



A Solid Introduction to Clinical Hypnosis

A Review of

Essentials of Clinical Hypnosis: An Evidence-Based Approach

by Steven Jay Lynn and Irving Kirsch

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006. 271 pp. ISBN

1-59147-344-6. \$69.95

doi: 10.1037/a0006093

Reviewed by

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An unfortunate byproduct of the prevalent misinformation about hypnosis is that many, if not most, clinicians are unaware of the considerable empirical support for hypnosis as an adjunct treatment for many psychological and medical conditions, or they might believe that its use would open a Pandora's box of false memories. The groundlessness of the second belief is confirmed yet again by a recent study, cowritten by one of the book's authors, which confirmed that clinicians should worry far more about misleading questions and not about hypnosis per se, which may have (as in this study) no effect on false memory reports (Scoboria, Mazzoni, & Kirsch, 2006).

Steven Jay Lynn and Irving Kirsch are two of the most prolific and best-regarded hypnosis researchers in the world, besides working as clinicians, so they can discuss authoritatively both the empirical support for different hypnotic interventions and provide verbatim hypnotic scripts and discussion of practical clinical considerations. Both authors endorse a psychosocial approach to hypnosis theory and research and prefer cognitive-behavioral interventions. To their merit, however, they have also integrated into their text some verbalizations and concepts (e.g., utilization) based mostly on the clinical work of Milton Erickson (see Yapko, 2003) and, although they do not cover it in depth, refer approvingly to psychodynamic approaches to hypnosis.

Essentials of Clinical Hypnosis: An Evidence-Based Approach starts with a chapter on what hypnosis is (and is not) alongside a succinct but enticing account of the history of the field. The authors then cover various contemporary theories and general research on hypnosis and focus henceforth on practical clinical applications. In the third chapter, on the basics of hypnosis, they include indispensable material for the beginning practitioner, such as separating fact from fiction regarding the nature of hypnosis, discussing indications and contraindications for its use, and presenting a useful way to introduce both general suggestibility and hypnosis to a client. The next two chapters introduce hypnotic inductions and suggestions, and the use of general principles for most clients, including ways to promote feelings of safety, managing negative affect, and so on. The remaining chapters cover specific areas for which hypnosis has good empirical support or at least seems promising: smoking cessation, eating disorders and obesity, depression, anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, pain management, behavioral medicine, and dentistry. In all of them, Lynn and Kirsch review the literature on supported clinical interventions (hypnotic or otherwise) and provide general treatment plans and specific "scripts" depending on the goal and condition.

Essentials of Clinical Hypnosis provides a comprehensive and empirically supported introduction to the clinical use of hypnosis, which various meta-analyses have shown to powerfully enhance both psychodynamic and

cognitive-behavioral psychotherapies. A book of this modest size does have some limitations, and reading a book, no matter its size, should not be taken as sufficient preparation for the use of hypnosis. Having taught hypnosis to students at various levels, I have seen the importance of hands-on practice and supervision to point out to the beginner areas that need further development and avoid following slavishly some hypnotic script. I wish that the authors had provided more information on resources for the beginner, including contact information for reputable professional societies that offer training (e.g., Division 30 of the American Psychological Association, the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis), lists of the best journals in the field, and so on. I also wish that they had covered active-alert forms of hypnosis that do not require special equipment or exertion (e.g., Cardeña, Alarcón, Capafons, & Bayot, 1998). Those wanting greater depth on some areas such as hypnosis with children, transferential issues, and psychodynamic approaches to hypnosis will also have to consult additional references provided by Lynn and Kirsch. I am disappointed that the American Psychological Association chose such a high price for an introductory book, but even so, this is a very high-quality tome that I hope will introduce many clinicians to a far more effective and safer set of techniques than they might suspect.

References

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