

DEMYSTIFYING hypnosis

Can someone really make you bark like a dog against your will?

by Deborah Goldman

Hypnosis was once synonymous with goateed men swinging pocket watches in front of their subjects. Although the practice is now known to be part of mainstream psychological therapies, hypnotist entertainers still lure in audiences with shows that have members of the audience acting like barnyard animals.

Is the portrayal of the hypnotist as a mystic or manipulator

accurate? My mother, who is a trained hypnotherapist, certainly didn't go about the local high street telling people, "Look into my eyes, look into my eyes!"

These negative depictions sometimes cause people to fear hypnosis. Some practitioners have even disguised its identity behind more palatable labels such as "visualisation" and "stress reduction techniques".

A good hypnotherapist will use hypnosis to slip into your unconscious to bring about the changes you desire in yourself. As with any therapeutic practice, however, some are better qualified and more talented than others.

I spoke with two of Singapore's leading hypnotherapy experts to find out how the practice is used in healing.

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EL: How does the power of suggestion work?

NH: When you are in a state of hypnosis, the mind is calm and relaxed. At this point, the subconscious mind becomes open to suggestion and healing.

EL: What is the “critical factor”?

NH: This is the comparing mechanism between the conscious and the unconscious mind. For instance, if someone were to tell you, “You are very creative,” your conscious mind will check with the subconscious mind whether it believes this to be true. When someone is in a hypnotic state, however, the critical factor is bypassed and the hypnotherapist can deal with the unconscious mind directly.

EL: What is self-hypnosis?

NH: This is when a person learns how to hypnotise themselves in order to utilise the power of suggestion. I often help clients learn the techniques necessary to do this, because when used in conjunction with our sessions, it can help speed the healing process.

EL: How is it that stage hypnotists are able to get people to do bizarre things?

NH: Hypnotism is sometimes confused with mind control, and stage hypnotists are largely responsible for this. The audience members who go up on stage do so voluntarily and are more likely to respond to the hypnotist’s

suggestions. If a shy, introverted person were to be dragged on stage unwillingly, the suggestions are unlikely to have any effect.

EL: What are some of the common problems that you treat with hypnosis?

NH: Anything from quitting smoking and overeating to childhood trauma, phobias, anxiety and depression. At the moment, I see many clients who are suffering from anxiety caused by the economy. The key here is to help clients relax and let go.

EL: What is regression and under what circumstances is it beneficial?

NH: Regression is the process of taking someone back to childhood, usually before age seven, to find the root cause of a problem. Often the root is not as dramatic as you might think, and doesn’t always lead to a discovery of abuse or other terrible events. Sometimes children just aren’t able to understand certain events or feelings, but as adults we are better equipped to figure something out and let it go. Between 60 and 70 percent of cases can be cured with this method.

I recently treated someone who had been suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) for 20 years. In his case, using the power of suggestion was not enough. I used regression to take him back to his childhood, and then to find the root cause of the problem. Once we discovered



this, he was able to let go of the OCD. It took only four sessions to accomplish this.

EL: Is hypnotherapy useful in the treatment of physical disorders?

NH: Although we cannot mend broken bones, hypnosis helps with pain management. I treat many cancer patients by helping them feel good about themselves. All healing is self-healing. Hypnotherapists are simply facilitating the process. ■