

54/06 - "Heterogeneity in high hypnotic suggestibility and its implications for the study of anomalous experiences"

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Abstract: Highly suggestible individuals exhibit considerable heterogeneity. A number of models have proposed that there is a dissociative highly suggestible subtype. This project tested predictions of these models and examined whether different highly suggestible subtypes display different patterns of anomalous perceptual experiences.

The first study investigated whether there are discrete subtypes of highly suggestible participants with a latent profile analysis of spontaneous phenomenological responses during hypnosis. The analysis suggested two subtypes, an inward-attention and a dissociative subtype. The former experienced greater alterations in awareness and volition, whereas the latter experienced greater attention and more vivid imagery.

The second study examined whether the two subtypes differ in hypnotic responding and cognitive functioning. High dissociative highly suggestible (HDHS) participants were more responsive to positive and negative hallucination suggestions and experienced greater involuntariness during hypnotic responding than low dissociative highly suggestible (LDHS) participants. HDHS participants exhibited impaired working memory capacity, whereas LDHS participants displayed superior object visual imagery. The two subtypes didn't differ in general psychopathology, but HDHS participants exhibited greater levels of pathological fantasizing.

The third study tested the prediction that a hypnotic induction would differentially impact executive attention in the different HS subtypes types. HDHS participants exhibited impaired cognitive control during hypnosis relative to the control condition, whereas low suggestible (LS) and LDHS participants displayed marginally superior cognitive control during hypnosis.

The fourth study examined the neural basis for differential levels of state dissociation among LDHS and HDHS participants. HDHS participants exhibited marginally greater state dissociation during hypnosis than the other two groups. We also evaluated the relationship between this finding and measures of electrocortical synchronization.

The fifth study examined whether the typological models can yield insights into the expression and prevalence of anomalous perceptual experiences. The HDHS participants were found to consistently report a greater incidence of anomalous experiences.

These studies indicate that there are different subtypes of highly suggestible individuals who exhibit dissimilar cognitive and phenomenological profiles.

Keywords: hypnotic suggestibility, hypnosis, dissociation, executive function, anomalous experiences