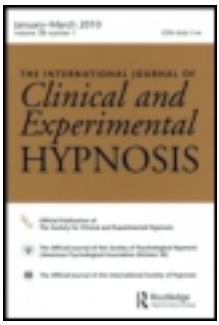

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Information processing during hypnotically suggested sex change

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INFORMATION PROCESSING DURING HYPNOTICALLY SUGGESTED SEX CHANGE[1]

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Abstract: During hypnotically suggested sex change, 36 real (12 virtuoso and 24 high hypnotizable) and 18 simulating (low hypnotizable) individuals listened to a story involving a male and a female character. They subsequently reported their experience and recall of the story. Virtuosos were less likely than highs and simulators to identify with the character consistent with their suggested sex. However, virtuosos recalled more information about the character consistent with their suggested sex than did highs and simulators. The authors discuss the findings in terms of attention and the selective processing of information during hypnosis. They conclude that character identification was not the major factor that influenced the recall of virtuosos and suggest that virtuosos may have processed aspects of the information in a more self-referential way and thus encoded and recalled it more effectively.

Hypnotized individuals often hold a strong conviction in the reality of their experience and often show a tendency to focus on information that confirms, rather than disconfirms, their experience (e.g., McConkey, 1991; Orne, 1959; Sutcliffe, 1961). Following Sutcliffe, Noble and McConkey (1995) suggested a change of sex to three groups of participants: virtuoso; high hypnotizable; and simulating, low hypnotizable. They found that a compelling hypnotic experience, similar to a transient delusion, could be established among virtuoso participants, in particular. Noble and McConkey challenged individuals' experiences of suggested sex change through procedures of contradiction (in which a hypothetical authority figure questioned their experience) and confrontation (in which they looked at an image of themselves on a video monitor). Noble and McConkey found that virtuosos were more likely than highs or simulators to maintain their response when challenged. In particular, these individuals appeared to reinterpret the conflicting information in a way that confirmed their hypnotically suggested experience.

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In the present experiment, we further investigated information processing during hypnotically suggested sex change. We were interested in whether hypnotized individuals selectively processed information that was consistent with their suggested experience. We gave participants a hypnotic suggestion for sex change (based on Noble & McConkey, 1995), and during that experience we asked them to listen to a structured story that involved a male and a female character. Following hypnosis, we asked participants to recall the story. Bower, Gilligan, and Monteiro (1981) used a similar procedure to explore information processing during a hypnotically induced happy or sad mood. Following a mood induction procedure, their participants read a story that featured a happy or sad character. Bower et al. found that individuals identified with the character whose mood was similar to their induced mood and recalled more information that was congruent with their mood. However, character identification was not the most important mediator of recall. Bower et al. argued that recall was mediated by differential encoding based on attending to the information that participants interpreted to be important.

In the present experiment, we expected that participants would demonstrate similar patterns of selective encoding and recall. Specifically, we expected that hypnotized individuals would be more likely than simulators to identify with the character consistent with their suggested sex rather than their actual sex. We also expected that hypnotized individuals, particularly virtuosos, would recall more information from the story regarding the character consistent with their suggested sex rather than their actual sex than would simulators. Following Bower et al. (1981), we considered that character identification alone would not be the most important mediator of recall.

Consistent with Noble and McConkey (1995), we used the real-simulating paradigm (Orne, 1959, 1971). This paradigm compares the performance of real, hypnotized individuals with that of simulating, nonhypnotized individuals who are motivated to respond to the demand characteristics of the hypnotic setting. The quasi-control condition of simulation provides an index of the influence of demand cues in the experimental setting. If reals and simulators respond similarly, then an explanation based on demand characteristics cannot be ruled out. If reals and simulators respond differently, then reals can be said to be responding in a way that reflects factors other than the demand characteristics of the setting as indexed by the responses of simulators. Because Noble and McConkey found that virtuosos responded differently from both high hypnotizable and simulating participants, we also used hypnotic virtuoso and high hypnotizable individuals as reals and low hypnotizable individuals as simulators.

METHOD

Participants

Fifty-four undergraduate students at the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, voluntarily participated in the experiment in return for research credit. There were 12 real, hypnotic virtuosos (4 males, 8 females; mean age = 20.00, SD = 2.49), 24 real, high hypnotizable individuals (8 males, 16 females; mean age = 20.67, SD = 5.14), and 18 simulating, low hypnotizable individuals (11 males, 7 females; mean age = 21.39, SD = 5.79). Virtuosos and highs had scored from 9 through 12 (M = 10.83, SD = 1.27 for virtuosos; M = 10.26, SD = 0.99 for highs) on the 12-item Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic Susceptibility, Form A (HGSHS:A; Shor & Orne, 1962). Following Noble and McConkey (1995), virtuosos had scored a perfect 10 on a 10-item tailored version of the Stanford Hypnotic Susceptibility Scale, Form C (SHSS:C; Weitzenhoffer & Hilgard, 1962; Hilgard, Crawford, Bowers, & Kihlstrom, 1979), whereas highs had scored from 8 through 9 (M = 8.61, SD = 0.50). Simulators had scored from 0 through 4 (M = 2.86, SD = 1.23) on the HGSHS:A and from 0 through 3 (M = 2.12, SD = 0.92) on the SHSS:C.

Apparatus

An audiocassette recorder was used to play a story about "Jim" and "Susan." This story was 2 minutes long and contained 31 statements or idea units; 19 idea units referred to Jim, 19 referred to Susan, and 13 were neutral. Throughout the story, five words associated with male stereotypes (e.g., aggressive, unemotional), five associated with female stereotypes (e.g., appreciative, dependent), and five neutral words (e.g., relaxed, cold) were embedded. These words were selected from a stereotypical trait index (Williams & Best, 1991) and were equally favorable or unfavorable in terms of likableness (Anderson, 1968). The order of character gender, idea units, and words was the same for all participants.

Procedure

The experiment involved the administration of real-simulating instructions, a hypnosis session (including a posthypnotic inquiry), and a postexperimental inquiry session. The first experimenter administered the real-simulating instructions and the postexperimental inquiry, and a second experimenter (the hypnotist), who was unaware of participants' real or simulating identity, conducted the hypnosis session.

Real-simulating instructions. Following informed consent procedures, the first experimenter instructed participants according to the real-simulating paradigm. Reals were told they would be taken to the hypnotist

who would conduct a hypnosis session. Simulators were told they would be taken to the hypnotist, and their task was to fool her into believing they were excellent hypnotic subjects. Simulators were told that the hypnotist knew some individuals would be faking but did not know who; that she would stop the session if she discovered they were faking; that the task was a difficult one, but intelligent individuals could do it; and that they should not reveal they were faking until they returned from the session. Also, all participants were told that they would discuss their experiences with the first experimenter during a postexperimental inquiry. Following this, the first experimenter introduced participants to the hypnotist, who was unaware of their real or simulating identity.

Hypnosis session. The hypnotist informed participants that she would hypnotize them and give them a number of hypnotic suggestions. She administered a hypnotic induction procedure and administered three standard SHSS:C items. She then administered the suggestion for sex change, which followed the one used by Noble and McConkey (1995). Specifically, she suggested to participants that they were becoming more like the opposite sex in every way (e.g., "You are becoming more and more masculine, in a moment you will be a man/woman, you will be male/female in every way"); this suggestion was given for three minutes.

The hypnotist then said, "Tell me about yourself," "Tell me about the sorts of sensations you are experiencing at the moment," and "Tell me what your name is." These questions were intended to index participants' responses to the sex change suggestion. Following this, the hypnotist told participants she would play a story on the audiocassette player, and she asked them to listen carefully to it; she then played the story about Jim and Susan. After the story, she asked: "Which character did you mostly identify with?" "Which character was most prominent?" and "Who had the most details associated with them?" These questions were intended to index processing of the story during the suggested sex change. The hypnotist then cancelled the suggestion by telling participants they would return to their actual sex. After this, the hypnotist administered a standard deinduction procedure.

Posthypnotic inquiry session. After hypnosis, the hypnotist asked participants to rate how male or female (suggested sex) they really felt, and how much of their male or female (actual sex) identity they sensed during the suggestion (posthypnotic rating: 0 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). She then gave the participants some paper and a pencil and asked them to write everything they could recall about the story as completely and as closely to the original as possible. Finally, the hypnotist thanked participants, called the first experimenter into the room, and left.

Postexperimental inquiry session. The first experimenter conducted an inquiry into individuals' perceptions of the overall procedures, interpretation of the sex change suggestion (e.g., "How did you go about experiencing the sex change suggestion?"), and reactions to the story and recall test (e.g., "What thoughts went through your mind as you listened to the story?"). In addition, she asked them to rate how male or female (suggested sex) they really felt and how much of their male or female (actual sex) identity they sensed during the suggestion (postexperimental rating: 0 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). Finally, the first experimenter answered any questions and thanked participants.

RESULTS

The hypnotist and an independent rater, who was also unaware of participants' real or simulating identity, categorized responses to the sex change suggestion. Any differences in initial categorization were resolved through discussion. Individuals were scored as responding positively if they did not deny the suggested sex change or assert their actual sex when asked, "Tell me about yourself," and if they expressed a change or difference in sensations, behavior, or physical appearance when asked, "Tell me about the sorts of sensations you are experiencing at the moment."

Response to the Suggestion

We focused on the 11 (91.7%) virtuosos, 21 (87.5%) highs, and 18 (100.0%) simulators who responded positively to the suggestion; chi-square analysis indicated no significant difference in this response pattern, χ^2 (4, N = 57) = 7.71, $p > .10$, *ns*. Table 1 presents participants' reports of name during the suggestion and their posthypnotic and postexperimental ratings of suggested and actual sex. Chi-square analysis indicated no significant difference in the pattern of response when participants were asked their name during the suggestion, $\chi^2(4, N = 50) = 6.93, p > .14$, *ns*. We acknowledge that some cell sizes in these analyses are less than 5 and that when $df = 1$ and expected frequencies are less than 5, the chi-square test is said by some to be unreliable (see Siegel, 1956). More recent consideration, however, is that the chi-square does generate accurate probability, and no correction is needed under these circumstances (see Bradley, Bradley, McGrath, & Cutcomb, 1979; Camilli & Hopkins, 1978).

Separate one-way analyses of variance revealed no significant differences in posthypnotic ratings of suggested sex (i.e., how participants really felt), $F(2, 47) = 1.911, p > .16$, *ns*, or in posthypnotic ratings of actual sex (i.e., how much of their male/female identity participants sensed), $F(2, 47) = 1.84, p > .17$, *ns*. Separate 3 (type of participant) × 2 (time of rating) mixed-model analyses of variance yielded significant main effects

Table 1
Reports of Name During Suggestion, and Posthypnotic and Postexperimental Ratings of Suggested and Actual Sex

	Virtuoso $n = 11$	High $n = 21$	Simulating $n = 18$
Reports of Name			
Name consistent with suggested sex	7 (63.6)	12 (57.1)	15 (83.3)
Did not know name	3 (27.3)	3 (14.3)	0 (0.00)
Actual name	1 (9.1)	6 (28.6)	3 (16.7)
Ratings of Suggested Sex			
Posthypnotic rating	4.36 (1.45)	4.57 (1.47)	5.31 (1.36)
Postexperimental rating	4.36 (1.63)	4.45 (1.48)	0.39 (0.78)*
Ratings of Actual Sex			
Posthypnotic rating	2.27 (2.05)	1.83 (1.76)	1.08 (1.40)
Postexperimental rating	2.36 (2.16)	2.00 (1.70)	6.33 (1.14)*

Note. For reports of name during suggestion, percentages appear in parentheses. For posthypnotic and postexperimental ratings of suggested and actual sex, 0 = *not at all*, and 7 = *extremely*; standard deviations appear in parentheses. Significant differences are between posthypnotic and postexperimental ratings.
* $p < .001$.

for time of rating for ratings of suggested sex, $F(2, 47) = 122.93$, $p < .001$, and for ratings of actual sex, $F(2, 47) = 98.581$, $p < .001$. Scheffé post hoc comparisons showed that, whereas the ratings of virtuosos and highs were similar across the posthypnotic and postexperimental inquiries, the ratings of simulators changed. This change was consistent with the simulators faking the rating when they were with the hypnotist in the posthypnotic inquiry and not faking it when they were with the first experimenter in the postexperimental inquiry. Importantly, the ratings of the virtuosos and the highs did not change across these two contexts of inquiry.

Processing of the Story

Character identification was assessed by three questions after participants listened to the story. Those who identified with the same character (i.e., Jim or Susan) for at least two of the questions were assessed as identifying with that particular character. Five (45.5%) virtuosos, 18 (85.7%) highs, and 13 (72.2%) simulators identified with the character consistent with their suggested sex (viz., Jim for females, Susan for males); the other participants identified with the character consistent with their actual sex (viz., Jim for males, Susan for females). Chi-square analysis indicated a significant difference in this pattern of responding, $\chi^2(2, N = 50) = 5.80$, $p < .05$. Virtuosos were less likely than either highs or simulators to identify with the character consistent with their suggested sex. In other

words, most highs and simulators responded in a way that maintained consistency with the reported experience of sex change, whereas virtuosos were split between identifying with the character consistent with the suggested sex and the one consistent with their actual sex.

The number of idea units that they recalled indexed participants' recall of the story. Table 2 presents the means and percentages of total idea units recalled that were related to the character consistent with participants' suggested sex, the character consistent with their actual sex, or neutral with regard to sex. To control for the total amount of material recalled, three separate analyses of covariance were performed, each holding recall for idea units other than the dependent variable constant. These analyses showed that groups did not differ in their recall for neutral idea units, $F(2, 45) = 0.17$, $p > .84$, *ns*, nor idea units related to their actual sex, $F(2, 45) = 0.71$, $p > .50$, *ns*. They did, however, differ in their recall of idea units relevant to their suggested sex, $F(2, 45) = 3.94$, $p < .05$. Post hoc Scheffé comparisons indicated that virtuosos recalled significantly more information related to the character consistent with their suggested sex than did either highs or simulators.

Discussion

Virtuoso, high hypnotizable, and simulating subjects responded similarly to a hypnotic suggestion for sex change. They were equally likely to change their names, and to give similar ratings of the reality of the suggested sex and the experience of their actual identity. In contrast to Noble and McConkey (1995), there was no difference across these types of participants in either the number who responded positively to the suggestion or the ratings they made about their experience. The demands of the setting may have conveyed the expected response, and an explanation of response to the suggestion in terms of demand characteristics cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, the comments of virtuosos reflected a compelling hypnotic experience. Although this was not as marked for high hypnotizable individuals, they also found the experience unusual and significant. As expected, as seen in the postexperimental ratings, simulators reported that they faked their responses to the suggestion. Taken together, these findings suggest that deeply hypnotizable individuals will accept a suggestion for sex change and will develop transient conviction in a subjective reality that has delusory qualities (see also Kihlstrom & Hoyt, 1988; McConkey, 1991; Noble & McConkey, 1995; Sutcliffe, 1961).

After listening to the story involving one male and one female character, virtuosos were less likely than were simulators and highs to report identifying with the character consistent with their suggested sex. When asked to recall the story after hypnosis, however, these virtuosos recalled more information than simulators and highs about the character consistent with their suggested sex. In other words, virtuosos were less likely

Table 2
Recall of Neutral Idea Units, and Idea Units Consistent with Suggested and Actual Sex

	Virtuoso (n = 11)	High (n = 21)	Simulating (n = 18)
Idea Units Consistent with Suggested Sex			
Unadjusted means	3.14 (1.40)*	1.86 (1.07)	1.67 (1.48)
Adjusted means	2.81 (2.12)	1.94 (1.51)	1.78 (1.63)
Total idea units recalled	43.19% (19.25)	37.58% (21.61)	35.99% (31.90)
Idea Units Consistent with Actual Sex			
Unadjusted means	2.45 (1.67)	1.95 (1.58)	1.83 (1.74)
Adjusted means	1.57 (2.93)	2.15 (1.99)	2.15 (2.17)
Total idea units recalled	33.70% (22.97)	39.39% (31.92)	39.44% (37.50)
Neutral Idea Units			
Unadjusted means	1.68 (1.03)	1.14 (0.79)	1.19 (0.94)
Adjusted means	1.37 (1.82)	1.24 (1.22)	1.32 (1.34)
Total idea units recalled	23.11% (14.17)	23.03% (15.96)	25.66% (20.26)

Note. Standard deviations appear in parentheses. Significant differences are between virtuosos and each of the other two groups.
* $p < .05$.

to identify with the character consistent with their suggested sex, but they recalled significantly more information relevant to that character. This was so even though individuals in the simulating group typically claimed they focused on the suggested sex character while listening to the story. Thus, consistent with Bower et al. (1981), selectivity occurred during the encoding stage, and reported character identification alone was not the major factor that influenced the enhanced recall of virtuosos. These findings suggest that the processing of information by virtuosos involved dimensions other than character identification. It seems that virtuosos interpreted selected aspects of the information as being highly significant to their believed-in imagining. This suggests the operation of particular cognitive processes in the development and maintenance of the suggested experience of hypnotic virtuoso individuals.

One explanation for this pattern of findings is that virtuosos developed greater ego involvement in or devoted greater attention to the suggestion than did highs and simulators. In the present experiment, while listening to the story during the sex change experience, they may have related to themselves, or self-referenced, the information about the character consistent with their suggested sex, rather than related it to the

character itself. This is supported by virtuosos' comments during the postexperimental inquiry. These comments indicated that virtuosos processed aspects of the information as self-referential and personally meaningful—in the context of their experience of sex change—and attended to it more carefully. This differential processing may have led to the observed recall performance of virtuosos. This interpretation is consistent with the finding that self-referent encoding strategies yield superior memory relative to both semantic and other-referent encoding strategies (Symons & Johnson, 1997). Future research could examine the role of self-referent information processing strategies in hypnosis by using an extension of the structured story paradigm to compare stories that contain self-referent vs. other-referent information.

Many virtuosos and some highs described the experience of sex change as compelling. For instance, "I could visualize myself changing. Surprisingly easy. It didn't take very long," and "I don't know how I controlled it. I immediately felt physically stronger. I felt egocentric." Some virtuosos and highs used particular strategies to experience the suggestion. For example, "I was thinking of my flatmate, thinking of her," and "I thought about males I know and took on characteristics from them." In terms of the story, many highs referred to stereotypes in the story. For example, "I first thought they were both really big stereotypes. Susan was more submissive, [Jim] was a stereotypical male." The virtuosos indicated they were not focusing on one or the other character, rather, they said they were focusing on both characters from the perspective of their suggested sex experience. For example, "I felt like I was Jim. I felt like him, a confident male." These comments point to the value of further investigating the phenomenal nature of hypnotic sex change, as well as to the complex and essentially personal nature of such hypnotically created beliefs. Future work could use methodologies, such as the Experiential Analysis Technique (Sheehan & McConkey, 1982), that focus more on the meaning to the individual of the hypnotic experience.

In our interpretation, we have focused on selectivity of encoding rather than on retrieval. It is possible, however, that participants' recall was influenced by strategies of retrieval rather than of encoding, and this possibility needs to be explored in future research. One way to do this would be to compare the recall of those who listen to the story during the sex change experience and recall it after that experience with the recall of those who listen to the story before the sex change experience and recall it during that experience. Together with the present findings, such research would extend our understanding of the role of information processing in hypnotic sex change in particular and in the experience of hypnotic phenomena generally.

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Informationsverarbeitung bei Suggestion von Geschlechtsumwandlung unter Hypnose

Catherine Burn, Amanda J. Barnier, und Kevin M. McConkey

Zusammenfassung: Bei einer Hypnosesuggestion zu Geschlechtsumwandlung hörten 36 tatsächlich in Trance befindliche Vpn. (12 waren als "virtuosos" [höchstsuggestibel] und 24 als hochsuggestibel eingestuft) und 18 simulierende (niedrigsuggestible) Vpn. eine Geschichte, die eine männliche und eine weibliche Figur beinhaltete. Sie berichteten dann ihr Erlebnis und die Erinnerung der Geschichte. Im Vergleich zu den hochsuggestiblen und simulierenden Vpn. war bei den Virtuosos die Wahrscheinlichkeit einer Identifikation mit der dem suggerierten Geschlecht entsprechenden Figur

geringer. Jedoch erinnerten Virtuosos im Vergleich zu hochsuggestiblen und simulierenden Vpn. mehr Informationen über die Figur konsistent mit dem suggerierten Geschlecht. Dieser Befund wird unter dem Aspekt von Aufmerksamkeit und selektiver Verarbeitung von Information in Trance diskutiert. Schlussfolgerung: Identifikation mit einer Figur war nicht der Hauptfaktor, der die Erinnerung der Virtuosos beeinflusste. Möglicherweise deutet das darauf hin, dass Virtuosos die Aspekte der Informationen mit stärkerem Selbstbezug verarbeiten, und demnach effektiver enkodiert und abgerufen haben.

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Traitement de l'information durant une suggestion hypnotique de changement de sexe

Catherine Burn, Amanda J. Barnier, et Kevin M. McConkey

Résumé: Pendant un changement de sexe suggéré par hypnose, 36 individus authentiques (12 virtuoses et 24 hautement hypnotisables) et 18 qui simulaient (peu hypnotisables) ont écouté une histoire impliquant un personnage masculin et un personnage féminin. Ils devaient ensuite raconter leur ressenti de l'histoire et le souvenir qu'ils en ont gardé. Les virtuoses s'identifiaient moins que les autres sujets au personnage du même sexe. Cependant, ceux-ci se souvenaient de plus d'informations sur le personnage du sexe suggéré que les sujets hautement et peu hypnotisables. Les auteurs débattent des résultats en terme d'attention et de traitement sélectif de l'information pendant l'hypnose. Ils concluent que l'identification au personnage n'était pas le facteur prépondérant qui influençait le souvenir chez les virtuoses, et suggèrent qu'il se peut que les virtuoses aient traité des aspects de l'information d'une manière plus auto-référentielle, et de fait, l'ont encodée et rappelée plus efficacement.

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Procesamiento de información durante cambio de sexo sugerido hipnóticamente

Catherine Burn, Amanda J. Barnier, y Kevin M. McConkey

Resumen: Durante un cambio de sexo sugerido hipnóticamente, 36 individuos verdaderamente hipnotizables (12 virtuosos y 24 altamente hipnotizables) y 18 simuladores (de baja hipnotizabilidad) escucharon una historia con un personaje varón y uno hembra. Subsecuentemente se les preguntó sobre su experiencia y qué recordaban de la historia. En comparación con los altamente hipnotizables y los simuladores, los virtuosos tuvieron menor probabilidad de identificarse con los personajes consistentes con el sexo sugerido. Sin embargo, los virtuosos recordaron más información sobre el personaje consistente con su sexo sugerido que los altamente hipnotizables y los simuladores. Los autores discuten los resultados desde el

punto de vista de la atención y el procesamiento selectivo de información durante la hipnosis. Concluyen que la identificación con el personaje no es el factor más influyente en la memoria de los virtuosos y sugieren que éstos tal vez procesaron aspectos de la información en una manera más auto-referida, por lo que los registraron y recordaron más eficazmente.

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