

## ANTISOCIAL COMPULSIONS INDUCED UNDER HYPNOTIC TRANCE

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A COMMONLY held belief about hypnosis is that under trance a person cannot be made to commit crimes or be forced to do anything which he would not do under normal circumstances or which would violate his ethical sense. This belief is generally held both by laymen and professional psychologists, psychiatrists, and physicians.

Rowland (3) conducted a series of experiments at Baylor which indicated that this was not the case and that individuals could be made to perform acts that endangered their lives. Wells (4), at Syracuse University, has also performed studies in which crime compulsions were induced and subjects made to steal objects under hypnotic trance. While Estabrooks (2) also is quite insistent that criminal behavior can be suggested, Erickson (1), on the other hand, has carefully performed a group of studies in which he arrives at the conclusion that crime compulsions cannot be induced. The critics of the experiments conducted by Wells, Rowland, and Estabrooks base their arguments on two points: First, that small cues inevitably inform the subject that he will be protected and will not really commit murder, suicide, or robbery; consequently, he goes through the suggested behavior secure in the belief that it is only an act, not the real thing, and that he is not really committing a crime. Secondly, they insist that if the individual actually carried out a crime compulsion it was because he had latent criminal tendencies in his nature; so he was not actually violating his true principles. They also point out the studies of Erickson and others who have not been able to induce crime compulsions. To these, Estabrooks (2, p. 169) suggests that operator-attitude is extremely important and implies that Erickson indirectly intimated to his subjects that

he did not really expect them to carry out the suggested crimes.

In this paper the writer wishes to report a series of experiments which might throw further light on this problem. The controls were certainly not as rigid as one would desire to establish firmly that criminal compulsions are possible, yet the combined weight of evidence from these studies definitely favors that contention.

### CASE STUDY A

The subject was an Army Corporal who volunteered for the experiment in off-duty hours. The objective of the study was to determine if information could be extracted from a presumably unwilling subject. The subject was first hypnotized and given the posthypnotic suggestion that any time the Experimenter handed him a yellow pencil he would have to go back to sleep immediately. The study was then conducted as follows:

- E: Do you think that you, as a good soldier (the subject had an excellent record), could be entrusted to keep confidential military information given you?
- S: Why, of course.
- E: Capt. S. here will give you a bit of information and order you not to divulge it to me under any circumstances. Can you keep it to yourself? Remember, if you tell me you are disobeying a direct military order.
- S: Certainly I can keep it. (Subject goes to Capt. S., who whispers the order. He then returns to his chair with a defiant appearance.)
- E: (Hands yellow pencil to subject, who immediately goes into a deep trance.) I am Capt. S. I just gave you a piece of information you were not to divulge. I want to see if you remember it, Corporal. What is it?
- S: Company B will leave at 2100 tonight. (Capt. S. nods to indicate that this was the message.)
- E: (Removes subject from trance.) Did you divulge the message?
- S: No, and you can't get it out of me.

- E: (Repeats message to the subject, who appears amazed, and who then insists that Capt. S. must have revealed it to the experimenter.)
- E: What is this I am putting in front of you?
- S: Why, that's a ten-dollar bill.
- E.: I want to try you again. I shall ask Capt. S. to give you another message. That ten-dollar bill is yours if you *do not* tell me the message. Do you understand?
- S: It's in the bag. (Goes to Capt. S. and receives another message.)
- E: (Places ten-dollar bill on table directly in front of the subject, and, while the subject is looking at the bill, hands him the yellow pencil. S immediately goes into trance, and E secures the second message in the same manner. He then awakens the subject.)
- S: The ten-dollar bill is mine, isn't it? (S reaches for it and is greatly disappointed when he is told he has divulged the message. He then becomes angry and indicates he thinks he is being cheated.)
- E: Let's try it once more. This time you can earn the ten-dollar bill if you will just stay awake. Do not go to sleep. Fight back and refuse to go into trance.
- S: (Rather belligerently) That's easy—just try to put me to sleep.
- E: (Hands subject the yellow pencil. Subject blinks a moment or two and then sinks back into a deep trance.)

The above experiment was repeated with similar instructions to seven different subjects. They were all military men and volunteers. Not one of them was able to earn any money. Of course, the seven were picked as readily hypnotizable and did not by any means represent a random sample of humans. However, the desire to earn the money was not strong enough to enable them to overcome the suggestions. In no case could the subject withhold information, nor could he refuse to enter trance when once hypnotized and set for rehypnotization by the post-hypnotic suggestion of the yellow pencil.

#### CASE STUDY B

The subject was an enlisted WAC who was working in a military intelligence office. The officer in charge was interested in the possibilities of extracting information under trance conditions and offered his assistants for an experiment to see if information could be secured by the experimenter from individuals ordered to withhold it. He was frankly skeptical of the possibility. Suggesti-

bility tests in the form of arm freeze and postural swaying were administered to some dozen WAC and civilian assistants. One responded positively but only to a small degree. The officer then gave her a message and ordered her not to divulge same. With difficulty she was placed in a light trance through eye-fixation on a bright nickel pencil. The trance was so light that she was fully conscious of all that she was being told to do. If she was requested to perform some "foolish" operation such as picking fruit she would do so slowly and smile about it. The experiment was then conducted as follows:

- E: You have a message given to you by your Commanding Officer. You are working in a military intelligence office and know the seriousness of not being able to keep confidential information. Furthermore, you know the consequences of disobeying a military order from a superior officer. Yet, in spite of this, you are going to tell me that message. It is rising in your throat, and you will not be able to keep it down. It is getting higher, higher, higher. Now it is on the back of your tongue. Now it is on the tip of your tongue. Now it is escaping from your teeth. You will endure the most extreme suffering until you release it and speak the message. Speak it! Speak it! (During all this time the subject's anxiety kept constantly increasing. Her face turned a livid red. She writhed all over, wrung her hands, made the most twisted grimaces and facial contortions. Finally the message virtually "exploded" from her.)
- S: The WAC detachment will embark tonight at 1930. (She immediately sighed and slumped in her chair. She was then brought out of trance.)
- S: My God, you didn't have to choke it out of me!

#### CASE STUDY C

The subject this time was a private with a very good record. He was in the same company as the experimenter and was well known to him. He had an excellent military record and was a most conscientious young man, about 20 years of age. He was respected by the other men as sincere and earnest. Several members of the medical staff of the Neuropsychiatric Division of a station hospital were present. The subject was placed in trance.

- E: In a minute you will slowly open your eyes. In front of you, you will see a dirty Jap

soldier. He has a bayonet, and is going to kill you unless you kill him first. You will have to strangle him with your bare hands. (A Lieutenant Colonel, the head psychiatrist and Director of the Neuropsychiatric Division of the hospital, was placed directly in front of the subject and about ten feet away.)

(The subject opened his eyes. He then slanted them and began to creep cautiously forward. Suddenly in a flying tackle he dove at the Lieutenant Colonel, knocking him against the wall, and with both of his hands [he was a powerful, husky lad] began strangling the man. It will be recalled that for an enlisted man to "attack" a commissioned officer is a serious offense in the Army. It took the instantaneous assistance of three others to break the soldier's grip, pull him off the officer, and hold him until the experimenter could quiet him back into a sleep condition. The Lieutenant Colonel reported that the man's grip was strong and dangerous, and that he might have been killed or injured if assistants had not been available to drag the soldier back.)

It will be noted here that the man did not violate his own conscience. He was attacking what to him was a Jap soldier and not an officer in the Army. He was acting under an induced hallucination. Yet had he been permitted to continue his act he would have committed murder from the social viewpoint and would have been punished if the prosecution had "proven" to the resulting court martial that "people cannot be made to commit crimes under hypnotic trance."

#### CASE STUDY D

The subject was a 21-year-old Lieutenant, friendly and non-aggressive in nature. He was a small man, weighing about 120 pounds and short in stature. The same experiment was repeated with him as with the subject in Case Study C. The "Jap soldier" was a friend, a brother officer. In this case the subject acted as did the private in Case C except that he suddenly pulled out and opened a pocket knife. (His possession of this article was not known to any others present.) Only the quick intercession of witnesses and an upward wrist parry by his officer friend (the Jap soldier) prevented a serious stabbing.

#### CASE STUDY E

The subject was a WAC volunteer for a demonstration of hypnosis before a profes-

sional group. She was a visitor at the installation. The subject was questioned prior to trance.

E: If you were captured by the Germans how would you answer questions asked you?

S: With my name and serial number, nothing more.

E: You're certain of that?

S: Certain.

E: Let us pretend I am a German military intelligence officer and you are a prisoner of war. Remember, you will tell me only your name and serial number.

(The subject was placed in hypnotic trance.)

E: I am your First Sergeant. I have a few questions to ask you. What's the name of the installation where you are now stationed?

S: The Aberdeen Proving Grounds.

E: What part are you in?

S: The WAC Detachment.

E: About how many are there in the WAC Detachment?

S: Oh, around 1500 girls.

E: What do you do?

S: I'm assisting with a research project.

E: What kind of a research project? (It will be remembered that this interview was taking place in the presence of a group of some 200 people.)

S: We are developing a new secret type of fuel for propelling rockets.

E: Do you know how this fuel is made?

S: Of course. I've watched them make it.

(At this moment a high-ranking officer present stepped in and said, "I think we've gone far enough. In the interest of military secrecy we'll have to stop at this point.")

It was apparent to all that this girl would have unconsciously divulged genuine, confidential information, which would have subjected her to court martial, if she had been permitted to continue.

#### CASE STUDY F

This subject was a corporal who had been hypnotized once before but had not been connected to any posthypnotic "yellow pencil" suggestion. The purpose of this study was to see if a person could be made to enter trance against his will. The subject was shown a ten-dollar bill which was placed on a table before him. He was seated and told to look at the bill.

E: "Now, George, this ten-dollar bill in front of you is yours under one condition. I want

you to look at it carefully. You can have it if you will *just not let me make you go to sleep*. Keep from entering a trance. Remember, you are to try your hardest not to enter a trance. . . . But it won't do you a damned bit of good because I am going to count up to twenty-five and by the time I get there you will be sound asleep. 1, 2, 3, . . . 25." The subject was in deep trance. His eyes closed at the count of twenty while staring directly at the ten-dollar bill in front of him. Of course this individual was very highly hypnotizable, but the experimenter has observed several others who were equally so.

#### CONCLUSIONS

1. Under hypnotic trance some subjects can be made to release, unconsciously, information which they had a prior strong motivation not to divulge. (Cases A and E)
2. Under light hypnoidal trance some subjects who are conscious of what they are doing can be "forced" to divulge information they intend to withhold. (Case B)
3. Under deep trance, hallucinations can be set up in some subjects which will cause them to commit "socially criminal acts," even to the extent of murder. (Cases C and D)
4. If sufficiently suggestible, some subjects

can be "forced" into trance against their will. (Case F)

These conclusions are not intended to be drawn for all people. From these studies, however, it seems they apply to some individuals. The subjects were selected from small groups of volunteers and represented about 10 per cent of those volunteering. They were, of course, highly hypnotizable individuals and not random selectees. However, no exhaustive or rigid selection system was employed other than the usual tests of suggestibility. There apparently would be many thousands of individuals like them in the total population.

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