

**Inducing a Flow State of
Consciousness**
and the Practice
of Positive Hypnosis

Dan Short, Ph.D.
Scottsdale, Arizona



Jean Marie Lucien Pierre Anouilh

"Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute! Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Only engage, and then the mind grows heated. Begin, and then the work will be completed."





Animal Magnetism



Problem Solving

Lunch is Not Sitting at a Table

And Hypnosis is Not Sleep (A)

- **Anton Mesmer (1779):** [hypnosis] is magnetic force, something that is animated, coming out of one living being and into another (**active**)
- **James Braid (1847):** all hypnotic phenomena occur without a sleep state, hypnosis is the fixation of attention on a particular task (**high concentration**)
- **Wesley Wells (1923):** used "waking hypnosis" to suggest amnesia, automatic writing, recalling forgotten information, complex mental computation and anesthesia to active and alert students (**awake**)
- **Milton Erickson (1930):** induction must be individualized according to the idiosyncrasies, unique life experiences, and spontaneous reactions of the subject (**self-organizing**)
- **Livingston Welch (1947):** trance induction is a behavioral progression from simple tasks to more difficult challenges (**achievement**)

Lunch is Not Sitting at a Table

And Hypnosis is Not Sleep (B)

- **Bányai & Hilgard (1976):** developed a scale to measure waking hypnosis, no mention of relaxation or sleep, conducted inductions during vigorous physical activity
- **Éva Bányai (1980):** alert inductions are significantly associated with reports of joyful dreams (**joy & deep satisfaction**)
- **Barabasz & Barabasz (1996):** there is no difference in response to suggestion following traditional or alert inductions (**equivalence**)
- **David Wark (2011):** value of alert hypnosis for enhancing learning skills and other educational applications such as exam preparation (**highly perceptive**)

Short Definition of Hypnosis

Dan Short 1999

- *"Hypnosis is a social phenomenon that allows us to witness previously unrecognized human potential."*
- It is the animation of expectancy sets as the impossible is made possible. Any behavior that can be summoned, though we do not expect it to fall under volitional control, is "hypnotic action" (e.g., movement w/o conscious intent, anesthesia, amnesia, changes to immune system, pain reduction, symptom removal, etc.)



Mihály Csikszentmihályi's Flow State



- **Flow:** a state of consciousness characterized by complete immersion in a specific problem solving task, without the effort of typical conscious problem solving
- **Beeper study:** Csikszentmihályi found that when teen's energies were focused on a challenging task, they tended to be more upbeat, less unhappy
- **Happiness:** "The best moments in our lives are not the passive, receptive, relaxing times... The best moments usually occur if a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile." Csikszentmihályi (1990, p. 3)
- **Learning:** "Flow also happens when a person's skills are fully involved in overcoming a challenge that is just about manageable, so it acts as a magnet for learning new skills and increasing challenges."

Hypnosis versus Flow State Same Phenomena, Different Name

- Narrowed focus of attention
- Loss of ordinary self-consciousness
- Utter absorption in an activity
- Time distortion
- Automaticity replaces conscious deliberation (less skeptical, doubting, rule-oriented thought)
- Flow: *Alert, active, increased capacity for perception, greater energy*



Positive Psychology: the scientific study of optimal human functioning and flourishing. Instead of drawing on a "disease model" of human behavior, it focuses on factors that enable individuals & communities to thrive and pursue opportunity in life.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disease Model: Patient is dependent on a doctor to identify pathology and perform the appropriate intervention • Medical Hypnosis: suggestion is treatment, an "exogenous agent," something done to remove symptoms • Cure: aim at restorative care, a return to a state of pre-incident biological functioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem Solving Model: enhancement of a person's ability to address problems of daily living and personal welfare • Positive Hypnosis: awaking the mental resources needed to better accomplish an action, task, or function • Transformation: the presenting problem is used an opportunity to increase problem solving ability for a lifetime of solving problems
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Significance of Flow for Problem Solving

- **Up-regulation:** Those with excess anxiety, panic, PTSD, chronic stress, chronic anger, need down-regulation, into parasympathetic activity. But those who have no energy, no initiative, are overly passive, overly submissive, procrastinate, or feel no drive or reason for existence, need up-regulation (sympathetic activation)
- **Generalizability:** behavior learned in the office should easily translate to the outside world. *How many challenges in day-to-day living are best handled by falling asleep? Or, how prudent is it to comply with everything another person tells you to do?*
- **Thriving:** fostering a state of mind in which optimal engagement and enjoyable experiences coexist

Flow Improves Performance
It is not just a matter of feeling good



- Jackson (2000): with flow, everything is optimal, the mind and body are in harmony, negative thinking and self-doubts are absent, and functioning is enhanced
- Vasquez (2005): basketball players who used hypnosis to access the flow state scored significantly better than a control group who just used relaxation techniques
- Pates (numerous studies): researched the possibility of improving an athlete's attainment of flow in athletic skills

Common Attributes of the Flow State

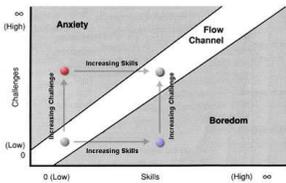
Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1999

1. Challenge
2. Focus on Process
3. Continuous Feedback
4. Goal-Oriented Action
5. Action & Awareness Merge
6. Self-Consciousness Disappears
7. Time Distortion
8. Self-Agency
9. Intrinsic Motivation



Condition 1: Challenge (A)

- During flow there is a perceived balance between challenge & ability (Flow is a dynamic state, stretching forward between anxiety & boredom)



Condition 1: Challenge (B)

- The task is designed to engage an established skill set so there is an experience of mental preparation, readiness, confidence, & positive expectancy (consider Welch's induction)
- Unconscious problem solving: Long practiced skills are used to the utmost as they are stretched by a challenge (the challenge requires speed and sensory range that is beyond the conscious mind)

Condition 2: Focus on Process

- During flow attention is narrowed to a limited stimulus field (consider Braid's fixation of attention)
- There is a heightened sense of awareness of the here and now with full concentration & complete involvement
- There is freedom of worry about failure because attention is focused on immediate experience rather than outcomes
- So absorbed in the activity that they "forget self"

Condition 3: Continuous Feedback

- During flow actors respond automatically to feedback about the activity (No time for deliberation)
- Evidence of progress is produced in a predictable manner
- There is immediate feedback connected to one's actions (consider hypnotic techniques such as verbal tracking, pacing, and mirroring)

Condition 4: Goal-Oriented Action

- "When we focus our attention on a consciously chosen goal, our psychic energy literally "flows" in the direction of that goal, resulting in a re-ordering and harmony within consciousness."
- Optimal arousal is achieved as physical and mental resources are fully engaged in an immediate task
- There are clearly identifiable goals with identifiable rules (consider eye-closure and increased responsiveness to suggestion as an identified goal for sleep hypnosis)

Condition 5: Action & Awareness Merge

- During flow there is less awareness of thought and feeling as mental energy is channeled into the execution of highly developed skills
- The absorption in doing is so great that the action & the actor are temporarily merged
- A feeling of being at the peak of one abilities, there is no preoccupation with failure

Condition 6: Self-Consciousness Disappears

- During flow the actor exists purely as one who has a difficult challenge to overcome
- Disconnected from identity as a global self (consider dissociative states observed first by Janet and later speculated on by Hilgard)



Condition 7: Time Distortion

- During flow the actor is no longer focused on time
- As with all highly pleasurable activities, even after considerable time has past, it is as if the task was just begun, resulting in less fatigue or exhaustion
- In some cases, time may slow down so that a skill can be executed with greater care (consider time distortion as a tool for escaping the limitations of ordinary reality)

Condition 8: Self-Agency

- During flow, individuals feel strong, alert, in effortless control, there is a heightened sense of autonomy & control over the activity (consider research on internal locus of control & initiative or persistence in problem solving)
- The actor is seeking to shape events in the outside world rather than allowing oneself to be passively determined by external forces, (opposite of sleep-oriented hypnotic induction with demand performance)

Condition 9: Intrinsic Motivation

- During flow the experience becomes its own reward, the activity is enjoyable & satisfying, the process feels good (consider intrinsically rewarding experiences associated with hypnosis such as relaxation, achievement, & approval)
- The activity becomes an end in itself. The primary goal is to do the activity (actors do not care as much about being paid or winning)
- The greatest reward comes from excellence of performance

Principles of Flow Induction

Core 4

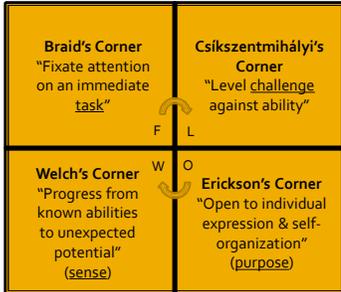
1. A task to be completed here (focus exclusively on an immediate concrete goal)
2. A challenge that draws on a lifetime of learning (solicit resources not known to the conscious)
3. A purpose that extends far into the future (the experience of autonomy, individual preference, and self-organization)
4. A sense of progress derived from what is happening now (moving from established skill sets to unexpected accomplishments)

= An altered reality in which the impossible becomes possible

Flow Box

Core 4

Creating an altered reality in which the impossible becomes possible



Positive Hypnosis

Animar (Latin): To encourage or inspire

- Animar: Part of the "Positive Psychology" movement, rather than shutting down and putting the individual in a sleepy passive state, *positive hypnosis* inspires, emboldens, and brings the person to life.
- Thriving: Focus is shifted from assuaging distress toward the pursuit of optimal functioning
- Empowerment: rather than emphasizing compliance or amnesic states (loss of control), emphasize heightened awareness and the joy of exercising individual choice. Replace direct suggestion for symptom removal with suggestion for excelling at a particular skill that is certain to yield good results (reframe the problem as an opportunity to exercise skill)

Temporal Contexts

- Immediacy: Translate clinical goals into an immediate action performed during therapy using either role-play or authenticity (practice within the therapy office)
- Regression: relive a time (full sensory involvement) when impossible odds were overcome, provide emotionally corrective experiences for any events that resulted in trauma
- Progression: Replace eye closure with imagery of intense engagement in an activity at some point in the future, invite absolute fullness of attention and concentration as future success is envisioned

Techniques of Positive Hypnosis

"Going with the Flow" (A)

- **Goal Setting:** select goals which the subject is on the verge of being able to accomplish, just need more time and practice, replace theory driven goals with goals that have a high subjective value
- **Scaffolding:** balance challenges with emerging abilities by breaking a task down into component parts, revealing operations that are easily understood
- **Encouraging Feedback:** replace redundant repetition or performance demands with intense excitement over what the subject is achieving on a moment by moment basis, "Yes! That's right! You've got it!"

Techniques of Positive Hypnosis

"Going with the Flow" (B)

- **CNS Arousal:** Rather than emphasizing passive relaxed condition, suggest readiness for an exciting challenge, one that creates energy and makes the individual feel more alive than ever before
- **Dual Channel Communication:** use of hand gestures & eye movement to maintain attention and symbolize experience—(not possible with sleep hypnosis)

Flow Enhancing Statements

- "You get to solve this problem in a way that is interesting to you. You get to use your unique skills and abilities."
- [enthusiastically] "Yes! ... That is it. ... Yes. ... You are doing it. ... Yes!"
- "See yourself [*performing the action*]. See how natural it is for you. No effort, just enjoyment."
- "Imagine you have all the ability you need. Pretend you are doing this with ease."
- "You wanted to be able to [*new skill*] and now you are doing it with me! How does it feel? Did you even realize that you are doing it?"

Who is the Primary Target for Induction?

"Do unto others as you would have done to you."



- **Disease Model:** Treatment is performed on sick patients, and NOT on healthy doctors
 - **Sleep State:** The therapist must resist drowsiness while seeking to subdue the hypnotic subject with sleepiness and passive acceptance of suggestion
- **Problem Solving Model:** Process work is collaborative, it is "done with the client"
 - **Alert State:** The therapist is the first to enter into the flow state, to achieve more effortless problem solving, greater perceptiveness, heightened performance, and to model the process

Maintaining Therapist Flow



- Enter into a flow state as soon as you sit in the therapist's chair, mark the beginning of therapy with an enjoyable state of altered consciousness
- Pick a challenging task that you almost know how to accomplish, *with the strong expectation that the rest will come to you.*
- Follow automatic association, share stories and analogies that "spontaneously" come to awareness.
- Replace self-consciousness with intense observation and focus on the client's face and micro-movements or expressions.
- Speak slowly, do not rush yourself while responding to the client
- Develop a positive expectation of increased performance (at your end) in response to challenging or unexpected behavior by the client.
- Focus your attention on immediate process and the exercise of skill more so than on future outcomes (do not worry about therapy "failing")

Conclusions

- Being engaged in life means actively searching for opportunities to exercise conscious & unconscious problem solving resources. Hypnosis helps us with the latter.
- Eye-closure is not required to access & activate unconscious resources
- Hypnosis can be collaborative & organic, so that what is good for the client is also good for the therapist
- Positive hypnosis is aligned with the goals and values of the positive psychology movement, producing joy & greater personal empowerment

Citations

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Abstract (A)

The idea of putting people to sleep is the most popular hypnosis paradigm. For almost 200 years, induction methods have focused on creating a relaxed, passive state in which the patient becomes increasingly dependent on the agency and influence of the practitioner. Surprisingly, this assumption has been challenged since 1847, when James Braid demonstrated that all hypnotic phenomena occur without a sleep state. Braid argued that hypnosis has less to do with sleep than the fixation of attention on a particular task or idea.

The sleep/obey paradigm was again challenged by Milton Erickson who pioneered the permissive approach to hypnosis. Using a problem solving perspective, Erickson shifted attention away from the agency of the practitioner toward the skill sets and individual motivations of the patient. With this approach, clients are given challenging tasks and encouraged to elaborate on their own problem solving abilities. Similarly, modern researchers have demonstrated that when the subject is given a meaningful task, hypnotic phenomena occur equally as well outside of a sleep state as with the induction of a sleep state.

Outside the field of hypnosis, modern neuroscience researchers, such as Michael Merzenich, have shown in studies of neuroplasticity that the brain not only needs to be engaged in continual problem solving but that it is most likely to release neuromodulators when it can set up the conditions under which it solves problems. A second arm of science, clinical outcome research, has shown that patients are less likely to relapse when they attribute change to personal agency rather than the actions or suggestions of the practitioner.

Abstract (B)

Finally, a third arm of science, positive psychology research, has shown that greater subjective wellbeing can emerge from altered states of consciousness. More specifically, researcher Mihály Csikszentmihályi has documented an altered state of consciousness, which he calls "flow." This state affords optimal engagement in problem solving and is associated with greater control over the contents of one's consciousness rather than being passively determined by external forces. In a flow state, people report time distortion and near effortless problem solving as they become more in touch with the intrinsic rewards of meeting the challenges in their lives and more engaged in using their skills and abilities. From this research, specific conditions have been identified for inducing a flow state of consciousness.

The induction methods are simple to learn, but one must be willing to think and act outside of the sleep/obey paradigm. While traditional hypnosis has a long and distinguished history, in order to remain relevant in an era of positive psychology and self-actualization, practitioners need to expand their repertoire of ability, moving beyond symptom relief to address the greater existential issues of happiness and self-governance. The time is due for a turning point in the history of hypnosis.

In this exciting workshop, Short will share his experience as a hypnotherapist using flow state of consciousness to produce positive outcomes with clients who were severely depressed, anxious, or otherwise despondent. A demonstration of traditional hypnotic phenomena, elicited during a flow state of consciousness, will be conducted. And most importantly, practical tools for the induction of a flow state will be provided. Rather than becoming better at putting people to sleep, attendees to this workshop will learn how to wake them up and focus attention on the task of thriving in response to life's ongoing challenges.

---Dan Short, Ph.D., Director of the Milton H. Erickson Institute of Phoenix, Phoenix, Arizona, USA
