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The Higher Thought Institute

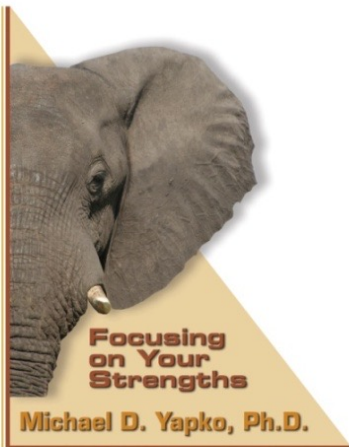
presents

Mindfulness and Hypnosis: The Shared Dynamics of Suggestion in Transforming Experience

with

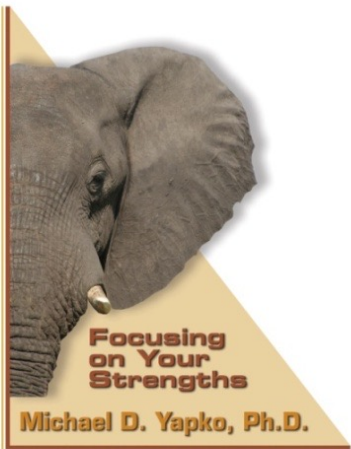
Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.

March 3, 2023



Section 1: A Beginner's Mind

Opening Up to a Different Perspective



In the beginner's mind there are
many possibilities, but in the
expert's there are few.

Shunryu Suzuki

Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

To encourage a more “whole person” participation, in recent years clinicians have begun to use guided mindfulness meditations (GMMs)

These have proved valuable in reducing anxiety, depression, and pain (and many other conditions); GMMs work, but our focus this morning will be on considering *HOW* they work

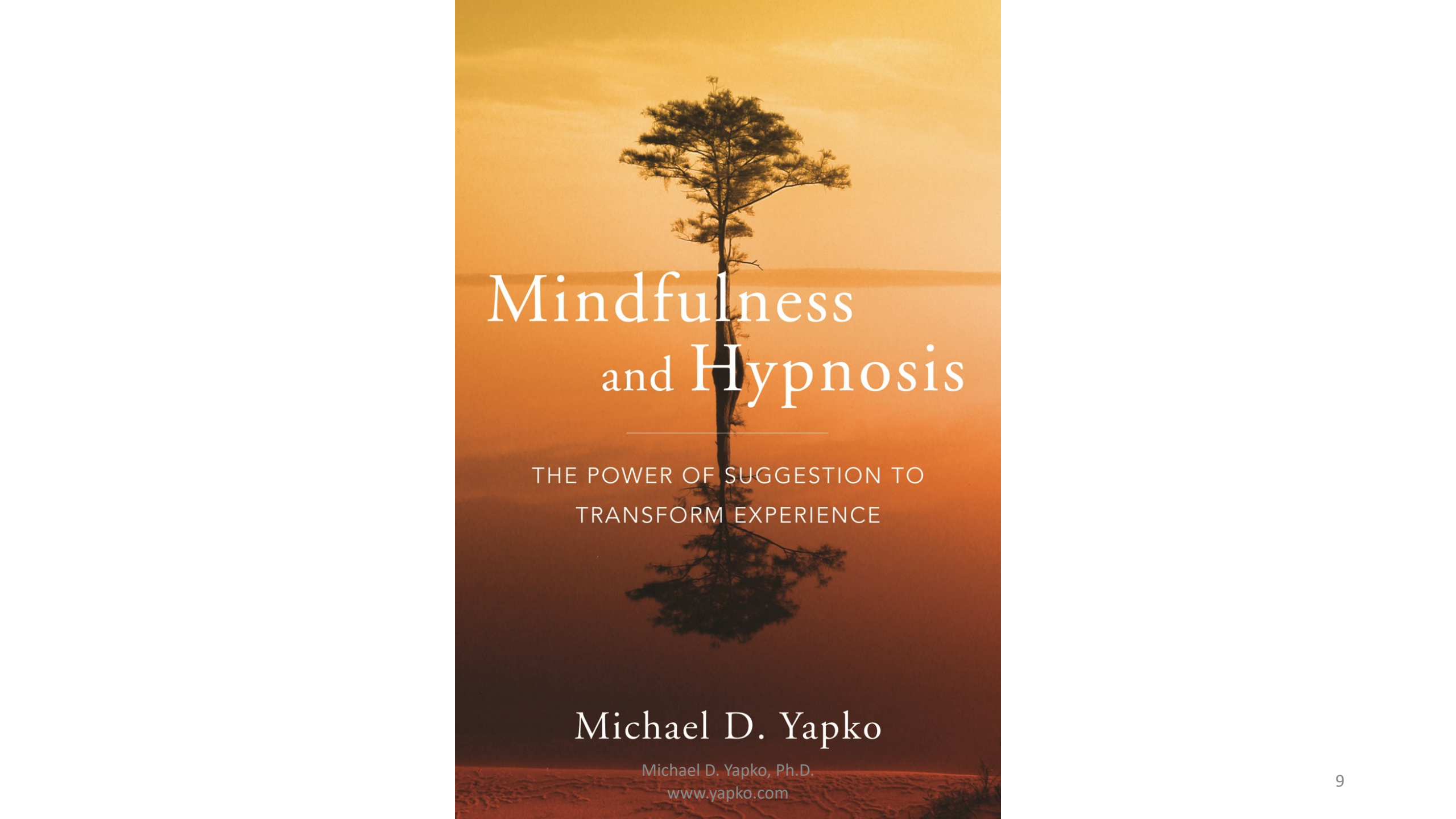
Hypnosis, the study of *how* people generate subjective experience, especially in response to suggestions from others (as in GMMs) has a great deal to offer in terms of relevant insights into these methods

To Consider How GMMs Work, We Can Consider Different Levels of Analysis

Should we:

- Strive to identify **changes in the brain and nervous system**?
- Explore the **historical roots** of the mindfulness practice?
- Analyze the prevailing **social conditions** giving rise to its popularity?
- Explore the **therapeutic relationship** in which it is practiced?
- Measure the tangible **clinical benefits**?
- Contemplate the **spiritual dimension** and both its tangible and intangible benefits?

My Own Level of Analysis is on the *Language* of Guided Mindfulness Experiences- the *Linguistic and Semantic Components* of the Things Clinicians *Actually Say* to Their Clients and the Resulting *Suggested* Effects



Mindfulness and Hypnosis

THE POWER OF SUGGESTION TO
TRANSFORM EXPERIENCE

Michael D. Yapko

Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.
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Like Hypnosis, The Word Mindfulness Can Have Different Meanings

- **A system of thought**
- **A vehicle for self-exploration**
- **A path to enlightenment**
- **A means of living**

Mindfulness emphasizes the importance of establishing a greater focus on being in the present moment rather than rehashing the unchangeable past or anticipating a future that may never happen.

“Mindfulness is paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, as if your life depended on it, non-judgmentally... It’s not about doing, it’s about *being*.”

Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D.

“Mindfulness: Seeing and responding to what is”

Marsha Linehan, Ph.D.

University of Washington

Each of us has a reflexive pattern that leads us to identify either similarities or differences across experiences

How is this *like* that?

How is this *different from* that?

We in the field of hypnosis reflexively tend to point out the *differences* that lead us to think of hypnosis as something “special,” as if entirely *distinct* from other approaches, thus requiring special recognition and consideration

In my study of mindfulness, though, it became glaringly apparent how many overlaps there are between hypnosis and mindfulness. I intend to identify some of these overlaps as well as some of the differences.

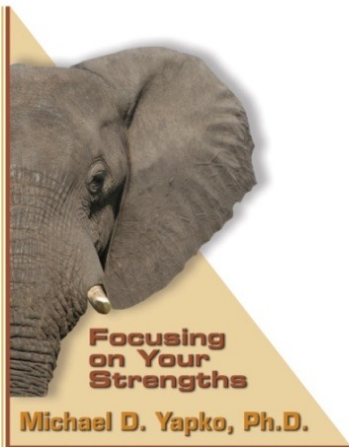
I intend to address the role of hypnosis and hypnotic phenomena in the use of guided mindfulness meditations (GMMs); as you will see, they are closely related in both *form* and *function*

Mindfulness typically makes use of guided meditations that are structurally identical to hypnosis sessions, but they are preceded by a very different statement of expectancy:

“This is a process of cultivating generosity, compassion and openness toward yourself, an orientation of non-harming”

(Jon Kabat-Zinn)

The field of hypnosis has a considerably longer history of exploring many of the key factors – *especially unconscious ones* - that regulate peoples' responses to experiential processes in general and GMMs in particular



Modern clinical hypnosis employs attentional focusing strategies to elicit healing resources the patient may not even know he or she has, empowering him or her in the process

During Hypnosis, People Can Experience Marked Shifts in:

- **Physiology** (breathing slows, muscles relax, etc.)
- **Sensory perception** (temp, weight, distance, etc.)
- **Cognition** (thoughts clearer, slower, detached, etc.)
- **Affect** (happier, sadder, curious, etc.)
- **Behavior** (self-help, new behavior, proactive, etc.)
- **Temporal orientation** (past, present, future focus)
- **Self-definition** (more resourceful, competent, etc.)

Likewise, During GMMs People Experience the Same Structural and Phenomenological Shifts

- **Physiology** (breathing slows, muscles relax, etc.)
- **Sensory perception** (feel lighter, larger, smaller, etc.)
- **Cognition** (thoughts seem distant, clearer, etc.)
- **Affect** (compassion, self-acceptance, loving, etc.)
- **Behavior** (act with equanimity, relate kindly, etc.)
- **Temporal orientation** (the power of now, etc.)
- **Self-definition** (feel transformed, enlightened, etc.)

The Key Questions:

- How does paying attention – focusing – translate into non-volitional yet meaningful responses?
- Why do some people respond so dramatically to experiential processes such as mindfulness, finding them “transformative”?
- What general factors determine one’s capacity to respond?
- What role do specific factors such as expectancy, suggestibility, and dissociation play in patient responsiveness?
- Can an individual’s quality of responsiveness be increased?

Does anyone come to therapy specifically looking to learn Buddhist meditations in order to become mindful?

Or are they instructed in the ways of mindfulness as a means of attaining the clinical outcome they came for?

Guided Mindfulness Meditations (GMMs) in Therapy

As mindfulness continues to expand into mainstream clinical practices, a key question emerges that provides the foundation of my presentation today:

- **Does mindfulness used as a *clinical tool* in therapy change its essential nature from mindfulness as a *spiritual practice*?**

Spiritual versus Clinical Applications

- **If Tanzan and Ekido were to come into psychotherapy, how many therapists would listen to the story of what happened and then join Tanzan in telling Ekido to "just let it go" rather than sort through what happened?**
- **As a parallel, if a couple comes in for therapy because one spouse did something that crossed a line and then refused to discuss it when the other spouse questioned him or her about it, is there any therapist *anywhere* that would simply tell the concerned spouse to "let it go" without talking it through to some constructive resolution that would well serve the relationship? From this vantage point, Tanzan's reply isn't enlightening- it's *avoidant*.**

“Throughout the 2,500 years that mindfulness has been a part of the Buddhist contemplative tradition, it was never intended to strictly be an awareness or attention-regulation exercise. Rather, it was always cultivated while concomitantly evoking the heartfelt, soulful quality of attunement, including tenderness, care, loving-kindness, wishing well for others and oneself, unselfish love, and compassion.”

Lama Surya Das

from the Foreword to *Mindfulness and Hypnosis*

Clinical Applications Differ From Spiritual Pursuits

- Therapy is purposeful and goal-oriented; success is measured in symptom reduction, cure, relapse prevention and risk factor reduction
- Therapy is an interpersonal process inevitably featuring social demand characteristics
- Suggestion is used in deliberate and purposeful ways to deliberately influence the client

Muddy Road

Tanzan and Ekido were once traveling together down a muddy road. A heavy rain was still falling. Coming around a bend, they met a lovely girl in a silk komono and sash, unable to cross the intersection.

"Come on, girl," said Tanzan at once. Lifting her in his arms, he carried her over the mud.

Ekido did not speak again until that night when they reached a lodging temple. Then he could no longer restrain himself. "We monks don't go near females," he told Tanzan, "especially not young lovely ones. It is dangerous. Why did you do that?"

"I left the girl there," said Tanzan. "Are you still carrying her?"

Reps, P. & Senzaki, N. (2008). *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones Classic Edition: A Collection of Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*. North Clarendon, VT.: Tuttle Publishing Co.

Explicit Teaching Points... or Missed Opportunities?

- How did Tanzan decide he could break the rule in this instance? **(A chance to teach judgment over rules)**
- How did Ekido manage to control his first reaction and hold his questioning until that evening? **(A chance to reinforce impulse control)**
- How did Tanzan decide Ekido didn't deserve an explanation for his deviation from protocol? **(A chance to model no one is above the principle that healthy relationships are about transparency and communication)**

Two Versions of Mindfulness

- Psychologist Marsha Linehan, who has had a great impact on the field of psychotherapy by integrating mindfulness into her Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) model of treatment for borderline personality disordered individuals, makes a distinction between what she calls “two versions of mindfulness.” She thinks of one version as a “**spiritual mindfulness**” and the other as a “**non-spiritual mindfulness**” (from an interview with L. Zeig, 2010 in the Milton H. Erickson Foundation *Newsletter*).

Two Versions of Mindfulness

- Both, though, involve “the notion of acceptance and change together,” and she stresses heavily the importance of being non-judgmental as the core of the compassion that mindfulness engenders (2010, p.23). Linehan, in stating that “the role of the therapist is not (to) promulgate spirituality,” is clearly an advocate for teaching mindfulness skills in the therapy context, where the goal is to develop a more “effective way of transacting with yourself and the environment” (2010, p.24).

Jay Haley on Types of Hypnosis

"I tend to think of three different hypnoses: 1) the **personal hypnosis**, where you go through a yoga experience or meditation experience, or whatever; 2) **research hypnosis**, where you're trying to find the limits of influence of hypnosis in various ways—in terms of deafness, color-blindness, or whatever; and, 3) **clinical hypnosis**, where you're trying to change someone—and I don't think that has anything to do with the other two hypnoses. . . . It's so different changing someone; the person's motivation is different, the responses are different."

Jay Haley (in Yapko, *Trancework* (5th ed.), 2019, p. 520)

Lesson #1: What You Focus on, You Amplify in Your Awareness

The salient clinical questions are, “What do we want the client to focus on, and why?”

The Four “Foundations” (Focal Points) of Mindfulness

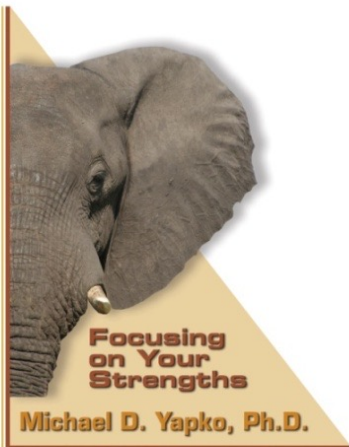
- Bodily sensations
- Feelings (not emotions, but valence of current experience)
- State of mind (mood, consciousness)
- Mental contents (images, thoughts, emotions)

Common Elements of Mindfulness and Hypnosis

- Hypnosis and GMMs are *experiential processes* that share the common structural components of ***suggestion*** and ***dissociation***; they both hold great potential to ***redirect attention*** and ***expand awareness*** in meaningful directions
- Both methodologies are built on a foundation of *capacity for focus*. How are guided experiences such as these influenced by factors such as the client's attentional capacity, dissociative ability, cognitive style, and other such patterns?

Does Either Hypnosis or Mindfulness Cure People?

NO! It's what happens ***DURING*** these experiences - the new and beneficial associations the client forms through the shift in focus and absorption in new possibilities – that holds the *potential* to be therapeutic



Capacities Strived for and Enhanced by Mindfulness Meditation

- **Attention (both length and intensity)**
- Sense withdrawal (reduction of somatic awareness)
- **Thought-cognition (beyond “thought stopping”)**
- Lucid dreaming (alert awareness through sleep)
- **Emotional intelligence (positive emotion)**
- Equanimity (non-defensive acceptance)
- **Motivation (altruism)**
- Moral maturity (love and compassion)
- **Unique capacities (e.g., control of the autonomic ns)**

Suggestions Catalyze the Goals of Treatment

- *The inevitability of the utilization of suggestion is the greatest overlap between mindfulness applied therapeutically in a goal-oriented way and hypnosis.*
- Hypnosis is unapologetically, overtly goal-oriented.
- It establishes an expectation and then gently leads the client (with direct and/or indirect suggestions) on an experiential path towards fulfilling that expectation.
- *When guided mindful meditations are explicit in their goals, their methods are every bit as suggestive as hypnosis.*

What Are Some of the Therapeutic Suggestions Embedded in Mindfulness Approaches?

- You can expect this experience/method to be helpful to you **(thereby building expectancy)**
- You can stop focusing on problems and just focus on breathing **(thereby curtailing rumination)**
- You can trust your breath to always be there **(thereby providing a stabilizing, empowering self-regulation)**
- You can notice your experience without judging it **(thereby curtailing negative self-evaluation)**
- You can be present in the moment **(thereby detaching from the painful past or anxiety-provoking future)**

Paradoxes in Mindfulness and Hypnosis

- What makes it special is that it isn't special.
- You're unique...just like everyone else.
- Don't change. *Accept*. So that things can change.
- When you are really doing something, you are not there.
- The goal is to have no goal.
- Do as I suggest...but behave spontaneously
- This metaphor is not about you...but this metaphor is about you
- Confusion provides clarity

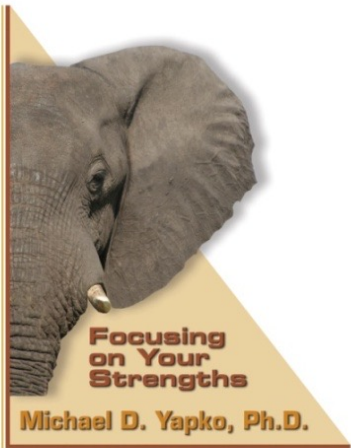
The everyday trance; the everyday meditation

Before enlightenment: chop wood,
carry water.

After enlightenment: chop wood,
carry water

Zen proverb

Section 2: Responsiveness, Dissociation, Association, and The Case of Terri



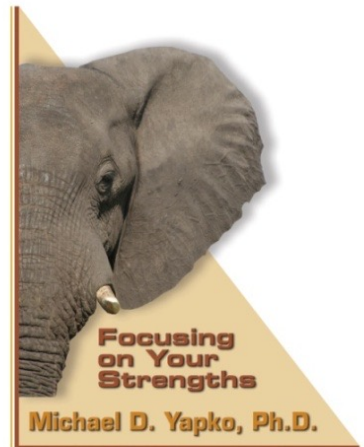
Individual Capacities for Contemplative Experiences Differ Markedly

Hypnosis as a field of inquiry has paid substantial attention to the question of individual differences in responsiveness to such experiential methods (generally termed “hypnotizability” or “hypnotic susceptibility”);

It is a well-established fact that people differ in their degree of hypnotic responsiveness

Domains Affecting Responsiveness

- Personal
- Interpersonal
- Contextual



Expectancy and Experiential Treatment Response

- Expectations regarding one's capacity to respond (fixed trait vs. changeable)
- Expectations regarding the general effects of the experience
- Expectations regarding the specific effects of the experience on the presenting problem(s)

The induction is the vehicle for facilitating dissociation, the defining characteristic of both hypnosis and meditation

Anything can serve as an induction process as long as it serves to ***absorb and elicit*** meaningful responses

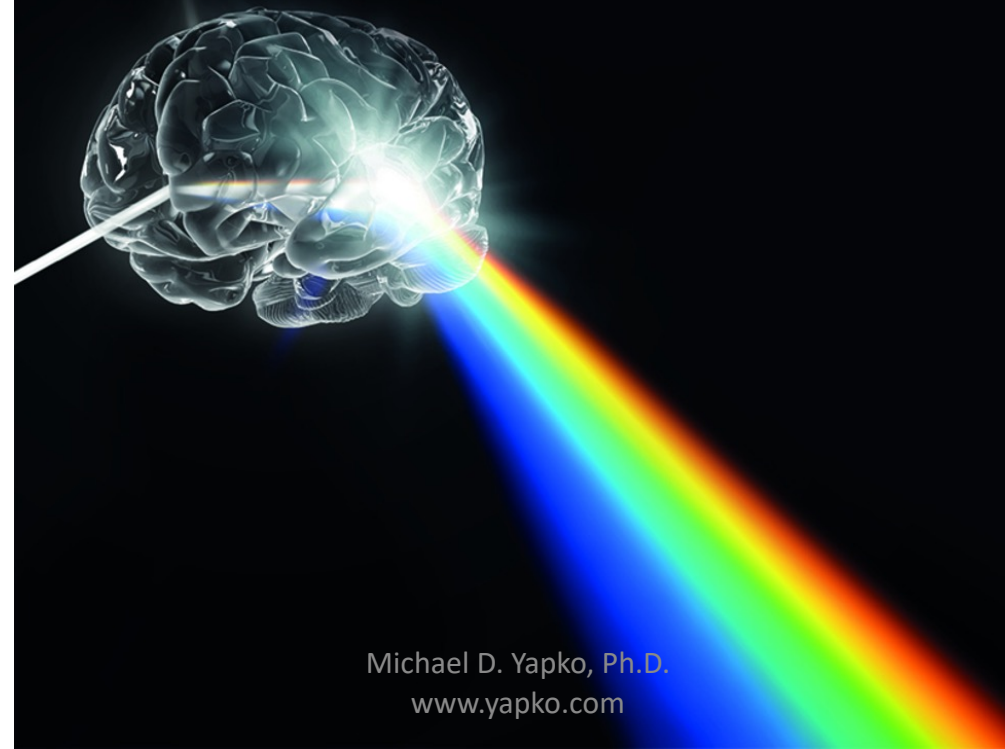
FIFTH EDITION



TRANCEWORK

An Introduction to the Practice of Clinical Hypnosis

Michael Yapko



Michael D. Yapko, Ph.D.
www.yapko.com

Dissociation

- Dissociation, simply defined, involves breaking a global, multifaceted emotional, sensory, and/or cognitive experience into its component parts. As soon as you suggest to someone that she focus on some specific stimulus, or experience a sense of detachment from some thought or feeling, you're directly and indirectly suggesting dissociation---drawing her attention to this aspect of the experience, functionally separating it from the rest.

The ability to detach from your own thoughts and other aspects of your internal experience is essential to transforming it

Dissociation in Normal Experience

- Self-hypnosis, meditation (“a part of... and apart from”)
- Fantasy proneness, fantasizing
- Daydreaming
- Out-of-body experiences (e.g., “I watched as if it were someone else”)
- Automatic responses (e.g., so-called “highway hypnosis”)
- Mixed feelings (e.g., “part of me feels *this* and part of me feels *that*”)

Dissociation

- When people speak about “parts” of themselves, such as when someone says, “My head tells me this, but my heart tells me that,” or “Part of me cares and the rest of me couldn’t care less,” they’re using the language---and suggested subjective reality---of dissociation.

Dissociation in GMM

- The ability to detach oneself from one's thoughts---externalizing angry or self-destructive thoughts by seeing them, for example, simply as “clouds passing in the sky”---has great therapeutic potential as a critical step in building impulse control, frustration tolerance, and reality-testing skills.

Dissociation in GMM

- In GMM, dissociation similarly becomes evident when people can separate themselves from their usual frames of reference. When someone drifts off into serenity through a narrowed focus on just the physical experience of breathing, the accompanying sense of depersonalization can be a beneficial dissociative response.

Consider the Role of Dissociation in Different Therapy Approaches

- **CBT** (“You are not your thoughts”)
- **EFT** (“Focus on the feeling beneath that behavior”)
- **Ego State Therapy** (“Which part of you tells you that?”)
- **Psychodynamic** (“Your unconscious need has motivated you to do that”)
- **Gestalt** (“It seems your hand is trying to tell you something”)
- **Mindfulness** (“You can focus on forgiveness”)
- **ACT** (“You can focus on acceptance”)
- **DBT** (“You can watch the impulsive message go by as if on a sign carried by a parade marcher”)
- **Ericksonian Hypnosis** (“Your unconscious is smarter than you are”)
- **Strategic Therapy** (“When you carry out the task, you’ll discover something important”)

Consider the Role of Detachment in Different Therapy Outcomes

Detach from:

- the pain in order to manage it
- the emotion and be more rational
- the past and be more present
- the fear and do it anyways
- situational triggers and react differently
- the wish and be more accepting
- the inner critic and be more compassionate

“Part of you is experiencing this while the rest of you (or other parts of you) is experiencing that”

“Just ***allow*** yourself to experience...”

Hypnosis Encourages Automaticity in Responding

Mindfulness strives to generate reflexive (nonvolitional, unconscious) responding as well but doesn't yet emphasize the role of suggested dissociation in the process

Dissociation and Automaticity

- In hypnosis, dissociation becomes especially evident when people respond non-volitionally, that is, without conscious effort, to a suggestion. For example, a clinician might suggest an experience of lightness or warmth in his or her body; Suggestions are offered for the client to *allow* the experience of lightness or warmth. The client is not aware of expending any effort to respond, instead the feelings of lightness or warmth seem to “*just happen.*”

Suggesting Seeing in Color vs. Black and White

- Conducted at Harvard University by Stephen Kosslyn and colleagues, the study was designed to find out whether hypnosis could be used to modulate color perception. Ss were shown a series of patterns, some involving color and some only shades of gray while in waking and hypnotized conditions.
- Color stimuli were shown to be processed in a separate brain region than the gray stimuli.

Suggesting Seeing in Color vs. Black and White

- Researchers suggested that the Ss visualize each image shown them as either color or b&w while the PET scan measured brain activity.
- When Ss were hypnotized, the color areas of the brain were less active when told to see color as only gray; likewise, the color areas were more active when told to see (i.e., hallucinate) the gray stimulus as colorful.
- Brain areas used to perceive color were activated in both brain hemispheres, despite exposure to only gray, just as they would activate when genuinely exposed to a color stimulus. This did not occur when not in hypnosis

Does the mind fool the brain
in mindfulness and hypnosis?

“Hypnotic visual illusion alters color
processing in the brain.”

Kosslyn et al., *Am J of Psychiatry*, 2000, 157, 1279-1284

The Eye Pupil Adjusts to Imaginary Light

Abstract: “If a mental image is a re-representation of a perception, then properties such as luminance or brightness should also be conjured up in the image. We monitored pupil diameters with an infrared eye tracker while participants first saw and then generated mental images of shapes that varied in luminance or complexity, while looking at an empty gray background. Participants also imagined familiar scenarios (e.g., a “sunny sky” or a “dark room”) while looking at the same neutral screen. **In all experiments, participants’ eye pupils dilated or constricted, respectively, in response to dark and bright imagined objects and scenarios.** Shape complexity increased mental effort and pupillary sizes independently of shapes’ luminance. Because the **participants were unable to voluntarily constrict their eyes’ pupils**, the observed pupillary adjustments to imaginary light present a strong case for accounts of **mental imagery as a process based on brain states similar to those that arise during perception.**”

Laeng, B. & Sulutvedt, U. (January, 2014). The eye pupil adjusts to imaginary light. *Psychological Science*, 25(1), 188-197.

The Induction of Affect

- Consider demonstrations of strong affect (e.g., “funniest movie”)
- Suggestion can be used to trigger emotional responses and emotionally based perspectives.
- What are the implications for the use of GMMs to elicit compassion? LovingKindness? Equanimity?

Is hypnotizability or focus learnable,
changeable?
Will practice enhance responsiveness?

How does your belief influence your clinical practice?

What about ***single session*** interventions that yield enduring results?

Types of Dissociation

- **Cognitive** (e.g., thoughts from feelings)
- **Affective** (e.g., feelings from actions)
- **Temporal** (e.g., past from present, or present from future)
- **Relational** (e.g., self from another's perspective)
- **Physical** (e.g., arm from body, left side from right side)
- **Contextual** (e.g., self from circumstances)

Dissociation is Evident in Suggestions for Mindfulness

- **“Focus on acceptance”** *suggests* separating what one wishes for or strives to deny from what is
- **“Focus on breathing”** *suggests* separating one’s attention on breathing from other elements of experience
- **“Focus on compassion”** *suggests* separating one’s attention from the usual self (or other) criticism
- **“See your thoughts as if clouds floating across the sky”** *suggests* separating one’s thoughts from Self

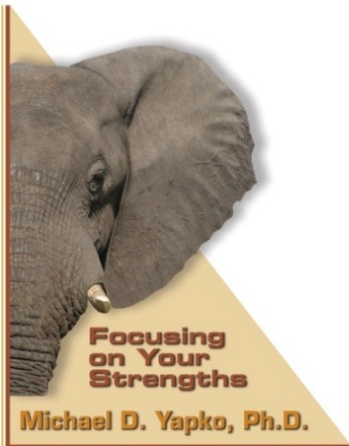
Dissociation as a Therapeutic Tool

- Dissociation involves the ability to break global experiences into their components parts; it features an ability to compartmentalize or separate elements of experience from one another
- Who has this capacity, and to what degree?
- Can it be learned? Practiced and developed as a skill? What determines someone's capacities in this regard?

Watching it Work: The Case of Terri

Is this a GMM encouraging a “**walking meditation**”?

Is this a clinical hypnosis session encouraging **cognitive and sensory associations**?



What follows is an abbreviated (about 30 minutes) demonstration of a hypnosis (or is it mindfulness?) session conducted with a volunteer at a conference on Brief Therapy in San Francisco

The full, unedited session is available from the publisher, Zeig, Tucker & Theisen at **zeigtucker.com**, then click on the “shop” tab

Key Suggestions Offered in The Case of Terri

- “You’re quite capable of absorbing new ideas, new ways of approaching things”
- “(You can) be with yourself in a way that reminds you of how you can be connected to some of the most important parts of yourself”
- “The first step, a comfortable step...which leads to the next comfortable step...and then it’s a question of how well-defined those steps are...being wonderfully aware where the next step is”
- “It’s all about the sense of readiness to take the next step...and you *stop* and you *observe*”
- Your shoes, your feet, your awareness...the next step in your personal development...
- “How valuable a skill it is to separate the next step from what mood you’re in...to separate the next step from whether you’re focused or distracted”

Key Suggestions Offered in The Case of Terri

- “Then it doesn’t matter which city you’re in...doesn’t matter whether you’re on the East coast or the West coast...this country or another country...whether it’s morning or whether it’s night... whether it’s been a busy day or a slow day...all of those things become wonderfully separated, Terri, detached from just having a strong sense of the next step”
- “And so to feel confident that you don’t have to feel confident *is* the next step in walking...you (can) find yourself *falling up* with an unusually confident posture”

Are these suggestions
indicative of hypnosis?

Or are they more reflective of a guided mindfulness
meditation, specifically a “walking meditation?”

Stages of the Experiential Process

- 1. **Preparing the client** (psychoeducation about the experiential process, building expectancy for its likely success, and securing from the client an intent to cooperate with its aims and methods).
- 2. **Orienting to the experience** and securing attentional absorption.
- 3. **Hypnotic induction or mindful focusing** (building focus, selective attention).
- 4. **Building a response set**, i.e., an increased tendency to respond positively as the session progresses (building a momentum of responsiveness towards therapeutic objectives resulting in an intensification or deepening of the experience).

Stages of the Experiential Process

- **5. Therapeutic utilization (Suggestions for Change)**, i.e., suggestions given directly or indirectly with an intent to alter the client's experience in some presumably therapeutically beneficial way (based on an agreed-upon treatment plan).
- **6. Contextualization** of new behaviors and perceptions, i.e., establishing a "link" or association between new experiences in the session and their relevance to other parts of the person's life (the primary function of the *post-hypnotic suggestion* in hypnosis).
- **7. Disengagement and reorientation** (guiding the person out of the experience).

Summary of Key Points

- Clinical applications differ from a spiritual interest
- Capacity for absorption varies across individuals and also within individuals at various times
- Focus can be enhanced by structuring a time and means for developing the capacity (i.e., practice)
- Such processes are *not* curative in and of themselves, but help establish new subjective associations that may be therapeutic
- Learning the *structure* of such processes allows the practitioner to vary approaches according to individual needs

Mindfulness and Hypnosis

- Both are non-rational
- Both involve utilizing attentional capacities
- Both emphasize the importance of full participation in the moment
- Both emphasize the potential for personal growth derived from the experience
- Both emphasize acceptance as a precursor to greater well-being
- Both use language as priming agents for stimulating expansive unconscious, automatic processes

“It is easier to meditate than actually do something for others. I feel that merely to meditate on compassion is to take the passive option. Our meditation should form the basis for action, for seizing the opportunity to do something.”

The Dalai Lama

“Mind comes first. Before deed and words comes thought or intention”

Buddha

Thank you for attending this
webinar and for your kind attention

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