Hypnotic Suggestion

- *Hypnotic suggestion* is any psychological influence that is not subjected to typical, critical conscious review.
- Hypnotic suggestion does not require eye closure or formal hypnotic induction.
  - “A nice man will use words to make your warts disappear.”
- Therapists who understand the power of suggestion integrate its benefits both before, during, and after hypnotic sessions.
  - “The type of hypnosis we will use is very powerful. You will see some changes in yourself almost immediately.”
Therapeutic Ideas

Milton Erickson, “Hypnosis is essentially a communication of ideas.”

• Must be hopeful, oriented toward a future of goodness
  – “There is a good solution to your problem, even if you do not know what that solution is, just yet.”

• Must be capable of altering negative expectations
  – “After today, you will have the proof you need to know that change is possible.”

• Must not interfere with expression of the core identity or with future needs
  – “After today, you will be better able to find and use your unique strengths to solve this problem.”

One Bear, 4 Dimensions
4-Dimensional Model of Suggestion

**Direct Suggestion**
- Function: **Provide direction & clarity**

**Indirect Suggestion**
- Function: **Provide space for individual responding**

**Subliminal Suggestion**
- Function: **Eliminate conscious critical review**

**Nonverbal Suggestion**
- Function: **Bypass patterns of thought triggered by language**

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**4-Dimensional Model of Suggestion**

- **Direct Suggestion**
  - “Go into a trance...now.”

- **Indirect Suggestion**
  - “I wonder how quickly you will go into trance?”

- **Nonverbal Suggestion**
  - [Using gesture to evoke a thought or action]

- **Subliminal Suggestion**
  - [Any visual or auditory stimuli that escapes conscious review]
Strive for Congruency

• It is incorrect to assume that one means of conveying suggestion is more effective or powerful than the other. Each serves a different purpose and is most likely to produce the desire results when used as a coherent whole.
  – As the hypnotherapist, you must believe with all of your mind and heart that what you are suggesting can occur. And you must want it to occur. You develop within you a sincere and eager anticipation of the desired outcome.

Demonstration

• Requires one English speaking volunteer from the audience.
• Identify which form of suggestion is being used
Ancient Methods of Hypnosis

Mystical religious practices often involve the use of direct suggestion, repetition and trance.

• Rhythmic Refrain: Repeated exposure to one idea, using a rhythmic chant
  – The chanting of monks
  – The public demonstration of power by a witch doctor, “The pole must rise…”
  – A children’s game, “Light as a feather, stiff as a board…”
Direct Suggestion is...

- **Literal**
  - There is a singular, primary meaning for what is said.
  - Useful when the patient is in shock & needing concrete direction.
- **Specific**
  - The patient is the obvious target of the instructions. It is the type of communication used in advice, "You should do X," and confrontation, "You should stop doing X."
  - Useful for when precision is important and mistakes might result in poor outcomes.
- **Concise**
  - With few words there is less risk of misunderstanding.
  - Useful when urgent action is required, such as during crisis situations.

3 Types of Direct Suggestion

- **Instrumental Instructions** (agency of the mind or body)
  - "Your eyes will close."
  - "Listen to my voice."
  - "Think about important events."
- **Experiential Instructions** (experience of the mind or body)
  - "You will feel sleepy."
  - "Hear without full conscious awareness."
  - "See things that have been long forgotten."
- **Contingencies** (linking one event to another)
  - "Soon your eyes will close and you will feel sleepy."
  - "Listen to my voice and hear without full conscious awareness."
  - "You will think about important events and see things that have been long forgotten."
Instrumental Instruction

Commonly used instrumental instructions include:

• Eye closure
• Altered breathing
• Listening (or watching a swinging object)
• Posture (sitting, standing, swaying, or reclining)
• Muscle tone (more stiff, or more relaxed)
• Arm levitation (finger movement, leg levitation)
• Less common: “Thinking, as if in a dream.”

Experiential Instruction

Commonly used experiential instructions include:

• Feeling (warmer, heavier, lighter, energy, numb, etc.)
• Seeing or hearing (without the presence of a physical stimulus)
• Dissociate (failing to have awareness of what one has said or done)
• Automaticity (experiencing an action as nonvolitional—occurring without conscious intention)
• Susceptibility (increasing irresistibility of suggestion)
• Less common: Greater sense of personal control.
The Use of Contingencies

- Erickson (1975), “It is important to present therapeutic ideas and posthypnotic suggestions in a way that makes them contingent on something that will happen in the future.”

- Contingencies are more likely to succeed when less probable events are made contingent on the occurrence of highly probable events (i.e., Instrumental > Experiential).
  - “Imagine you are holding a bowling ball. You can actually see the ball in your hand. Now notice how heavy your arm starts to feel.”

Ericksonian Contingencies

- Traditional forms of hypnosis tend to make suggested outcomes contingent on the ability of the hypnotist.
  - “You will soon go into a deep trance state, and I will remove your symptoms.”

- Erickson preferred to make suggested outcomes contingent on the ability of the patient, using events that were certain to occur.
  - “As you continue to think about your life, you will find that you posses some surprising abilities.”
Post-Hypnotic Suggestion is Contingency

- Therapy is useless if it’s benefits do not transfer outside of the office. Therefore, contingencies are used to carryover gains into ordinary life.
- Post-hypnotic suggestion: When you do ___, you will experience ____.
  - “The next time you start to feel anxious, you will be able to take 3 deep breaths, AND the anxiety will vanish.”
  - “After ending therapy, you will practice your new skills, AND this will prevent the symptoms from reoccurring.”
- Although it is possible to make the desired behavior contingent on an external event:
  - “The next time your boss insults you, you will find humor in the situation.”
  - it is better to locate the control within the client:
  - “Anytime you feel insulted, you will be able to find humor in the situation.”

Repetition Strengthens Suggestion

- Erickson, “All I need to do is keep on presenting my ideas until the patient realizes that I’m very, very serious about it. Then the situation changes inexplicably...[to a child] ‘I know there are no dogs there but I want you to see dogs there.’” 1985 (Rossi)
- Short, “You do not have to believe there is healing energy going into your body, just pretend you feel it. Keep pretending, that you feel it, now, in your legs.” Patient, “I feel it!”
Indirect Suggestion is...

- **Implied**
  - *The suggestion is implied, or readily understood, although it is not explicitly stated.*

- **Open to assumption**
  - *The meaning of the suggestion and its intended target are not clarified.*

- **Inferential**
  - *Words & ideas are used for their close connection to other words, thinking of one brings the other to mind.*
  
  - *Enuretic is told he can automatically close his eyes to prevent seeing, which rhymes with “peeing.”*
Co-constructive Therapy

- Less mental activity is required to comply with a direct command. However, with indirect suggestion, a greater amount of discernment & imagination is required.
  - Consider the difference between watching TV and helping someone write a play.
- Indirect suggestion elicits a search for how to respond. Given this uncertainty, the client will naturally go in the direction that is most personally relevant.
  - Client, “When you said, ‘Emotion is like a river,’ you wanted me to realize that this terrible feeling will come and go, it will flow past! Is that right?”

3 Types of Indirect Suggestion

- **Presupposition**: any statement that assumes or implies a certain idea.
  - “The most helpful part of therapy is often at the end.” (the statement presupposes that therapy will be helpful)
- **Figurative language**: metaphor, analogy, & idioms.
  - “Emotion is like a river. ... What do you know about a river?”
- **Allusion**: innuendo, insinuation, & suggestive stories.
  - “I helped a client with the exact same problem. She is doing great now.”
Presupposition

For ideas we do not wish to have questioned, attention is diverted to a distracting detail, which is founded on this single idea.

- **Questions:**
  - “Are you able to recognize your progress?” (progress has been made)

- **Qualifiers, such as only, even, except, just:**
  - “Only your unconscious knows when the symptom will vanish.” (the symptom will vanish)

- **Conjunctions, such as or, and, but:**
  - “I do not know if you will respond better to hypnosis or to regular therapy.” (you will respond to me)

Figurative Language

- **Metaphor**
  - “If you wish to have a flower in the garden, then you must care for it.”

- **Analogy**
  - “Marriage is like a garden. It requires much care and attention.”

- **Idioms**
  - “Drunken life, dreamy death.”
    - 醉生夢死
Allusion

“I have had many clients dramatically improve their quality of life after a simple exercise that involves thinking of their problem using a metaphor... Next, I ask them to imagine a metaphorical solution... Just like a flower opening up, their unconscious mind provides the answer. Looking at the person’s face, you can see the metaphor activating unconscious knowledge. There is a look of excitement and energy. This exercise helps clients learn how to trust their own problem solving ability.”

Indirect Suggestion

What is he thinking? What will he do next?
Hear One, Understand Ten (Ichi leba Ju Wo Shiru)

• Spoken word has many unknown, subjective meanings. It is possible for words to contaminate communication. Nonverbal messages penetrate deeply.
  — “Still waters run deep.” — Ancient proverb
• Attention is better held by movement, rather than words. Unexpected movement has particular value in hypnosis.

Speaking is Optional

• Linda K, “I will never forget the first time I saw you demonstrate hypnosis. A young Asian student asked if hypnosis will work as well with someone who does not understand the language. You did not say anything, but instead motioned for him to come sit up front. He sat in the chair, and you knelt down beside him. You never said a single word, but I watched him go into a deep trance” (with arm catalepsy).
Anticipation Heightens in Silence

- Once the expectation is set, there is no need for words.
- Haley, “Erickson asked for a volunteer, he pointed to where the man should stand on stage, and then turned his back on the man and resumed talking to the audience. Within minutes, the volunteer was in a deep trance. None of us understood how Erickson had induced the trance.”
- Later, Erickson explained, “The man came up there to do something. I was not telling him what to do. But he knew that he had come up there to demonstrate hypnosis.”
Secure a Physical Commitment

“The thing to do is to get your patient, any way you wish, any way you can, to do something.” Erickson, 1980

- Erickson, “There was a professor who did not believe in hypnosis. I asked if he would allow me to demonstrate hypnosis with him. He agreed but insisted it was all a hoax. I told him to watch, and preceded to levitate my arm slowly into the air. I then turned my gaze to his arm, which was also floating in the air, completely cataleptic!” (archival recording)

- Hypnosis can be modeled by the therapist. Any demonstration of hypnosis, witnessed by the subject, is essentially nonverbal suggestion for how to respond during trance.
Subliminal Suggestion

Subliminal suggestion occurs whenever stimuli, which escape conscious attention, are found to influence thoughts, feelings, or actions.

- Simple methods include:
  - Interspersal & masking
  - Micro-expression
  - Micro-speak
  - Background elements

Interspersal & Masking

- When seeking to make a suggestion, outside awareness, Erickson would alter his voice for certain words, or make certain statements completely out of context. These stimuli were “masked” by all of the other words that were spoken. (This is most practical when working from a written script).
- Less complex forms of masking, include speaking the suggestion in a low voice, and then suddenly changing the subject of conversation.
Seeding as a Form of Suggestion

- Short will often use time to mask difficult suggestions, using 3-4 weeks to convey a single idea.
- Speaking to a narcissist:
  - **Week 1** “No one is perfect. We all make mistakes.”
  - **Week 2** “He was narcissistic, and unable to learn from his mistakes, because he did not see them.”
  - **Week 3** “You did not learn what you needed to learn from that mistake.”
  - **Week 4** The client says to me, “I have problems with narcissism.”
- As a young therapist, I was more blunt. I stated the diagnosis (or painful revelation) as soon as I recognized it. Unfortunately, these patients never returned.

Micro-Expression

- Subliminal gestures are not the same as nonverbal communication. The movement must be so subtle that it escapes conscious detection.
- A slight nod of the head or shake, signals either “Yes” or “No”, but without conscious recognition.
  - Clients will talk longer, more confidently, if you use a micro-nod. Clients often correct their own faulty assumptions if there is a micro-shake. This way you avoid shaming the client.
- Emotion can be expressed with the face so rapidly that it is felt but not seen by the client.
  - Use when client is not fully ready to experience that emotion, or will be embarrassed by obvious approval.
Micro-Speak

• Milton Erickson's ability to control mind-readers.
• The teenager named John, and his cosmic ray gun.
• The young married couple who demonstrated their ability to “read each other’s mind” (they had to be facing one another, though they remained silent)
• Having clients answer my questions (before I can say what the question is) or stating the insight that I wish for them to have.
• **Subliminal speech can be achieved by thinking “loudly”** about the same idea, with vigorous repetition.

Background Elements

• Artwork hanging on the wall will have an emotional impact and effect cognitive functions.
  – Morbid themes increase fear and conservative choices
  – Loving themes increase felt security and intellectual flexibility. Client, “Is that a new picture on the wall?”
• Titles on the spine of a book will be processed
  – “I can’t stop looking at that book on your self.”
• The type of music playing in the background will effect choices
  – The wine study
Can People Be Controlled with Hypnotic Suggestion?

“You will soar like an eagle!”

Short’s Demonstration

• Defiant Teenage Student, “That may work on other people, but you cannot hypnotize me!”

• Dan, “Not only can I hypnotize you, but I can get you to do everything I say. But first you must take your test. No hypnosis until everyone has sat quietly and completed their tests.”

• He was frustrated with his compliance, and challenged me saying, “You tricked me once, but you cannot trick me again! I repeated my claims, and added, “Do not stay sitting down!”
Four Ways to Heighten the Saliency of Suggestion

• Anticipation (i.e., trance induction)
  – Emotional excitement over what is about to occur
• Contingencies
  – Linking something that is merely possible to that which is highly probable
• Physical Commitment
  – Voluntary involvement (response to instrumental suggestion) is used as a prime for experiential responsiveness.
• Repetition
  – Increasing the familiarity of an idea

Strive for Effortless Delivery

• All methods of delivery are summed up with the confident expectation that, “This will happen.”
• Do not try to consciously recognize all the different ways in which you are suggesting something, but always remain mindful of what you secretly expect of the client.
Final Tips

• Keep suggestions simple and easy to follow
  – Complicated, multi-step instructions require more mental energy and conscious resources to follow
• Be confident, only suggest things that you know will happen
  – “You will close your eyes, eventually, and you will continue to learn new things.”
• Be patient, give plenty of time for response
  – Most people can’t generate instant hypnotic phenomena
• Do not seek to take away, instead add new abilities
  – Therapeutic hypnosis is not control, rather it is supportive & encouraging, “You can do this!”

Breakaway Groups

• Gather into groups of five. Work as a team to practice different forms of suggestion.
• Take turns being the subject. The subject will use subliminal suggestion, aimed at the other four members. Concentrate on what suggestion you want to receive, use subtle mouth movements (e.g., health, courage, learning, confidence, etc.).
• Each of the four will offer a direct suggestion (the one that is fresh to the mind), followed by the same suggestion in indirect form.
• The subject will inform the group if anyone offered the desired suggestion. Also, tell each person whether their suggestion was more compelling in direct or indirect form.