

STAGE

HYPNOSIS

Explained



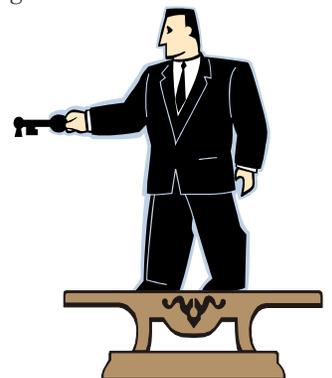
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Stage hypnosis is not hypnotherapy. Rather, stage hypnosis is the application of hypnosis for entertainment purposes. In such shows it is the hypnotist's craft to convince the audience that hypnosis is a magical and mysterious power. The greater the magic and mystery, the better the show. It is important to know that what the audience sees is not a pure and magical display of the powers of hypnosis. Like a good magic show there is more going on than that which you see or are told.

A major factor rarely revealed is the power of the stage subjects complying with commands due, not so much to hypnosis, but of a phenomenon called group or crowd expectation. Psychologists know that it is much easier to predict, influence and determine an individual's behavior when the individual is in a crowd or large group of people. There is a strong power called stage conformity that greatly enhances the stage hypnotist's apparent magical powers. Through stage conformity the stage subject(s) agrees to go along with the hypnotist, not because of the hypnosis, but because they don't want to let down the audience. They follow the directions of the hypnotist to incredible ends; however not because they are in hypnosis and don't have a choice. But because they want to please the audience and avoid personal embarrassment from a crowd caused by not doing what is expected of them. It does not matter if they end up doing embarrassing things, like quacking like a duck; that's not the point. The better and louder they "quack", the more bizarre they are, the more that hypnosis comes off as mind control... then the better a performer they are. The audience will like, approve, and embrace them more if they "go with show" instead of resisting the directions of the entertainer. Stage conformity can indeed be stronger than the effect of hypnosis. Having been a stage subject on two different occasions I can attest to what that experience is like.

Does hypnosis play a part in the stage show? Yes, but mostly only to a degree. In stage shows, hypnosis is serving to help focus the mind. Using hypnosis to focus and clear the mind places the multitude of conscious, oftentimes random, thoughts aside for the time. Again, a clear and focused mind is a very powerful thing. This, combined with stage conformity, makes the hypnotist's job not very difficult indeed. You will notice they are able to concentrate a lot of their own energy simply on entertaining and livening up the show. The more they can convince the audience hypnosis is mind control, the more interesting the show. And that is what gets presented; it is not what is going on.

Hypnosis is a very pleasant, relaxing and mentally refreshing experience. It's like taking a refreshing mental rest. As a stage subject it is easy to want to go along with the show because you sense that not doing so will end the pleasant experience of hypnosis you are in. Your mind relaxes, it is not analyzing, grabbing or holding onto random thoughts. This does not mean the subject is unconscious, in a coma, or has had their mind taken over. You are aware of what's going on and aware of the sounds around you; perhaps more so than in normal waking consciousness. You know that if you really wanted to you could immediately wake yourself up. But for what purpose? If the hypnotist is respectful of your limits it is just as well to go with the experience.



When subjects are asked to do or say something that goes against their moral, ethical, or religious beliefs they either wake themselves up or simply do not comply with the hypnotist's command. A subject doesn't do anything while in hypnosis that they wouldn't normally do when they are awake; in the same context and setting. This came into question once with one stage subject that started taking off her clothes during the show, while the other subjects went only so far as that which is socially acceptable- pretending to "strip" but stopping well short of crossing the social standard. The hypnotist himself was quite surprised and realized he had to stop the woman, which he did. It wasn't until after the show that he found out that her occupation was that of a stripper.

Most hypnotherapists do not condone or endorse stage hypnosis. There is a real split between stage hypnotists and hypnotherapists. The reason is understandable for a stage hypnosis show works by portraying hypnosis as an unconscious sleep state which lends itself to mind control. This is a misrepresentation of hypnosis. It works to reinforce the false, socially held belief that hypnosis is weird, strange, and bizarre- which it isn't. You don't fall asleep, you aren't in a coma, your mind is not being controlled. Hypnotherapists choose to use hypnosis as a tool to help others live a happier, healthier, and more rewarding life. In comparison stage hypnotists use hypnosis as the central prop in their entertainment shows. It is clear why a split exists.

Despite the obvious differences between the stage hypnotist and hypnotherapist, the stage hypnotist does, inadvertently, serve a percentage of humankind through their application of hypnosis. In Part Two of this article you learned that the number one motivation people turn to hypnotherapy is because they have tried everything else. The stage show, along with television depictions, fuels the collective belief that hypnosis is a powerful and miraculous thing that taps the power of the mind. It doesn't take much to put the pieces together. "I have tried everything else, why not try hypnosis as a last resort? It's strange, I don't know how it works (fear of the unknown), but I don't care... it just might work". That is the line of thinking that prompts many telephone calls to the hypnotherapist listings in the yellow pages.

In a perfect world people would be taught in school what hypnosis is and how it works. The value and benefits of hypnosis would be understood and there would be a more prominent place for it in society. However, that is not the world today. Hypnotherapists have their work cut out for them when it comes to educating the public about hypnosis. Mass education should be a long-term goal of the profession. Ironically, this hypnotherapist sees a lack of public education being enacted by hypnotherapists. Many brochures written by hypnotherapists themselves tend to lack educational value about hypnosis. The author suspects that a number of hypnotherapists prefer to keep hypnosis "magical" and "mysterious" because this quality, unquestionably, can boost clientele. To flat out condemn stage hypnosis is quite premature at this point in time.

The author envisions the two sides, the hypnotherapist and stage hypnotist, moving together to serve a larger purpose which is to inform, demonstrate, and educate humankind on the potential of the mind using hypnosis as a safe and natural method to focus that potential for positive purposes. This can be done by hypnotherapists taking extra time and special care to educate people who come to them on how hypnosis works; the fundamentals involved- and avoiding skipping over the issue with, "oh yes, hypnosis works for this and that".

Stage hypnotists are in a unique position to literally reach thousands of people who attend their shows. Stage hypnotists are encouraged to realize the high degree of influence they have which can be used to inform and educate people on the benefits of hypnosis and hypnotherapy. Perhaps at the end of the show they can remind the audience what has been demonstrated, "We've had a great time here tonight. I want each of you to know that what you have seen is just a glimpse at what a focused mind can do. Aside from entertainment, hypnosis is just as powerful at helping to improve peoples' lives. A hypnotherapist can use hypnosis to focus your mind on living a happier, healthier, and more rewarding life."