

Opening the minds to revoke the understanding of Hypnosis – The Mind Theory

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Abstract

Hypnosis is emerging as a very effective psychological therapy. Even though it has proven beneficial in medical and dental field, its applications are still limited due to lack of knowledge and inadequate training. Understanding the basic mechanism of hypnosis lays a strong foundation to its applicability. There are numerous theories proposed by various authors in the same regard. Similarly, Dr John Kappas proposed theory of mind in simpler and easier way which can be understood even by common man. The theory states that the mind is divided into four parts – conscious mind,

critical area, subconscious mind, and primitive memory.

The mind receives message units from everything around and from within the body, which will get filtered by the critical area and sent to subconscious mind for processing and storing in the primitive memory. During hypnosis, due to overload of messages the critical filter break and give access to sub conscious mind when the individual enters a highly hypnotizable state, which is the mechanism of hypnosis. Thus, the theory of mind gives a clear picture of the science behind hypnosis and makes it easier to understand and accept it in the day to day clinical practice.

Keywords: conscious mind, subconscious mind, critical area, message units, Hypnosis.

Introduction

Hypnosis, one of the oldest psychotherapeutic methods is coming into limelight as a captivating subject for scientific research and as an effectual clinical technique. Hypnosis has been defined as “a state of consciousness involving focused attention and reduced, awareness characterized by an enhanced capacity for response to suggestion”.¹ Understanding the basic mechanism behind hypnosis is one of the topics which has evoked interest in many researchers. This led to the proposal of various models to explain the mechanism of hypnosis.

Ivan Pavlov a Russian physiologist proposed a theory of hypnosis in animals with the principal mechanism of inhibiting the cortical and subcortical activity. This was stated in the book of William Edmonston an American psychologist in 1981.² Edmonston (1991) postulated that Neutral hypnosis was induced by relaxation.³ Many authors have suggested various theories on hypnosis and studies have been conducted to study the neurophysiology of brain during hypnosis.

There are various misconceptions about hypnosis amongst the dental fraternity that has limited its application to dentistry.⁴ The reasons attributed to this being the lack of knowledge, and inadequate training.

The present article aims to explain the science and mechanism of hypnosis. The article focusses on the Theory of mind to explain the same which makes it easier to understand and accept hypnosis as an therapeutic measure to be incorporated in the medical and dental clinical practice.

John Kappas has put forth a theory of Mind to explain the mechanism of hypnosis in a simpler manner, which is narrated in the present article.

Mechanism behind hypnosis⁵

To understand the theory of mind we need to revisit how primitive man has evolved. Animals have undergone tremendous evolution based on their survival struggle, developing fight or flight abilities depending on their strengths and weaknesses. The animals which fail to undergo evolution based on the fight or flight principle faced extinction. During the era of primitive man, human beings were functioning based on instincts without any inhibitory process.

For survival the primitive man had to undergo changes in his behaviour and approach which led to the development of inhibitory mechanism leading to consciousness and responsibilities towards others and himself. The subconscious of man started to regulate the inhibitory mechanism which was involuntary. The parasympathetic system developed as an automatic compensating system to these inhibitory processes. As the evolution of man progressed further the concept of fight was overtaken by the concept of flight. This led to the development of anxiety in man. With increased conscious awareness of the unknown and the potentially life-threatening things the anxiety of the man also increased, which made him resolve to flight than fight mode.

Hypnosis and anxiety can be correlated as when man undergoes extreme anxiety, which he cannot handle, he will enter a state of trance which is the reversal to the most primitive mind.

The human brain receives messages from four different sources. The first being the external environment which includes all those things that surround us. The second includes the activities or message units sent by our body to the brain. The third is constituted by the conscious mind which processes thinking, decision making etc. Lastly, the fourth source is the subconscious mind which

stores all the message units without either accepting or rejecting them.

Evolution has made man capable of dealing with larger amounts of messages being sent to the brain without activating the fight or flight mechanism. Instead, development has led to a more sophisticated form of mechanism to deal with this, the pain/pleasure mechanism. The known factors are those which are already learned, understood, and do not cause any threat and constitute the pleasure component. The unknown factors are not learnt and cause psychological and physiological reactions that have not been experienced before leading to development of fear. The known and the unknown factors cannot be generalized because the factors known to some can be unknown to others and vice versa.

Based on the pain/pleasure principle, to cope with the enormous amount of message units received from the four sources, the modern man added reaction Vs action to his fight reaction and repression Vs depression to flight reaction. With evolution, progressing of the involuntary functions in man which were under control of the conscious mind and the subconscious reactions to these functions were reduced. The development of more complexity in the mind of man developed nervous anxiety and tension. A reaction in a situation of anxiety would let the man to vent it through walking, running, or through some physical activity. As an extension of flight syndrome venting was done later in the form of dream or emotional reaction which indicates repression where immediate reaction is controlled.

In situations when the brain receives more message units from one of the sources, the body feels threatened from the external environment and when it cannot cope up with the pressure, the body enters spasmodic shivering and adrenal secretions increase. This will further add to

the message units sent to the brain and when the conscious mind breakdown the subconscious mind takes charge and initiate fight or flight response. The body undergoes physiologic changes like increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure and dilated pupils. When no fight situation exists, anxiety increases and the parasympathetic system sets in putting the body into a slow, passive, sleep like mode, which is like the primitive man lying dead till the threat is cleared.

In other words, whenever the situation goes beyond fight the body reverts to an apathetic, highly suggestible mode. This can be futile if it happens in an uncontrolled environment, and since the body has entered a highly receptive mode any negative messages sent can create havoc. Hypnosis is created in a similar manner but in a positive controlled environment. The individual entering the therapists office, develops fear of unknown and the messages sent from the objects in the session rooms adds on giving a feeling of loss of control. The subject is seated in a comfortable position and asked to close his eyes which will retrieve the power of vision and increase the nervousness. The suggestions given by the therapist increase the message units. The conscious mind tries to fight the situation but fails, as the operator's instructions are much faster for the conscious brain to process it. In this situation the subject reverts to the subconscious mind and the defence mechanism of fight. The body stiffens and realises that some part of the brain activity is inhibited, and flow message units leads to acceptance of escape mechanism through flight. At that moment, snap of a finger and touch on the forehead or just voice modulation leads to escape replacing the urge to fight and the individual slips into hypnotic trans. At this state the body and brain are in complete safe environment and feels relaxed.

The body undergoes various physiological changes during the fight or flight mechanism in hypnosis. The first is breathing which is initially increased as the brain requires more oxygen to fight the fearful situation. Secondly, dryness in the mouth which is a common sign of fear. Third is the rapid eye movement where the brain tries to fight by venting the fear through dreams. Once the individual enters the hypnotic state, the breathing slows down, eyes roll up and the facial muscles relax, and the body becomes still. This state of relaxation is created by the release of relaxation hormone.

In brief, anxiety and hypnosis are similar, except that the hypnosis is experienced as pleasure in a controlled environment with positive suggestions and anxiety is experienced as pain in an uncontrolled environment with self-negative suggestions.

Theory of Mind⁵

The mind is divided into four areas which must be influenced to take a person to suggestible state.

- Conscious mind – any events and feelings can be retained or remembered for short period of about two hours.
- Critical area of mind – partly conscious partly subconscious. Retains information from past twenty-four hours.
- Modern memory area of mind – part of subconscious mind, which holds memory from the time of conception to present stage of life.
- Primitive area of mind - this is also part of subconscious mind which include primitive memory including genetic heritage, and evolved learning and conditioning and lies dormant. It gets activated only when triggered.

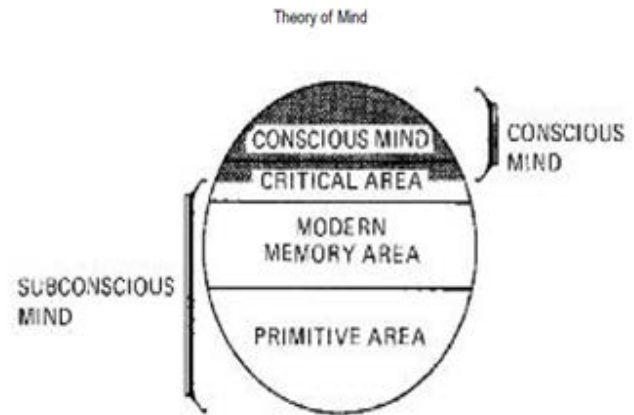


Fig 1: Theory of mind [By John Kappas]⁵

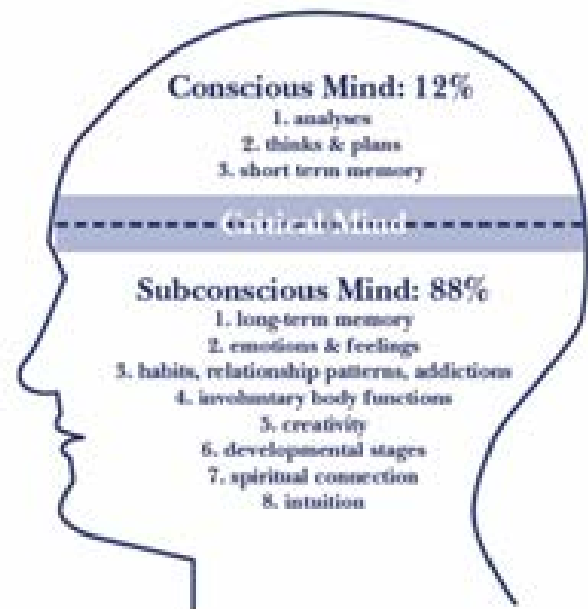


Fig 2: theory of mind by Dr Kappas (Simplified)⁷

Everyday numerous message units are sent to the conscious mind which are stocked and detained at the critical area. The critical area which is partially conscious and partially subconscious is developed by the individual's conscious level which in turn is a product of the education and analytical senses. The message units held by the conscious mind transfer the messages to modern memory, while the subconscious mind avoids potentially hazardous messages. The critical area will block the messages from entering the modern

memory. During sleep or in the state of hypnosis critical area will not be able to retain the messages entering the subconscious mind.

Accumulation of enormous number of messages in the critical area makes the individual fatigued and disorganised. Sleep helps the person to vent the messages into the subconscious mind which makes the person feel refreshed. Similarly in hypnosis lot of messages will be bombarded to the critical area which makes the individual slip into sleep.

The messages that are dropped into the subconscious mind are scrutinized and a few are allowed to enter the modern memory while the remaining are discarded as dreams. The messages stored in modern memory will be segregated and stored in different parts of primitive memory.

As the normal wakeful hours of a person is 16 hrs, it will be during this time that the critical area analyses message units before dropping them into the modern memory. The longer the message unit stays in the critical area the weaker it gets. So, any messages reaching the modern memory will have more longevity and strength.

During hypnosis this process will be occurring in minutes. The message units that are sent from the conscious mind to the critical area for analysis takes place in minutes. The critical mind drops the messages quickly to the modern memory since a lot of unknown processes occur around them. The suggestions given during this state are usually accepted quickly. But sometimes the subconscious mind may abreact to the suggestion given and try to vent it through the body. In such situation the suggestions are delivered once again after the abreaction is recognised. Once there are no further reactions encountered, the suggestions are repeated which will enter the modern memory. After acceptance from the modern memory, the suggestion is

sent to the critical area where the suggestion will be analysed and accepted by the conscious mind for further action.

A suggestion rendered under hypnosis will be more powerful than a suggestion given in the conscious state as there is no dilution of suggestion due to passage of messages directly to modern memory from critical area. A consistent positive reaction to a suggestion rendered will become a habit without requirement of constant reminder or motivation. The success of any suggestion rendered will depend on how it is understood by the conscious mind and the mode in which it is sent to the critical area where the suggestions are analysed and changed and finally sent to the modern memory where it gets stored as symbols to deliver the required action. The structuring of the suggestion rendered will also play an important role in the success of hypnosis. So well-structured suggestion based on the individual requirement improves the success rate of hypnosis.

The powerful acceptance of theory of mind can be correlated to the study conducted by Schimdt et al. in 2017. The study was conducted to assess the ability of individual to read the numbers with visual blockade under hypnosis and the result concluded that the individuals under hypnosis were not able to read the numbers under hypnosis even without actual blockade of eyes which indicates the power of mind on the functioning of brain.⁶

Conclusion

The theory of mind proposed by John Kappas, bridges the gap in the knowledge for understanding the basic mechanism of hypnosis. This theory has been put forth in such a simplified manner making it easier for common man to understand. The limitation being the lack of studies supporting the theory. The uniqueness of the theory has instigated research in the field of hypnosis

to study its applications in day-to-day clinical practice of both the medical and dental fields.

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