sends resources to the internal imagery section of the brain, leaving less attention for the semi we're about to drive into. Similarly, deliberate hypnotism is most often accomplished in a peaceful environment. When the setting is comfortable, for instance in a quiet room with someone we trust, those critical thinking skills aren't needed as much. Covert hypnosis often relies on confusing the subject so that their decision-making and critical thinking skills are overwhelmed and shut down out of self-defence. In both cases, a hypnotist will direct brain power to the areas that focus on mental imagery. A suggestion will slip through the critical thinking stage - that may have rejected it - and go straight into a mental picture. If the picture is strong enough or repeated often, it can be accepted as a memory. And a strong enough memory can change our beliefs and alter the criteria by which we think critically.

Being hypnotized is like downloading a file without running it through a fire wall and anti-virus program first. It removes the filter of critical thinking and the independence of decision making. Critical thinking is opened wide, and decision making is handed to either the hypnotizer or to predetermined ideas that the hypnotized reinforces within himself. Core beliefs are still there, but without that virus scanner, they can be gradually changed.

The stated goal of hypnotherapy is to implant images and memories that help people overcome some hardship. When



a smoker thinks of a cigarette, the image of pride for having quit smoking overtakes the image of desire. When someone who is afraid of water gets on a boat, she goes to an image of peace instead of the memory of nearly drowning when she was six.

But, of course, hypnosis can also be abused, even by otherwise well-meaning hypnotherapists. The imagination is a powerful tool; it can create an entirely different experience than the person ever witnessed, and create "memories" of past lives or abuse that never happened.

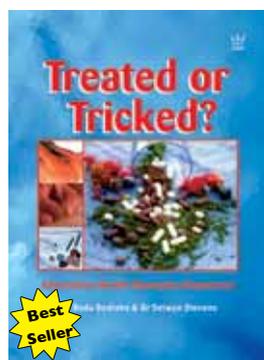
The power behind hypnosis is used every day in more subtle ways - we call it charisma. People who greatly trust their leader hand over their decision-making skills to some extent. We see this with religious leaders, military commanders, politicians, aggressive salesmen, and cultists. And we do it to ourselves when we decide to block out the pain while playing sports, or when reading a book, watching a movie, or playing a video game (especially alone) we're completely absorbed in.

Dangers of and defences against hypnosis

The first obvious danger is careless or dangerous hypnotic suggestions. Hypnosis is a form of brainwashing, and can be used to similar effect. Improperly or maliciously done, it can alter memories and beliefs in a damaging way.

Another danger is the limited training of hypno-"therapists." Hypnotherapists may be trained in hypnosis, but not necessarily in counselling. They are not equipped to deal with the underlying issues that resulted in the problem, and may just cover up something that needs to be fully dealt with.

There are two groups of people who are somewhat protected from hypnosis. The first is those who don't want to be hypnotized, who deliberately keep their decision-making and critical thinking sections "on". These people cannot be hypnotized by conventional means, although they may still



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"Have nothing to do with the things of darkness, but rather expose them."

(Ephesians 5:11)

"Treated or Tricked: Alternative Health Therapies Diagnosed"
(Book, E-Book)

be susceptible to covert hypnosis. The second group, as discovered by Stanford's School of Medicine, have a disconnect between the decision-making and critical thinking sections of their brain. It may be that while most people remove processing power from their decision-making and critical thinking sections evenly, others have a double gate-guard - hypnosis may get through one but not the other.

The Christian response

There has been talk among Christians that hypnosis may open the mind to demonic influence. We don't know how this works, exactly, but it is possible. When a person's critical-thinking and decision making skills are turned off and their internal imagination cranked up, they are more susceptible to lies and harmful influences. This would seem to be a ripe time for a demonic attack. In fact, 1 Peter 5:8 (*8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*) warns us that we need to be self-controlled (make our own decision) and alert (think critically) to be protected against the enemy. And hypnosis has long been associated with those in the occult who want to reach evil spirits. This may even explain startlingly detailed "memories" that people wouldn't normally have (Acts 16:16-18).

It's interesting to note how critical thinking and decision-making skills guard what comes into the mind in light of Proverbs 4:23 (NIV): *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it."* When we put the guards to sleep, our hearts are left undefended, which directly influences our actions. Even if the hypnotist is working for our benefit, the risk of danger is phenomenal.

The Bible validates this. Galatians 5:22-23 mentions that we need to control ourselves, not give control to someone else. Romans 6:12-13 says we need to submit ourselves to God, not someone else. Romans 6:16 warns us against submitting our decisions to another. Despite the success stories, despite how much we may trust the hypnotist, the Bible tells us to stay away from anyone trying to control our minds.



Jubilee Resources International Inc.
PO Box 36-044

Wellington Mail Centre 5045, New Zealand

Internet: www.jubileeresources.org

www.facebook.com/jubileeresources

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