Applying Hypnosis to Alien Abduction Investigations

Sean F. Meers examines and explains the delicate process of attempting to penetrate the barriers of amnesia that can sometimes occur in abductees, due to the sheer trauma and often repressin of memories.
The Application of Hypnosis to Alien Abduction Investigations

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One of the many tools utilised in the investigation of alien abduction accounts is hypnosis. It is used as an adjunct in the delicate process of attempting to penetrate barriers of amnesia that can sometimes occur in abductees due to their abduction experiences. Some contend that these barriers are the result of traumatic abduction memories being disconnected, in part or whole, from an abductee's conscious recollections, due to repression. A self-defense mechanism of the mind that removes specific traumatic memories from one's conscious memory and stores them deep in their subconscious memory. 55 [P. 111] Others have opined that these barriers are the direct result of post-hypnotic suggestions instilled into the abductees by the abductors themselves. 47 [p. 19, 229] It is not precisely known, however, what causes these barriers in abductees.

When I first began researching alien abduction cases, and the application of hypnosis to those cases, I immediately needed to determine five things. Firstly, if hypnosis is inherently dangerous. Secondly, if the material retrieved through hypnosis could be accurate. Thirdly, how the primary abduction researchers using hypnosis were trained in this practice. Fourthly, if the process of attempting to retrieve amnesic traumatic memories of alien abductions is different from attempting to retrieve amnesic traumatic memories that resulted from established, universally acknowledged traumas (e.g. kidnapping, rape, child sexual abuse etc.). Finally, I needed to know what arguments were being made against the use of hypnosis in abduction cases. In this paper I will explore these five things.

Part 1 – Is Hypnosis Inherently Dangerous?

To determine if hypnosis is inherently dangerous, I reviewed a cross-section of psychiatric literature written and published over the course of roughly sixty years.

In Dr. William S. Kroger's book Clinical & Experimental Hypnosis: In Medicine, Dentistry, and Psychology, 2nd Edition (2008), there is a chapter pertaining to this titled “Chapter 20 - Dangers from Hypnosis”. In it, among other things, is a statement from 1959 by Dr. K. Platonov, a Soviet psychotherapist who used hypnosis in his work for over 50 years in over 50,000 cases. He stated the following:

“We have never observed any harmful influence on the patient which could be ascribed to the method of hypnosuggestive therapy, presumably leading to the development of an “unstable personality,” “slavish subordination,” weakening of the will, increase in suggestibility, pathological urge for hypnosis, etc.” (Kroger, William S., 2008 [p. 104])

“There are real dangers in the use of hypnosis, even when carried out in an ethical manner; but it can be shown that, in almost all cases, they lie with the therapist and not with the method.”

In Dr. Paul F. Kost’s 1965 article titled “Dangers of Hypnosis” (published in the International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis), he stated the following:

“The various kinds of complications which have been associated with hypnosis are reviewed, and it is concluded that they have been greatly exaggerated. The dangers that are involved in hypnosis occur through ignorance, overzealousness, lack of understanding of the bases of interpersonal relationships, and the irresponsible acts of those who would use the technique for entertainment.”

In Dr. Jacob H. Conn’s 1972 article titled “Is Hypnosis Really Dangerous” (published in the International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis), he stated the following: “The literature on the dangers of hypnosis, the author's experience with 3000 private psychiatric patients, and the current opinions of experts in the field of hypnosis are summarized. The author concludes that hypnosis cannot be considered as being “a cause” or an external “force”. …
There are no significant or specific dangers associated with hypnosis per se. The actual dangers are those which accompany every psychotherapeutic relationship.\[p.61\]

“In my own practice, over a period of 30 years, which includes the treatment of over 3,000 patients, I have not observed hypnosis “precipitating a psychiatric illness.” Patients have been reported by others (Meldman, 1960) as becoming psychotic following hypnosis, but never, in my opinion, because of hypnosis.”

In the book Psychiatry, 3rd Edition, published in August 2008, Dr. Jose R. Maldonado and Dr. David Spiegel wrote a chapter on hypnosis titled “Chapter 94 – Hypnosis”. They stated the following: “Hypnosis is not intrinsically dangerous. For the most part, it is a benign process. The same cognitive flexibility that allows patients to enter the trance facilitates their exit from it with clear structure and support from the therapist. The dangers of hypnosis lay not in the process itself but in how it is used.” [p. 1986]

Maldonado and Spiegel went on to point out that in the application of hypnosis to memory retrieval two problems can occur. The first is confabulation, the formation of false memories which are subsequently conveyed as though they were real. The second is concreting (or memory hardening), an undue boost in the confidence with which memories are conveyed as true or false by the hypnotised subject. [p. 2006]

In The Handbook of Forensic Psychology, Fourth Edition, 12 the sources for confabulation and memory hardening are discussed:

“Second, experts supporting the per se exclusion rule mistakenly attribute to hypnosis phenomena that are really aspects of memory. Thus, confabulation, memory hardening, and postevent misinformation are all attributes of memory; they are not created solely by hypnosis, and they occur without the use of hypnosis. Memory research has shown that confabulation is a natural way in which memory works rather than a by-product of hypnotic trance (Loftus, 1980). Experiments with eyewitness testimony have conclusively demonstrated confabulation in nonhypnotic settings and have also demonstrated that hypnotically refreshed recollection is not necessarily confabulated (Brown et al., 1998; Hammond et al., 1995; Loftus, 1975, 1979a, 1979b, 1979c).” [p. 681 – 682]

Part 1 – Conclusions

Based on this broad cross-section of data, it is evident that the potential dangers of hypnosis are within its misuse as a tool, not the tool itself. While there are problems that can occur in the application of hypnosis to memory retrieval, for example confabulation and memory hardening, those two problems are attributes of memory, not hypnosis, and exist inside and outside of hypnosis.

Part 2 – Can the Material Retrieved Through Hypnosis be Accurate?

The answer to this question can be yes and it can be no. Yes, because it has been shown that hypnosis can accurately enhance recall of personally meaningful, emotionally arousing memories (see Appendix A). No, because it has also been shown that hypnosis generally does not enhance recall of personally meaningless memories, absent of emotional content. 13 [p. 5, 9 – 10]

The success or failure of any attempts to retrieve memories through hypnosis can depend on the levels of personal meaningfulness and emotional intensity of the memories. However, there is no guarantee that hypnosis will enhance recall of personally meaningful and emotionally arousing memories. Nor is there any guarantee that, if it does appear to enhance recall, that those recollections will be entirely accurate or inaccurate.

‘Hypnotically retrieved memories can be accurate and they can be inaccurate, just as they can be reliable or unreliable. Their veracity can only be determined by independent verification.’

Hypnotically retrieved memories can be accurate and they can be inaccurate, just as they can be reliable or unreliable. Their veracity can only be determined by independent verification. Like confabulation and memory hardening, the unreliability of hypnosis in producing consistent results pertaining to memory enhancement is the result of memory, not hypnosis. In and out of hypnosis, memory is unreliable, and because of that any and all attempts at memory enhancement, including those that do not involve the use of hypnosis, produce inconsistent results (Yapko, Michael D., 2012 [p.114]).

In regards to documented cases where details (and in one case mannerisms), that were previously consciously inaccessible, were able to be elicited (temporarily reinstated in the case of mannerisms) under hypnosis and later verified, see the clinical, experimental and legal cases listed in Appendix A.
Part 3 – Two Primary Alien Abduction Researchers and Their Training in Hypnosis

Budd Hopkins

The late Budd Hopkins was initially an abstract artist by trade. He subsequently went on to become one of the most prominent alien abduction researchers in the world. He published numerous, non-fiction books on the subject and he utilised hypnosis in his investigation of abduction cases. From 1976 to 1983 Hopkins underwent, for all intents and purposes, a seven year apprenticeship in the art of hypnotic regression. He was personally trained by multiple psychologists and psychiatrists including Dr. Robert M. Naiman (psychiatrist), Dr. Aphrodite Clamar (clinical psychologist) and Dr. Girard Franklin (psychologist).

In addition to Hopkins, Dr. Naiman also trained Dr. Franklin in the use of hypnosis. Hopkins did not personally use hypnosis with abductees during his seven year apprenticeship. He brought them to the psychiatrists and psychologists who were training him and they conducted the hypnotic regressions. Each held skeptical positions in regards to alien abductions. According to Dr. Clamar, Hopkins brought her over a dozen men and women from all over the USA and she worked with them over the course of two years.

By the end of Hopkins’ apprenticeship he had observed firsthand the techniques of eight or nine different hypnotherapists. He also observed how they applied hypnosis to the many abductees he brought to them. Even after his apprenticeship ended in 1983, and he began using hypnosis with abductees, he continued to have qualified professionals sit in and observe his work. He tape recorded his sessions and in some cases sent them off to be critiqued by people he respected. 43

As knowledge of Hopkins’ work with abductees grew within the psychological community he began to receive referrals from professional therapists whose clients were reporting post-traumatic symptoms that followed periods of missing time and UFO sightings (features of the alien abduction phenomenon). One of the therapists referred one of their patients to Hopkins and sat in on the session while Hopkins interviewed her (the patient) and then regressed her hypnotically.

The therapist was so impressed by the positive outcome from this patients’ work with Hopkins, and the therapeutic efficacy of his method, that she put him in touch with Dr. John Mack, a professor of psychiatry from Harvard Medical School. 45

Budd Hopkins – Conclusions

A seven year apprenticeship which included firsthand training and tutelage from multiple psychologists and psychiatrists, some of whom trained other psychiatrists in the use of hypnosis, clearly demonstrates that Hopkins was carefully, thoroughly and competently trained in hypnosis. That Hopkins continued to allow qualified professionals to observe and critique his work after his apprenticeship had concluded indicates that he was diligent and conscientious in maintaining and improving the quality of his work. That certain psychiatrists were confident enough to refer some of their patients to him, and that they were complimentary of him and his work after sitting in on some of his sessions, reinforces the high quality of his work.

There is currently no formalised training available in the application of hypnosis to the investigation of alien abduction accounts. A person can be taught how to use and apply hypnosis in a clinical setting, but that in itself does not mean such a person will be able to effectively utilise their skills to investigate alien abductions.

Hopkins, in many ways, was the first of his kind with respect to being trained to properly use hypnosis to investigate abductions. During his seven year apprenticeship, when he brought abductees to the psychiatrists and psychologists to be hypnotised, he observed the early application of hypnosis to investigating abductions. He observed over time how the hypnosis process evolved and was refined to better investigate such accounts.
Dr. David M. Jacobs

Dr. David M. Jacobs is a retired Associate Professor of History at Temple University. He is also one of the most well known alien abduction researchers in the world. He has published, and continues to publish, numerous, non-fiction books on the subject and he utilises hypnosis in his investigation of abduction cases.

In the early 1980s, Jacobs met with Budd Hopkins for the first time after the release of Hopkins’ book Missing Time. Like Hopkins, he became deeply fascinated with the abduction phenomenon, particularly with how it was investigated through the use of hypnosis. For this reason, he decided to learn how to conduct hypnosis himself and apply it to his own investigations of alien abductions.

According to Jacobs, he learned to use hypnosis primarily by firsthand observation of the hypnotic regression sessions being conducted by Hopkins. He wrote down Hopkins’ inductions, listened to his questions, and evaluated his answers. He frequently consulted with a psychiatrist friend of Hopkins about hypnotic techniques. He also did this with Hopkins and many other researchers. [p. 23] Jacobs also spoke with an independent psychologist who used hypnosis in his practice. In addition to this he attended a hypnosis conference in Philadelphia and extensively researched as much literature on the subject of hypnotic techniques as he could. He spent a total of four years learning about hypnosis before he began to conduct it personally in 1986.

Dr. David M. Jacobs – Conclusions

Like Hopkins, Jacobs did not rush into using hypnosis. Four years of study, observation and professional consultation preceded his first use of it. Firsthand observation of multiple hypnotic regression sessions, being conducted by someone trained in hypnosis by numerous psychiatrists and psychologists, is an effective and direct way to learn how to use hypnosis. Consulting with psychiatrists and psychologists about hypnotic techniques is equally helpful in refining one’s skills if their advice on the matter is sound and adhered to. Like Hopkins, Jacobs observed the application of hypnosis to investigating abduction accounts. He saw it evolve and become refined to better investigate abduction accounts.

Part 4 – How is Alien Abduction Hypnosis Different from Regular Hypnosis?

To successfully perform alien abduction hypnosis one first needs as thorough an understanding of the abduction phenomenon as possible. In particular, the common and uncommon reported features of it.

Like normal hypnosis, the hypnotised subject requires an environment of support without judgement, and a rapport needs to be established between the subject and the hypnotist. While the hypnotist is under no obligation to believe what the subject is reporting, they need to give the impression they do during the sessions in order to ensure the relaxation and openness of the subject.

Abduction hypnosis is best learned from a person who practices it.

- It is essential that the hypnotist has an open mind. They need to be able to persevere with their work and not abandon it just because they personally feel what they are hearing is too unbelievable in nature to possibly be true.
- The wellbeing of the hypnotised subject always outweighs any potential knowledge about abductions that may be yielded from the hypnosis sessions.
- Any suspected confabulation needs to be noted and compared with other suspected confabulation that emerges from different abductee's hypnosis sessions.
- The vital difference between normal hypnosis and abduction hypnosis is a comprehensive knowledge of alien abductions. More effective strategies to yield more reliable information can depend on this.

Part 5 – Arguments Made Against the Use of Hypnosis in Abduction Cases

The primary arguments being made against the use of hypnosis in abduction cases are that hypnosis can result in confabulation and memory hardening, and that abduction accounts are created by suggestible hypnotised subjects being lead by unscrupulous or incompetent hypnotists feeding them abduction narratives. The first reason these arguments are wrong is because confabulation, memory hardening and suggestibility are all aspects (flawed aspects at that) of memory, not hypnosis. They exist and occur inside and outside of hypnosis, and are not direct results of it.

The second reason is because abductee hypnosis transcripts show numerous instances of them resisting deliberate false leads employed to test their suggestibility. [p.386], [p. 31-33, 36-39] The third reason is because the psychiatrists and psychologists who trained Budd Hopkins were all skeptical of the reality of alien abductions and they were the ones who conducted the hypnotic regression sessions with abductees for the first seven years of Hopkins’ training. The abduction accounts came out under their regressions just as they subsequently did under Hopkins’. Dr. Benjamin Simon, who conducted hypnosis on
Barney and Betty Hill, was equally skeptical of the reality of alien abductions. Nonetheless an abduction account came out during the hypnotic regression sessions he conducted with the Hills.

Some have criticised alien abduction research because Institutional Review Boards (used to officially govern the safety of human subjects in research) are not used and do not apply to it. According to the policy that governs IRBs (Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Public Welfare Department of Health and Human Services Part 46 Protection of Human Subjects Revised January 15 2009 Effective July 14 2009) an IRB review is only required when human subject research is supported or regulated by any federal department or agency which takes appropriate administrative action to make the policy applicable to such research inside or outside of the United States of America, or if an institution has voluntarily agreed to apply the regulations to all research, regardless of the source of funding. For research that is not required to be regulated by this policy, exemptions are not required because the policy is not required. Alien abduction research is not federally supported or regulated so it does not need to apply for an IRB. Were a federal department or agency to support or regulate such research, as well as taking appropriate administrative action to make the IRB policy apply to this research, then such research would have to apply for and abide by the rules of an IRB. The fault in this problem therefore lies within the inactions of federal departments and agencies to support and regulate alien abduction research, not with abduction research. 5

Conclusions

The application of hypnosis to alien abductions is safe and credible. Hypnosis itself is not dangerous and it can yield accurate information when applied to the task of memory retrievals.

The training of the two top abduction researchers in hypnosis is more than sufficient. They both had years of training as well as diverse professional tutelage before they personally engaged in practicing hypnosis.

The differences between normal hypnosis and alien abduction hypnosis essentially lie within one's knowledge of the subject of abductions, and one's tolerance and tenacity when confronted with the unbelievable.

The primary arguments against using hypnosis in abduction cases involve mistakenly attributing the flaws of memory to hypnosis. The argument that abduction research is irresponsible because it is not governed by IRBs is the result of the lack of federal support by official agencies to govern the research.

The lack of formalised, structured training programs in the application of hypnosis to the investigation of alien abductions is disappointing but hardly surprising. Objective efforts from academia into the study of abductions are a rarity, and by and large the subject is considered taboo.

The field of legitimate study into alien abductions has, in recent years, become severely anemic, with many of the best researchers either retired or dead. However, much to the chagrin of the critics of this field, some of whom try to purport the alien abduction phenomenon beginning and ending with its researchers, the phenomenon itself is not going anywhere. It was present before researchers began researching it, and it continues on after.

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Appendix A

Cases Where Details That Were Elicited for the First Time Under Hypnosis Were Able to be Independently Verified

Two cases (Lecron, 1963) 17
One case (Degun-Mather, 2001) 18
One case (Young, 1926) 19
One case [where mannerisms were reinstated and verified] (Young, 1926) 19
One case (Howell, 1965) 20
One case (Taylor, 1995) 21
Four cases (Kroger and Douce, 1979) 22
Four cases (Kleinhaus and Horowitz and Tobin, 1977) 23
Four cases (#1, #2, #5, #8) (Schafer and Rubio, 1978) 24
Six cases (#1, #2, #4, #5, #7, #9) (Wester and Hammond, 2011) 25
Two cases (Schafer and Schreiber, 1999) 26
One case (Copeland and Kitching, 1937) 27
One case (#2) (Mutter, 1990) 28
Two cases (Reiser, 1982 [p.205]) 29
One case (#2) (Reiser and Nielson, 1980 [p.73]) 30
One experiment (White, Fox and Harris, 1940) 31
One case (Reiser, 1980 [p.187]) 32
One experiment (Rosenthal (1944) 33
One experiment (Depiano and Salzberg, 1981) 34
One court case (Sears, 1954) 35
One court case (Beck v. Norris, 1986) 36
One court case (State v. Evans, 1994) 37
One court case (Rock v. Arkansas, 1987) 38
One court case (State v. Stolp, 1982) 39
One court case (State v. Contreras, 1983) 40

References