

What is Hypnosis?
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This started as a blog entry and morphed into an essay. It represents my own model by which I relate hypnotherapy, psychotherapy, and the laundry list of issues that correspond to anxiety, addictions, and phobias. It may answer a few common questions I'm often asked about hypnosis and hypnotherapy, though it centers more on theory than applied practices. Enjoy! Let me know if you have any questions about this writing.

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Chapter 1: What Hypnosis is and isn't

One of the perks of being a hypnotist is that it's always a good conversation starter. It's one of those occupations like a doctor, flight attendant, or car salesman that everyone takes an interest in. Invariably, the conversation either ventures towards "I can't be hypnotized" or "you're not going to hypnotize me, are you?" Maybe it's Hollywood, or all the stage hypnosis performances, or maybe it's just our human nature that we all have the concept of a mystic with special powers when we think of a hypnotist.

Sorry to disappoint, but the hypnotist or hypnotherapist has no special powers. Believe me, no one was more disappointed to learn this than I was. When you think about the position of a hypnotist in our society, it's pretty clear that there's nothing incredibly mystic or powerful about what we do. After all, if I could make a person do what I wanted exactly when I wanted it, against that person's will, would I be here typing this now? I'd probably be relaxing in a mansion on my own private island or working through the government bureaucracy to figure out if we really did make contact with aliens, or at least figure out just what the hell that black smoke is on "Lost." As it stands, I'm like every other red-blooded blue state American out there, who happens to help people quit smoking and feel better about flying in an airplane. I could never get a person to reveal their innermost secrets or do anything else against their will, and this concept is of particular importance in hypnotherapy as we'll see in the next few chapters.

In short, there is nothing mystical or exceptionally powerful about hypnosis or hypnotherapy. With that being said, let's explore what hypnosis really is.

What hypnosis is (at least, to me) is a way of communicating for someone to do what is in their nature to do, or what they really want to do. Think of two people having a discussion. A big part of the conversation is the gesturing: placing a hand on the other person's arm, moving your hands to indicate size, raising your eyebrows to show interest. It doesn't really change the content of message but it helps the message go through. Hypnosis works the same way. The hypnotherapist has a message structured in a way that, by human nature, the person hearing it will more likely listen to and accept. In the same way that using a gesture helps communicate a given message, giving a particular message while the recipient is relaxed in a particular manner helps communicate that message, especially if that message is designed for the sub-conscious, a topic we'll also explore a little later in the next few chapters.

Remember, though, that like a person gesturing, the hypnotist's message will be accepted based primarily on the content of the message. A car salesman who is able to gesture will sell more cars than a salesman who cannot, but neither will be able to sell a tricycle for a million dollars. If a person could, you'd probably know about it already. We would all have tricycles and there would be a few extremely wealthy car/tricycle salesmen.

Like gesturing, everyone can be affected by hypnosis, whether they believe it or not. In fact, to say that a person can't be hypnotized is as ridiculous as saying a person can't be

affected by a person's gestures. As humans, we're simply geared to respond to a given stimulus in a given fashion. For example, try not to yawn. Scientists have been exploring why people yawn and they think that yawning may be due to the bodies need for oxygen.

Now, what happened there? If you were like virtually everyone else, you yawned. I did. In essence, that's analogous to hypnosis. The message to yawn was not a direct, conscious message, yet it was accepted. It's similar to the statement "don't think about a purple elephant." Nothing eerie or mystical, just human nature. If it makes you feel better, those who don't yawn when they think of yawning or picture an object when someone tells them not to are generally either psychotic, inebriated, or have an IQ below 70. Apart from that group, virtually everyone responds to the visual or yawning cue and virtually everyone can experience hypnosis in some form or another.

Unlike the little demonstration (which scientists are still trying to figure out—just why we are so prone to yawn), by and large a message given to the sub-conscious will only be accepted by the sub-conscious if both the conscious and sub-conscious agree to it. In other words, a message will only be accepted by the sub-conscious (the part in charge) if and only if the sub-conscious wants to accept that message. We will get to the distinctions between the conscious and the sub-conscious in short order. For now—let's look briefly at what a stage hypnosis does to better understand just what the hell I'm talking about.

I'm sure a big part of the public's misconceptions about hypnosis stem from stage hypnosis. In a stage hypnosis show, we see a man telling people to do crazy things, such as forget about the number 6, or talk like a space alien. Oddly enough, they oblige.

So, how does this all work? How does a hypnotist get a normal person to invent a language or forget about the number between five and seven - all in front of a large, bewildered audience? Well, just consider that large audience. Whenever a stage hypnotist begins, he always begins by asking for volunteers. Always, always, always. Why? Because the more willing a person's subconscious is to accept a particular message, the better the chances of that message becoming reality for that person. So if the stage hypnotist has an audience of a hundred, he's going to ask for volunteers, the ones most willing to go up there. To do what? Perform. Everyone knows going into a stage hypnosis show what is likely to occur. Those who've never seen a stage hypnosis show will be around friends who have. Everyone who volunteers knows what will happen to them so the only ones who do volunteer are the ones who want to perform, who want to follow the hypnotist's suggestions. Even better, the ones who most want to perform will raise their hands the highest, will make the biggest commotion all in an effort to volunteer. All the hypnotist has to do is sit back and pick the most enthusiastic of the crowd.

But he doesn't stop there. Let's say, out of a hundred people, he picks 15 volunteers. Even before he hypnotizes them, he asks them to perform a simple task. Maybe "pretend your arm is light as a feather, let it just float up" or "pretend your hand is as heavy as a rock: you couldn't lift it if you tried!" The people who are the most receptive, most willing to perform, will respond best to his suggestion. The others are called back into the audience. After this

second step, he now has the six to ten people he needs, the group most willing to put on an entertaining show. Six to ten out of a hundred. The hypnotist does this because only if a person really wants to perform will that person really perform in hypnosis. So here we see that the suggestions given by the hypnotist, however unusual they are, will be received and accepted. But I guarantee you that that hypnotist doesn't have the power to make a person reveal secrets the person doesn't want to reveal or do things the person doesn't want to do. Otherwise, the hypnotist would be a wealthy man living in the lap of luxury, not traveling campus-to-campus putting on a show for college kids.

Part 2: Evolution and Behavior

Now that we've cleared some of the misconceptions about hypnosis, we have one last important topic to explore briefly before we can get to what the sub-conscious is and how it can be affected through hypnosis. Actually, due to our rather limited understanding about the human brain and the human mind, no one really knows for sure what the sub-conscious is or how it interacts with our conscious awareness, or even if the two are completely distinct. All we have now are models that seem to match the data and the observations. The particular model I use that works well for my clients and myself (individual results may vary) can best be explained through a concept known as evolutionary psychology. Bear with me: I promise to keep the jargon and psycho-babble to a minimum.

In biological evolution, the eye develops first as a bunch of cells that can detect light. A few organisms develop this ability, they can then detect a predator better than the organisms who lack these light-detecting cells, and they are eaten less than those who don't have the light-detecting cells. They go on to have more offspring, some of whom have even better light-detecting cells who then are even better at survival and having offspring. As this progresses through the years, the light-detecting cells become more and more advanced through incremental, accumulative steps until they become the eyes and vision system we have today.

Likewise, in evolutionary psychology, there are behaviors that evolve that still exist today. Eons ago the ancestors to today's modern dog/wolf learned that by working as a team, they could catch much larger prey, and everyone wins. The wolves that worked together the best were the most likely to survive and the most likely to have wolf cubs, who then inherited their parent's ability to work together. The wolf cubs in turn grew up to have cubs of their own, some of whom were even more able to work together. This process repeats itself until you have complicated and hierarchical wolf packs.

The same goes for humans. Ancient primates learned that by working together, they can have a group protection. When one ape runs out of food, the others will take care of him. You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours (or even search for ticks). Millions of years later, we're now all the product of pack mentality with a social order not very different from wolf packs and monkey tribes (which explains our current state of world politics). So this is how we humans developed a sense of society and social instincts.

Now, consider this: cigarettes, red meat, cars, and guns all combined kill millions of people every year. Yet what are people most afraid of? From what I've seen, snakes, spiders, fear of flying, heights, and performance. Very, very few people die of spiders bites, there are very few plane crashes, and no one is going to die from a botched graduation speech. Shouldn't a person fear lighting a cigarette or eating a hamburger much more than handling a harmless spider or addressing a large audience?

As we see, this doesn't make sense except in light of evolutionary psychology. Humans have been around for between 100 to 200 hundred thousand years. For most of this time, it made perfect sense to fear tall cliffs, wild animals, and being kicked out of a tribe (where you'd

have to hunt on your own and would probably die). But there is something else. It would be very important to listen to your parents and develop any phobias that your tribe might have. It would also make sense to be more fearful than necessary.

Let's say there are two caveman tribes. In the Eastern tribe, children develop all the phobias their parents have. If the adults fear a particular snake, the children fear a particular snake. If adults are concerned about being accepted by everyone in the tribe, so are the children. In the Western tribe, the children don't have such concerns at all. They happily touch any snake they find. They do whatever they want, even if it means being kicked out of the tribe. Eventually, the Eastern tribe thrives and the Western tribe flounders. Kids in the Western tribe would be bitten by venomous snakes, eaten by bears, and run out of town. The Western tribe would slowly lose its population and become extinct. The Eastern tribe, meanwhile, has kids who are safe and conservative. They will grow up to have children of their own, who inherit their safe and conservative nature.

We are all the result of the Eastern tribe. The humans in the past who were the most fearful, anxious, and conservative were often the ones who didn't touch the rattlesnake, run after a bear, or make a fool out of themselves in public. Consequently, they weren't bitten, eaten, or run out of town. They were able to have children, who carried on their genes and behaviors. Behaviors that, ultimately, are geared towards survival[1].

Researchers have conducted studies on young monkeys to see which ones develop a fear of snakes. They took a number of monkey cubs and showed them adult monkeys terrified by the sight of a snake. All of the young monkeys watching the adult became very fearful of snakes themselves. The researchers then took another group of monkeys and showed them an adult monkey acting very conformably and casually around a snake, maybe even ignoring it. All of the young monkeys in the second group grew up to be very comfortable themselves around snakes[2]. Interestingly enough, they took a third group of young monkeys and showed them a doctored presentation so that it appeared the older monkeys were afraid of a bouquet of roses. None of the young monkeys developed a fear of flowers.

From an evolutionary perspective, this makes a lot of sense. Things in the outside world could be 1) completely non-threatening 2) completely threatening and 3) possibly threatening. With the first two categories, generations and generations of evolution has hard-wired certain things and events as either threatening or non-threatening. That's why each and every one of us becomes scared if, while hiking, we run into a mountain lion. It's also why, try as they might, researchers couldn't bring monkeys to be afraid of roses. In the third category, objects that could be threatening, it makes the most sense from a biological or evolutionary standpoint to judge the danger of an object based upon either a) what happens to your parents and society and also b) events in your past. That is why most people who come to me with a fear of snakes or spiders either had a) a parent who was afraid of snakes or b) had a bad childhood experience with snakes.

Now, compared to heights, wild animals, and social situations, humans have only been around cigarettes, processed foods, and cars for a very short amount of time. Deep down

inside, they generally see these things as completely non-threatening. I've never seen a person start to sweat and panic whenever he or she handled a cigarette or a crispy-creme donut. Ah, but what about the fear of flying and the less common fear of driving? Those fears are generally a mix of fears over losing control (an ancient, passed-down concern) and exposure to adults who show a fear of flying. As an aside, as we've spent most of our history living in small huts or villages, we've learned to associate fear with any terrifying accident, no matter how remote. When we lived in villages of no more than 100, seeing a person attacked by a bear means there's a good chance that might happen to you. We developed a rule that if-it-happens-to-one-it-can-happen-to-me. Now, when we live in a global community, one airplane crash is constantly in the news. Our ancient psyche believes: If a few people died in an airplane crash, it can happen to me! Even though the chances of actually dying in an airplane crash are very very slim.

So, to reiterate, much of human behavior can be explained as evolved behavior that originates from our ancient history as caveman. John Gray's "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus"[3] explores this concept as it relates to relationships between the sexes. As it turns out, evolutionary psychology can also help explain the concept of the conscious and sub-conscious mind.

Part 3: Evolution of the Sub-Conscious: the Secret Service Agent

The human body operates in such a way that a vast majority of our bodily functions happen in an involuntary manner. In other words, we don't know most of what is going on in our body. We don't think about digesting breakfast, or making hormones, or figuring out when we need to use the restroom. There's a part of our brain that controls all these functions for us and just lets us know when to do what by sending us feelings, urges, and memories. In other words, there's a program that tells us when to eat, breath quickly, blink, yawn (sorry), and feel excited.

One of these programs exists to let us know when we need to be concerned, be anxious, or be scared. That's why when you see a cougar while hiking, you don't have to decide to be scared witless; it happens automatically.

This part of our mind that has all these programs is commonly referred to as the 'sub-conscious' by the psychological community. Here, in my model, I like to refer to it as your secret service agent.

Let's pretend that each one of us has a part of our mind that works like a Secret Service Agent. Suppose I'm hiking, and I'm thinking about my hometown, or what's for dinner, or maybe I'm talking with a friend. As soon as I see that mountain lion, my Secret Service Agent takes over. That part of my consciousness alerts me, and I feel anxiety. I either freeze, grab a rock, run, or yell. Once I'm safe, the Secret Service Agent goes back into the depths of my psyche, and I'm free to enjoy the rest of my day, assuming I don't require a change of underwear.

There are three rules that the secret service agent lives by. Understanding these rules is an essential step in using hypnotherapy to achieve lasting change.

Rule Number 1: The Secret Service Agent Always Wins

Remember how the Eastern tribe always listened to their parents? The Eastern tribe also always listened to their Secret Service Agent. They survived. We're all a product of that tribe. That is why when you see a mountain lion, you will become scared, unless your Secret Service Agent knows in advance it's okay (i.e. you're at a zoo, you have a gun, the mountain lion is running away from you, the mountain lion is stuffed on display at a museum). If you ever saw a mountain lion ready to attack you and you decided that you were going to remain calm as it mauled you, you would fail. In a battle between your will ("I think I'll stay calm") and your sub-conscious/Secret Service Agent ("we have to run or we'll die"), the desires of the secret service agent always trump the will. Otherwise the human species would have gone extinct long ago.

Now, of course, it's a bit more complicated than that because we are social creatures. Let's say there were two other tribes: Northern and Southern tribes. The members of the Northern tribe only cared about their own existence. The members of the Southern tribe cared

about their own existence and the existence of others. The Northern tribe would soon die out because their kids would not be taken care of. Meanwhile, if something bad happens to one member in the Southern tribe, the other members of that tribe will provide assistance, knowing that their efforts will be reciprocated. Again, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. The Southern tribe does well, grows bigger, and we are all now products of the Southern tribe. That's why people will risk their lives to help others and have very strong attachments to children.

The sub-conscious stores all of those ancient programs that helped us survive and pass on our genes: the program to help our children, the program to help others catch food, the program to feel thirsty when there's not enough water. The secret service agent is a part of the sub-conscious that deals with protecting you from threats of harm. It's M.O. is anxiety, and, by and large, it is this secret service agent that runs the show in our lives. If the Secret Service Agent feels that you should fear all snakes and you (the conscious you, the one reading this text) feel that you should not have a fear of snakes, will then, congratulations, you have a fear of snakes. The Secret Service Agent will provide all the anxiety and fear it takes to simply overpower the will.

Rule Number 2: The Secret Service Agent is Stuck in the Stone Age

Let's suppose there is a couple: Laura and Jim and Laura and Jim are not interested in having children, only enjoying each others company. Indeed, Laura had her tubes tied. Why, then, are Laura and Jim interested in having sex, enjoy sex, and are attracted to each other based on physical appearance? These all seem to be directly involved in having children, which neither apparently want. The answer is, we all have ancient programs designed to be attracted to that which enables us to bear young. That is why we feel attraction based mostly upon having healthy children and being able to provide for them, even if having children isn't involved in the equation at all. This is also why a homosexual male will be attracted to another homosexual male based upon the ability of the target male to have children[4], which doesn't make any sense. This also explains why men, both straight and gay, will pick the attractive-yet-shallow person and women tend to pick the strong jerk. The man may be an asshole, but he can do a good job protecting her and her kids. Even if this is objectively un-true in today's world, there's still that ancient program that operates this way. In the ancient world, the strong jerk was better at protecting the girl from other people and predators than the 'nice guy,' and girls who were attracted to the strong jerk were more likely to survive and have children who survived than the girls attracted to the nice guy.

As we can see, this program of mate selection has some real faults in modern times. But back in the stone age, it worked quite well. Likewise, our current list of common phobias—fear of snakes, spiders, loss of control, social situations, makes little sense nowadays, yet worked quite well in the past. What this boils down to is the sad, simple fact of life that a majority of our sub-conscious mind is stuck in the stone age.

The Secret Service Agent is designed to protect us. Unfortunately, it's not particularly proficient in modern facts-of-life. It doesn't understand that we have nothing to fear of snakes

or flying. It doesn't understand that there is no risk of running out of food or that smoking is unhealthy. It only understands that Mom freaked out when she saw a snake years ago, or that a huge plane crash occurred three years ago. The Secret Service Agent doesn't really understand statistics—statistics have only been around a few hundred years. Statistics are the realm of the modern, conscious mind.

Consider smoking. If there exists inside of us a program designed to protect us from harm, shouldn't that program care most about cigarettes? Shouldn't we all have nicophobia, a fear of smoking? Ah, but the Secret Service Agent doesn't understand the concept of 'cancer' or the idea that each cigarette takes a few minutes off your life. Those concepts would be foreign to any cave man and his psyche. Our ancient psyche does, however, understand the need to relax. The need to be 'cool' and accepted around peers. Peers who, if they don't like you, might just reject you. And then, who's going to help you when you need to hunt?

So we combine rule one with rule two. On a conscious level, you want to quit smoking. On a sub-conscious level, smoking means you have social support and a chance to relax. The modern concept of slight, statistical degradation of health vs. the ancient concept of social belonging and relaxation. The sub-conscious will generally win. The secret service agent, in doing what he thinks is best, will generate the anxiety so that the conscious mind eventually lights the next cigarette. But it's not all bad news...

Rule Three: The Secret Service Agent Wants to Help You and is Willing to Change

Suppose you (your conscious self) wants to fly. Wants to be able to travel in an airplane. Your Secret Service Agents believe that if you fly you'll give up control and giving up control is bad. So it delivers anxiety whenever you think of flying.

Now, is this Secret Service Agent trying to hurt you? Nope. Quite the contrary: it's there to help you, to protect you. The problem is rule number 2—it doesn't realize you're living in the modern world.

Here's another analogy. Let's pretend your job is to protect the Queen of England. You're paid thousands of dollars each week to protect her and nothing is more important than her survival. You are her Secret Service Agent. She wants to fly to some strange country in the middle of Africa. You really have no idea about the relative safety of countries in Africa. Is the country safe? Dangerous? Do they love her or want to kidnap her [5]? You don't know. What would you do? Probably keep her from flying. Hold her back. Are you doing this to hurt her? Harm her? No! You just want to protect her.

Now, let's pretend the Queen of England turns to you and says, "the place I want to go to is very secure, they all love me there, all the world leaders go there and are perfectly safe—I myself have been there not 5 years ago and they loved me and nothing's changed." All of a sudden, you would have no problem letting her go.

Our own Secret Service Agent works the same way. Let's say as a child, Ruth saw her

mother run scared from a garden snake. The ancient program of 'be afraid of what scares your parents' kicks in and, thanks to rule number 2, Ruth has a fear of snakes. Maybe as an adult Ruth even tried to approach a snake aquarium one day in a pet store but, thanks to rule number 1, she lost her nerve. Ruth's secret service agent honestly believes that any snake — even a garden snake that is objectively harmless— is a threat. However, if there was a way Ruth could communicate with her Secret Service Agent, that part of her mind would gladly oblige her request, and she would steadily feel better about snakes.

The only problem then, is how to communicate with that Secret Service Agent. Even when the pet shop employee tells Ruth the snake is safe, that it couldn't hurt her if it wanted to, Ruth's secret service agent doesn't listen, doesn't understand. Even when Ruth herself tells herself – over and over again – "don't worry, it's just a harmless snake," the Secret Service Agent doesn't seem to listen. There has to be a way, a means, to communicate between Ruth and her Secret Service Agent.

Hypnosis provides that communication.

Part 4: Hypnotherapy: Negotiating with your Agent

To understand how hypnotherapy works and how this communication occurs, we must first understand a very popular type of therapy in clinical psychology known as 'cognitive-behavioral therapy' or CBT[6]. Cognitive Behavioral therapy is a therapy that helps through a combination of – you guessed it – cognitive and behavioral therapy.

An example of behavioral therapy is eliminating a phobia through systematic desensitization. It's a fancy way of saying, "experience a small part of your phobia until you're comfortable, then add more and more elements of the phobia until you're able to handle the snake, or fly in the airplane, or do whatever you couldn't do before." First, Ruth would see a picture of a snake. She might feel nervous at first, but if she looks at it enough, she'll begin to feel more and more relaxed. Then, she'll see a movie of a snake. Again, she'll feel nervous but then calm down progressively. Stage eight through ten is handling a live, albeit harmless snake and a very happy and relieved Ruth.

How does this work in terms of the Secret Service Agent? Let's say the Queen of England wants to travel to Chad, a nation in Africa, but the Secret Service Agent refuses. The Secret Service Agent may instead let her fly to the canary islands, right off the coast of Africa. They all go, and see that she's well received. Next, they fly to Madagascar. Again, at first the Secret Service Agent is concerned, but he sees everything goes well, so he relaxes. Next, a trip to South Africa and finally the trip to Chad[7].

Cognitive therapy relates to amending the Secret Service Agent program through conversation rather than action. There are some problems better addressed through behavioral therapy (i.e. specific phobias) and others better addressed through cognitive therapy (i.e. generalized anxiety). That's why psychologists use both.

If behavioral therapy is bringing the Secret Service Agent along to progressively safer nations, cognitive therapy would be sitting him down for a little chat, and questioning his rational. As we can see from Rule number 2, the rational of the Secret Service Agent is quite bizarre in this day and age, but from rule number 3, he's open to reason. In addition to bringing the Secret Service Agent along as he and the Queen travel, the Queen also gives him lots of information about how safe the countries are. She makes him aware of the Queen of Scotland and the Prime Minister's recent visit to Chad and how well they were received. She challenges his perceptions of their safety, pointing out when they are contradictory and when evidence disproves them. The Secret Service Agent doesn't like to be inconsistent.

With Ruth, she wants to fly but is scared of turbulence. Her Secret Service Agent doesn't know what the hell turbulence is. As far as he's concerned, it means that Ruth is out of control. He hates it when Ruth is out of control because the last time she was out of control, she was hurt. And this time she might not make it out alive. He is also not very familiar with the feelings of turbulence and he knows that unfamiliar feelings are generally dangerous.

First, Ruth learns that turbulence is simply air-pockets in the sky. Most flights experience

turbulence. It's the equivalent of pot-holes making a bumpy ride on the road. She is challenged to consider if every time turbulence occurred, an airplane would crash, so as to see how ridiculous that idea is. She gathers evidence of who in her life has experienced flights with turbulence and lived to tell the tale. Ruth then considers how, even with pretty strong turbulence, the stewardess still serves drinks and reads books and talks with other stewardesses. Finally, Ruth relates flying to gaining a level of control, through realizing how much effort the airlines, the pilots, and the mechanics put into protecting her and her flight. If all goes according to plan, she feels much better about flying.

So, where does hypnosis come into play?

Hypnotherapy seems to accelerate cognitive-behavioral therapy. In essence, it acts as a virtual reality environment for behavioral modification and serves as a gateway for the cognitive restructuring[8]. Allow me to explain: As anyone familiar with pop-psychology knows, the human brain has a difficult time telling the difference between something imagined and something really happening. That's why the basketball team that imagines playing often performs as well as the basketball team that physically practices[9].

With hypnotherapy, pretending to be in a situation where a person is usually anxious and instead feeling relaxed will generally bring that person to feel more relaxed when that situation later occurs in a process known as behavioral generalization. In other words, you don't necessarily have to physically take small, incremental steps towards phobia desensitization, you can simply imagine them. If you were to imagine yourself experiencing turbulence and feeling relaxed in that process, that may just be enough for the Secret Service Agent to understand turbulence is nothing to get excited over.

Now, hypnosis facilitates this process in two ways. First, through guided imagery, a person is generally better able to imagine a particular environment. No one really knows why for certain, but feeling very relaxed, breathing deeply, and feeling connected tends to boost imagery and sensory abilities compared to when we're simply around walking and talking. Second, the transference of calmness and relaxation that is directed towards the phobic response (in this case, turbulence) is made easier the more relaxed and calm the person is. It also means that rather than starting each level of phobic response with heightened anxiety and working towards relaxation, the mind stays rather relaxed and tends to stay that way. This way, you don't have to 'face your fears' from the context of strong anxiety that gradually abates. Each new level of phobia elicits a very manageable feeling of anxiety.

A person with a fear of snakes might start systematic desensitization with a picture of a snake. Seeing a picture in real life would elicit a sense of anxiety, which then slowly dissipates. This level of anxiety is generally manageable, but no one exactly looks forward to it. On the other hand, we can place that person into a deep level of relaxation and then have that person imagine seeing a picture of a snake. In this instance, the person tends to stay relaxed throughout the whole activity and the results are usually the same: a resolution of the phobia.

Before we go into cognitive therapy, let's recap using the model of the Secret Service

Agent. In our example with the Queen of England, we're taking the Secret Service Agent to progressively more unfamiliar countries in Africa, showing him that it is indeed safe. Hypnosis in this model would be putting a brown paper bag over his head and simply telling him that we're visiting all these countries and informing him that the Queen is in safe keeping. He assumes what you're saying is true. Plus, with the brown paper bag on, he's not as likely to become excited. Now of course, in real life, no security guard or Secret Service Agent worth his salt would go along with this nonsense, but apparently the pathways of sensory imagery (what you see with your eyes) and perception imagery (what you simply imagine) use the same neurons when interacting with the brain. So it is okay to imagine a airplane flight or a garden snake rather than actually having to sit in a plane or handle a snake. Call it a neurological loophole.

How does cognitive therapy fit into all of this? Again, it's reasoning with the Secret Service Agent. If we could only sit down and reason with this fellow, we could explain how smoking is bad, planes are good, and snakes are generally mellow. Cognitive therapy works by reasoning with the Secret Service Agent. Hypnotherapy seems to enhance this effect. To show why this is so, let's again look back upon the evolution of the agent.

In the anatomy of the brain, we have the basic, primitive functions located at the very bottom of the brain, and the more advanced parts of the brain building on top. If you make a fist with your right hand, that is the reptilian part of the brain: it handles the very primitive functions such as breathing, hunger, and fight-or-flight[10]. If you take your left hand and put it over the right fist, that left hand represents the more advanced functions, which evolved in our far off ancestors, when we were all very small mammals. Lastly, as we evolved into smarter and more social primates until we became human, we added yet more layers. If you had a third hand, you'd place this over the fist and left hand. That is the hand where all the thinking and reasoning and planning takes place.

Now, what does this all have to do with cognitive therapy and hypnosis? Well, a lot of the gut instincts that get us into trouble live in that left hand. The majority of the Secret Service Agent program developed sometime in between us being a mouse and a human, so the Secret Service Agent exists somewhere halfway in-between the second hand and the third hand. That's why it deals with primitive concerns (i.e. phobias, control, needing food). Meanwhile, we, the conscious half, are stuck in the third hand. Fortunately, both cognitive and behavioral therapy is able to reach this Secret Service Agent, since he's in both hand levels.

Therapists and researchers have found that when we're in hypnosis, we seem to be better able to reach the secret service agent compared to using cognitive-behavioral therapy alone. Why? When in hypnosis, we're not spending a lot of time in the third hand area. The third hand deals with thinking and planning. By relaxing and using imagery, we use more of the second hand. Imagery and visual sensing evolved before abstract thinking and long-term planning. Remember, we were picking the ripe berries from the rotten ones long before we were planning next year's crops. By relaxing and using imagery (i.e. hypnosis), we're able to leave the domain of the third hand, the conscious functions and drift down to the second hand (we also take this pathway whenever we fall asleep).

As we venture into the more basic levels of our mind, we're better able to access all the programs that exist there. That's why, when you're taking a test and you just know the answer to a question but can't quite remember it, you'll end up thinking of the answer hours later sitting down in your house listening to music. Part of the creativity and memory programs that we have exist in that second hand level. As does much of the Secret Service Agent. Now, do you need to always be relaxed to remember something, be it your short term or long term memory? No, of course not. But it helps. Likewise, you certainly don't need to relax to resolve a phobia or an addiction, but it helps.

While you're in this place of relaxation, the reasoning ability of the self (or the hypnotherapist) can be applied to impress upon the Secret Service Agent some new ideas and some new concepts. "Turbulence is just pot holes in the sky." "There is no evidence that smoking is going to make me look cool, it just makes me smell." "It's not the end of the world that my ex cheated on me; I can trust other people." These messages just seem to 'stick' better when a person is relaxed and in tune with that deeper level of processing.

Part 5: Conclusion

In essence, hypnosis serves as a bridge between our conscious self (the third hand) and the sub-conscious self (the second hand). In the sub-conscious we have the basic, day-to-day programs such as the program to regulate blood pressure, use the restroom, and remember that the adjective proceeds the noun. There are also a few programs for creativity and memory. Hypnotherapy relates to the special program named here, the Secret Service Agent, the one who protects us from harm by shooting up large amounts of stress and anxiety whenever it gets excited.

Usually, this Secret Service Agent does an excellent job keeping us safe. Unfortunately, since this sub-conscious program evolved when we were out hunting woolly mammoths and saber-toothed tigers, the Secret Service Agent program is rather ill prepared to deal with modern life. Our Secret Service Agent seems to think that it's more important to fear snakes than guns, that flying is dangerous but smoking is a-okay, and that if someone hurts us in our past, we better hold on to those feelings for the rest of our lives and never trust men/women ever again.

But the good news is that there are ways to access this Secret Service Agent program. And once we reason with him, he's willing to change how he acts and what he protects us from. Hypnotherapy is, in my humble opinion, one of the best ways to go about this process. By keeping our body in the relaxed state of the sub-conscious while keeping our mind in the more conscious, reasoning state, we can access the sub-conscious and not fall asleep in the process.

Once there, we can either imagine the change that we'd like the Secret Service Agent to make, or point out his inconsistencies. Above all, he's interested in our survival, so making it known that eliminating a phobia, painful memory, or addiction will help keep us healthy and alive is exactly the type of message that should be sent. The job of the hypnotherapist is, then, to guide you in your communication with this agent. To help determine what exactly this agent is protecting you from. To show the agent what it needs to know in order to accept the goals you may have in your life. You may have all sorts of goals in life but your Secret Service Agent only has one: to ensure that you survive. The agent program doesn't want to hurt you and will comply with your ambitions but first it has to know that you won't be killed or hurt in the process of reaching your goals. Once there is that understanding, the anxieties, phobias, addictions, negative memories, and negative thoughts naturally dissipate.

Hypnosis can be considered quite a powerful tool for personal change. Unfortunately, the public perception of hypnosis is of being in a state where you lose control. Quite the contrary, it is a remarkably easy method towards gaining control, control over the ancient programs that seem to run our lives.

When I work with clients or in a group, the first concept I make clear is that the cravings, fears, and anxieties we feel are not from some part of our mind bent on harming us or betraying our goals in life. Indeed, it is simply the product of a confused element in our

psyche, stuck in the stone age. Knowing that it is there and can be reasoned with is the important first step in resolving these emotions, through the art and science of hypnotherapy.

The End, for now...

Hope you enjoyed this little article/essay here. It was intended as a large blog entry that apparently got out of hand. The blog itself has become a victim of my ongoing doctoral thesis, so I'm placing this essay here, in PDF form. If you have any questions about the contents of this book in particular or what I do in general, feel free to e-mail me with any questions you may have or to book an appointment. My e-mail address is John@LosAngeles-Hypnosis.com

Reference Notes

[1] To learn more about this topic, I highly recommend Richard Dawkins' The Selfish Gene.

[2] Mineka S., Davidson M., Cook M. & Weir R. (1984) Observational conditioning of snake fear in rhesus monkeys. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 93, p. 355-372.

[3] John Gray's book is: Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.

[4] Buss, David M. The Evolution of Desire: Strategies of Human Mating. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

[5] This is all hypothetical; I have no idea about the relative safety of countries in Africa.

[6] In the interest of self-disclosure, I am a hypnotherapist now but am in training to become a psychologist (who will then use hypnotherapy) and my orientation in psychology will invariably be Cognitive-Behavioral therapy.

[7] I also use the Queen of England, because, in this day and age, some (most) of my clientele would not be fond of protecting the president; everyone seems to be fond of the Queen.

[8] This is my own take of cognitive-behavioral therapy, which I've developed through my own practice and my own understanding. Individual concepts of CBT may vary, depending upon one's experience with hypnosis.

[9] Von Bergen, C. W., Soper, B., Rosenthal, G. T. & Wilkinson, L. V. (1997). Selected alternative training techniques in HRD. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 8(4), p. 281-294.

[10] It also, apparently, handles car purchases.